



Slifka

Joseph Slifka Center for Jewish Life at Yale

Embraces and Dances

By Brian Matusovsky '19

The Muslim call to prayer resounded against the walls around us, filling our ears with words I could not understand.

I was standing at the Western Wall in Jerusalem, surrounded by people I had met very recently but who already meant worlds to me. I had just recited my *Torah* portion, spoken words that I had only very recently come to understand. The loud call to prayer forced us to stand there in silence, waiting before we could continue the Bar Mitzvah ceremony. It gave me a moment to take in everything that happened up until that point.

I looked around at the faces I had come to know so well — tired faces, but happy ones. We had traveled all across Israel, from border to border, through Haifa, Tel Aviv, the Salad Trail, and the Dead Sea. We had slept in hotel rooms together, ridden for hours on a bus together, eaten bowls of hummus and so many falafel sandwiches together, shared secrets together, learned together, danced together, cried together. I had experienced with these people a world that I had never even imagined: a country that filled me with wonder at all of the novelty, but also pulled my heartstrings as I came to face the generations of history that led to its existence, to my existence, to my being in Israel. I related with these people in a way that I had never imagined being understood. I didn't

grow up in a Jewish neighborhood or attend a Jewish school.

I had never had words to describe my experience, or people to relate to about it before. My family were immigrants from the USSR; our Jewish culture and religion was something that they hid when they left the house, a habit formed over many generations. The Bar Mitzvah ceremony was the culmination of generations of fear and silence within

my family, allowing me to declare out loud that I was Jewish and that I was proud. It was also at that moment that I came of age, came face to face with my identity and chose to wrap my arms around it and pull it into myself. As the ceremony came to an end, I emerged into the future. I was barraged with *Mazel Tovs*, congratulations, a few tears, and so many hugs. We all stood in a circle then, arms interlocked, and we danced the *Horah*.



Brian Matusovsky '19 pictured above with Brittany Farrah Stollar '17 was one of 14 students who participated in a Bar/Bat Mitzvah ceremony at the Wall in Jerusalem during the December 2016 Yale Birthright trip. On the right are Rebecca Jaye Rabbinic Intern and participants Daniel Leibovic '17, Anne Lauren Zlatow '18 and Eliana Cohen.



Slifka Center organized and hosted the 1st annual 'Ivy for Israel Student Leadership Summit' bringing together a total of 39 students from 6 different Ivy League schools to build a community of Israel-involved students. The summit was made possible by the Schusterman Family Foundation.



Muslims and Jews Pray Together

By Michael Zanger-Tishler '18

On January 20, 2017 the Slifka Center hosted a group of thirty students from the Muslim Students Association for Shabbat dinner. The following Friday, the Muslim Students Association welcomed a similar sized group of students from Slifka for their noon prayers (*Juma'ah*), followed by a communal lunch. Both of these experiences allowed the communities to learn about each other in experiential and meaningful ways. It was striking to hear the beautiful chanting of the Quran, and also to recognize the similarities between Muslim prayers and prayer services held in Arab Jewish synagogues which I have had the opportunity to visit while in Israel.

Hearing Chaplain Omer Bajwa, Director of Muslim Life at Yale, give the *Dvar Torah* Friday night is still one of the

more inspiring religious experiences I have had at Yale, as was hearing him reflect on the relationship between the Muslim and Jewish communities the following week in his Friday sermon. This Muslim/Jewish exchange was the result of a true commitment from the staff and students at Slifka to developing substantive relationships with our Muslim brothers and sisters in a time of need for both of our communities. As co-president of the Yale Hillel student board, I was so proud to be a part of such a strong, passionate, and active community.

In the past month, there have been numerous anti-Semitic incidents occurring across the country, including attacks on Jewish cemeteries in St. Louis and Philadelphia. When I walk around our campus, I feel safe knowing the support the Jewish community has from other groups around Yale. Knowing this, and with support of the staff at Slifka, many members of the broader Slifka community and I hope to be able to work to foster that sense of security for other groups on our campus using our tradition and history as spiritual and intellectual guideposts.



Commencement and Reunions 2017

You are welcome at Slifka Center during commencement or reunion weekends!

Slifka Center is a convenient place to meet up with friends over a bowl of chicken soup or Sunday morning bagel. There are comfortable spaces to talk, pray or relax. Feel free to browse our art gallery.

Slifka Center will host Shabbat services, Kiddush/Happy Hour and kosher meals throughout the weekend. Please indicate that you will eat at Slifka Center when you register for your reunion (www.aya.yale.edu/reunions).

For updates and more information go online to Slifka Center (www.SlifkaCenter.org) or contact Ellen Rabin at ellen.rabin@yale.edu or 203-432-7376.



Friday

- 5:30 pm Happy Hour – Meet and Greet with Rabbi Leah Cohen
- 6:00 pm Candle lighting with singing
- 6:20 pm Traditional Minyan
- 6:20 pm Kabbalat Shabbat Service
- 7:00 pm Family-Style Shabbat Dinner**

Saturday

- 9:14 am Traditional Shacharit Service
- 12:00 noon Shabbat Lunch

Sunday

- 9:30 am - 1:30 pm Famous Bagel Brunch



From Out of the Mud – The Untold Passover Story

By Rabbi Leah Cohen, Executive Director and Senior Jewish Chaplain

Botz. That is the Hebrew word for “mud.” Try it out loud, a perfectly resonant example of onomatopoeia. Perhaps in its sucking, squishy sound there is a pertinent message for our times. With the coming of spring, we admire the blossoming flowers and the thrilling rebirth of new life. These pastoral images are pleasing enough, but hardly the whole story if we are to be totally honest. For after all, there is the mud - the same mud from which the sprouts pop up and the calves are dropped and muck about in. The truth is, we are living in muddy times. The political quagmire of national and international affairs, the moral messiness of abandoning truth and the sinkhole of despair that many feel today comprise the smeared backdrop of campus life this season.

When you’re in the mud, you can pretend you are not, but it really does no good to do so. It’s best to acknowledge the situation and figure out how to move through it. The worst possibility is to get stuck in the mud. In the midst of the celebrated story of our rebirth, the redemption that not only saved us, but is the basis of our imperative to redeem others, there is an important mud message.

When the Israelites were escaping across the parted sea, Pharaoh’s army gave chase. As they gained on the fleeing slaves, the wheels of their chariots began to lock up. They got stuck in the mud and could not advance or retreat. Once the Israelites crossed safely to the other side, the walls of the sea came crashing down and the immobilized Egyptians perished. Woe onto him who gets stuck in the mud!

In this murky era, many people are asking themselves, “What can we do?” There are a myriad of possibilities and Passover is a perfect time to reflect on the meaning of freedom and oppression, degradation and redemption. For me and the staff at Slifka Center, now, more than ever, we must continue to help young adults develop skills in community leadership, relationship building, listening across divides, taking responsibility for outcomes, building character and thinking critically about complex issues.

We do this by intentionally creating opportunities that both nurture and challenge them.

Emerging from the mud is the quintessential story of our own creation. In the biblical narrative Adam is formed from the soil; his very name means dirt. We need not be intimidated by mud, rather let us roll up our sleeves, and start digging ourselves out. We are blessed with the skills and aptitudes to make changes for the common good. We can solve problems, improve lives, and create new possibilities. Judaism teaches us to do so, not just for ourselves, but for the sake of the whole world.

This Passover, as we remember the story of our exodus, let us pause long enough to recognize the mud for what it is. But let’s not get mesmerized by it, least we get stuck. One foot in front of the other, holding hands with family and friends, reaching out to help those in need, practicing patience, resilience and perseverance, together we will cross to the other side. Lifting our eyes to the horizon, we faithfully plug along, never doubting for a moment that we will reach the promised land.

Happy Pesach and may this season of liberation inspire you and yours!

Chag Kasher v’Sameach!

Yale Law School hosts “Jewish Law in the Modern State”

On Sunday, March 5, Yale Law School hosted a conference on “Jewish Law in the Modern State.” The conference was organized by the Jewish Law Students Association and was generously co-sponsored by Slifka Center. Lawyers and students came together for a day of learning, conversation, and schmoozing. Speakers included Suzanne Stone, William Forbath ’83, Michael Helfand ’07, Anthony Kronman ’75, Frederick Lawrence ’80, and Professors Eugene Fidell, Steven Fraade, and Elliyahu Stern. The conference came to its conclusion with a closing keynote by Rabbi David Saperstein, President Obama’s Ambassador-at-Large for International Religious Freedom from 2015-2017, and the former leader of the Reform movement’s Religious Action Center for over 40 years. Ambassador Saperstein spoke on American Jewry’s Use and Abuse of Jewish law in Contemporary Political Debates, and urged the different denominations to, where possible, speak with a unified voice on fundamental principles of Jewish law, history, and ethics.



Slifka Arts & Literature



Portrait and illustrations by Anshie Kagan

“Hashem Is Here” Anshie Kagan Exhibition



Curated by
Elizabeth Kingsley, '19

The Blanksteen Fellowship doesn't end with the summer; tied with it is the obligation (or privilege, rather) of curating an art exhibition at Slifka Center during the year. So after spending 10 weeks together at the Jewish Museum, Molly Channon, Elias Bartholomew and I were brought back together by Juli Goodman to collaborate on an exhibit. We chose Brooklyn-based artist Anshie Kagan for his artistic talent and for the discussion his works warranted that felt apt for a college campus. His pieces use modes of imagery one might see on Google or social media and content that pulls from pop culture to ultimately juxtapose the secular and sacred in a witty and sometimes irreverent way, forcing questions about the clash – or possible synergy – of the pace of mass culture with groups rooted in tradition. As we wrote in the introductory text, “This exhibit addresses contemporary Jewish life for the twenty-first century audience,” which speaks to why the show was a perfect fit at Slifka Center. Anshie could not have been more pleasant to work with, and we were so excited to welcome him and his family to the opening reception held Feb. 8, 2017

For more about Anshie Kagan visit www.Anshie.com

Shibboleth

By David Hopen '17, Editor-in-Chief

I heard whispers about *Shibboleth* when I was a freshman. It was a journal of intense scholarship, I was told, aimed at combating Jewish complacency and paying testament to the likes of Hillel and Bellow. The founders were a circle of legendary thinkers from a previous Slifka era. Editorial meetings were long and pyrotechnical. The name, esoteric by design, had taken on a mythic quality. And so it was that, three years after *Shibboleth* had fallen into disrepair, I became infatuated.

With guidance from former editors, I helped revive *Shibboleth* as a sophomore in 2015. Working on *Shibboleth* has been one of the most transformative and rewarding elements of my Yale career. Our journal, I believe, plays an important role facilitating a diversity of Jewish thought—in literature and politics, in philosophy and theology, in culture and fiction—and bolstering the community of Jewish intellectual engagement at Yale and beyond. Now, well into its second life, *Shibboleth* has grown into a cornerstone of the Slifka experience, enriching both extracurricular life and that which our predecessors first set out to protect—the uniquely Jewish voice. It has been a great privilege to restore *Shibboleth*, and I take pride in knowing our journal will endure for generations of Yalies to come.



2017 Shalom Hartman Institute iEngage Student Winter Seminar

By Jonathan Marx '17

When the Yale cohort for this winter's Hartman iEngage Student Seminar met for our first pre-trip sessions at the Joseph Slifka Center, I felt confused about the nature and goals of the program. Were we going to be learning about Israeli history? Traveling and experiencing culture? Debating politics? But after just a few hours on the picturesque Hartman Institute campus in the heart of Jerusalem, I understood the significance and scope of the project.

The Hartman Institute Seminar sought not to instigate arguments about facts or political views, but to instill in each of us the self-awareness necessary to discern and express the underlying values which lead us to our political opinions. The experience pushed me not just to think about how I engage with Israel but, just as importantly, to consider how I process the way in which others engage with Israel.

The iEngage student seminar brought together a group of incredibly

diverse, passionate, and open-minded Yale students. While students self-identified at points across the political and religious spectrum, we all felt drawn together by a love for Israel and a desire to see it thrive, regardless of what form that might take. For every student and every opinion, there were faculty who both challenged and reinforced our opinions, learning styles, and ways of thinking about the difficult issues we discussed. I signed up for the program looking for answers to many of my big questions, and I came away with a tremendous body of knowledge – about the Arab-Israeli conflict, about religious pluralism, and about Jewish thought and history. Naturally, I also left feeling filled with more questions than when I had entered. But thanks to the Hartman Institute way of learning and to the myriad of Israel discussion and program opportunities offered at the Slifka Center, I've never felt better equipped to continue the evolution of my relationship with Israel.



Students enjoyed celebrating Chanukah in Jerusalem L to R (starting from bottom) Talia Schechet '19, Daniella Cohen '20, Rebecca Karabus '18, Leah Meyer '18, Sam Rapowitz '18, Jonathan Marx '17, Juli Goodman Director of Jewish Student Life and Anabel Starosta '17.



Everyone at Slifka Center wishes Shlomo and Chana a Mazal Tov on the birth of their daughter and all the best as they say goodbye to Slifka Center.

Dear Friends,

As this semester is our last as Directors of OU-JLIC at Yale, we wanted to share some parting thoughts. In addition to recently welcoming Amalyah, our newborn daughter into the world, Chana is completing law school this Spring and will be working as a clerk for a federal judge. I am focusing on writing my doctoral thesis. We both care for our growing family and anticipate next year will be both exciting and very busy for us.

Chana and I want to express our appreciation and thanks to all those who have made the Slifka Center our home during our time here – the amazing students, supportive staff, and everyone who works to make our community as great as it is! Even when we are not at Slifka, we hope you will remain in our lives and that we will have many opportunities in the future to see each other.

We are very grateful for our time here, for the friendships we have formed, the lessons we have learned, and the wonderful community of which we will forever feel a part.

Best wishes,

Rabbi Shlomo and Chana Zuckier (and Meital and Amalyah)



Rabbinic Intern

By Rebecca Jaye '11, '17

My name is Becky '11, currently I am the rabbinic intern at the

Joseph Slifka Center and will soon graduate from Yale Divinity School with a MA in Religion. In Fall 2017, I will be attending Hebrew Union College to pursue my rabbinic degree and ordination in the Reform Movement of Judaism. I have been so happy to be a part of the Slifka community.

As the Rabbinic Intern, I work primarily with the Reform *Chavurah* planning meaningful events both on campus and in the greater New Haven area. This past fall, the Reform *Chavurah* held a wonderful “*Havdallah* on the Seaside” complete with bonfire, music, and most importantly, s’mores! We’ve begun to integrate Saturday night *Havdallah* services into regular programming which has been a lovely addition to our religious, spiritual and communal lives here at the Slifka Center.

I staffed the Winter Break Birthright trip. What an experience! Spending time with forty students as we traveled Israel was life-changing. Our most memorable and beautiful experiences happened in moments when we least expected, in time we were able to slow down, and appreciate the being in each other’s presence in the beauty of Israel. This occurred in the serenity of the kibbutz farm we shared, the sunset outlook of Sde Boker, and even on the side the road, stuck in traffic, in the presence of complete-strangers-turned-friends, as we waited for the traffic to clear and the road to give way to our next adventure.

My studies at the Divinity School focus upon formation of Judaism as an identity in the context of the Spanish Inquisition. Rabbi Cohen and I just returned from Spring Break in Andalusia Spain leading “Reflections and Refractions of Self Fellowship”, a seminar in which Yale students learn about the different facets and forms of Jewish identity. We explored the Spanish Golden Age, Sephardic Jewry, and the deep history of Spanish Jewry in Western Europe.

Upon our return, the Reform *Chavurah* will be hosting a “Creative Shabbat” to welcome the Slifka community back to campus. We look forward to having yoga, arts and crafts, and live music to bring in the Sabbath!

Sunday Bagel Brunch



At the baptism site on the Jordan River are an Eritrean Asylum Seeker holding her newborn son, Sarah Landau '17, Alison Mosier-Mills '17, and the Eritrean translator.

Global Health Scholars conduct research in South Tel Aviv

By Sarah Landau '17

This past summer I had the incredible opportunity to conduct research in Tel Aviv, Israel. As a member of the Global Health Scholars Program at Yale University, I designed an independent field research project that examined an area of public health of my own choosing. Having attended Jewish Day School, I have always felt a connection to Israel. I have learned about Israel’s remarkable healthcare and I have also learned about the less remarkable way that Israel treats immigrants from Africa, especially those who are not Jewish. With this reality in mind, I decided to study the way that African asylum seekers in Southern Tel Aviv accessed and used healthcare services. With the help of the Slifka Center and the guidance of faculty at Yale, I traveled to Israel with one of my peers and conducted a 10 week research project, interviewing over 115 asylum seekers. Not only was this experience extremely valuable for me academically, but it also provided for immense personal growth.

Living across the street from HaBima, one of the main performing arts centers in Tel Aviv, I found myself surrounded by mostly white, well-off, young Israelis. Every day, my research partner and I would walk 20 minutes to Southern Tel Aviv and enter an entirely different world. The southern region of Tel Aviv is predominantly African. When we walked through the markets, taxi drivers would ask us if we were lost. Many people didn’t understand why two white American girls were wandering through a black neighborhood in Israel. At first, it was unsettling to feel like such an outsider. However, within a matter of days, our translators, who functioned as our bridge to the African asylum seeker world, showed us the kindness, courage, and strength of their community. Despite the hardship of their lives in Israel, the asylum seekers we met were always quick to offer us a cold drink, a place to sit, and a window into their lives. By the end of our research period, we had attended an Eritrean baptism at the Jordan River, dined in an authentic Sudanese restaurant with members of the community, and spoken with over 150 men, women, and children who were seeking asylum in Israel.

Through my research, I was able to experience Israel in an entirely new way. And while a lot of what I saw challenged the rosy depictions of Israel I got during my Jewish Day School upbringing, it hasn’t changed the way I feel about Israel. If anything, I now have a deeper, more informed relationship with the state of Israel, one that I hope to continue to cultivate as I continue along my academic and career paths.

Slifka *in Action*

2016-2017



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Coming to New Haven for your upcoming reunion? Please join us for Shabbat Dinner or Sunday Bagel Brunch. Check our website for our weekend schedule or call 203-432-7376 for more information. We look forward to welcoming you to your Jewish alumni house at Yale.

slifkacenter.org/reunions

Passover at Yale

The Passover Seder is a dinner with special symbols, smells, sounds and tastes that are remembered throughout a lifetime. **Slifka Center will be hosting a large Seder in the Lindenbaum Kosher Kitchen on first night (Monday April 10th) as well as a traditional Orthodox Seder. On Tuesday April 11th, several themed dinners will take place allowing students to explore the themes of Exodus and freedom in creative ways.**

Slifka Center prepares "Seder's to Go" which include all the trimming including chicken soup, Sedar plate ingredients (including the plate) and a Hagaddah. Last year more than 60 Sedars were hosted in residential colleges and apartments encouraging Jewish life to thrive all over campus.

Slifka Center is grateful for the generous support from the Eugene M. Zwilling Memorial Seder Fund, David Henry Marks Passover Endowment, Fleisher Passover Fund, Safer Family and Poorvu Family. These donations allow Slifka Center to provide kosher for Passover Seders and meals throughout the week. Please consider joining the donor list by contacting ellen.rabin@yale.edu. Your gift will help to create special holiday memories for Yale students.



Slifka

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