

UZI EVEN

b. October 18, 1940

ISRAELI GAY PIONEER AND SCIENTIST

*“You no longer have to be ashamed.
You can even be elected.”*

**Uzi Even is an
Israeli gay pioneer
and the first openly
gay member of
parliament.**

A pioneering advocate for LGBT rights in Israel, Uzi Even became the first openly gay member of the country's parliament, the Knesset, in 2002. He is a professor emeritus of physical chemistry at Tel Aviv University, from which he earned a Ph.D. in physics and molecular chemistry.

Even worked for the Israeli army at the Nuclear Research Center. When the Israel Defense Forces discovered he was gay, Even was stripped of his security clearance and his rank as a lieutenant colonel. His testimony about the matter led Yitzhak Rabin's government to change the law in 1993, thus allowing open homosexuals to serve in any position in the armed forces. The same year, under President Bill Clinton, the U.S. Department of Defense issued “Don't Ask Don't Tell,” which remained official U.S. military policy until 2011.

Even first ran for a seat in the Knesset in 1999. He lost, but in 2002 was appointed to a vacant seat. During his tenure in parliament, he helped advance LGBT rights and brought attention to important social issues related to the gay movement.

Even also helped to advance same-sex spousal protection on the university level, advocating for health care coverage for his partner. He brought same-sex adoption into the spotlight when he and his partner became the first gay couple in Israel to legally adopt (by then) their 30-year-old foster son—a young man who had been kicked out of his home at 16 for being gay. “We opened a door, ... a window for others,” said Even's son, Yossi Even-Kama, “an opening of hope for the couples that will follow.”

In 2006 Even joined the Labor Party in hopes of further advancing LGBT rights. “As a community, it is important that we be involved in a major party,” he said.

Six years later, Even set another legal precedent when he divorced his partner, whom he married in Canada in 2004. Because the Rabbinical Court does not recognize same-sex marriage, the divorce was granted in Family Court, paving the way for both straight and gay couples to bypass religious law in marriage matters.

Even hopes his coming out and public advocacy on behalf of LGBT people will inspire others to do the same. “It's a symbolic act,” he said. “I'm the one breaking the glass ceiling.”

LGBT rights in Israel are the most advanced in the Middle East. Israel is the only Middle Eastern country to recognize same-sex marriage.

© GETTY IMAGES

lgbt[™]
HISTORY
MONTH

www.lgbtHistoryMonth.com

Copyright © 2015 – A Project of Equality Forum