

1. What goals do you have as Religious and Cultural VP for the 2019-2020 year? The goals that I have as RCVP for the 2019-2020 year are to implement new unconventional service concepts. As a current NFTY song-leader, I noticed that services are difficult to keep people engaged in and I believe the best way to engage participants is through interaction. With this, I would like to make services more fun and engaging by allowing teens to form groups and create skits based on a prayer they are given. These skits would not deter from the meaning or significance of the prayer, but would allow an innovative way of portraying the message and meaning of the prayer while getting our teens out of their comfort zones and allowing them to meet and interact with new people. I would also like to educate our teens on the current news that occurs in Israel. I would like to do this by scheduling monthly zoom calls with adults/ teens that have great knowledge about or live in Israel. Being a participant at the URJ Kutz Camp this past summer, I met teens that were involved in their youth movement in Israel, Netzer Olami. With this opportunity, I now can connect with those teens to schedule amazing opportunities for our participants and be able to get updated about events that are going on in Israel while also discussing different perspectives of these issues.

2. Why have you chosen to run for Religious and Cultural VP? I have chosen to run for RCVP because I have an immense passion for learning about Israel, Judaism and different cultures. From an early age I was always that kid in religious school who truly enjoyed attending, learning new prayers and building an understanding of the history of my religion. Preparing for my bat mitzvah opened up my eyes to how important Judaism is to me and my love for it continued to grow. In recent years I have been given opportunities to run and plan Shabbat and High Holy Day services which has expanded my leadership skills by cooperating with others, by taking charge, and being able to stand proudly in front of my congregation. I truly love my current job of being the RCVP of my youth group and I want to share my love and passion for Judaism to NFTY.

3. List what experiences make you qualified to be Religious and Cultural VP? The experiences that make me qualified to be RCVP are that I have had multiple opportunities to plan and run services. With this responsibility, I have had to work with temple clergy, leadership, and other teens to help make sure the service runs smoothly. As a current NFTY-STR song-leader I have been exposed to what it is like to work with Regional Board members. I

know that teamwork is crucial in creating amazing events. Also with this opportunity I now have experiences working with other musical teens which allows me to share input and understand musical choices when applying them to service planning. Finally, as RCVP of my temple youth group, I am fully aware of the responsibilities that come with being an RCVP.

4. Write a D'var Torah for a Torah portion that occurs during Winter Regional. This week's Torah portion is Parshat Vayechi which means "And he lived" and it is the story of Jacob, who we know as Yisrael, and he is 147 years old and on his deathbed. As was the custom, his family had gathered at his bedside to say goodbye. Jacob is concerned about the responsibility and the legacy he is leaving his family to carry on, the Jewish faith. He starts to have his doubts and the Torah says that his family responds "Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One," the Shema. It was his children, the 12 tribes of Israel, or Jacob, reassuring him with this central basis of our faith. Jacob goes on to give blessings to his children. He starts by blessing sons Ephraim and Menashe as the future of our people. Then blesses and assigns each of them a role as a tribe: Judah will produce leaders, legislators and kings; priests will come from Levi, scholars from Issachar, seafarers from Zebulun, schoolteachers from Simeon, soldiers from Gad, judges from Dan, olive-growers from Asher, Naphtali is granted the swiftness of a deer, Benjamin the ferociousness of a wolf, and Joseph is blessed with beauty and fertility. He, also makes a point of excluding a few sons who have sort of fallen out of favor including Reuben, Simeon and Levi for unholy acts.

I think that the take-away for us is that these blessings were assignments. Jacob looked at each of his children, took into account their defining traits and interests and blessed their success in these. It was then up to each of his sons to focus on this purpose, like a musician in training, dedicating themselves to the important things in life which would contribute to their personal growth. With this in mind, I began to reflect on how we can achieve our own personal growth for ourselves and with the New Year approaching, I think this is a perfect time since we will be setting resolutions. We are all still kids with responsibilities that may have been assigned to us by our parents or teachers or maybe we are who we are despite what we are being raised to be. We must be true to ourselves and to others. We must be kind to one another, focus on our goals, and pursue them.