

Shalom from MIT Hillel to our Alumni, Faculty, Staff, Parents and Friends!

- 1) Director of Graduate Student Engagement, Natalie Yosipovitch, hosting a virtual Passover seder for GradHillel students
- 2) Undergraduate students learning how to make matzah pizza with Assistant Director, Marissa Freed
- 3) Graduate students participating in GradHillel JLF (Jewish Learning Fellowship)

MIT Hillel Update



I hope this enewsletter finds you and yours healthy and staying safe. Strength to all of us as we continue to navigate these COVID times.

It was the night Purim ended, March 10, that MIT informed students that they had to leave campus, and the rest of the term would be virtual. In the short span of two months, or long span of eight weeks, since then students, faculty, and staff have adjusted to our now virtual world. MIT Hillel has adapted and evolved along with them.

We have now completed two Jewish Learning Fellowship cohorts, one for undergraduates and one for graduate students. Participating in the tenth of ten sessions of the Graduate student group, I heard students share how important their weekly learning community was to them – a place of respite during COVID-19, a space for open, sometimes heated, dialogue on meaningful topics, grounded in Jewish texts, and a creation of deep connection with other MIT Jews of diverse backgrounds. The gratitude was expressed directly, and even over Zoom, the body language of appreciation was clear. Over half the class is continuing another learning experience with our Director of Graduate Student Life, with a number of new faces expanding the cohort. Our staff is planning multiple 5-week learning cohorts as we transition from the school year into the summer. Students want Jewish knowledge and community, and we are there for them.

For Passover, we were uniquely MIT. One of our students, John San Soucie, spent hours creating an online, downloadable MIT Graduate Student haggadah for a 2nd night seder, full of jokes and memes relevant to our students, as well as to this year. ([Check it out](#): I especially like the “how-to-wash-your-hands steps of the seder” picture for hanging above the sink.) Our entire community – students, staff, alumni – were invited to an MIT Hillel

Afikomen Hunt, created by Shuli Jones '22. You can still [attempt the puzzle](#), if you want. (I'll even provide you with the [hints](#), spaced 1 per page so there aren't accidental spoilers).

Sometimes one can make lemons out of lemonade... or, as Prof Ezra Zuckerman Sivan re-quoted, "Never let a good crisis go to waste." Leading Jewish Minds @ MIT, our 3x/semester faculty luncheon series, has now gone virtual, as well. Through Zoom, we expanded our presentations across time zones and countries, connecting with more than 100 non-Boston alumni and friends we don't usually have the opportunity to engage. If you missed the talks live, you can watch the [video](#) from Prof Daniel Jackson's talk on resilience. Prof Zuckerman Sivan's video on the emergence of a 7-day week will be available within the next week or two. Participants expressed that the topics were exceptionally relevant for our times today. Be on the lookout for an invite to our next Leading Jewish Minds @ Home Zoom seminar on June 4 featuring Prof Sherry Turkle!

It is hard to believe, but Commencement is only a few weeks away. Working with the MIT Administration, I have helped created a "live" Sunday celebration for our observant Jewish graduates who cannot participate in the wider Friday (on Shavuot) virtual Commencement Exercises. My Invocation at that special program will touch on dreams – fulfilled, lost, or changed – on gratitude, and on blessing and opportunity. These are themes that have been on my mind throughout this pandemic, and as I look ahead.

I said it last month, and I have seen it demonstrated day after day and week after week this unusual semester. **MIT Hillel's core values of relationships, community, learning and practice continue to be our driving principles.** We are here for -- and with -- our students, supporting them, challenging them, providing the meaningful opportunities that they will remember throughout their MIT times and beyond.

L'shalom,

Rabbi Michelle H. Fisher
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Mentshn of Mention



Greetings from my living room in South Florida! I personally have lost most concepts of time and scheduling while finishing the semester at home, but I have found it helpful to reflect on my (overly-scheduled) experiences from earlier in the year:

I am currently a sophomore majoring in computer science and considering a minor in Chinese. Outside of class, there are quite a few communities that have really enhanced my time at MIT and allowed me to meet so many awesome people: the Women's Ultimate Frisbee Team, Maseeh 2 (my living community), Hillel, and more. While at MIT, I've gotten involved with quite a few of Hillel's programs. What I've enjoyed most has been being on the Hillel Student Board for the past year, first serving as a VP of Programming, now serving as Treasurer. I find it really rewarding to plan events for the Jewish community on campus (and now over Zoom). At MIT, things get so hectic with classes and clubs that a whole semester can just fly by and leave you regretting being less involved with something than you meant to be; organizing events for Hillel has been a good way for me to keep myself involved.

Some of my favorite events to plan in the past have been community service trips to the Greater Boston Food Bank and Community Servings. This semester, we also brought back Coffee Chats (last organized in 2017 under the name JDates) which are small group mixers to give members of the community the chance to meet 3-4 new people that they may have never talked to before. Virtually, some things have stayed the same; at the beginning our Student Board meetings, which are now held over Zoom, we still have the tradition of sharing the highs and lows of our weeks. Some things are different; our matzah pizza making event was changed into "Matzah PizZoom" where people shared the experience of making matzah pizza but from their own homes.

This past winter I went on the Birthright Trip along with some fellow MIT students. One of my favorite parts of the trip was hiking up Masada to see the sunrise. I remember getting to the

top, looking at the view, and thinking, “Wow, I can’t believe places like this actually exist”. And, shortly after, we pulled out an MIT flag to take a group picture with because even in the face of Masada’s awe-inspiring beauty, we remembered that being with the MIT Jewish community made the experience more meaningful, just as the communities I have found at MIT makes my life better every day.

Between being on Hillel Student Board and going on the Birthright trip, I’ve met a lot of very different Jews who have found their places and people of comfort all over campus, including the (usually food-containing) Hillel Center. I think that’s partly why I think MIT is so great, and why it’s been so hard to be away: there are so many things there that make it feel like home.

You’ve probably heard the phrase “we are living in strange times” at some point this past month. For me, that saying is overused but still rings true; it feels like I should have all the time in the world to do things that I love, yet somehow I am barely able to make time for those activities. Of course, I did make time for making (and eating a lot of) matzah ball soup with my Mom during Passover, which is something I wouldn’t have been able to do on campus.

Although I most look forward to being back on campus, whenever that may be, for now I look forward to the times when I can see my friends’ faces over Zoom and enjoy the sunny (yet also rainy) South Florida weather. Most importantly, while we are no longer together on campus, I hope that everyone is safe and healthy wherever you happen to be.

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Torah from Tech



Sarah Toledano graduated from MIT in 2015 with a B.S. in Chemistry. She is currently working as an analyst in the Global Industrials Group in the Investment Banking Division at Goldman Sachs in New York.

Many of our well-known Jewish holidays (Rosh Hashana, Yom Kippur, Pesach, Sukkot, Shavuot) originating from the Torah and Shabbat are introduced in Parshat Emor along with restrictions pertaining to Kohanim/High Priests, the Omer, among other things. It is no secret that these universal practices, restrictions, and unique traditions associated with Shabbat and these

holidays have endured for generations, and sometimes, for decades in our own households.

Growing up attending K-12 Modern Orthodox Jewish day school, I studied and dedicatedly practiced many of these rules throughout high school. My family did our best at home to honor the days and celebrate together, and I greatly enjoyed celebrating my father’s Moroccan and my mother’s Ashkenazi Jewish traditions. Even though I returned home for some Jewish holidays as an MIT undergraduate and while working at a small firm in Wisconsin for two years after graduation, there were times when that was not an option. I was then incredibly grateful for the MIT Jewish community Shabbat and holiday dinners, and for the Chicago friends and local families who invited me into their homes to celebrate in the Midwest.

This past Passover, I again found myself in a situation where I could not celebrate in-person with my family. With some creativity and help from my mother, I had enough supplies to prepare for a full Zoom Seder (including my father’s Moroccan charoset). Once I was “seated” at the corner of the dining room table, it was almost as though I was there in person. We took turns reading the Haggadah in Hebrew and English, and we still ate dinner together. And even though I couldn’t join my father for our usual 12 mile run the next morning (he got me into long distance running), he still found a way to test my endurance, challenging me to sing the entire Dayenu outloud in Hebrew. For weeks leading up to the Seder, I dreaded that it would not measure up to our typical Seders, but it ended up being a very unique, positive experience that brought a familiar warmth to my empty NYC studio

apartment after isolating for almost a month.

The new reality of working from home has also radically changed my day-to-day routine (as I would imagine it has for many others). The new restrictions, in place for critical reasons, have introduced interesting challenges that never existed before. Faced with these new challenges, I am grateful for the extent that MIT designed its courses to encourage creative problem solving and innovative thinking, even in situations where there are no clear answers. I have learned that there is so much value and joy to be gained from objectively reframing problems, collaborating with others, and learning to find solutions within new sets of constraints, whether adapting Passover recipes to minimize trips to the grocery store or optimizing a new work-from-home routine. Stay safe!

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MIT Hillel's 2020 Annual Fund

Add to Jewish life @ MIT!



To Our Current and Future Supporters,

First, THANK YOU for reading this! I do not have to see your email inbox to know that you have received many development messages over the past month. This week in particular is another “giving week”, and non-profits across the spectra of purpose, size, and geography are making appeals for special Covid relief funding, including MIT. Thank you for all you are doing - each response makes a difference, financially and sympathetically.

From the other side, I have “attended” a series of webinars offered jointly by Association of Fundraising Professionals, Women in Development, and CCS Fundraising (consultants), and another offered by Fidelity Charitable Gift Fund. I check out ejewishphilanthropy.com every day. There has been much advice disseminated by Hillel International, my network of colleagues on campus and beyond, bloggers, and newspaper columnists. Like the coronavirus itself, the sense of financial doom and gloom is invisible, contagious, and scary, leaving many of us – donors and askers - feeling uncertain of how to move forward.

MIT Hillel continues to deliver on our mission through our existing programs for all constituents, as Rabbi Fisher described above in her column, and is also contributing to “campus” more broadly. MIT has assigned every student, undergraduate and graduate alike, a coach. Every member of our program team (Michelle, Marissa, Shoshana, and Natalie) volunteered, and in the aggregate they are serving as resources for 37 students, of whom 30 are Jewish / Hillel constituents and 7 are part of the larger MIT community. The type of personal outreach and questioning that is our hallmark has added relevance for students today as they cope with such major changes to their educational experience, living situation, and social lives.

After much thought, I have ONE ask / piece of advice for MIT Hillel donors. Many non-profits end their fiscal year on June 30. For MIT, for MIT Hillel, and for all of your other interests, if you gave a gift last year, please give again. Regardless of whether you maintain your same level or can only give a small token gift during the current circumstances, your participation will demonstrate that you remain supportive of the mission and that the communal base of support has a solid foundation. The professional and lay leaderships of all of these places will deeply appreciate the continuity of your support. *Bad times do not last forever, and our relationships sustain us through hardship. This is as true for our institutions as it is for our families.*

And, like any good p-set, the toughest questions have a few parts. Part b of my ONE ask is: please don't wait for June 30! The biggest challenge that non-profits face right now is

uncertainty.

Those of you who read here regularly know that my two objectives for this column are to reiterate our gratitude for your support of MIT Hillel and to inspire you generally in your philanthropy. Both goals have increased intensity today – for MIT Hillel and all of your other places, you are needed more than ever, and you are appreciated more than ever.

May you and all those you hold dear remain safe.

Marla Choslovsky SM '88
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[Add your name](#) to MIT Hillel's 2020 Donor Roll! Scroll down to MIT Hillel to give.

[Thank you for supporting MIT Hillel!](#)

Your generous support allows us to help keep Jewish life vibrant on the MIT campus!

Tamid Initiative - Planned Giving @ MIT Hillel

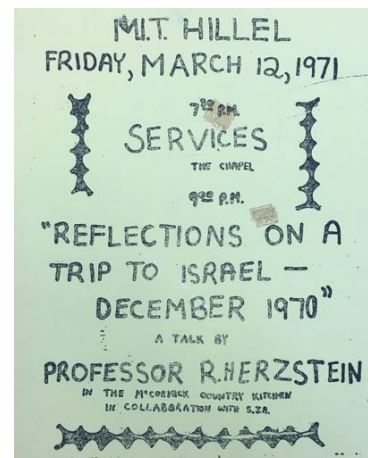
We invite alumni and friends who care deeply about Jewish life at MIT to consider joining the Institute's **Katharine Dexter McCormick (1904) Society (KDMS)** and be part of the **Tamid Initiative** by making a bequest to MIT, for the benefit of MIT Hillel. Your generosity will help MIT Hillel engage today's students, securing our Jewish future with confidence.

MIT and MIT Hillel are eager to help you meet your objectives. For more information, please contact MIT Hillel Director of Development, Marla Choslovsky, marla360@mit.edu. To inform us that you have already planned such a gift, please contact us directly.

From the Archives!

This month, we are throwing it back to a poster for Friday night services from 1971!

This particular Shabbat included a talk from Professor Rherzstein, who spoke on "Reflections on a trip to Israel".



On the Calendar

Leading Jewish Minds @ Home!

Thursday, June 4, 2020: Sherry Turkle has agreed to be our next speaker for our new Leading Jewish Minds @ Home Zoom seminars - stay tuned for an invite with the link to register.

Click [here](#) to access the recording from Professor Daniel Jackson's talk on "Portraits of Resilience", as well as more Leading Jewish Minds info from this semester.

Mazal Tov!

If you have life-cycle events to share with the MIT Hillel community, please [let us know](#).

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