

We live in a world that has turned on its head, and many of our questions are left unanswered. Who am I? How do I fit into this world? How will my Judaism affect my life? What are my morals? What does it mean to be a Jewish teenager? Sometimes it can be disorienting and overwhelming, the Jewish experiences that are a part of NFTY have helped me navigate these questions. NFTY is a place with a deeply supportive community, and I believe that next year I can create a home for questioning Jewish teens to thrive and connect with each other. I will create this spiritual home by listening to others, looking beyond traditional religious practices, and by using Jewish culture to connect with our collective spirituality. **That is why I, Talia Holzman, am so excited to be running for NFTY-MAR's Religious and Cultural Vice President for the 5781-5782 year.**

Listening to ourselves is a very difficult thing to do, especially when we don't know who we really are. In order to create a community through listening, I would constantly have an open ear, ready and eager to listen to all of your ideas, feelings, and concerns. Any sort of problem, compliment, or criticism will be gratefully accepted because I cannot make NFTY a home for everyone without your input. Community is about so much more than services and programs, it's about being accepting and willing to learn about who each of us are and who we want to be.

Our Jewish identities are personal and unique, but they cannot exist without the community surrounding us. The first step of **exploring our Jewish identities** is accepting that we all have different beliefs. Some of us may feel uncomfortable about the idea of God, struggle to incorporate Judaism in their life outside NFTY, and have mixed feelings about some Jewish teachings/stories. Next year I will strive to make NFTY a place where you can find clarity about your beliefs through more inclusive prayer. I would create a google form that is always available on the NFTY instagram and website, for any suggestions and criticisms about religious and cultural programming.

Creating a spiritual home in NFTY for everyone means building spaces where we can be vulnerable, connect with others, and learn more about ourselves. Writing programs that delve into the nitty gritty of Judaism are so important, but there is so much else that I want to explore. For example, programs about ridiculous Jewish laws and funny stories, as well as insightful programs about Jewish identity and how we are assimilated into society. Ultimately, I want to make being Jewish fun, and inspire a sense of excitement about Judaism in every MARite.

Spiritual identity cannot be explored using a formula or pattern. It requires wandering, investigating, and sometimes failing to find answers. In order to figure out more of who we are, we need to listen, explore our Jewish identities, and create a home in NFTY for all who need one. Failing and lifting each other up again is vital to supporting one another and growing our spiritual community. Creating new ways of prayer and participating in insightful programs are just some of the many ways we can explore ourselves and answer our questions. I am so excited to answer our questions together.

L'shalom NFTY-MAR,
Talia Holzman