

One of the many NFTY-MAR favorite Shabbat songs is “Oseh Shalom” by Elana Jagoda. (May the one, may the one who brings peace... yeah, that one.) When we get to that part of the service, everyone gets up out of their seats and starts to dance, make hand motions, and belt out the lyrics. Now, think about it. The prayer Oseh Shalom is from the Kaddish, a prayer dating back to at least the year 900. On the other hand, this particular melody was composed less than a decade ago, and all around the country, NFTYites in 2019 are singing ancient words at the top of their lungs in the name of God. That is an incredibly powerful feeling, and is, in my opinion, one of the main reasons why NFTY exists.

I would love to help propagate this feeling to next year’s NFTYites. I, Noah Simon, am so excited to be running for the position of 5779–5780 NFTY-MAR Religious and Cultural Vice President! I believe I am well prepared to carry out the duties of this position. I am currently BAYTY’s RCVP, I have been a MAR songleader for two years, and I am also on the NFTY North American Cabinet Israel Engagement Committee. In addition, I will be attending the Songleading immersive at URJ Kutz Camp 2019. This Spring will be my eleventh regional event, and I am a three-time camper at URJ 6 Points Sci-Tech Academy — East. I feel I am ready to take on a larger role in the NFTY community, and I have the following ideas to enhance the ways with which we interact with our Judaism and Jewishness:

Firstly, I want to make sure that anyone, not only Board and Cabinet, is able to take an important role during services. Leadership is extremely important to NFTY, and I want to extend the opportunity of leadership in a Jewish context to as many people as possible. This lends itself well to Shabbat services. Whether it’s reading Torah, writing a d’var, or even leading Nisim B’chol Yom, I believe that any MARite should have the opportunity to walk up to the bema and help the region connect with Shabbat.

My next proposal is that we continue the trend of making services inclusive to all spiritual preferences. Personally, I love the traditional URJ/NFTY-style service, with singing, chanting, and reading Torah, but I know that there are many who feel bored or dissatisfied during regular services. However, in the past couple of years, we have had meditative services, social action-based services, and even a sensory deprivation service. I want to provide this sort of alternative service for those who feel more engaged and challenged by this type of service, while also always running a standard Shabbat service for those who enjoy the traditional NFTY experience. It is my hope that this will empower the region to better appreciate the meaning of Shabbat, even if one does not believe in God or in the Torah.

Finally, I want to further educate the region about the history of the Jewish people with regards to culture and thought rather than religion and practice. While most of us went to Sunday school and spent long mornings learning about stories in the Bible, far fewer have learned about, for example, the differences in culture between Ashkenazim and Sephardim, or the Jewish Enlightenment (Haskalah). I believe this is a subject that many people will find fascinating if presented in the right way, so I would like to work with the rest of Board and with Cabinet to come up with fun and engaging programs on this topic. By learning more about history of our people rather than of our religion (although both are important), I hope every MARite will come closer to forming an idea of what it means to them to be a Jew.

I can’t wait to sing, learn, and study Torah with you all!

B’shalom,
Noah Simon