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

1) Students registering for our winter Birthright Israel trip

2) Haley Abramson ’19 and Mae Dotan ’19 at the Caramel Apple Study Break

3) Amy Vogel ’20, Meital Hoffman ’20, Hilary Vogelbaum ’20 at the Caramel Apple Study Break

Executive Director’s Update

L’shanah tova! A happy, healthy, sweet New Year!

At Passover time I announced, “Over 245 seder meals served!” I think the equivalent for Rosh Hashana would either be “Over 108 pounds of apples consumed!” or “More than 1444 honey sticks enjoyed!” (Both are probably close to true…)

We’re MIT, so a few other statistics. We had over 110 at Sunday’s first night Rosh Hashana dinner. We had 15 attend “Ctrl-Alt-Del: Rebooting for the New Year”, an inspiring and deep discussion on Monday afternoon, during which students reflected on the past year and thought about and discussed some big guiding life questions for the year ahead. Dozens of students who were traveling the Infinite Corridor during the holiday made commitments for what they want to do this year, and what they want the new year to be. (See picture) This was in addition to the 120+ who attended our Conservative, Orthodox, or Reform services.

The Jewish calendar worked in our favor this year… September provided us a holiday-free month to engage students as they arrived and returned. Every freshman received a personal invite from a Hillel staff member for coffee or ice cream – and my staff and I now have our own meaning for “Freshman 15”. We are already seeing freshman leaders: one created a second night Rosh Hashana dinner for New House (see picture below) (this was after identifying all her dorm’s Jews with a huge building white board invite to “Join Lowkey Jew Club”), and another organized a Hillel-wide caramel apple making last week, after immediately asking if she could join the student board, having heard one board member was off to Cambridge England this year.

Throughout September, we launched a series of Saturday afternoon discussions called “All Jews Considered”, designed as a way for different students and student sub-communities to better know and engage with each other – and hear about how varied Jewish experiences can be. Over the three weeks, Moriel Levy ’17 talked about growing up in Mozambique and Portugal; Jonathan Harvey Buschel ’18 shared his experiences coming from a mixed Jamaican and Jewish heritage; Tchelet Segev ’18 framed growing up in Israel, the US, Taiwan, and South Korea (yes, she’s fluent in Chinese) as a “blockbuster record-breaking saga”. Students who had only seen each other at dinners or events now have greater knowledge about, and feel less intimidated by, talking with each other.

Oh, and back to the numbers: we already have begun 5 Jewish learning class series, expanding the Jewish knowledge and thinking of over 55 students through the study of everything from traditional Biblical rabbinc texts to modern Jewish literature (and much in-between).

May the new year of 5777 bring positive growth, measurable outcomes, and meaningful interactions and friendships. As well as the more traditional blessings of happiness, health, and sweetness.

G’mar Hatima Tova - May you be inscribed, and sealed! for a good year

Rabbi Michelle Fisher SM ’97
Our Torah this month is taught by Reb Josh Weisman, our new Rabbinic Intern working with the graduate student population. He is a fourth-year rabbinical student at Hebrew College. Before moving East for rabbinical school, he was a grass-roots organizer for ten years in his native San Francisco. Reb Josh is a lover of Jewish texts and nature, and a teacher and practitioner of Jewish meditation. Reb Josh can be contacted at joshwe@mit.edu

Most of us have probably heard Rosh HaShanah called the Birthday of the World, but I suspect most of us have not dwelled much on the image. There’s good reason for that since, as my teacher Rabbi Ebn Leader has pointed out, the image of Rosh HaShanah as the Day of Judgment tends to crowd out the image of it as Birthday of the World in our minds. Even though the precedent for the birthday model goes back to the Babylonian Talmud (Rosh HaShanah 10b). Even the famous (and catchy) piyyut “HaYom Harat Olam,” which begins with the birth metaphor, quickly turns to the theme of judgment and remains there. With the fate of the planet ever more on our society’s collective mind, and having recently celebrated the first birthday of our first child, I have a new appreciation for what Rosh HaShanah as birthday of the world could mean for us.

I say we celebrated the first birthday of our child, Erez Noam, but in reality we celebrated it three times: first a few weeks before he turned one, while my parents were visiting; second closer to his actual birthday, this time for friends and local family; and third on his actual birthday, when we were out of town. Energy aside, we could have kept on celebrating, because as anyone who has loved a child knows, the love we feel for children knows no bounds and wants to find expression as often as it can. My wife and I often remark how our favorite pastime over the past year plus has been becoming sitting and watching the baby – watching him sleep, smile, play, then roll, crawl, walk, and now explore his world. It’s only cliché because it’s true: There is no detail of a baby or her activities that is not a delight to those who love her. That’s what makes their early birthdays such major events. As we all know, birthdays at 21, 41, 61, and so on, aren’t as special as they are at one. By the time you hit 5777 (or 4,543,000,000, give or take), people aren’t so likely to make a big fuss over your birthday, or even to take much note at all.

I’d like to suggest we view the Birthday of the World more like the first birthday of a beloved child. What if we dotted on our world as much as we do over a small child? What if we noticed every detail of her body and behavior and marveled over it? What if we celebrated her birth with the same overflowing love with which we celebrated a new child? As scientists, you know the inner workings of the world and the universe in greater depth and detail than others, which only puts you in a better position to appreciate and celebrate their preciousness. Your work is vital to increasing our gratitude and care for our one precious Earth. As my teacher Rabbi Art Green urges, now is a time to put the illuminations with deeper thoughts about how we approach life. At one point he said, paraphrasing here, that “things are only important because we choose to make them important”. With respect to the show, I understood that he was basically telling us that he is diverting our attention, and that it is easy to be tricked when the relative importance of things gets skewed.

But I also heard that phrase through my MIT Hillel filter. I heard the line with one ear as being about the Jewish New Year, and with the other ear as being about our philanthropic choices. “Things are only important because we choose to make them important” applies to our lives in many ways – what we believe in, what we say, and what we do. At any rate, in this period of reflection between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, may we all re-focus ourselves on what we choose to make – and keep – important in our lives.

Announcements:

THANK YOU to all the New Yorkers who joined us for lunch with political science Professor Adam Berinsky. The topic of political polling was of particular interest as we approach the election. Attendees overcame heavy rain and significant traffic obstacles in all modes of transportation (UN General Assembly, Chelsea bombing two nights prior, and increased security for both). A special thank you to hosts Martin ‘51 and Madge Miller, for their renewed sponsorship of this event, and another to Prof Berinsky for traveling to NYC to help us convene MIT’s Jewish community.

Are you a Florida snowbird? Professor Berinsky will reprise his talk – with a post-election debrief - in the Miami area on Sunday, December 4. If you do not live in Florida all year and want to be invited to this event, please email Ron Flax, Hillel administrator extraordinaria, ASAP so that we can make sure you are included.

Lastly, our annual appeal letter should be arriving in your mailbox, perhaps even today. Thank you in advance for your generous response. If the gift array on your personalized letter seems out of whack (see above on relative importance!), it is most likely because MIT Hillel is a small portion of your overall support of MIT, and we thank you for all you do across campus.

G’Mar Hatima Tova - May you be inscribed, and sealed!, for a good year.
Add your name to MIT Hillel’s 2017 Donor Roll!

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 or let us know in writing.

On the Calendar

Leading Jewish Minds @ MIT

- **November 4**- Polina Golland: "From Pixels to Clinical Biomarkers"
- **December 2**- Jay Keyser and Nancy Kelly: "Travels to India"
- **December 4**- Adam Berinsky in Miami: "Public Opinion, The 2016 Election, and Beyond"

MIT Hillel wishes a mazal tov to:

Evan Crane (SB ’17) on his engagement to Talia Weisberg!

*If you have life-cycle events to share with the MIT Hillel community, please let us know.*