



21 Elul 5780
September 10, 2020



Shana Tova from MIT Hillel!

- 1) Customized honey dippers that were sent to the grad students in their Rosh Hashanah care packages
- 2) Rosh Hashanah care packages that were sent to the undergrad students
- 3) Students participating in a virtual challah bake and showing off their finished products

MIT Hillel Update



It's a new school year! It's almost a new Jewish year. Shana tova! As the prophet Isaiah (57:19) greets the ancient Israelites as they return: "Shalom! Shalom! To those afar and those who are near!" What an appropriate greeting at this time and in this era.

MIT Hillel exists for our students. Regardless of historic world events, affecting where students are learning from, how they are learning, and what they physically can or cannot do, Hillel is and will be there for them. Whether it be in the realm of learning, Jewish practice, or community building, we provide deep and meaningful content and opportunities for our students, undergraduate and graduate.

How are we delivering now?

- We're offering a variety of cohort-based learning opportunities (Greek Jews, Freshmen, an Israel curriculum, a Basic Judaism curriculum, and a Pursuing Justice curriculum) for both undergrads and grads. Students voted with their presence that such on-going cohort communities are meaningful to them by continuing to stay with their cohorts last spring and then signing up for new cohorts throughout the summer.
- JJ Kimche joined our staff as a new Orthodox Educator. He is offering three classes a week: Parshah and Commentaries, 929 Bible Class, and Great Debates in Jewish Philosophy.
- Staff are reaching out to our students for virtual meetings. Many of our first-years

participated in Orientation Week activities. We will be following-through to have 1:1s with them, as well as with our returning students.

- Virtual Shabbat dinners and “Jew it Yourself” holiday offerings. The Grad Students also have been organizing and will continue to run Shabbat dinner discussions on different themes.
- We will be streaming [Higher Holidays](#) (Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur) services in partnership with International Hillel and Reboot, as well as offering a number of MIT Hillel staffed learning options on and around the holidays. We also will have two Jew Year’s Eve communal celebrations/gatherings. (Note: These Higher Holiday live-streaming services and other options, are open to *anyone* connected to a Hillel: students, alumni, faculty, staff, etc. [Free registration](#) is happening now.)
- Undergraduate and Graduate students who give us their term addresses will be receiving High Holiday care packages from Hillel.
- 1-off classes on many different topics, including spiritually preparing for the High Holidays, holiday themed food/cooking classes, and “Torah on Tap” graduate student classes.
- Our undergraduate and graduate student boards have each been running a number of game nights and other social gatherings throughout the summer and now into the term.

Suffice it to say, MIT Hillel continues to deliver on our mission through both adaptive and creative new ways. It’s amazing to see the innovative and resilient way everyone at Hillel – and MIT in general -- continues to work.

As we enter 5781, may you remain safe, healthy, and centered. May this new year be one of positive change, increased health and safety, and personal meaning and growth, one in which we will again be able to gather closely in person as families, friends, and communities.

L’shana tova,

Rabbi Michelle H. Fisher SM '97 (V)
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Mentshn of Mention



Hello! My name is Sarah Knopf, I’m a year 2022 Biology and Science Writing major. I chose those because I love both subjects, and I believe that science can only make a difference if it’s communicated clearly!

I grew up in the SF Bay Area, where I was raised Protestant and Reform Jewish. I attended services when I was younger, but other than celebrating major holidays like Passover and Rosh Hashanah, I only had a surface level involvement with my religious background. That has greatly changed since coming to MIT.

I first came to Hillel back when I was in high school. I was visiting my older brother, Nathaniel, who graduated in 2019 and was also involved in Hillel. I sat in on a Shabbat dinner with him and his friends, and had a lot of fun. It encouraged me to continue attending with him my freshman year.

I was definitely a little shy when I first came to MIT, and Hillel started as a place for me to spend time with my brother and his friends. Him being there made socializing a little easier, and I spent my freshman year sitting with him and slowly getting to know everyone at Hillel. Once he graduated, I found that even without him, I still had the community I’d become a part

of. It was still easy to be involved even though he wasn't there, and that helped me realize how amazing the community was.

After that, I decided that I wanted to get more involved in Hillel. I began attending Hillel events, participated in a Jewish Learning Fellowship (JLF), and eventually became a member of the Hillel Student Board, where I got to plan my own events. I really felt at home becoming friends with everyone at Hillel, and it became a place where I could feel comfortable when the stress of MIT became too much.

At first, I was hoping to get closer to the people while exploring my culture, but I slowly also became more interested in learning more about my Jewish identity. I've really started to explore my Judaism since becoming involved in Hillel. I learned more about my history and culture through programs like JLF and the summer chavurah cohort learning.

I even began attending reform services every Shabbat. Before MIT Hillel, I never would've imagined I would be able to start attending services on my own - I was fairly shy and not confident enough in myself and my Jewish identity. However, being at Hillel gave me the confidence in my community that I needed to take the first step and begin attending.

Although the stress of Covid has been a struggle, it's been great having such a supportive group. Seeing my friends at Hillel and helping to plan virtual events has been really fun because I get to come up with creative ways to see everyone. I also joined the summer chavurah learning group to both stay in touch with people during quarantine, and to have in-depth and thought-provoking discussions that were a great distraction from the stress of Covid.

I never expected Hillel to become such an important community to me, but I'm so glad it has. I will always be thankful to everyone making me feel so welcome.

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Torah from Tech



Gerald Clarke retired from the Boston University faculty in the Questrom School of Business after 25 years, and was previously on the faculty and research staff at MIT. He was a senior consultant with PriceWaterhouseCoopers, Exxon Enterprises VC Group, and an expert witness in the Federal Courts and before the SEC, NYSE and NASD. Happily retired, he was appointed to Public Health and Environmental Protection committees and commissions of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and elected to the Chair of the Board of Health. He happily reports

that it is well that he is of antique age for otherwise he would not have been able to keep up with the 60-80 hour workload that the pandemic has brought.

Nitzavim-Vayelekh (Deuteronomy 29:9-31:30) is the combination of two Torah portions that is read in the week before Rosh Hashanah. The words that come together to create the name of the Torah reading are contrasting verbs that seem to be at odds when combined. **Nitzavim** means "ones standing (in place)" and **Vayelekh** means "and then he went out".

- The individual portions are like entangled electrons in Quantum Mechanics having the opposite values in their characteristics, addressing the community (*eidah*) and the individual in opposite directions.
- Nitzavim speaks directly to **those standing** in gathering before HaShem on the **need for unity in the community** as it is a major factor in the effecting and improving the survivability of the people.

- Yet, Vayelekh predicts that there is **freedom of choice**, and the opportunity for the people to turn away from righteousness, with HaShem hiding His face, and even if a choice leads to death.

Speaking from my perspective as an official in Public Health, the Torah proves itself to be always current and appropriate. The analogy and application are trivially obvious, to use an old MIT professorial admonition:

- Members of the population must be willing maintain **unity** in how they act and sublimate their natural inclination for large and pleasurable interactions and gatherings. Individual liberties, be it not masking or partying in crowds, must be lessened in importance and observance to behavior which benefits the community as a whole. This is counter to what we hear from those who erroneously, fallaciously and facetiously cite supposed rights. This is also counter to the normal proclivity of the young to think of themselves as invulnerable. Traffic accident rates tell us differently and so we see the same in the SARS-CoV-2 pandemic.
- Failing to think and act for the benefit of the wider interest of the population, and instead **going one's own way** in one's action and in a group of friends, those who fall away from guidance and unity become transmitters of disease and possibly even death, to themselves, to their families even with older members and to the larger population. Even with ethical standards and laws in place requiring adherence to public health measures, one is still free to violate those laws, with or without penalty directly to the violator, but the penalty also falls on members of the population.

The late Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, spoke to this oxymoron in our observances and our service of God (*avodah*). He said that a Jew must both be standing and firmly rooted in tradition and yet, like an electron, must be moving progressively higher in unison with his companions. His words should lead us both now in this Jewish month of Elul as we approach Rosh Hashanah and always: we are in a superposition of opposing states, "moving and standing, striving for spiritual while remaining physical, (*rotzo vshov*) - running and returning" as is found in Ezekiel 1:14.

In this holy but difficult season, may you all be safe and healthy and mindful of all your responsibilities.

Prof. Gerald Clarke '66
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MIT Hillel's 2021 Annual Fund

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To Our Current and Future Supporters,

Pandemic Elul is noticeably different for me from last year's pre-holiday month. Specifically, as I reflect on the year, I notice that this year I have far fewer people to contact and ask for forgiveness. Social distancing will do that.

For the first time ever I am thinking of loose words and misdeeds not solely as sources of embarrassment and remorse, but also as blessings in and of themselves.

They result from human interaction. They make us strive to do better in the coming year. They lead us to mend relationships and be thoughtful about how we build new ones. I'm pining for regrets, yet another weird outcome of Covid.

Yes, sins of commission in our relationships may be down. But I wonder – are sins of omission on the increase? When we don't see others, are we more likely to miss opportunities to help others? Are sins of omission as strong a driving force to compel us be our better selves in the coming year? As individuals, how much do we rely on the full sensory interpersonal experience to motivate us to action?

In the aggregate, I also wonder what this means from a development standpoint. To be sure, the pandemic has increased need across the spectrum; I think it has also heightened awareness of these needs and is bringing out the best in philanthropists, in donors of all levels. I pause here to thank the community of MIT Hillel supporters for meeting our FY20 goal and ensuring that we supported students through the shutdown, the summer, and into the new academic year.

However, as we settle into a “new normal”, how do we maintain those communal bonds that we seek so desperately when in shutdown and isolation mode? Do we feel as responsible for one another when we won't physically gather to atone together? Can we sustain our sense of ownership of the organizations we have cared about in the past? Even if we are easily able to send our annual donations... will we?

One example that comes to mind is having a doctor's appointment by Zoom. When we go into the hospital, we see the facility (equipment and donor wall alike), we see people - other than our one provider – working and get a sense of the breadth of activity and need, and we see other patients in the waiting room. Is the convenience of telemedicine as compelling to respond to the hospital's appeal letter? Without that personal interaction with the doctor, are we as moved to express gratitude for the care we have received?

As the High Holy Days approach, I wish you a year not only of physical health and well-being, also of mental and spiritual strength to overcome the adverse effects of social distancing on ourselves and our communities. May we have opportunity for sins of commission, and take joy in learning from our missteps.

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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!

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.

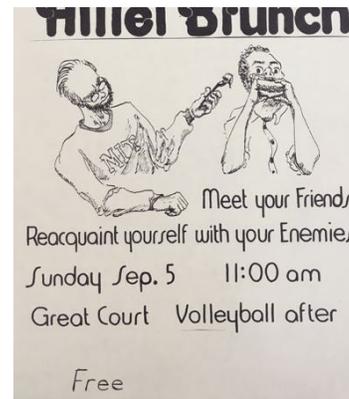
From the Archives!

This month's "From the Archives" is a poster



advertising a Hillel brunch in the '70s!

This welcome back brunch acknowledges that while this is a good opportunity to catch up with old friends, this is also a great time to reacquaint yourself with your enemies.



On the Calendar

Leading Jewish Minds @ Home!

Stay tuned for our fall line-up, in formation:

- Rainer Weiss, Date TBD
- Jay Keyser, Date TBD
- Speaker TBD

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", and Professor Sherry Turkle's talk, "Not Alone Together, but Together Alone - the complexities of screen time today".

Mazal Tov!

- Mazal tov to Ronit Langer '20 on her marriage to Andrew Katz!
- Welcome to [JJ Kimche](#), MIT Hillel's newest Orthodox Educator!

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

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