

“Zionism Program” explores NFTY’s relationship with promoting Zionism among teens. It looks to point out the ways NFTY may be pushing a Zionist agenda on teens without providing adequate Israel education. The idea for this program came from the experience of many teens in NFTY who don’t have a strong connection to Israel, yet have to participate in Israel programming that either focuses on those connections to Israel, or supporting Israel as a state. The aim was to create an Israel program that sheds light on those teens who can’t always fully participate in Israel programs while creating a completely inclusive Israel discussion. It also looks to let teens challenge their own views on Israel that may have been formed through their participation in NFTY.

During the program, participants will do a social barometer (an activity where a statement is read and participants stand on a physical spectrum based on how much they agree or disagree), first at the beginning, then at the end again using the same statements to discuss how answers may have been changed or affirmed. A few examples of statements are: “I feel I can contribute fully to conversations about Israel connections.” “As reform youth, I feel Israel is being forced on me.” “If I were not involved in a youth movement, I would not have a connection to Israel.” “I feel out of place when being talked to about taking a trip to Israel.” After the first social barometer, there are three stations. One break-out group focuses on the history of Zionism and Zionism in Israel. The group leader will discuss with participants a few of their answers to the social barometer questions, then lead a discussion about what Zionism is like in Israel (when this program was run originally, this discussion was lead by an Israeli). Then, the group leader will talk a bit about the history of Zionism by using a timeline to show it visually. The second breakout group focuses on the prominence of Zionism in the reform movement. The group leader will take participants through printed copies of NFTY’s resolutions on Israel. Participants will be asked to discuss how those resolutions make them feel, and if they are reasonable and inclusive of all levels of Israel knowledge. The discussion will expand to discuss how participants that don’t have a connection to Israel feel during Israel programming. The third breakout group focuses on what it means to be a good Jew, and if having a strong connection to Israel is part of that. In this breakout, the group leader will lead a discussion on the different ways to be “good Jew” and how your connection to Israel plays a part in that. The conversation will expand to discuss reform Zionism and how participants feel about it. When stations are done, participants will come back to run the social barometer questions again, and a final group discussion about how mindsets about NFTY’s Israel education may have shifted during this program.