



Two General Assembly Perspectives

Wendy Paler and Jacob Labendz

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Immediately following a wonderfully rejuvenating and restorative Shabbat retreat with my Wexner class, I walked into the GA with a sense of excitement and an expectation that I would spend the next few days building my professional network and listening to speeches delivered by famous politicians and prominent community figures. Indeed, the networking and the speeches were a valuable part of the conference; however, my preconceived notion of the GA failed to capture the rich learning and thinking that my 48 hours in Washington, DC have inspired.

The GA offered many sessions that dealt with topics including professional development, Israel, peoplehood, and Jewish service. In Dan Pallotta's forum on "Innovation in Philanthropy," I developed skills and language that will help me to become a more thoughtful and effective professional. Dan pushed us to tackle problematic and pervasive issues, including the practice of measuring donor dollars in the oversimplified terms of cause vs. overhead, by reframing the conversation and focusing on the crucial and more difficult questions that usually go unaddressed.

From my seat in the plenary hall, in a sea of thousands of Jews who care deeply about the future of our community, I heard speaker after speaker expound upon the need for innovation and fresh ideas in Jewish life. Many times throughout the conference, including in the session run by the Wexner Foundation, people repeated a mantra-like statement of truth: "What got you here will not get you there." Since the GA, I've been struggling to figure out what exactly it will take to "get us there." Although I have not come up with any simple answers, I know that it will take creativity and leadership, optimism and honesty. More than ever before, I believe that the future success of the Jewish community depends on thoughtful, critical, and open conversation and collaboration. Only if we partake in this type of discourse and subsequent action will we be able to bring about sustainable, real change – the type of change the Jewish community needs.