

Talk by Shulamit Yaish

WIZO Directorate and Keren Kayemet Lelsrael Directorate

I am honored to participate in this esteemed forum as representative of World WIZO in the name of its President Mrs. Michal Modai, on this evening, dedicated to the memory of Rabbi Michael Weissmandl Z”L and to the memory of Gizi Fleischmann Z”L. These two heroes of the Jewish people dedicated their lives to save Jews from Hungary, Slovakia and other European countries, when the threat of extinction hovered over them, in the dark time during which the Nazi regime reigned in Europe.

I will focus, with your permission, on describing the personality of Gizi, an eminent Zionist woman, who was a member of WIZO. Gizi was remarkable for her Zionist activity and for her heroic public leadership, along with Rabbi Weissmandl in the “WORKING GROUP” in Bratislava.

At that time, Gizi headed the HICEM Organization, which played an important role in searching for places of emigration for Jews. Gizi helped hundreds of Jews who succeeded in escaping from Poland via Slovakia. She organized aid and transferred them to Hungary with forged papers. Many children were among them. Gizi had two opportunities to abandon her activity and escape, but she refused.

In the two volumes of the history of WIZO, “THE SAGA OF A MOVEMENT”, the annals of our movement are inscribed from the day of its founding in 1920 until the present. Each of the fifty Federations around the world today holds a respected place there. It inscribes for ever their past within the framework of Zionist activities in their countries, and their part in the unified partnership between us: the establishment of educational institutions for toddlers, children and youth; Centers for the advancement of the status of women, and for the welfare of the family. If Gizi and her chaverot could be with us today, how proud they would be to see the graduates and students of our schools who have become famous and who, now, contribute their part in all walks of life in Israel: in the Government, in the Knesset, in the spheres of EDUCATION, ACADEMIA, MEDICINE, MEDIA, MUSIC and THEATER.

An important and impressive chapter in the book perpetuates the activities of Zionist women in Czechoslovakia that began early in 1901. In the beginning, these women dedicated themselves to social and cultural activities. At the end of the First World War a number of these women emigrated to Israel, bringing with them a wide range of skills in the spheres of HOME ECONOMICS, SOCIAL WORK, DIETETICS, TEACHING and EDUCATION. WIZO activities in Bratislava were led by a young and talented woman named Gizi Fleischmann. The connection between Bratislava and groups of Zionist women in other communities was maintained via Prague. In 1938 WIZO Czechoslovakia numbered 12,000 members organized in 104 groups. Let me point out that of the 22 International World Conferences conducted by World WIZO, three of them took place in Czechoslovakia and the first one in Karlsbad in 1921.

Ladies and gentlemen, the upheavals felt by the Jews in Germany were already evident early in 1933. They caused great concern among Jews in neighboring countries. The flight of Jewish refugees from Germany began. Gizi and her friends

aided in their absorption, in housing, in educational frameworks, in providing professional training and instruction to women and girls, and in financial assistance received from London.

Graduates of those courses received a professional WIZO certificate. This certificate helped them upon arrival in Israel or hastened their emigration to England. Gizi and her friends managed to save many souls. In August 1944 the Slovak Rebellion broke out and the German army invaded Slovakia in order to quell it. It was proposed to Gizi then that she leave Bratislava and go to an area held by the partisans, but Gizi refused.

On the 15th of October, 1944, Gizi was arrested and deported to Auschwitz in the last transfer from Slovakia to the gas chambers.

In the name of World WIZO and in the name of its President Mrs. Michal Modai, I would like to present to the family of Gizi a certificate in her memory.