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Reflections on the Mickey Weiss Fellowship 2017/5777

We read in Pirkei Avot, “*Aseh lecha rav*, “Make for yourself a teacher.” What a curious phrase. How might one go about making a teacher? I didn’t really know the answer to that question until I attended the Shalom Hartman Rabbinic Torah Study Seminar this past summer as a grateful recipient of the Mickey Weiss Fellowship. Through the generosity of Edna Weiss, I participated in the 10-day seminar in Jerusalem, along with 130 other rabbis from North America, South America, Europe and Israel.

To have 10 days of study without the interruptions of teaching and congregational responsibilities was intellectually and spiritually fulfilling and renewing for me, and I believe for all of us who attended. The topic was “1917, 1947 and 1967: The Legacy of the Past and the Future of Modern Israel.” To be able to study about Israel while being in Israel added to the power of the experience as well.

The teachers were just outstanding. Each day we had a lecture by one the Shalom Hartman senior faculty members. The teachers, Donniel Hartman, Yehuda Kurtzer, Elana Stein Hain, Tal Becker, Yosi Klein Halevi to name a few, combined rich scholarship, high energy, and openness to questions and comments that made being a student both stimulating and challenging.

After the opening lecture we spend the remainder of the morning in 3-4-person *chevruta* groups. Here, we are the teachers with and for one another and many of us have not had this kind of in-depth experience since rabbinical school. Afternoons are dedicated to elective courses and evenings are filled with additional, exciting and provocative lectures and other programs, and those are open to spouses/partners. There are even outside tours to join as part of the Hartman program.

So how did I make for myself a teacher? Participating in the Shalom Hartman Rabbinic Torah Study Seminar, allowed me to make myself a student, which allowed me to make for myself not just one teacher, but so many outstanding teachers, both Shalom Hartman faculty and my fellow rabbis. And, I also renewed the teacher in me. I am so grateful and appreciative for the many gifts that I received.

Rabbi Edwin Harris, Ph.D.
Playa Vista Jewish Community
Visiting Assistant Professor, Hebrew Union College, Los Angeles

When I applied for this very generous fellowship I already knew that Hartman had a wonderful reputation. My time at the conference well surpassed my already high expectations. We all know it is extraordinarily hard to create an environment that feels safe and yet challenges. Each speaker and *chevruta* session was designed to be full of text, teaching support, and a high level of deep thought. Each day I was presented with ideas that I thought I already had a firm grasp on. Each day I was challenged to reinvent, dig deeper, and embrace greater nuance and complexity.

Each individual lecture is masterfully crafted to dig deep into the theme of the day or week. That, in and of itself, would have been wonderful. Yet, the real magic came in processing the space between the lectures. The theme this past year was Israel in 1917, 1947, 1967, and 2017. I found my own Zionism renewed with energy, depth, and nuance. I found my own personal attachment to Israel as I combined and internalized the various approaches of each of the senior faculty.

I have already repeatedly used much of what I learned directly, and I cannot measure the indirect impact in the way i think about, talk about, and teach about Israel. I am extraordinarily grateful for this opportunity and I encourage you not to pass it up!

Kol Tuv,

Rabbi Jason Fruithandler