

Dear NFTY-MAR,

When Coronavirus cancelled all spring NFTY events, it felt like a punch in the gut. Thinking back to Winter Kallah and JELLO, I'm filled with memories of bus rides, huge hugs, Shabbat services, Gongaslosh, Talent Shows, and, of course, Havdalah. After a day of long intense programming, the Havdalah service is the transition from the rest of the Shabbat to Big Fun.

Three years ago, the MAR community welcomed me, and after dozens of programs and thousands of connections with fellow MARites, Havdalah stands out in my mind. During the weekend we spend time separated into our room assignments, and programming/friend groups. Then Saturday evening, we enter Havdalah. linked together, spiraling in, and moshing to Eliyahu Hanavi. These three parts symbolize the essence of why I love NFTY-MAR, and because of that, **I Avi Holzman announce my candidacy to run for Regional President for the 2020-2021 year.**

We start Havdalah by holding hands which illustrates MAR's value of **Connection**. Connection in your high school might look like playing on one of your school's sports teams. That is connection by association. Connection in MAR is very different: it is the bond we feel with each other, the region, Judaism, and the world. The first time I felt connected to my NFTY-MAR community was at my freshman Spring Kallah when I was asked by a regional board member to participate in a program. At that moment of connection with an upperclassman, I became a complete part of the MAR community. We can do more to make each MARite feel that way. This starts with expanding mixers beyond Friday night. Mixers, even on Zoom, should be designed not just to welcome 8th and 9th graders but instead connect newcomers from all grades.

This also extends to connecting with the world around us. As an intern this past summer at the Religious Action Center (RAC) I was exposed to the URJ's head social justice organization and better understood the issues facing our generation. By working with the RAC, inviting social justice speakers, and bringing social justice programs to subregional events, we can connect our events to the different problems that need fixing. This will better inform MARites about local issues facing us and better connect MARites to the rest of the world.

Just as linking hands during Havdalah teaches the MAR value of connection, we find the value of **Visibility** as we spiral in. The spiral enables us to see each other's faces in the dim light, making sure everyone is recognized as an individual. At school we can sometimes feel invisible, like we are just there and no one cares what we have to say or stops to ask what we think. I hope to keep MAR a place where all people are heard and valued for who they are and what they say or do.

When I attended URJ Heller High in Spring of 2019, I was part of the regular team of service leaders. This group helped me realize that people feel visible when they are included in deep, introspective conversations. Each service planning group helped me get closer with my peers because we all felt heard and understood. This feeling of being understood starts with

ensuring that everyone can attend regardless of finances. To make every MARite feel visible regardless of financial means, I plan to increase the fundraising for scholarships. By having fundraiser type programs (like a dunk tank) at each event we will achieve this goal and make MAR a more accessible community.

Planning services also taught me about the visibility of different types of leadership: if the service was too boring people would tune out, so I had to listen to participant's voices as well. All MARites deserve to be heard, which is why I will hold monthly town hall style zoom meetings with regional board members where participants can voice their thoughts and opinions. This makes every MARite, even the ones unaffiliated with a TYG, visible. In addition, I will hold presidential network calls twice every month to communicate with TYG presidents, making visible the importance of leadership at the TYG level.

Finally, when Havdalah ends, we sing Eliyahu Hanavi and dance. This demonstrates my third vision for NFTY-MAR: the value of **Joy**. For us, Joy is more than just having a good time; joy happens in the process of leading. When I was on committee as a Ruach chair freshman year, I found that teaching and leading a group provided me gratification. Over the years, I learned that this came from working with friends to create awesome experiences. As a Programming chair, doing outreach and leading more programs, each opportunity to help other MARites continue their NFTY journey, grew my sense of joy.

As president, I will share this joy with others, like a mosh pit that starts with one person but grows until everyone is dancing. A crucial part of being a president and leader is listening more than you speak. We are a community of leaders each with something valuable to say.

This starts with setting goals with the Regional board for the region and specific events. It continues by convening the cabinet and event group leaders on pre-event Zoom calls. The joy will spread during monthly drop-in Zoom calls where any participant can ask questions and propose ideas. Lastly, the joy of NFTY can be extended to first time MARites by holding outreach Zoom calls where new participants who have never been to an event can talk with existing MARites, ask questions, and make friends in the MAR community.

Just as we all sing together as one collective voice at Havdalah we all should be able to lend our voices to help improve our region. This magical MAR community exists as an alternative, with a much better culture than our local high schools. Our current situation has made me appreciate all of the moments that I have had with all of you, forcing me to understand that even though we might be scattered across the Mid-Atlantic Region our community enables us to continue to feel connected, visible, and joyful together.

Peace and Love,

Avi Holzman
(He/Him/His)