

Dear NFTY-PAR,

For as long as I can remember, music has been an essential part of my life. Now, I'm wholeheartedly invested in musical theater and perform in shows multiple times a year, but that wasn't always the case. With both of my parents being symphony musicians, going to concerts was never a choice; it was a requirement. While many people paid to see them perform, it would be a knock-down-drag-out battle to even get me in the car! Unfortunately, this same feeling and struggle is common for many Jews regarding our religious services. Believe me, being a Camp Harlam girl and musicians' daughter, I totally understand dreading going to services-- sitting next to my best friends but not being able to talk to them seemed to slow down services and make them take forever. I knew that if there were more interesting services, I would not only be able to interact with my friends but also become more connected to the amazing Jewish community that exists throughout the world, so that when I went to Israel I would be fully immersed in the experience. **This is why I, Abby Hart, excitedly announce my candidacy for the position of NFTY-PAR Religious and Cultural Vice President for the upcoming 5779-5780 year.**

Most people at camp bring things to do during services, like string to make bracelets with. PARites do something similar using their phones. Over the past year, I have been getting more and more involved in songleading, and as a result, more involved in the service itself. At NFTY Convention in February, I was introduced to a new and unique way of leading services where we got to choose the service we participated in. I chose the one I was most interested in, a yoga variation on traditional prayers. While I was fully immersed in the stretches and how each one represented a different prayer, my phone stayed unnoticed in my backpack. Since we were able to choose what we were interested in and what we liked, I felt more engaged and more connected to Judaism. By putting my own spin on activities, like changing classical concerts to performing in musicals and changing sitting in services to songleading in them, I was able to end up loving what I used to dread.

**My vision as the NFTY-PAR RCVP:**

**Create a Songleading Floor Plan:** It can be intimidating to sit during services while having songleaders sing, especially if it feels one-sided; like they're singing at you instead of with you. Songleaders mirror the energy in the room and without a three-dimensional service, it can be hard to maintain a connection with the PARTICIPANTS. This year, I will work with the Head Songleader to create a floor plan where the songleaders can walk around, surround, and interact with everyone through their music. This will give them a more dynamic and interactive presence, and in turn, encourage engagement during services.

**Interactive Group Services:** In NFTY-PAR, we have experimented with having a common theme that the service was based on. My goal is to take this to the next level and allow PARTICIPANTS to not just sit and learn about topics but to also have a chance to choose a service they will have the best experience in. I will accomplish this by trying many various hands-on activities, engaging in mini-groups sessions, and delivering interest surveys after each service. This will allow PARTICIPANTS a voice in their choice of services which they feel are most meaningful and relevant to their current circumstances. I will also connect this programming to Israel because there are many aspects of Israel that go unnoticed by many Jewish teens who would be more interested in it if they knew about how innovative and modern a country it is.

**Live-Stream One PAR Service At Each Event:** An important aspect to services is the feeling of family or משפחה (mishpachah). By collaborating with the Communication and Membership Vice Presidents, I plan to create a live-streamed service that affords those who can't make it to still be a part of our valuable משפחה. This allows PAR to get a new level of engagement outside of the PARites attending the event and create a chance for discussions after the event. Many parents are interested in being able to see what their kids are doing at NFTY events, and, by utilizing modern technology, we can increase their support of their kids attending PAR events.

Since my very first NFTY event, I have known that I wanted to be on the regional board because they were so welcoming and seemed like such a close community. The only question was what position? It may have taken some (a lot) of self-reflection, but I realized that RCVP is the perfect fit for me because of my growing passion for music and desire to take advantage of every minute at PAR events. PAR has affected me in ways that I can't even begin to express and I hope to be able to affect the future generations of PAR. I am looking forward to this coming NFTY year with bright hopes!

עם התרגשות ואהבת (with excitement and love),  
Abby Hart