



About Hillel

Corner Office Blog

Bronfman Debuts New Book at JCC Literary Festival

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Friends and supporters of the [Washington DC Jewish Community Center](#) gathered for an intimate conversation with renowned philanthropist and Jewish leader Edgar M. Bronfman as part of the 10th annual [Hyman S. & Freda Bernstein Jewish Literary Festival](#).

The event celebrated the release of Bronfman's newest book, *Hope, Not Fear: A Path to Jewish Renaissance*, which he co-authored with Beth Zasloff. Hillel International President Wayne L. Firestone posed thoughtful questions to both Bronfman and Zasloff about the messages behind their latest work.



Beth Zasloff, Wayne Firestone and Edgar Bronfman discuss 'Hope, Not Fear.'

Written to appeal to all generations, *Hope, Not Fear* explores the notion that a joyous approach is the only way to secure a Jewish future. Bronfman explains he first began using the phrase "hope, not fear" with Richard Joel, former Hillel president and current president of Yeshiva University, after committing to support Hillel in the early 1990s.

"Richard told me he didn't fully understand what I meant until his wife explained to him later at home: We need to stop obsessing about anti-Semitism. We need to focus on the hope that we can have more Jews and more engaged Jews and create a Jewish renaissance," says Bronfman.

For this very reason, Bronfman serves as the chair of the Hillel's International Board of Governors. In that role, he has been instrumental in transforming Hillel and supporting programming to engage uninvolved Jewish college students of varying denominations.

Firestone commented that Bronfman and Zasloff's work is asking its Jewish audience to "raise the bar" as it relates to respecting one another. "It's not enough to tolerate each other," suggests Firestone of the book's message. "We need to have a deeper understanding of differing viewpoints, find common ground, use common language."



Wayne Firestone and Edgar Bronfman.

Firestone adds that Hillel has found this strategy to work well on college campuses where observant Jews and students from interfaith families are working together on social justice projects, sharing *Shabbat* meals and traveling to Israel.

Bronfman, a self-described "Political Jew" with ambivalent feelings toward God, told the audience his

own Jewish journey is the inspiration behind his notion of hope. Admitting he'd once eaten ham on *Yom Kippur*, but now refuses to consume pork or shellfish, Bronfman laughed that even a non-observant Jew has great potential to embrace the Torah.

The Hyman S. & Freda Bernstein Jewish Literary Festival runs through Wednesday, September 24.