

Will Hall | Personal Statement

During my senior year of college, I met with a rabbi to explore the idea of pursuing the rabbinate. When I broached the subject, he immediately responded, “You want to be a rabbi? Don’t you know? You’ll have to work with Jews all day!” After we stopped laughing, it occurred to me, that was exactly what I wanted.

I am a people person. The relationship and collaboration-based aspects of this profession are part of what pushed me to pursue the rabbinate. I love not only getting to know others, hearing their stories, and forming bonds, but also providing a Jewish lens in which to rejoice in their *simchas* while also giving support in their moments of hardship and grief.

I have always felt a deep connection to the Jewish people. I take pride in my immigrant ancestors who fled from, as my grandmother used to tell me, “An Eastern European border town that seemed to change countries each morning, and whose name you could only pronounce properly in a cough,” alongside my more recent family, who worked tirelessly to earn their place in an historically restrictive American South. In all of their brilliance, values, quirks, and neuroses, the Jewish people are *my* people, and I feel a deep connection to our ongoing story.

Despite this connection, such a description only represents a partial picture of my family at best. I come from an interfaith family, and the experience left an indelible mark on my understanding of what it means to live Jewishly. In an interfaith family with our practicing Christian father and Jewish mother, my sister and I experienced full Jewish childhoods. We attended Jewish day schools, observed holidays, and participated in community events while also seeing my father’s family, helping him celebrate his holidays, and working to recognize and appreciate the impact of his faith on his own life. My family helped me to understand interfaith work is not only about appreciating differences but recognizing similarities. My parents’ interfaith marriage is successful because their relationship is not based on what they believe religiously but in who they are as people. At its best, interfaith work illustrates a sense of shared humanity that can be taken outside of a program’s walls and into regular life. I strive to bring this sense of shared humanity into my work by emphasizing personal relationships, pastoral care, and *bikkur cholim* – visiting the sick.

I prioritize Jewish youth work because I find it to be endlessly meaningful in my own life, but more importantly because I believe it holds the greatest potential for impact in both participants’ lives and the growth of communities. Youth work is inherently personal, as the youth worker actively helps young people develop their Jewish identities by grounding their social lives in Jewish experiences. In doing so, we may help facilitate Jewish friendships, provide dependable support systems, and model a fully accepting and welcoming Jewish community. For me, this work feels powerful enough to be religious practice, actively bettering and maintaining the Jewish

community through personal relationships and personalized experiences. Wherever I go, I look forward to working with Jewish youth to create spaces where they may feel accepted as their full Jewish and personal selves.

Lifelong learning is a core value in my life. I understand learning to be the central vehicle to fulfilling all forms of Jewish interest, and in my own life, moving me towards areas of Jewish growth. After graduating college, I moved to Jerusalem and enrolled in the Pardes Institute for Jewish Studies because I wanted to study *Torah lishma* (*study for its own sake*), and make strides in my Jewish beliefs that could only come with purposeful learning. From a desire to better engage with both the state and people of Israel, I signed and honored a pledge to speak only Hebrew for eight-weeks in Middlebury College's intensive Hebrew learning program. Similarly, wanting to better understand Jewish nonprofits' inner workings and gain knowledge of management, fundraising, and development, I spent a summer at the Zelikow School for Jewish Nonprofit Management, earning a Certificate in Jewish Organizational Leadership. Lifelong learning is an essential part of my life, and I hope to share this value with others, helping them pursue their own Jewish interests and making our tradition relevant in their modern lives.

I feel most spiritual at the intersection of God and Jewish peoplehood. I understand the Divine's greatest reflection to be humanity itself, and Jewish people are a central part of my spiritual identity. I believe that people are ultimately God's hands and form of action in the world, and in times when I struggled to find God in my life, I could always find people. My understanding of God is fluid and ever-changing, evolving through spiritual and personal experience. I find great value in using prayer and Jewish tools like *Mussar* study to add intention, meaning, and reflection to my life. I look forward to praying and working to bring godliness into the world with my future community.

I am shaped by a spiritually rich interfaith home, a love of both humanity and Jewish particularism, a commitment to Jewish youth, a fascination with learning, and the intersection between God and community. I am a people person and am eager to work with community members to foster meaningful relationships. I would love the opportunity to serve a congregation, to work and learn from a senior rabbi and clergy team, and to contribute to a Jewish community. When my rabbi warned against the rabbinate, he should have known he instead issued an advertisement. Working with people is what brings me to this work.