

••••• *Hillel said: do not separate yourself from the community.* — Pirkei Avot 2:4 •••••
Dear NFTY,

For nearly a year, we have all been subject to varying degrees of isolation in our homes. Some have been unable to go to school, some have had to miss important lifecycle events, some have missed out on sports and other extracurriculars, and most devastatingly (at least for me), many of our synagogues have temporarily closed their doors, sealing off a critical avenue for us to connect with our people. And it would have been so easy to lose connection with the Jewish community, as Rabbi Hillel warned us against, but NFTY stepped up its game. All year, we have been maintaining our *kesharim* (connections) with each other through initiatives such as RJ on the Go, NFTYx, and virtual NFTY Convention, and by doing so, we have maintained our link to Judaism. With that in mind, **I, Noah Simon, am pledging to guide NFTY in strengthening our *kesharim* to our shared Jewish identities as a candidate for your next Religious and Cultural Vice President.**

In NFTY, leadership is accessible to anybody. That certainly applies to our services and other Jewish experiences, as over the years, NFTY has raised countless songleaders, *shlichei tzibbur* (service leaders), writers of *divrei Torah*, and planners of spiritual programs. NFTY teens in all of these roles set an example for the whole Reform Jewish movement, and people often find their spiritual home at NFTY thanks to their work. As RCVP, it would be my most important goal to ensure that every region is able to provide for NFTYites who are interested in learning and practicing any of these important skills. I hope to use NFTY's platform to amass a wealth of resources and expertise to continue to lower the barrier to participation in NFTY's Jewish life. This could take the form of webinars with experienced professionals, networks of NFTY teens with similar Jewish interests, or a publicly accessible bank of documents and guides for anyone involved in this work to use.

We engage with as many different ideas of God as there are NFTYites. Many people are surprised to learn that I am an atheist. Even so, prayer and study are deeply meaningful and visceral experiences that connect me to my spirituality. Judaism is a religion centered around thinking, questioning, and "wrestling with God", and it would be a programmatic priority of mine to help NFTYites deepen their understanding of their own personal Jewish identity.

NFTY is unafraid to speak out against both cruelty within Israel and towards it. As an inherently Zionist movement, we form deep connections to our ancient homeland of *Eretz Yisrael*. We do not shy away from difficult conversations about Israeli and Israel-American politics, and we acknowledge that no issue is ever as simple as we'd like it to be. However, it can be difficult to write Israel programming that is appropriately nuanced and still engaging and fun. As RCVP, I hope to bridge that gap along with the Israel Engagement Task Force by discussing ways of making Israel programs accessible and by sharing program ideas that were successful. Members of the Task Force can bring this knowledge back to their own regions for future programs at regional events.

I believe that I am someone with the knowledge and experience to guide NFTY in connecting in these ways. I served as the Religious and Cultural Vice President of NFTY-MAR during the programmatic year of 2019–2020, and I have held the same position in my local TYG for two non-consecutive terms. These three years of experience as an RCVP have provided me with invaluable experience planning events, spiritually engaging programs and services, and most importantly, working with others. In addition, I attended the former URJ Kutz Camp in 2019 and the Sci-Tech Machon program in 2020, both intensive leadership experiences that have helped me grow as a person and a leader in incredible ways.

NFTY, in this age of constant connection, I hope that you will consider me for the job of helping make those connections stronger and more meaningful.

L'chayim tovim ul'shalom (To life and to peace),
Noah Simon