



# Slifka

*Joseph Slifka Center for Jewish Life at Yale*

## Birthright & (Re)Discovering Israel's Magic

By Juli Goodman, Director of Jewish Student Life

I have been to Israel many times on a variety of different programs and experiences: guided tours, personal hang out time, even living there for an extended period. Consequently, I may have become a little jaded as to just how exciting a place Israel can be.

Staffing Yale's Birthright trip was unlike any previous Israel experience I've had or been apart of. It was exhausting, but like pretty much everything I do at Slifka, it was immensely rewarding. I was witness to many young people experiencing Israel for the first time, lending me a renewed sense of the magic contained in the experience of the Land of Israel.

"Juli," a participant remarked to me sometime during our first day, "I know this sounds lame, but I just can't believe there's a Jewish state"

This magic was only enhanced by the special add-ons, planned and impromptu, that made the Yale Birthright Trip so unique. On our trip, we ran into Isaac Herzog and Tzipi Livni campaigning in the Carmel market in Tel Aviv; we had an in-depth study of the weekly Torah portion where (among other concepts) God's omnipotence and benevolence were discussed; we met with the founder of XLN Global, a start-up in Tel Aviv, and learned about Israel's start up culture; we relaxed in hot springs in Tiberias, floated covered in mud in the Dead Sea, and snorkeled in the Red Sea; we looked out onto the border of Syria and Lebanon and spoke to UN Peacekeepers who were keeping an eye out on the region; we prayed at the Western Wall – the holiest place in Judaism – alongside another group comprised of Holocaust survivors from Krakow, Poland;

we comforted and embraced our Israeli Soldier friends as they told stories of lost loved ones from the recent operation in Gaza; we hiked through the desert in the south, the lush greenery in the north, and up Masada to watch the sunrise; we stayed up late singing around a campfire outside of the Bedouin tents; we traveled from the very most northern point in the Golan to the very most southern point in Eilat; we posed for instagram photos with Israeli teenagers in the old city of Tzfat; we snacked on Bamba, drank chocolate milk in a bag, and ate enough falafel to last a lifetime; We did so much in such a short period of time, I can't believe our trip was only 10 days.

While I'm sure this will not be my last time visiting Israel or staffing Birthright, I feel so blessed to have experienced and contributed to, for so many Yalies, this magic – the magic of Israel.



Yale Students during this spring's Birthright trip on top of Masada at sunrise.

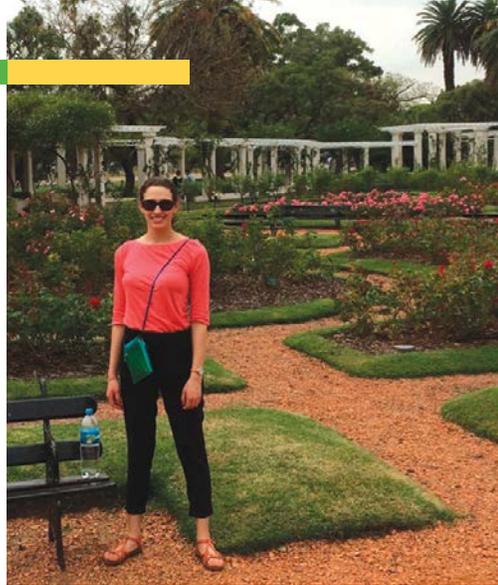
## My Slifka Center Journey

By Deena Gottlieb '15

When I was applying to college, one of the things that I loved most about Yale was the fact that it had a strong, vibrant, and pluralistic Jewish community. Over my four years at Yale, Slifka Center has become my second home on campus. When I arrived at Yale, Slifka was one of the most welcoming communities on campus. Slifka had the most fun events (including a Matisyahu concert during the second week of school) and I loved spending the holidays in New Haven with my new Jewish community that I knew would last a lifetime.

At the end of freshman year, I wanted to take a leadership role in the community to help create meaningful Jewish experiences for my peers. I became Religious Life Chair on the Yale Hillel Student Board, and it was one of my favorite experiences in college. One of the highlights was planning the High Holy Day programming. Along with the Slifka staff and the rest of the student board, I planned many interesting events including a Feldenkrais lesson, which is a method that promotes changes in movement as a way to achieve change in other aspects of life – a perfect lesson for the time in between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. I also helped to facilitate an interfaith discussion on atonement and forgiveness with the Muslim Students Association, the Yale Christian Fellowship, and Yale Students for Christ. I enjoyed helping to make the holidays special for people.

I loved my leadership role so much that I decided to run for Hillel Co-President. One of the best parts of being Hillel Co-President was getting to know freshmen and welcoming them into the community the same way that I was given a home when I was in their shoes. One of the highlights of each week was Shabbat dinners at Slifka. Walking downstairs into the Lindenbaum Kosher Kitchen and seeing students who come every week, greeting people who came for the first time, hosting faculty and



Deena Gottlieb '15 in a beautiful park, called El Rosedal, in Buenos Aires.

guests, and announcing all of the fun events going on during the coming week reminded me how special it is to have a Jewish home at Yale. I learned that what ultimately creates a strong Jewish community is the relationships that are built and strengthened in a Jewish context, either during events, over meals, while celebrating holidays, or just spending time together in our shared space.

As a senior, I love attending and participating in events that the current leadership plans, engaging in Jewish learning with Slifka Center staff members, and spending time with my friends in the Jewish Community. I'm also participating in the Slifka Spring Break Social Justice trip in Argentina, which is wonderful. Slifka has given me countless opportunities to create meaning and to travel, and I am so grateful for all of the experiences that I have had. My time as an active member in Yale's Jewish community has inspired me to attend Rabbinical School at Hebrew Union College, and I know I will bring all of the lessons that I have learned at Slifka, as well as the joy that comes with being part of such a vibrant Jewish community, to my career in the Rabbinate.

## Passover at 80 Wall Street and Beyond

By Jennifer Rogin Wallis, Manager, Annual Fund and Alumni Engagement

Passover at Slifka Center is like Grand Central Station at rush hour. The moment our online registration went live, we had hundreds of Seder meal reservations. All four floors were transformed by the delicious smells and familiar rituals into a homey place to gather for the Seders and throughout the week for kosher for Pesach meals. Students, Yale faculty and staff participated in the Slifka Seders, which included 8 unique opportunities to re-tell our story over two nights: Social Action Seder, Visual Art Seder, Queer Seder, Traditional Seder, Undergraduate Seder and Family Seder. In addition, the ever popular Seders-To-Go enabled students to hold Seders in their residential colleges and off-campus housing. Students had the opportunity to create their own Jewish memories – some for the first time outside of their family home.

Slifka Center is grateful for the generous support from the Eugene M. Zwilling Memorial Seder Fund, and the David Henry Marks Passover Endowment, and the wonderful families who support Jewish Life at Yale. If you would like to help contribute to our Passover programming, please contact our Development Office at [jennifer.wallis@yale.edu](mailto:jennifer.wallis@yale.edu). Your gift will help to create special holiday memories at Yale.



Yale Hillel President Becca Bakal '16 (right) with Jennifer Pancer '17 making matzah pizza during a Passover study break.

## Slifka Center's Sound of Success

By Rabbi Leah Cohen, Executive Director and Senior Jewish Chaplain



The senses recognize good music, before the mind can imagine all the reasons for it - so too, when observing Joseph Slifka Center for Jewish Life at Yale. Like the rich blend of sounds in an orchestra, our center pulsates with passionate students debating over meals, erudite lecturers expounding theories, beautiful cellos rehearsing in the afternoons, the rise and fall of *chevrutot* studying, and the melodies of prayers offered on Shabbat. But these sounds describe only the surface level. They describe what you would hear if you walked into the center. They are the results, not the cause of, success at Slifka Center. If we listen carefully, we can discern how these elements come together so harmoniously. In short, the formula is

**Creativity + Collaboration + Commitment = Contribution to Community**

### CREATIVITY

A creative spark emerges- from a student, a staff member, an alumna, Yale faculty or administrators or from a myriad of other sources. It might happen during a Hillel Board meeting, at a conference, over coffee, in the form of an unexpected email or even in the still of the night. Recent ones include, "How about designing a student led alternative spring break!" "I have an idea- let's empower the Jewish LGBT community at Yale." "Wouldn't it be great to learn more about Israel from our peers?" "Could I make a mural out of colored tape with a powerful spiritual message?"

The ideas come in many shapes and sizes and from many sources. But recognizing a good idea is only the first step.



Tape mural in the back of the Sylvia Slifka Chapel by Ezriel Gelbfish '16

### COLLABORATION

The originator of the creative spark must find others with whom to collaborate. Students reach out to other students; various campus groups come together to co-sponsor; staff support and coach students to reach their potential; alumni offer their insight and the idea gains traction as its merit begins to inspire others. But the excitement of a good idea quickly fades without this next piece.

### COMMITMENT

Once there is a critical mass to make a good idea come to life, individuals must step up with their time, energy, and resources to see the project through completion. Students in leadership roles put in countless hours. The staff is selfless in their time and accessibility. Our donors, alumna and board of trustees generously commit their resources to enable good ideas to come to life.



Rabbi Leah Cohen with longtime Slifka Center friend, Dr. David S. Fischer with his special Yale tie spelled in Hebrew letters.

### CONTRIBUTION TO COMMUNITY

The result is that the Slifka Center community flourishes. Students gain valuable experience in creating and collaborating in a Jewish framework. These experiences in turn help forge their Jewish identities during these formative college years. We gratefully recognize the harmony these elements bring together as the song of success at Slifka Center. For all these and for the ability to build upon the strength and vision of previous generations, we express our deepest appreciation.

Yale students with the Pecos community in Argentina during this year's Social Justice Spring Break trip





## Creating Community

By Alexandra Golden '17

This past spring break, fourteen Yalies took to the streets of Buenos Aires, Argentina, to engage in meaningful service work and experience Jewish and Argentine culture. We worked at Pecohue, a social integration program jointly run by the University of Buenos Aires and the Tobar García Hospital. Pecohue is an urban farm that employs young adults with mental or physical disabilities in order to build their capacity, generate confidence, and integrate them into the workforce. We worked at Pecohue each morning for several hours, forming relationships with the other workers and volunteers as we made compost and planted crops. We also worked at Fundación Sí, an organization that distributes donations of all kinds to people in need.

In addition to the service component, the group met with various speakers, including a journalist, a university professor, and the former president of the AMIA, Argentina's Jewish community center, to discuss Argentine politics and Jewish life. We visited the Holocaust Museum, the site of the Israeli embassy bombing in 1992, the site of the AMIA bombing attack of 1994, and the Templo Libertad. We also participated in a Shabbat service at a local synagogue, Bet Hillel.

In addition to these Jewish cultural activities, the group visited classic Buenos Aires tourist attractions, including La Boca, the Recoleta cemetery, the Malba museum, and the Plaza de Mayo. We were also lucky to take a day trip to Colonia, Uruguay, to explore the old historical town. Between eating empanadas, learning tango, practicing our Spanish, and visiting a group member's Argentine family's home, we truly had an immersive Argentine experience.

Organizing and participating in Slifka Center's Social Justice Spring Break Trip has so far been my most rewarding experience at Yale. Reflecting on this past year of planning, I am incredibly happy with how the trip turned out.

When I became Hillel's Social Justice Chair last spring, I thought of different ways to create a community of Jewish Yale students that centered around service. I felt that a spring break service trip would be the perfect way to foster that community. Thankfully, I had incredible support from Rabbi Leah Cohen and my friends Adam Sokol and Dani Czemerinski, who all jumped at the opportunity to help plan a trip.

Organizing the trip was just as fun as the trip itself; I always looked forward to the meetings when the four of us would bounce ideas back and forth, researching sites to visit and shaping our vision for the experience.

We wanted the trip to encompass a perfect synthesis of service learning, Jewish identity, and Argentine culture, and I believe we achieved that. Through the planning process and the trip itself, we learned that flexibility, communication, and organization were the keys to the trip's success.

In Buenos Aires, no matter how exhausted or hot we were, our wonderful group was constantly engaged and eager to learn and explore. We all came out of the experience with a strong sense of community and a deeper understanding of our Jewish identities and conceptions of social justice. I know that my co-planners and I grew both professionally and personally from the experience of planning this amazing trip, and we are extremely grateful for having had the opportunity to do so.

## Holiday Study Breaks

By Leon Ebani '17

Study breaks are a major part of the Yale experience. They let students briefly forget about the stress of academics and other commitments and refresh among friends. Thankfully, the Jewish calendar grants a certain Yale community the chance to host quite a number of study breaks each year around the holidays. Thanks to student creativity and dedicated staff support, holidays at Yale are more than just prayer services and tablecloth dinners. This past Tu Bishvat is a great example. Hillel hosted a concert by Tangled Up In Blue, Yale's favorite "earthy" folk group and a "Flavor Tripping" Seder where students snacked on miracle berries and buzz buttons, fruits that transformed taste buds and sweetened the sour. A caramel-apple and bonfire study break before Rosh Hashanah, a hike to beautiful East Rock Park for Tashlikh, a gingerbread-house-making event on Sukkot and a hilarious Latke-Hamentash debate on Purim with Professors Elli Stern and Shelly Kagan are just some examples of the many holiday programs that took place at Slifka Center this year. I am so grateful to have been a part of these stress-relieving study breaks and been able to experience what makes the Jewish holidays so meaningful.

Leon Ebani '17 (left) with Clark Prof of Philosophy Shelly Kagan and Associate Professor Elli Stern at this year's Purim Banquet.



# Me, Who?

By Isabel Singer '16

Me, Who? is a group dedicated to exploring issues related to gender, sexuality, and identity in Jewish communities. We meet weekly for discussion groups in which we converse about current events and Jewish holidays in a queer and feminist context. We also bring in a few speakers each semester. Last semester we heard from Elana Sztokman about the impact of haredi political power on women's rights in Israel. We also conducted a workshop with Rabbi Staub on queering Jewish texts. This semester we brought Rabbi Steve Greenberg, one of the only out gay Orthodox Jewish rabbis, to speak to the Orthodox community at Yale about including queer individuals and will be hearing from Professor Karla Goldman, who will speak on Holocaust Remembrance Day about Rabbi Regina Jonas, the first female rabbi and a Holocaust victim. We look forward to planning many more events next year and continuing to foster a diverse welcoming Jewish community at Slifka Center.



Isabel Singer '16 (left) with Elana Sztokman, award-winning author, sociologist, educator, activist and thinker in the field of Orthodox Jewish feminism.



## Bringing TAMID to Yale

By Andrew Brod '17

Yale's Jewish community has always struck me as having a strong entrepreneurial mindset, and so, when I first got in touch

with TAMID Israel Investment Group, I quickly realized the spectacular opportunities this organization could help bring to campus. By starting a local chapter, I hope to fulfill TAMID's national mission of connecting undergraduates to the Israeli economy. We'll bring in Israeli businessmen as speakers, learn about business in Israel, engage in on-campus consulting for Israeli companies, and even facilitate fully funded summer internships in Israel. Hopefully, as we strive to understand and apply those ideas that led to such spectacular economic success in the Start-up Nation, TAMID will allow Yalies to embrace their affinity for Israel and for entrepreneurship all at once.



## Interviewing Ari Shavit

By Maya Sweedler '18

Early last semester, before I was even officially inducted as a staff member on the Yale Daily News, I had the opportunity

to interview Haaretz journalist Ari Shavit. I had read Mr. Shavit's book My Promised Land right before I visited Israel in May of 2014, and his words made an impact on both my trip but also my perspective.

Needless to say, my experience meeting Mr. Shavit was thrilling and incredibly rewarding. Mr. Shavit, in his first stop on a monstrous press tour around American universities, could not have been more helpful. As a journalist – and one infinitely more experienced than myself – he intuitively understood the purpose of each one of my questions and focused his answers accordingly. He spoke confidently and authoritatively, pausing when he saw me falling behind.

I was also able to hear Mr. Shavit talk at a Master's Tea in Davenport College later that afternoon. There, he displayed his capability to take an immensely complex issue and break it down to comprehensible pieces without being reductive. It was an informative and opinionated talk, one of three public lectures he was to give at Yale that day.



Ari Shavit

I heard him speak in several different locations, and each time, he impressed me with his clarity, compassion and ability to streamline information. These traits, combined with his talent for writing, land Mr. Shavit among my list of journalistic role models. I'm incredibly grateful to the YDN as well as the Slifka Center for granting me the chance to speak with Mr. Shavit.

Ari Shavit (center) with: Rabbi Leah Cohen, Executive Director and Senior Jewish Chaplain; Josh Feinzig '16; Sam Savitz '17; and Jonathan Ellison '17.



## Rabbi Joshua Ratner

Associate Rabbi and Engagement Director, Slifka Center / Yale Hillel



Rabbi Joshua Ratner serves as Associate Rabbi and Engagement Director of Joseph Slifka Center For Jewish Life at Yale. Ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary in May 2012, he was a Joseph Neubauer

Fellow and also earned a Master's Degree in Midrash and a Certificate in Pastoral Care. During rabbinical school, Rabbi Ratner worked as a Public Policy Fellow for the Rabbinical Assembly and as a Rabbinic Fellow for the Jewish Council for Public Affairs. He also received training in congregation-based community organizing, traveled to Mexico as part of an American Jewish World Service Rabbinical School Delegation, and was part of the original rabbinical student cohort of CLAL's Rabbis Without Borders fellowship program. He was an attorney for five years prior to entering rabbinical school.

Some of his activities this year at Slifka Center have included: creating a panel conversation on Judaism and journalism with Abigail Pogrebin, Mark Oppenheimer, and Dan Friedman; teaching and advising Slifka's Tzedek Fellows social justice fellowship; teaching and advising members of AEPi (Yale's predominantly Jewish fraternity); leading an interfaith Tu B'Shvat Seder; planning and officiating the Conservative/Egalitarian High Holy Day Services ; leading a group of Jewish students to the People's Climate March in New York; hosting a Sukkot party for graduate students; moderating a bioethics panel at the Yale Medical School convened by the Jewish medical student association; organizing a discussion about anti-Semitism in Germany in conjunction with the Yale World Fellows; coordinating with Yale's Jewish professional and graduate student groups to foster a sense of connection with the Slifka community; and creating relationships with Jewish undergraduate students who are not active at Slifka Center through one on one engagement. He is married to Dr. Elena Ratner and they are the proud parents of Dimitri, Eli, and Gabby.

## Rabbi Shlomo Zuckier

Associate Rabbi, Co-Director of the Seif Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus



Shlomo Zuckier is Associate Rabbi and Co-Director of the Seif Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus at the Joseph Slifka Center for Jewish Life at Yale. Following 3.5 years of study at Yeshivat Har Etzion in Israel, he

received a BA in Philosophy and Jewish Studies at Yeshiva College's Schottenstein Honors Program. He furthered his academic studies by completing MAs in Bible and Talmud at the Bernard Revel Graduate School in Jewish Studies

at Yeshiva University, where he also studied for Rabbinic Ordination and was a Kupietzky Kodshim Fellow. Shlomo served as Rabbinic Intern at Lincoln Square Synagogue in New York and Congregation Keshet Israel in Washington, DC. Shlomo is a second year PhD student in Ancient Judaism in Yale University's Religious Studies department. He is a Wexner Graduate Fellow, and the graduate of the inaugural year of the Tikvah Fellowship. Shlomo grew up in Teaneck, New Jersey, and is the organizer of this year's Orthodox Forum on the topic of "Contemporary Uses and Forms of Hasidut."

Shlomo enjoys learning with and teaching students, holding over ten Chavrutot (individual study sessions) with students and teaching three to four classes every week. He also enjoys informal chats over

lunch or coffee, or helping to organize student events. Some examples of his classes include an Introductory Talmud class, sessions on the Kosher laws, and a series on the different Shabbat songs. Shlomo also organizes the Young Israel House at Yale Orthodox Minyan on campus, and oversees the Kashrut of the Kosher Kitchen.



The Zuckier Family: Chana, Shlomo and Meital

## Chana Zuckier

Co-Director of the Orthodox Union's Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus at Yale



Chana Zuckier is Co-Director of the Orthodox Union's Jewish Learning Initiative on Campus at Yale University. Along with

her husband Shlomo, Chana studies various Torah topics with students, both individually and in groups. She and her husband often host students for Shabbat dinners, onegs, and other events in their home. Chana graduated from Stern College as Jewish Studies valedictorian with a BA in Physics and Jewish Studies. She recently completed GPATS (Graduate Program for Advanced Talmudic Studies), an MA program in Talmud at Yeshiva University. As an undergraduate, she was Editor-in-Chief of Kol Hamevaser, Yeshiva University's undergraduate Jewish thought magazine. She served as Educational Intern at Congregation Keshet Israel in Washington DC, and has taught Talmud, Jewish law, and Tanach at various synagogues and communities throughout the United States. She currently attends Yale Law School.



## Juli Goodman

Director of Jewish Student Life

Juli joined the Slifka Community as the Director of Jewish Student Life this past summer. Prior to Slifka, Juli graduated cum laude from Rutgers University where she earned her BA in Art History. She then went on to receive a Master's Degree in Educational Leadership in Jewish Communal Settings from the Davidson School for Jewish Education from the Jewish Theological Seminary. While in graduate school Juli spent a semester in Jerusalem earning a certificate as an Israel Educator and had an internship and the 92nd Street Y, Resource Center for Jewish Diversity. Juli has previously worked in a variety of Jewish institutions both large and small from the time she was 16 and worked as a day camp counselor until today. Her passions include sports (NY Jets!), music, travel, coffee and the formation of Jewish Identity.

Since beginning at Slifka Center, Juli has worked closely with Yale students to plan exciting programs and events such as holiday themed events. Some Highlights include, Sushi in the Sukkan, the Hanukah Dessert Reception, over 100 students celebrating Tu B'Shvat at the Flavor-Tripping Tu B'Shvat Seder (in which students sampled berries that alter your sense of taste) and TUIB'Shvat (a special Tu B'Shvat performance by Yale's folk a cappella group Tangled Up In Blue, or TUIB), as well as the Purim Banquet featuring Yale professors debating the merits of the Latke vs. the Hamentashen. She has worked closely with the Hillel board and other student leaders to plan and implement regular programs as well as excursions to places such as a bowling alley on a Saturday Night and an apple orchard before Rosh Hashanah.

Additionally, she has worked closely with students on exciting new initiatives, such as *Me, Who?*, a group dedicated to exploring identity, gender, and sexuality in a Jewish context. *Me, Who?*, a name that is a play on the Hebrew Word for "Who" (מי— read as "Mi") being a homonym for the English word "Me".

Juli has employed her expertise as an Israel Educator though working with the Shalom Hartman Institute to create a program for Yalies to participate during their winter college seminar. This group meets regularly to discuss serious issues plaguing Israeli society such as exploring what it means for Israel to be a Jewish and Democratic State. This group of Hartman Fellows also traveled to Israel over winter break to participate in a seminar with other Ivy League college students.

Juli's office is located on the second floor in the programming office and she loves having people pop-by to say hi or eat snacks with her.



Slifka Center staff with Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks (center) on his recent visit at Yale University. L to R: Jennifer Rogin Wallis; Ziv Eisenberg; R. Shlomo Zuckier; R. Leah Cohen; R. Joshua Ratner; Juli Goodman and Simeon Cohen.



## Simeon Cohen

Rabbinic Intern

Simeon Cohen is coming to the end of his one-year rabbinic internship at Slifka Center. He is a third-year rabbinical student at the Jewish Theological Seminary (JTS) and spent the previous year

studying at the Schechter Institute in Jerusalem through JTS. He is also a graduate of the Columbia/JTS Joint Program, where he studied philosophy and Jewish Thought. Prior to beginning rabbinical school, Simeon spent a year in Israel as a staff member on the Nativ program. He has also spent time studying at the Conservative Yeshiva and at Yeshivat Hadar, and has taught in many settings, including Hebrew University in Jerusalem to overseas students.

Simeon spearheaded a number of exciting initiatives at Slifka Center. His primary responsibility entails overseeing the Conservative/egalitarian community on campus; to this end, he helps to organize and lead Conservative Shabbat and holiday services. However, Simeon also plays an active role in the daily religious life of the students at Slifka Center. In addition to facilitating an egalitarian weekday minyan on Wednesday mornings, each week, Simeon studies with students from across the religious spectrum in *chevruta* (study partnership). Furthermore, he teaches a class on the philosophy of Maimonides on Wednesday nights. The teaching Simeon has done this semester has been the highlight of his time at Slifka Center and he feels privileged to have the opportunity to both teach and learn from the incredible students at Yale.

Another highlight of fall semester included convening a book club to read Ari Shavit's New York Times Bestselling book, *My Promised Land*. The final meeting of the book club was an opportunity for the students and Simeon to meet with Ari Shavit as part of his 28-hour visit at Yale University co-sponsored by Slifka Center and Hillel International. It was a once in a lifetime learning experience for all!

# Slifka

Joseph Slifka Center for Jewish Life at Yale

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Coming to New Haven for your upcoming reunion? Please join us for Shabbat Dinner, Sunday Bagel Brunch or at any point throughout the weekend. Check our website for our weekend schedule or call 203-432-9419 for more information. We look forward to welcoming you to your Jewish alumni house at Yale.

[slifkacenter.org/reunions](http://slifkacenter.org/reunions)

Eddie Maza '18 and Jordie Gardenswartz '18 at IsraYale on Old Campus in the fall.



# Slifka

Joseph Slifka Center for Jewish Life at Yale

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