

## **Jasmine Morgan**

### **Erev Rosh Hashanah Message - 2013**

Welcome home, I stepped off a bus in an unfamiliar place and was immediately bombarded by those two words. I looked around searching for a reason to call this new place home, but I couldn't stop thinking. This isn't home. Home is 12 hours and almost 1,000 miles away, or at least that's what I thought.

Just days later I realized I was surly mistaken because Kutz had become my home. Kutz is the North American Federation of Temple Youth's campus for leadership training. This summer I was blessed enough to find the scholarship money to spend 4 weeks at Kutz studying Torah and finding myself along with finding my Judaism. Each camper chooses a major, a month long minor and weekly minor. For me, my major was easy, torah corps. I spent my time at camp debating torah, god, and Jewish customs with 14 other opinionated teens and our amazing teacher from Prague.

Before embarking on my journey to camp I thought I wanted to be a Rabbi, and now, I am certain.

My month long minor was one that you must apply to get into. It is called Fellowship and it is Kutz's partnership with the Campaign for Youth Engagement. I was picked with 11 others from over 70 applicants to be a part of the fellowship cohort and it was by far my favorite part of camp. Fellowship comes with a \$1,000 scholarship and did not end when camp did. The 12 members of the cohort are each to return to their home communities and create a project to engage the disengaged, under engaged, and unengaged youth in their community. My project is the creation of a stronger and more active youth group at CBY.

Now, you may think we have a youth group so why does it need to be changed? But, while we have a youth group that has been getting stronger and stronger over the past 4 years this year 6 of our 10 members are graduating and 10 new members will be joining Beth Yam Youth Group. This year will be pivotal in ensuring the continuation of our youth group after this year because the majority of the members will be new to youth group.

Through my project I hope to build a strong youth group board, create a greater involvement with NFTY and regional events, introduce programming to new members, and plan fun, interactive, and explorative programs and events to engage new members and grow their love for youth group. Working with our new full time advisor Sheryl Keating and the other members we have begun the plans for the upcoming year including the annual Purim Carnival, a youth group cooking day, and a trip to Savannah for the Jewish Food Festival.

Why is this so important to me? It's simple, NFTY and youth group have changed my life. My freshman year I attended my first kallah, or regional convention, and I have attended 9 more regional events as well as was lucky enough to attend the national convention in Los Angeles this past February due to generous assistance from both CBY and CBY Sisterhood. These events have taught me to be confident in myself, no matter how quirky and strange I can be. NFTY has taught me leadership skills by giving me opportunities to write programs and lead programs with 300 participants. I have also found my passion through NFTY and Temple Youth Group. After leading services both here at CBY and at regional events and exploring my Judaism in innovative ways including meditation, music, and liturgy I discovered my dream of becoming a rabbi.

However those are not the only reasons, one of the biggest reasons that the engagement of youth is so important is the continuation of our religion. If the youth movements lose their strength who will be here to continue the religion after this generation ends? If teens lose the Judaism early, they are unlikely to raise their children with Jewish roots and slowly the religion will die out. This is an important time for the URJ as currently there is only a 20% engagement after b'nai mitzvah and it is the Campaign for Youth Engagements goal that by 2020 they increase youth engagement 50%. I plan to aid the campaign by making sure that CBY has a ZERO % drop off after b'nai mitzvah this year, and hopefully in all years to come.

I could not thank CBY enough for their support over the past year and the generous amount of scholarship money that I received in order to get to have these life changing experiences.

L'shana Tova T'ka Tavu.