



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

- 1) Israeli graduate students hosting a JIY (Jew-It-Yourself) Sukkot dinner
- 2) Technion Hillel students visit MIT as part of the MIT-Technion Hillels' ConnecTech Fellowship
- 3) GradHillel students celebrating Sukkot by eating sushi in the sukkah

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### **MIT Hillel Update**



“Our work is about people, not programs.” I participated in a Boston Symposium last week sponsored by International Hillel, and in one of the breakout sessions, a colleague opened with these words. It is a statement I have also shared and asserted many times. Hillel is about individual student growth, about meeting students where they are at, listening to their needs and goals, and finding (perhaps connecting them to, perhaps creating together) the Jewish opportunities – educational, communal, ritual, and/or

spiritual – that will help them make a lifetime commitment to their Judaism and the Jewish people.

In an exercise to help crystalize the meaning of this statement, all of us in the room spent 10 minutes in small groups talking about what motivated us in college, and what was happening on campus, in America and in the world at that time. It became a conversation about our formative time as emerging adults, as 18- to 22-year-olds. In my triad, diverse epochs and experiences meant the discussion included: the impact of the Civil Rights era, finding one’s spouse, and

building a peer community. In just 10 minutes, we “dove deep” and learned about what made each other “tick” and what drove and inspired us.



The consciousness of today’s Hillel approach is about building such relationships, and not ever letting our first conversation be our last. Listening deeply to the successes, and travails, of our students. Guiding. Mentoring. Pushing to take the next step. Encouraging to do one more, or one less, thing. Introducing a Jewish text or thought that relates to a personal experience. Mapping, with the students, where their Jewish journeys could go, and walking with them as they take those steps. Inquiring about other friends who could benefit from like conversations.

Over my past 11 years, a conversation on “what does it mean to love?” led to a multi-year 1:1 study of Buber. A walk on Yom Kippur afternoon led to a student learning how to lead Friday night services. A recognition and connecting the dots, over many cups of coffee, of a student’s stepping into leadership for his fraternity and sports team became him designing and leading seders over multiple years: for Hillel, for his family (including his super-proud grandfather), and for friends. These are just three of my personal “coffee date” favorites. I, and each of my staff, could add so many more.

The reason we are one of the top Hillels in the nation is not because we have the best program; many Hillels do incredible things. We are one of the best because we invest in the labor-intensive process of individually knowing our students. Having personal relationship building as our focus is also the most rewarding part of my job.

L’shalom,

Rabbi Michelle H. Fisher  
Executive Director  
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## Mentshn of Mention



Hi! My name is Meital Hoffman. I am a senior studying urban planning and computer science. I am also in my first year of the Masters in City Planning program at MIT. I was born in Jerusalem but grew up in Skokie, a suburb of Chicago. I grew up going to Jewish day school and attending an egalitarian minyan. Judaism has always been an important part of my identity and I am consistently learning how I want to engage with it as an adult.

I first came to Hillel for Shabbat dinner my freshman year. I was looking to make new friends and to scope out what Jewish life was like at MIT. I was surprised and pleased to find a lot of interesting students and an amazing staff who have helped me grow and learn over the past 3 years. One of the most meaningful

and memorable Hillel experiences I’ve had has been through the ConnecTech program.

ConnecTech is a program that connects 10 Jewish MIT students with 10 Jewish students from the Technion in Haifa. In the Spring we faceted with the cohort and discussed our Jewish experiences around different holidays. Then in May, the MIT students went to Haifa for a week to explore Jewish-Israeli life and spend time with the Technion students. This past week, the Technion students were in Boston visiting us and learning about the American Jewish experience. I am generally a very left-wing person, and I have had a complicated relationship with Israel. Conversing with the Technion students about politics and identity helped me better empathize with the Israeli experience. In one of our conversations in Haifa, one of the participants described the anti-semitism he experienced in France prior to making Aliyah to Israel. It then clicked for me why Israel's strength and security was so important to him – those were things he could not experience in France.

Last week, I hosted a couple of the Technion students in my co-ed fraternity prior to the start of the program. One night, one of them, Nirel, asked my friend who lives in the house what they thought about Israel. We discussed outside perception and understanding, mostly concluding that the political history of Israel is complicated. The conversation then veered to questions of identity. "I don't think Americans have a strong identity" Nirel claimed. Trying to describe to him which American values are important to my identity made me reflect on exactly what parts of my beliefs stemmed from being American vs. being Jewish. I explained that multi-culturalism, pluralism, and sensitivity were attitudes I attribute to growing up in America.

Beyond helping me better understand the Israeli perspective, these conversations helped me reflect on myself and my experiences. Another highlight of the exchange was spending Sunday with everyone exploring Boston. Daphne, an MIT grad student, and I planned a photo-scamper hunt. We ran around in teams taking photos of Boston landmarks, patriots gear, college signs, and most importantly, cute dogs. It was so much fun to see the Israelis get so excited about things that I typically take for granted, such as eating Chipotle or spending time at the beautiful Public Gardens. In all different spheres, ConnecTech helped me see from a fresh perspective and has given me the space to listen and reflect.

Meital Hoffman '20  
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## Torah from Tech

*Marc D. Silverstein, MD SB '71 is a retired Professor of Medicine. Marc and his wife Cindy King live in Mashpee on Cape Cod. Marc is currently President of the Cape Cod Synagogue in Hyannis, Massachusetts and a member of the MIT Club of Cape Cod.*

### Parasha Lech L'Cha

#### Why did God Choose Abram? Ethical Choices and Opportunity

*The Eternal One said to Abram, "Go forth from your land, your birthplace, your father's house, to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you shall be a blessing." Genesis 12:1-2*

In Parasha Lech L'Cha, Abram follows God's command and travels to the land of Canaan with his wife Sarai and his nephew Lot. Famine requires Abram and Sarai to go to Egypt where he chooses to present Sarai, who is beautiful, as his sister. Sarai is taken



to Pharaoh and Abram's life is saved and he becomes wealthy. The deception is revealed, and Abram and his family travel to the

Negev. Lot is captured and rescued by Abram. Sarai is barren and offers her maidservant Hagar to Abram; Ishmael is born to Hagar when Abram is age 86. God makes a covenant with Abram at age 99. Abram will now be called Abraham, and will be the father of multitudes through Sarai, who will be called Sarah. God gives the land of Canaan to Abraham and his descendants who must observe the covenant of circumcision of all males through all times.

Why was Abram chosen by God to leave his birthplace and travel to Canaan? In a Rabbinical Midrash Abram rejects his father's polytheism and smashes his father's idols. What were the consequences of God's choosing Abram? Abram makes a major (career) change late in life. Abram's faith and ethical choices are complex. His deception in presenting Sarai as his sister in Egypt is troubling. Abram behaved magnanimously as a victor in battle. Abram redeemed his captive nephew and then avoids conflict with him. Abram and Sarai were coping with Sarai's infertility. Abram is faithful to his barren wife. God rewarded Abram's ethical choices with a covenant making him the father of multitudes— the Jewish people.

MIT undergraduate or graduate students might ask why were we chosen for the opportunity to leave home and family, travel to Cambridge and study at MIT? Did the opportunity arise from our own merit and hard work alone? How did we benefit from our family, our teachers, our schools, our community, and other institutions that made choice possible? How will we choose a major, projects, friends, and social activities?

Mid-career MIT alumni, MIT faculty, or MIT staff might ask, are we honest in our professional roles? Have we engaged in a deception like Abram's asking Sarai to present herself as his sister to save our lives - hoping to be rewarded? Will it turn out as well for us as it did for Abram? How do we balance our own interests and the interests of our colleagues, proteges, company, community and country?

All MIT students and MIT alumni might ask how do we approach the inevitable differences of opinion and conflicts that arise with our family or kinsman? Will we behave magnanimously when we are successful and victorious? Will we behave well if we fail or are defeated in our endeavors? How will we balance family, career and personal needs? Will we support our spouses, our parents and our children as Abram treated Sarai? Will we help our family as Abram did when he rescued Lot? Will we respond to illness, injury and dependence as Abram responded to Sarai's infertility?

Parasha Lech L'Cha prompts us to ask these questions. Abram's life may guide us to make ethical decisions in our lives.

Marc D. Silverstein, MD  
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## **MIT Hillel's 2020 Annual Fund**

### **Add to Jewish life @ MIT!**

To Our Current and Future Supporters:

When November hits and I see turkey décor everywhere, I start to look forward to having my family completely together, which is less likely now that my three children are adults in their own right and making their own plans.



My daughter lives and works locally, my first son is in graduate school out of state, and my younger son is in college in yet a different state. American culture reinforces Thanksgiving as a time for family, and at least

so far, it is the one time of year I can count on everyone coming home at the same time, even more so than with the Jewish holidays.

Last year, instead of preparing the whole feast myself *for* them, we redefined the holiday to be less about the dining room and more about the kitchen. The emphasis of the day was hanging out in the kitchen *with* each other while each person took a turn to cook something. Some dishes were shared efforts. Those not at work were seated nearby and part of the conversation, cooking advice, and laughter.

My plan this year is to build on that experience and also make it about nourishing each other. Yes, with food. And yes, with all the things that nourish the soul.

How my thoughts evolved is a direct outgrowth of my work here at MIT Hillel. "My" donors share humor (regulars who make me laugh, you know who you are), share my love of crosswords, share pride of and at times concern for MIT, share your Jewish journeys, and sometimes share your life events. You are mostly alumni, and also faculty, staff, parents, and other friends. You range from Class of 2023 (parents of freshmen) to Class of 1945! When I come to work every day, I feel like I am hanging out *with* you as much as I am a resource *for* you. Thank you for nourishing Hillel in both ways.

All of that, even though, perhaps, we have never actually met. I invite you to find a way to connect – in the spirit of Thanksgiving, we always appreciate the opportunity to say thank you in person. We're in NYC this week (please stop by our event even if you have not RSVP'd). We have on-campus luncheons in November and December. And we are pleased to announce a Florida event on Tuesday, February 4 (snowbirds, please let me know to invite you). We also plan to get to DC and to California this year, and on occasion we make it to other destinations. We hope to see you!

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

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

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

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### **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.

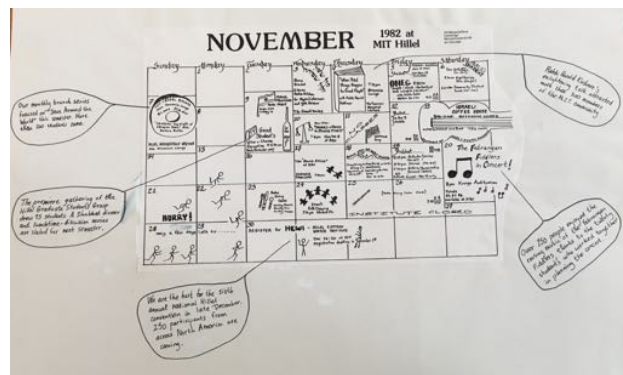
MIT and MIT Hillel are eager to help you meet your objectives. For more information, please contact MIT Hillel Director of Development, Marla Choslovsky, [marla360@mit.edu](mailto:marla360@mit.edu). To inform us that you have already planned such a gift, please contact us directly.

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## From the Archives!

For this month's "From the Archives!" we found a calendar from November 1982.

On today's date in '82, Hillel hosted a semester-long bagel brunch series titled, "Jews Around the World", which drew over 200 students!



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## On the Calendar

Mark your calendars for two more Leading Jewish Minds seminars this semester:

- [Friday, November 15, 2019 - Professor Susan Silbey](#)
- Friday, December 13, 2019 - Professor Laura Schulz

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## Mazal Tov!

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

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