

# Food fight at MIT

➤ Keith Nelson is a brilliant guy. A chemistry professor at MIT, his faculty Web page says his research “is aimed at time-resolved optical study and control of condensed matter structural changes and the collective modes of motion through which they occur.”

Judging by his performance two Wednesdays ago at the seventh Latke-Hamantash Debate at MIT, sponsored annually by MIT Hillel, he’s also a rabid hamantash critic.

“For me, the fight started when I was very young,” recalled Nelson, “enjoying what I thought was a simple cultural inheritance. Little did I imagine that I was sampling an invitation for pure evil. Haman, the villain . . . who sought the fiery death of all Jews; every bite of every hamantashen you ever eat is filled with the soul of Haman!”

The competition pitted six MIT academics in a battle to determine the superior of the Jewish treats — the three-cornered Purim pastry made with a variety of fillings or the fried potato pancake (latke).

Other presenters that night included Nelson’s teammate, professor David Jones, who linked the recent salmonella outbreak to some bad hamantashen.

Asking us what we thought were the respective environmental footprints of the foods, Jones’s opponent, chemistry prof Jeffrey Steinfeld, unveiled “experimental evidence” in the form of a six-year-old hamantash that was still in good shape. A comparably aged latke, meanwhile, he’d had to dispose of as hazardous waste for public-safety reasons.

In the interest of objectivity, I’ll say that my allegiance lies with the latke, a treat so disgustingly delicious that, when I was growing up, it would have the Christian kids rethinking their religion. Most in attendance, as evidenced by the intimidating number of hands raised when tallying votes at the debate’s end, seemed to agree.

The vote counters, unfortunately, no doubt fearing a terrific brawl, called it a tie. But something interesting occurred later while waiting on line in the lobby to sample the pastries. I noticed that the latkes were devoured faster than their counterparts. The true winner, it seemed, had revealed itself.



**THE CHOSEN ONES**  
Academics at MIT recently debated which Jewish treat — latke or hamantashen — reigns supreme.