



DIGEST

The newsletter of the World Congress of Gay & Lesbian Jewish Organizations
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Wiesel to Gays: "Those Who Hate You Hate Me"

The following is a transcript of remarks made by Nobel Laureate Elie Wiesel at the 8th Annual Fundraising Dinner of the Human Rights Campaign Fund in New York, on November 5, 1989. Our thanks to HRCF and "Out in the Eighties" for providing this transcript.

My good friend Congressman Green, friends:

Some of you came up to me earlier to personally thank me for being here.

In doing so, actually they reflected a certain pleasant surprise to see me here — and I understand. Because, probably they must have read one or two or three of my writings; and I am a student of the Bible, a student of mysticism, and therefore they must have known that I come from a very religious, Orthodox background with some puritan undertones and overtones. And they were surprised. What are you doing here?

cause of their personal choices. We are all equally responsible for one another.

What I have learned, therefore, is that the worst sin is to inflict shame and/or humiliation on anyone else for whatever reason.

I must tell you this evening, listening and looking, I must confess: I have rarely witnessed a scene that I have seen here tonight. I have rarely seen an audience as warm, as generous, as receptive, and as thirsty for understanding and compassion.

Therefore, it is normal that I should be here.

It is normal for a person with my background to be here to tell you that those who believe in oppression include everybody. Those who are bigots do not stop at classes, at races, or again, at gays and lesbians. Those who hate you hate me. Those who hate, hate everybody.

Those who hate Jews will hate blacks; and those who hate blacks will hate neo-



1986 Nobel Peace Laureate Elie Wiesel and Paulette Goodman, National President, Parents and Friends of Lesbians and Gays, 1989 HRCF Humanitarian Award recipients. Photo ©1989 by Leslie DiRusso.

rights that must apply to every single segment of our population and to every area of human endeavors? Gay, lesbian, black,

They need not be surprised. True, in our Orthodox background, in the Bible, in the Torah, you don't fare too well. We have to tell each other the truth and the truth is that in fact the Bible is not at all tender to you.

But those who study the Bible carefully and deeply know that there are innumerable laws in the Bible that simply are there to be in the Book, but never to be implemented.

What I find, rather, in our ancient tradition, is the lesson that we are all equal. Never have I learned at any time that there is one group of persons superior to another because of their color, because of their race, because of their creed, or be-

ple simply because they talk differently or because they believe something that they refuse to believe. Hate is contagious. Hate does not know any boundaries. And hate does not believe any explanations.

Those who wanted to isolate you in the past, and too often they succeeded, they are committing sins: sins against society; sins against humanity; and against creation as such.

No one has the right not to allow you to acquire the dignity, the respect, and the self-respect to which we are all entitled — all of us.

So, why should I not be here to speak to you about self-respect and about civil

white, Chinese, Koreans — we are all human beings.

I have seen in my lifetime the consequences of the opposing views when they dominated the scene. I have seen Jews (naturally, being always the first victims), and so many others, including gays, in those places of darkness, silence and fire.

So I would surely support any attempt, any plan, any project, imagined or envisioned by any group, to say that human rights and civil rights apply to me, to my wife, to my son, to my family, to my people, to gays, to lesbians.

We have no right to limit freedom. We have no right to limit respect. Because anyone who begins will not stop.

World Congress Achieves Record Growth

A glance at the membership roster of the World Congress in this **Digest** shows that 29 organizations are now members of the World Congress, a record total in the ten years of the World Congress' existence. Five have joined since the last issue of the **Digest**: Beit Haverim (Paris), B'nai Shalom (Louisville), Lambda Chai (New Orleans), Tikvat Shalom (Denver), and ha-Va'ad L'milchama b'AIDS (Tel Aviv). Of these five groups, one is French and another is Israeli, demonstrating the continued successful commitment of the World Congress to being a truly international organization.

The membership roster also indicates the variety of organizations comprising our community: synagogues, havurot, social groups, support groups, and service

groups. Some combine several of these aspects. What unites us is that we are, according to the World Congress by-laws, primarily Gay and/or Lesbian, and primarily Jewish, committed to supporting each other and to combatting homophobia in the Jewish community and anti-Semitism in the Gay and Lesbian community.

Other Lesbian and Gay Jewish groups exist, as yet unaffiliated with the World Congress, in cities such as Honolulu, Johannesburg, Pittsburgh, Stockholm, and Vancouver. We are, of course, in touch with them, and hope that they soon will join our family. We expect, too, that our regional and international conferences will continue to spark the growth of new communities and groups, and will continue to break down isolations.

We Remember

The World Congress notes with sorrow the death of Ed Traitman, on May 10, 1990 (15 Iyar 5750), of complications resulting from AIDS. Ed's involvement with the World Congress spanned a decade and a half, from the first precursor meeting in 1975 responding to the UN's anti-Zionism resolution up until his death.

Ed co-chaired the 6th International Conference of Gay and Lesbian Jews in Philadelphia in 1981, represented Beth Ahavah on the Board of the World Congress from 1982 to 1984, and was the President of the World Congress from 1984 to 1985.

Our hearts go out to his family, friends, and loved ones. May his memory be for a blessing.

Support Needed for Israel AIDS Quilt Tour

In conjunction with World AIDS Day, December 1, 1990, a three-week Israel Tour of the NAMES Project International AIDS Memorial Quilt is planned. Both US-based and Israeli committees have been established, including World Congress member organizations Aguda L' shmirat Tzchuyot Haprat (Society for the Protection of Personal Rights) and ha'Va'ad L'milchama b'AIDS (Israeli AIDS Task Force). The Israeli committee is also supported by Israel's Ministry of Health.

Although Israel has not yet been hard hit by HIV, notes Andy Rose, AIDS Project Coordinator of San Francisco's Jewish Family and Children's Services, "those involved with AIDS work [in Israel] are well aware that the actual numbers of infected people are considerably higher than the officially reported figures. [A] little AIDS awareness could go a very long way in terms of promoting both prevention and compassion."

The Quilt is a symbol of care and compassion, embracing and uniting diverse communities and nations. The Quilt is a symbol of love and memorial, including the names of many World Congress members, friends, and loved ones. The Quilt is a powerful and tangible reminder that we must all be partners in **tikkun olam**, the repair of the world. In the United States alone, the display of portions of the Quilt in synagogues and community centers in cities such as Cleveland and Milwaukee has contributed immeasurably toward this end.

The World Congress is committed to helping the Friends of the Israel Tour of the International AIDS Memorial Quilt bring the Quilt to Israel. Funds are still needed to achieve this goal. Any excess funds will be donated to Israeli organizations to further AIDS education and care. Please send a generous check to the World Congress earmarked for the NAMES Project — Israel Tour, to help further this vital work.



Upcoming Events

1990

June 29-July 2 3rd Midwest Regional Conference of Gay and
Toronto Lesbian Jews

World Congress Member Organizations

AGUDA L'SHMIRAT
TZCHUYOT HAPRAT
P.O. Box 16151
61161 Tel Aviv

BEYT G'VURAH
P.O. Box 8503
Minneapolis, MN 55408
(612) 870-1001

MISHPACHAT AM
P.O. Box 39127
Phoenix, AZ 85069
(602) 940-0000

July 2-3; Toronto World Congress Board of Directors Meeting
 August 10-12 3rd Western Regional Conference of Gay and
 Seattle Lesbian Jews
 August 17-19 4th Northeast Regional Conference of Gay
 Pawling, NY and Lesbian Jews
1991
 May 24-27 12th International Conference of Gay and
 San Francisco Lesbian Jews

Two More Congregations Acquire Holocaust Scrolls

World Congress members **Mishpachat Am** (Phoenix) and **Beth Simchat Torah** (New York) are among the most recent organizations to acquire Torah scrolls from the Holocaust.

As part of their "Final Solution," the Nazis stole Torah scrolls and other sacred objects from Jewish communities, to be exhibited in a planned museum of a dead culture. Liberated at the end of World War II, many of the scrolls were deposited with London's Westminster Synagogue, which distributes them on permanent loan to congregations and havurot around the world. In 1980, **Beth Mishpachah** (Washington) became the first Gay and Lesbian synagogue to receive a Holocaust scroll, which has since been used in numerous Shabbat, holy day, and bar and bat mitzvah celebrations.

The World Congress is grateful that its member organizations can bring renewed life to these sacred symbols of our faith, recalling most movingly the impact of the Holocaust on both the Jewish and Gay and Lesbian communities.

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