



20 Tishrei 5781
October 8, 2020



Happy Sukkot from MIT Hillel!

- 1) A beautiful gingerbread sukkah from the first ever Virtual Sukkah Hop
- 2) A zoomed-in Zoom picture of students and Assistant Director, Marissa Feinman Freed, making a Rosh Hashanah toast to the new year
- 3) On-campus seniors, Anna Rose Osofsky, Austin Edelman, and Boaz Marks, standing beside the Covid-modified Hillel sukkah they built in the Maseeh Courtyard

MIT Hillel Update



A major theme of Sukkot is temporariness. We are told in the Talmud that for a full week we are to make our permanent dwelling temporary and make a temporary dwelling (the sukkah) permanent. With the cooperation of the weather, one is supposed to eat, sleep, study, dwell in the sukkah. Particularly as an “engineer”, this is actually one of my favorite holidays – it is so hands on: building, decorating, cooking, lots of physical preparations.

But it’s been very weird to think about a temporary structure during what feels like a temporary time. (While having reached the six+ month mark of our Covid lives, it may be hard to think of this time as temporary, I am hopeful that the level of restrictions we currently are living with will be less a year from now...) It turns out that making a sukkah on MIT’s campus in the time of Covid, particularly while trying to uphold specific social distancing rules spanning different pods, takes more effort than the five hours the Hillel staff and students usually spend to erect the large Hillel sukkah on Kresge Oval. Many thanks to the numerous MIT administrators, staff, and students who helped make this happen.

Here are just some of the considerations and learnings that went into creating the opportunity for our students on campus to have a sukkah in Maseeh courtyard:

- It is possible to use most of the pieces from a pre-fab 24'x24' sukkah to build an 8'x12'
- A three-sided sukkah is both kosher and safer in Covid. But it requires a new tarp.
- A sukkah with windows is also kosher, and even safer in Covid. That newly-purchased tarp will be immediately sliced and cut up.
- One needs more shade than sun at mid-day for a kosher sukkah. While one does not need to see the stars, MIT is pleased that it is good to have air flow through your schach/roofing.
- Jews and non-Jews alike are fascinated by the details of Jewish law, and using it to make Jewish life vibrant, happy, and do-able on campus, even in difficult times.

For all our students, on and off campus, Hillel also ran two virtual “Sukkah hops” for celebration, learning, and socializing. Just in time for Sukkot, the newest version of Zoom allows users to self-select breakout rooms. This made for virtual *ushpizin*, allowing our students to jump between different “sukkah” rooms, as if they were progressing as guests from one sukkah to the next.

Creativity and ingenuity will always be a hallmark of our Jewish and MIT practices!

A happy, joyous, safe, and healthy Sukkot!

Hag sameach,

Rabbi Michelle H. Fisher SM '97 (V)
Executive Director
rabbif@mit.edu

Mentshn of Mention



My name is Sarah Aaronson and I'm from Ashland, Oregon, a town of 21,000 people and 3 synagogues. I'm currently a sophomore majoring in 14-2, mathematical economics, and on campus I'm a part of the varsity sailing team, a sister of Alpha Chi Omega, and president of Burton-Conner House.

I first was interested in MIT when my high school friend Hazel told me all about her visit to the campus. She was absolutely in love

with MIT, but ended up deciding not to apply since she wanted to be a history major. Her passion for the school piqued my interest and after diving through the blogs and exploring the website, I was set on applying. After being admitted and attending CPW, where I got to see all of the incredible facets of MIT's culture, I knew I was hooked.

At the very beginning of my MIT experience, I wanted to be involved with Jewish life on campus, but CPW and Orientation were such whirlwind experiences that I couldn't keep track of everything I hoped to do! Luckily, somewhere during that time I met Marissa Feinman Freed, Hillel's Assistant Director (probably at Activities Midway but at this point I'm not 100% sure), and she reached out to me to get coffee. I remember being really touched that she put in the work to make these individual connections with students and had a feeling that this was a sign that I would find a great community within Hillel. My feeling was right!

Also, at the beginning of my first semester, I signed up for the Jewish Learning Fellowship (JLF), thinking it would be a good way to keep sight of myself as I was pulled every which way with all of the new experiences. I wanted to make sure I had something to keep me grounded. I loved the conversations we had in JLF and the fact that I could think about my personal development in ways that weren't immediately tied to p-sets or grades. JLF is also where I met Sarah Wertheimer, the current Hillel Student Board president, who asked me if I wanted to be a part of the board.

Joining the board was definitely one of the best decisions I've made in my time at MIT. I like being tied to the Jewish community in this way and helping take this bond and harnessing it to help other Jewish students at MIT build relationships with each other and find a deeper sense of community on and off-campus. My Jewish involvement helps keep me grounded to my values and connected to my sense of heritage and belonging, so contributing to other students being able to experience similar things is very fulfilling.

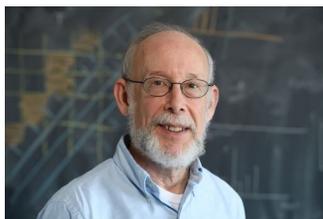
Unfortunately, I didn't get much opportunity to organize board activities while we were still on campus. I coordinated a Tu BiShvat hike right at the beginning of the semester, and then just a month later, before I got to see any of my other events come to fruition, we were sent home. Luckily, we've still been able to hold plenty of virtual events, and I think the challenges of building community in times of Covid have strengthened my creativity. Having the constant of Hillel when I'm disengaged from so many other aspects of MIT has helped me make sure I don't lose this second family I've formed. It keeps me thinking about MIT and the value of the communities I've found there.

As we continue into the virtual fall, I've brainstormed a lot about how to create a version of this for the new freshmen. My first virtual event of the fall was indeed designed with this in mind. We all played the video game Kahoot with various random facts about MIT (mostly things freshmen would casually learn from upperclassmen if we were on campus) and went into breakout rooms to get to know each other. It was clear from the attendance that there was a lot of interest in being a part of the MIT Hillel community even if it would all be virtual. Since then, Marissa and I have planned "Keshet24," a cohort-based program that brings the Class of '24s together for alternating sessions of ice breakers, meeting other members of Hillel, and Jewish education. My hope is this allows the '24s to create connections with each other and the wider MIT Jewish community so that they have a support system during this virtual fall, and also when they eventually get to be at MIT in-person.

Overall, Hillel has been an impactful and meaningful part of my MIT career, and I hope to continue replicating this experience for this year's new students and ones in the future.

Sarah Aaronson '23
saraha@mit.edu

Torah from Tech



Julian Krolik (SB 1971, Courses VIII and XVIII) received a PhD in physics from UC Berkeley 1977 and has been a professor in the Department of Physics and Astronomy at Johns Hopkins University since 1984. A theoretical astrophysicist, his work for the last 20 years has focused on the many ways matter can get into trouble in the immediate vicinity of black holes, and, as a result, make these regions extremely bright. Married for 37 years, he has two grown children.

I have a special relationship with Parshat B'reishit, the first portion of the Torah that we begin on Simchat Torah, and read completely one week later. It begins with my professional

connection: as an astrophysicist, cosmology and the early development of the Universe are part of what I do for work. But it continues with personal ties. Both my son and my daughter were born in the fall, and without any sort of fiddling, the most natural dates for his bar mitzvah and her bat mitzvah landed on B'reishit.

If you follow the triennial system, the parshah breaks up into three pieces: the first covers the creation itself, the second Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, the third Cain and Abel and the geneology up to Noah. In MIT-speak, there is another way to tell the story of the first two sections, and use of a different set of terms can suggest different connotations.

In this language, the first section is about defining the physical and biological universe. Where partial differential equations rule the roost (e.g., the general relativistic magnetohydrodynamics that fills my days), you can understand a system in terms of three things. Its initial conditions describe its state at the point the action begins; its underlying equations tell you about how its parts interact; and its boundary conditions tell you about how the action is influenced or limited by what's going on outside the domain where you actually solve the equations. Creation as described in the first part of the parshah is about all three: introduction and initial placement of the world's elements; their mutual roles; and imposition of a periodic boundary condition on how things change over time -- Shabbat.

The second section adds people to the story and begins its evolution in time. Once Gan Eden, the Garden of Eden, has been landscaped, Adam and Eve are placed there; their interactions are regulated (e.g., which trees' fruit to eat and which to leave alone); and by implication, they are confined to wandering within the garden's boundaries. However, as often happens in physical systems, there are large-amplitude transient effects as the system moves away from its initial state and toward what it will look like in the long-term. A sudden change of state takes place, and the rules governing their lives change discontinuously. In addition, the spatial boundaries set on their travel are inverted -- they can go anywhere except Eden, and an ultimate boundary in time is also imposed: "From dust you were made, and to dust you will return."

This phase change involves deeper implications than those derived from boiling or magnetization. Before it takes place, Adam and Eve have no more autonomy than a particle minimizing its action as it "finds" its trajectory; at first God controls them, then they are manipulated by the snake. By contrast, after their abrupt change in status, they are able to change course in response to internal as well as external stimuli. In this new regime, physical analogies -- and therefore MIT-speak -- become less useful because people with freewill also have independent creativity, so that their interaction dynamics continually change. Now only the boundary conditions imposed by life in the natural world remain.

On the other hand, with this new capacity, human moral intuition is invented -- gratitude leading to sacrifice, responsibility for one another, mercy, and so is its inverse -- crime. It is at this point that the main Biblical story, which is about the way people live in the world, begins.

Julian Krolik '71 (VIII, XVIII)
jhk@jhu.edu

MIT Hillel's 2021 Annual Fund

Add to Jewish life @ MIT!



To Our Current and Future Supporters,

There's an awesome new show, I'm calling it JHH BlueZone, that aired recently. It was modeled on NFL RedZone, a weekly, seasonal, 7-hour show that allows



fans - in the truest “fanatic” sense of the word - to see every touchdown from every game, every Sunday afternoon during football season.

Jewish High Holiday BlueZone is, of course, merely your computer tuned into Zoom for remote services during Covid Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. Just like football fans can choose to watch one full game for a few hours on network TV or every game each for a few minutes on this cable program, we Jews had the opportunity to do something similar this year with our observance.

In my family, the three of us who are local gathered together in one room to view the same monitor, just as we would sit together in shul. We mostly watched the home team for many consecutive hours... but who can resist the remote control during commercial breaks, especially on Yom Kippur when a fridge run is out of the question? We also tuned in for a little bit of a favorite leader at our former shul, a few minutes at a third local synagogue that we like when we have occasion to be there, and we tried unsuccessfully to view a cantor friend at a fourth synagogue. Even though we couldn't gather with community, somehow we ended up being able to connect more widely than we could physically. Overall we felt that the extra access to multiple places partially countered the isolation of davening at home.

As a development professional, I want to suggest that this is also a good time to connect with the organizations you care about, or even to explore some new ones. It's a lot easier to “channel surf” these days!

- Maybe before you routinely turned down offers to spend an hour at Starbucks to meet with a professional or lay leader to be solicited or merely be thanked in person; whereas maybe now you'll be open to a 20-minute Zoom call to achieve one of those goals.
- Maybe before you didn't want to commit an entire evening to an organization's event just to learn more; whereas maybe now there is an online info session being offered by an organization you were curious about.
- Maybe before you gave out of habit and barely glanced at the offerings from your organizations; whereas maybe now you'll tune in and update your knowledge about the impact of your donations.

As always, thank you to you, our community of support. We are especially touched that so many of you have been moved to make your gifts early in the new year (Jewish, fiscal, academic). My personal goal is to not need an “Al Chayt”, that is an extra strike to my heart and appeal for forgiveness, next year for the sin of belated thank-you notes.

I invite you to take advantage of MIT Hillel's offerings: Leading Jewish Minds @ MIT speaker series, annual Young Alumni Learning event, and whatever new things we come up with this year to score a touchdown that you won't want to miss being part of.

Chag sameach!

Marla Choslovsky SM '88 (XV)
MIT Hillel Director of Development
marla360@mit.edu

[Add your name](#) to MIT Hillel's 2021 Donor Roll!

Scroll down on the giving site and click on "MIT Hillel" to make your donation.

[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's "From the Archives" is a picture of students building the sukkah in the 1950s!

Nearly seven decades later, our students still love to build the sukkah.



On the Calendar

Leading Jewish Minds @ Home!

Fall 2020

- [Wednesday, Oct 21: Samuel Jay Keyser, "The Mental Life of Modernism"](#)
- Thursday, Nov 12: Ed Roberts, Topic TBD
- Thursday, Dec 3: Rainer Weiss, "Probing the Universe with Gravitational Waves"

Click [here](#) to access the recordings from Professor Daniel Jackson's talk on "Portraits of Resilience", Professor Ezra Zuckerman Sivan's talk on "Inventing The Seven-Day Week: Millennia-old Lessons for our Self-Quarantine World", Professor Sherry Turkle's talk, "Not Alone Together, but Together Alone - the complexities of screen time today", and Professor Joe Coughlin's talk on "MIT AgeLab Asks: Back to Normal Or Lifestyle Reset? - How COVID-19 Has Accelerated Tech-Enabled Living Across the Generations"

Mazal Tov!

- Mazal tov to Judi Fusman '21 and Alon Kosowsky-Sachs '20 on their engagement!

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

MIT Hillel

Tel: 617.253.2982
hillel.mit.edu
Email: hillel@mit.edu

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