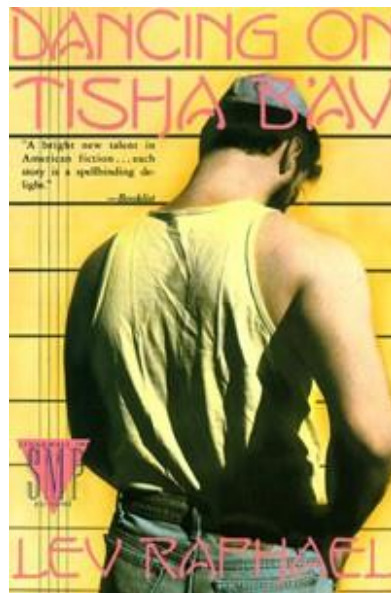




The World Congress of GLBT Jews: *Keshet Ga'avah*

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## Tisha b'Av 2020



[Lev Raphael: Fiction & Memoir: Dancing on Tisha B'Av](#)

### **President's Message**

by Goldy Goldberg, she/her/ours

We must stand together, strong and proud. We are one community!

Tisha b'Av, encompasses a time of the year when a myriad of challenging and pivotal moments have occurred in our collective history, both as Jews and as Twilight people. For people of color in our community, such a time is now. To truly proclaim our support for both our Jewish and LGBTQI+ families, we must raise our voices in tikkun olam and support the "Black Lives Matter" movement.

As a Jew, I have been the target of physical attacks, verbal harassment and discrimination from both neighbors and institutions. As a queer person, I have been in fear for my livelihood, which enables me to support my family. Yet, I can't begin to understand the depth and measure of such experiences for a person of color. Reality is that I benefit from

"white privilege," a truth different than for my family of color.

Psalm 90 says the length of our days is seventy years. Today some 70 countries around the world still have laws that criminalize LGBTI status or conduct. Throughout the world, people with more melanin in their skin are subjected to widespread race-related violence, discriminatory police profiling, and discrimination in hiring and housing. These shattering truths lead to disparities in health and healthcare, safety, income and overall quality of life as well as decreased life expectancy.

Let today be the day when we work to bring to a close the length of days given to such despicable disparities around the world.

We must stand together, strong and proud. We are one community. Be well and stay safe.

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## **Dancing on Tisha B'Av**

by Lev Raphael

I published *Dancing on Tisha B'Av* almost thirty years ago and the book capped ten years of publishing groundbreaking stories about gay Jews and children of Holocaust survivors. More than that, it fulfilled a childhood dream of having people read a book of mine because I was so crazy about stories even then. I longed to see a book of mine on library shelves and in bookstores.

I've now published twenty-five more in genres from mystery to memoir and I've loved writing each one and have never known where any book would take me.

*Dancing* had a unique trajectory. It launched me as a public voice of gay Jews, as someone building bridges between Jews and non-Jews, gays and straights. It started me on what has seemed like a never-ending series of book tours that has included hundreds of invited talks and readings across the U.S. and Canada and in England, Scotland, France, Germany, Israel.

It opened me up to the magic of reaching an audience, however large or small, and how exciting that could be. Thanks to having been a classroom teacher and taken theater classes in college, I knew something about being in front of an audience but needed more experience which I got, in spades. I also received "director's notes" from my husband (then partner), who came on many of the tours, and I trained myself to become the best possible performer of my own work that I could possibly be, rehearsing before each event.

My career took many turns after that: I reviewed for fifteen years for a handful of newspapers and radio stations, even producing my own local radio show where I interviewed authors like Doris Kearns Goodwin and Salman Rushdie. I launched a mystery series featuring a gay sleuth and his partner. I published in genres I never expected to, like horror, *The Vampyre of Gotham*, and historical fiction, *Rosedale in Love*. More recently I returned to university teaching for six years at Michigan State University, which inspired two new crime novels set in academia.

I always counted myself fortunate in having an amazing writing and teaching mentor in college, and when I asked her how I could thank her, all she told me was to "Pass it on." And that's exactly what I've aimed for in both my writing and teaching over the years, and

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it's what I continue to strive for in my online mentoring [today](#). Her guidance is always with me. Truly, that Lutheran professor helped make me the Jewish writer I am [today](#).

Lev Raphael's author website is [levraphael.com](http://levraphael.com), and his online mentoring website is [writewithoutborders.com](http://writewithoutborders.com)

***Thank you Lev for responding to my request to submit an article to our newsletter—the Editor.***

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## Larry Kramer

by Shep Wahnon, *World Congress Advisor, Cultural Inclusion and Diversity*

Larry Kramer was a complicated man, very difficult, and always angry. He was also a fighter for his community, our community, the gay community. Larry was the single most significant leader in the initial fight against AIDS. May 27, 2020 was a sad day for all of us who were infected or affected by AIDS. That was the day Larry Kramer died at the age of 84. So many of us, myself included, owe our very lives to him and the organizations he created such as Gay Men's Health Crisis and ACT-UP. I had the privilege of meeting Larry many times and witnessed his constant call to action. Nothing could stop him. He was truly like a biblical prophet to the gay Community. He said things that no one believed or wanted to believe. He said them anyway.

Larry was born in Connecticut but moved to New York and behaved very much like a real New Yorker. He always spoke his mind!

Never having been a gay-rights activist when AIDS touched the gay community something came alive in Larry and he responded like his life depended on it. And it did. AIDS came to public attention in the summer of 1981. In January 1982, Larry along with a few friends, founded the Gay Men's Health Crisis (GMHC). It was the first organization to help people living with AIDS. Eventually I would become a client.

Later, Larry founded the AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power, ACT-UP. The first demonstration was the Wall Street Action on March 24, 1987. I was there. Through the persistent actions of ACT-UP, drugs got to desperate AIDS patients faster, thereby saving many lives. In a very real way, Larry Kramer and ACT-UP created patient advocacy.

One of Larry's greatest gifts to the gay community was the semi-autobiographical show *The Normal Heart* which played in 1985 and was revived in 2011. The moving thing about *The Normal Heart* was that it told the story of gay men in New York City living and dying from AIDS during the actual time of the AIDS crises. It was terrifying to see our lives portrayed on the stage. Larry was inspired to write *The Normal Heart* upon visiting Dachau Concentration Camp. Dachau was open in 1933 and no government stepped forward to stop it. *The Normal Heart* helped to chronicle the American governments' similar reaction to HIV/AIDS.

As obstinate and stubborn as Larry was, when we needed a leader during one of the darkest periods in gay history, he was there. At one moment Larry would admonish us that we were killing ourselves, the next minute he would say how much he loved the gay community. Larry was a Jew, but not a religious one. Even so, on the High Holidays he would attend services at Congregation Beit Simchat Torah (CBST). At one of his rants at The Cooper Union he mentioned that he did not think he was a good Jew. At the end of his lecture I pulled him aside and told him that I didn't care what anyone else thought about him. I said, "Larry, considering all the lives you've saved, I think you are the best kind of Jew. Don't think otherwise."

Near the end of his life Larry, ever the activist, was working on a new play about the COVID-19 pandemic called *An Army of Lovers Must Not Die*.

With all Larry accomplished he still thought he had failed. People were still getting infected, there was no cure. You might say he was kind of a negative person. The "negativity" kept him angry and passionate.

He was the right the person at the right time. Larry Kramer, a gay Jew, left his mark on our community and

on his country. I personally, owe my life to him and other activists. I got infected with HIV in November 1984. In May 1994, I was rushed to the hospital suffering from AIDS and sepsis, a bacterial blood infection which ultimately caused me to have my right arm amputated. Because of all the protests and demonstrations, the FDA released the lifesaving non-nucleoside reverse transcriptase inhibitors in 1996 which have sustained me ever since. I became a client of GMHC and was somewhat active in ACT-UP. I doubt we will ever again have another leader in our community like Larry Kramer.

*[Editor's note: "How did I meet Larry? He called me a murderer and an incompetent idiot on the front page of the San Francisco Examiner magazine," Dr. Fauci recalled to The New York Times's Donald G. McNeil Jr. after Mr. Kramer's death in May. Mr. Kramer eventually apologized, and the two would go on to forge "an extraordinary 33-year relationship," Dr. Fauci said. "We loved each other."]*

Dr. Fauci is an American physician and immunologist who has served as the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases since 1984.

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## **Doing the Daf א** by Lior Carver, *World Congress, At Large - Eastern Hemisphere*

I've been doing the Daf Yomi for seven months now and I'm still enjoying it. I've finished an entire tractate (Berakhot) and am close to finishing Shabbat.

Thinking about the daf has become part of my daily ritual during these strange times of lockdown and physical distancing. It feels as though I'm in internal exile and the sages, who wrote much of the Bavli in exile, have been my constant companions. I haven't always enjoyed their company, but they have been thought provoking, have made me laugh and, on occasion, have proven to be strangely relevant.

## **Demons in the toilet**

As rumours of an impending lockdown were swirling in the Netherlands and people were stockpiling toilet paper, we were reading Shabbat, which has a lot of information on 'appropriate behaviour' while in the toilet. Berakhot 62a:8 says, Because fear of demons in toilets was pervasive, the Gemara relates: Abaye's mother raised a lamb to accompany him to the toilet. The Gemara objects: She should have raised a goat for him. The Gemara responds: A goat could be interchanged with a goat-demon. Since both the demon and the goat are called *sa'ir*, they were afraid to bring a goat to a place frequented by demons.

Until reading Berakhot, I had no idea that demons frequented toilets, though I have been in public toilets that appeared to have been used by a herd of goats. I did wonder if most of the people in Amsterdam knew about demons in toilets and were trying to appease them with offerings of three-ply loo roll. There must have been a vast number of toilet-demons as the shelves were stripped bare in one frenzied afternoon. Personally, I'd prefer to have a sheep accompany me to the toilet: you'd never have to worry about not having anything to wipe with as you could just snip off a bit of wool and wipe. All the lanolin in the wool would also keep your bum nice and soft.

### **Olive-Bulk or an Egg-Bulk**

Berakhot also discusses how much one has to eat before one is obligated in Grace After Meals. 49a says the standard halakhic principle holds that eating is defined as the consumption of an olive-bulk. And continues with: Rabbi Yehuda holds: "And you shall eat



and be satisfied," refers to eating that includes satisfaction. And what is considered eating with satisfaction? The consumption of an egg-bulk. So which is it? An olive-bulk or an egg-bulk? And are we talking about a quail's egg or a hen's egg? And how big is an olive anyway?

### **Tasting or eating?**

Berakhot 14a says tasting a cooked dish does not require a blessing beforehand and one who is fasting may taste and it is of no concern. I was pleased to read this as I like cooking and tasting is an essential part of the process. But then I had to wonder where tasting became eating: what size spoon should I use to taste the pasta sauce? A teaspoon, a dessert spoon, a tablespoon? And if I ladle sauce into a small bowl and dip some focaccia into it? If I taste an olive-bulk's worst of food, am obligated to say Grace After Meals? There is always much to ponder.

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*Doing the daf has made me more aware of what I eat, how much I eat, and how very lucky I am to be able to afford to eat. For that, I am grateful.*

## The European Conference of the World Congress Keshet Ga'avah

On the 28th of June, the European conference of the World Congress Keshet Ga'avah took place via Zoom. It was to take place in Berlin during the weekend 17- 19 April, and now postponed due to COVID-19 until 2021. The conference simply wanted to maintain the connection between the European LGBT Jewish associations pending the more complete face-to-face gathering. World Congress president "Goldy" Goldberg greeted the participants and introduced the World Congress.

Participating countries included USA, Australia, UK, Netherlands, Italy, Israel, Spain, and Germany. Then Goldy gave the floor to Marco Fiammelli. Everyone told about the COVID-19 situation of their countries, the LGBT+, and Jewish LGBT+ issues and the policies implemented by their respective countries. After two hours of conversation the conference ended with the plan for another meeting via Zoom in late September 2020.

### **RIGHT THE SHIP!**

Rabbi Haim Ovadia, [rimmon.org](http://rimmon.org), a place for all men & women to become Jewish Leaders.

June 26, 2020



Parashat Korah is the perfect time to discuss leadership. Let me take you back in time:

It is the first century of the common era. The narrow alleys in Rabbi Yehoshua's neighborhood are packed with excited spectators awaiting the arrival of a Jewish dignitary. Rabban Gamliel, President of the Sanhedrin, is coming to visit Rabbi Yehoshua and offer his apologies after publicly embarrassing him.

Rabban Gamliel has already offended Rabbi Yehoshua twice in the past, but that third time cost him his position, as the people rebelled against his methods and removed him from the presidency.

The President approaches his opponent's home with his entourage of guards, servants, and

disciples, but there is no room for them in the small hut, and they must stay outside. The tension hangs in the air like a thick fog, and Rabban Gamliel, with his magnificent robes, looks around in a desperate search for a casual statement, an icebreaker. He notices the blackened walls and decides to show the host that he, The President, understands the life of commoners.

“By looking at your walls”, he says, “I can tell that you are a coal maker.”

But his comment does not achieve the desired result, and Rabbi Yehoshua retorts:

“Woe to the generation which has you as a leader!”

What does Rabbi Yehoshua say to Rabban Gamliel? Is he simply rejecting the attempt to apologize? Is he refusing to see Rabban Gamliel as a leader?

No, Rabbi Yehoshua rebukes Rabban Gamliel for his harsh leadership style. Rabban Gamliel sought to unite all Jews under one religious rule in order to prevent discord, but in the process has created some of the most bitter disputes in rabbinic history. Rabbi Yehoshua argues that the false sense of unity stems from an inability to understand the whole nation. The walls in Rabbi Yehoshua’s place were ashen because of the low-quality oil he was using, and Rabban Gamliel’s unawareness of that fact meant that he is out of touch not only with a large part of the population, but even with a colleague he sees daily at the Beth HaMidrash, the Hall of Study.

Elsewhere in the Talmud, the nation’s religious leader is analogized to a captain. The analogy is not superficial. Even though most of us are not seafarers, we still use idioms such as “all hands on deck” and “to be on board”. These idioms come from the maritime legacy of calling all who are aboard the ship to help at time of distress. Even criminals were unchained from the oars in such times because it was understood that if the ship goes down, everybody is lost, from the captain to the lowliest sailor. When the ship is in the middle of the ocean it is only as strong as the combined strength of all its occupants, and if the captain does not understand the people on his ship, the journey will end in a disaster.

Rabbi Yehoshua calls on religious leaders to leave the secluded safety of their ivory towers, to step out of the captain’s quarters and down from the upper deck. He wants them to talk to all who see themselves as Jewish, hear their concerns, celebrate and mourn with them, and feel their pain and joy, lest the leaders remain detached and the ship sinks.

So, esteemed religious leaders, do you see the blackened walls? Do you see the tears? Can you hear them scream? Look closely at the scratching marks! They are telling stories you need you listen to! You can right the ship, but you must account for all on board.

I have spoken about those issues in the past, and I will keep addressing them until they are righted. I know a rabbi who was denied membership in his local Orthodox Rabbinic Vaad because he worked in Kiruv, outreach. The other rabbis told him that they are concerned that he will empathize too much with non-frum Jews (Heaven have mercy on us!!!)

Can you believe this? The Vaad’s members were afraid of empathy! They were terrified by the idea that someone who actually knows people with diverse levels of observance and needs will be part of an organization which makes decisions impacting the lives of those very people.

That rabbi chose to keep quiet and observe the Vaad’s actions as an outsider, but there is another option. It is the option of acknowledging the needs of the broader community, including those who are marginalized or ignored by the leadership because of otherness or because they are accused of “inability” or “unwillingness” to keep up with the uniform and normative standards set by the leadership.

That is why Torah VeAhava is establishing a Beth Din which will make it a point to listen,

understand, and find solutions. Whether people are struggling with Jewish education, marital strife, family purity, Kashrut, conversion, marital status, living with an Eruv, and generally balancing professional and religious life, we want to help. I will share more details as the project evolves, but for now I will say that one of our main goals is helping the anchored women, Agunoth, whose husbands refuse to divorce them according to Jewish Law. There are many Halakhic tools which can be used, if there is a will, to release them from their terrible Halakhic prison. We want to be able to tell those women that they do not have to be anchored anymore and that they can be free to set sail on the wings of justice.

Shabbat Shalom

Rabbi Haim Ovadia, <https://www.facebook.com/haim.ovadia.1> And the Torah VeAhava Beth Din

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For the first time,  
the World Zionist Organization  
is setting up a unit to work with the LGBT Jewish community.

Within the framework of the Pride Month, the World Zionist Organization (WZO) has established a Unit for Activities with the LGBT community that will operate in three spheres.

The central one will be to assist members of the LGBT community to make aliyah and strengthen the connection with them. This unit will be part of the Department for Zionist Enterprises of the World Zionist Organization, which is headed by member of the WZO Executive, Dror Morag from Meretz.

This new unit will assist gay immigrants from the LGBT community, in cooperation with the Association for the LGBT Community. This unit was established in order to give answers to the special needs and interests of those interested in Aliyah, new immigrants and those who have already made Aliyah in the past. This is to ease their transition and integration into the Israeli society and the LGBT community, in order to give them services through the Department for Zionist Enterprises of the World Zionist Organization, the Association for the LGBT Community and other LGBT organizations in Israel.

The purpose of the project is to bring down barriers for the LGBT community that are interested in making aliyah by setting up a database of easily accessible information and a platform for questions and answers, accessibility to Hebrew language courses



(Ulpanim) of the World Zionist Organization throughout the world, lectures on various subjects relating to Aliyah and setting up various services that will ensure a soft landing for these new immigrants when they arrive in Israel.

Another project is Zionist pride. With its framework, the World Zionist Organization issued a call for action to LGBT youth organizations and community organizations throughout Israel to submit unique and special projects. These projects dealt with the issue of Jewish Peoplehood, establishing an exemplary society, tolerance and pluralism in a diverse Israeli society. The projects chosen will receive a special grant to carry out these activities.

**Three initiatives that were chosen within the project are:**

1. The Transball Soccer Team of the Gay Sports Club. A soccer team that is geared towards youth on the transgender spectrum in order to give them a secure and professional place for their activity.
2. The history of the LGBT movement- An innovative New Media project that will establish a digital archive that will include all LGBT Jewish stories, Israeli, Zionist and from the diaspora. This digital database that will be written in Hebrew.
3. IGY International Live, that will establish joint leadership groups of Israeli gay youth and gay youth from the Zionist Youth Movements for Zionist Fulfillment in the diaspora.

Dror Morag, Head of the Department for Zionist Enterprises in the World Zionist Organization said: "Gay pride month will be especially remembered this year by the fact that the World Zionist Organization setup a unit for Zionist activities among the gay Jewish communities in Israel and in the diaspora. This pioneering activity strengthens the organization as a pluralistic and up to date one. I am proud of the activity that we have initiated and especially promoting the values of an exemplary society as proposed by Theodor Herzl-equality, pluralism and prevention of discrimination. They are central themes in Israel's Declaration of Independence."

For further information contact: Liron Yehezkel, Adv  
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052-8259892 mobile

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## **The World Congress: Keshet Ga'avah - Rainbow Pride**

### Our Vision

Our vision is a world where Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual, and other Jews of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities (LGBTQIA+) worldwide can enjoy free and fulfilling lives.

### An Organization for Organizations

We strive to be a worldwide voice for LGBTQIA+ Jews, to support, inspire, and strength local groups, to foster a sense of community among diverse individuals and organizations.

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Join or donate via PayPal at our [website](#) (preferred) or by postal mail to: World Congress (WCGLBTJ), P.O. Box 23379, Washington, DC 20026-3379, U.S.A. If by check or money order, make your payment payable to the World Congress (WCGLBTJ) in US dollars, please.

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### **Here are some organizations, links, or events that may be of interest to you:**

Multiple dates and locations <https://limmud.org>

OutRight Action International <https://outrightinternational.org> International Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Intersex Association, <https://ilga.org>

The World Congress: [Keshet](#)

Ga'avah <http://gltjews.org> and <https://www.facebook.com/gltjews/>

<https://www.notfreetodesist.org/>

<https://lgbtqreligiousarchives.org/collections/>

<https://www.torahveahava.com/>

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My name is Steven Joachim. I'm a Texan living in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

I volunteer as the Communications Coordinator, and as the Treasurer of the World Congress: *Keshet Ga'avah* [rainbow pride.]

**Hello to The University of Texas at Austin, Hook'em Horns**

We have a bi-monthly newsletter, a website, and a Facebook page.

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### **Steering Committee**

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