Dear Friends—

Our community saw both profound challenge and deep commitment this year.

The pandemic altered every facet of our students’ lives and every facet of our work. Jewish gatherings over food and song - the lifeblood of our community - became impossible, and students grappled with sprawling uncertainty, loss, and fear. We were there – physically and emotionally – for hundreds of students.

During this spring’s war in Israel and Gaza the legitimacy of Israel, and of Zionism as a belief at Yale, were called into question when the YCC endorsed an ugly statement of condemnation against Israel over the objections of Jewish student leaders. We publicly criticized these decisions while making space for the wide range of views held by Yale’s Jewish students. That work continues today.

Lastly, the ongoing once-in-a-generation renovations to our building have forced us to reinvent again. We gathered in a large outdoor tent when it was warm, and in our temporary indoor space “Slifka North” just off campus as the chill set in. We invested in the short- and long-term: providing home, community, and support for students in these moments of great need while making Yale’s Jewish hub safer, more beautiful, and more functional for decades to come.

We thank you for your support, and for your commitment to what this community is, and can be – for students, parents, faculty, and alumni. In the following pages you will find highlights of this past year’s work - thank you for your part in making it possible. We can’t wait to welcome you into the renewed Slifka Center, and in the meantime, are always happy to hear from you.

Sincerely,

Uri Cohen, Executive Director
Rabbi Jason Rubenstein,
Howard M. Holtzmann Jewish Chaplain

Above: Rabbi Jason, left, and Uri Cohen
Below: Slifka Center’s Tent on Prospect Street
FALL 2020 – Saul ’21 Timothy Dwight College on Shabboxes:
A Senior celebrates Shabbat’s timeless role in sustaining (socially distanced) community

I don’t remember what it said, but I remember how it made me feel. With in-person Shabbat dinners impossible, Slifka provided Shabbat boxes (colloquially “shabboxes”) through the 2020-21 school year, and one of the students distributing the boxes had taken the liberty of writing me a little note. The message was no more than a half dozen words scrawled on the lid of the box, but the impact was enormous. The little box with the 8oz bottle of grape juice, tiny challah roll and dessert was not merely a tool for Jewish ritual, but also represented a community of people who, no matter how far apart, form a vibrant, generous, committed community.

Social distancing requirements changed the imagery I associated with Slifka’s community; no longer were there Friday night dinners where the whole community converged, and tables meant to seat 8 instead sat 12; or students from the Yoga tefilla group and orthodox minyan mingling after Saturday morning services, with a sharp contrast between attire. Instead, the community grew as a huge network of overlapping and interlocking small groups. To me, it manifested through the long walks with Jewish friends, the incidental run-ins when picking up shabboxes, and the conversations over coffee (outdoors) with staff members.

The class of 2021 officially graduated on May 22nd in three separate ceremonies on old campus to allow for social distancing. Parents weren’t invited. Two days later, I therefore found myself packing a rental car for a road trip halfway across the country with a friend I had met my first week at Slifka. Pulling onto the I-95 was bittersweet, but a fitting end to my Yale career, for while I was leaving the space behind, I was carrying forward with me the friendships, connections, and community I had found at Slifka.

Notice something different?
Handsome Dan has a new cousin in town. Meet the new Slifka Center mascot in your inbox and on social media this winter.
SUMMER 2021 – Ruthie ’23
Benjamin Franklin College
on Slifka’s Can-Do Spirit:
A Hillel Co-President on reimagining student community through team work

Though you might think that summer would be a time of pause and relaxation for Slifka, Summer 2021 was one of the busiest times for staff and for me and Zevi as co-presidents of Hillel Student Board. Almost the moment the spring semester ended, we started thinking about the fall. What would students need? What would be able to give them? And how to make that all work with ongoing renovations?

As the summer progressed, our plans came into clearer focus. We knew securing an outdoor space would make it possible to hold large events in a COVID-responsible way. From our discussions and dreams staff (Margarita) worked tirelessly and set up the tent in Lot 38 on Prospect Street, which has been so important to us this fall. But we also knew that we would need indoor space. We knew that we would be able to give first-years a full welcome - and ordered the swag, planned a welcome week with events every day and a first Shabbat to be remembered.

Coming back to school, meeting the first years, and seeing the plans we had made remotely over a busy summer, play out with perfect execution in front of my eyes — that was a reward like no other.

At the end of the day, what matters are the people. And what we have learned from the summer, and from the entire time spent as co-president is that the people in Slifka— staff and students alike— are like no others.

Shalom! I’m a Molecular Cellular and Developmental Biology major, originally from South Padre Island, Texas, a small island on the border with Mexico. Moving from a very small Jewish community with about five other young Jews my age to a community of hundreds of other young Jewish students was a major shock in the best way possible. Because I hadn’t had the opportunity to participate in Jewish life growing up, I was more than excited to join the Slifka community.

Now in my Sophomore year, I have just begun my second term as Social Justice Chair on the Hillel Student Board. With my position I have been able to organize trail clean ups, food and clothing drives, community programming, and much more. In this new term, I hope to partner with Yale cultural centers and other religious organizations, as well as other university Hillels to create joint programing and volunteer opportunities.

My favorite part of my position, however, has been being able to meet a large portion of the Slifka community, and while I haven’t met everyone yet, I am looking forward to meeting even more Slifkaites at shabbat dinners and coffee dates. In my time at Slifka, I hope to spread the kindness and support that this community has shown me.

FALL 2021 – Hannah ’24
Benjamin Franklin College
on Leaning in to Slifka:
A Sophomore broadens her Jewish experience through campus action

L to R: Yom Kippur Food Drive
First Student arrives at Slifka North!
Lots of Lox at Bagel Brunch
Sukkot garlands at The Yale Farm
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Names in bold, incoming staff
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