



Edgar M. Bronfman

Edgar M. Bronfman

More than twenty years ago, after witnessing continued discord within the ranks of inter-denominational Jewish leadership, it became clear to me that our people simply did not know how to talk to one another and that many were unable to learn. I felt something needed to be done.

I dreamed of educating an interdenominational cadre of young Jews who would see their commitments to Judaism and the Jewish people through a lens broader than their own perspective. So I translated my frustration with my peers into a new program for talented young people from all our denominations who would model a different quality of discourse for the Jewish community. In the summer of 1987, the first group of Bronfman Youth Fellows traveled to Israel to learn to talk, and more importantly, to listen, to one another.

I hoped the program would create a core of young leaders who would remain in contact throughout their lives and that even when they fundamentally disagree, they would bring the values of mutual respect and civility to the debate. I also dreamed of a renaissance of Torah study which made room for all Jewish backgrounds at the table. I knew that commitment must be based on knowledge, and that new leadership should not merely react to the threat of external enemies. Young leaders must be more informed and inspired than much of the leadership of my generation.

These were unique ambitions for a summer program. But if my hopes were ultimately to be realized, I felt that these needed to be my goals. Now, I see the fruits of what I started more than two decades ago. Through their continued association with the Bronfman Youth Fellowships, Fellowship alumni have begun to engage in many aspects of Jewish communal life, with a renewed interest in our heritage and a commitment to interact positively.

As the Fellowships continue to grow both in North America and Israel, and as we generate new programs, such as Amitei Bronfman, our Israeli Youth Fellowship, I am proud to witness the impact of our Bronfman Fellows, many of whom are now accomplished professionals. I continue to dream of all they will achieve for our people in the future. Of my many philanthropic endeavors, no group gives me more hope for our people than the "Bronfmanim."

May they go from strength to strength.