

chesed

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HFBA MISSION STATEMENT

The Hebrew Free Burial Association devotes its resources to performing chesed shel emet (the ultimate act of loving kindness). It is the only agency in the New York metropolitan area dedicated to assuring that every Jew, regardless of financial means or religious affiliation, receives a dignified, traditional Jewish funeral and burial.

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The Jewish View of the “Afterlife”

Early references to the afterlife in Jewish literature appear in the part of the Jewish canon known as the “Prophets.” In the book of *Daniel* we read, “Many of those who sleep in the dust will awake, some to eternal life, others to reproaches.” In the books that bear their names, the prophet Isaiah says, “The dead shall live, dead bodies will arise and the earth shall bring to life the shades,” and Ezekiel describes a vision of dead bones reconfiguring into bodies.

Unlike Christian theologians who spent a lot of time and ink on this subject, Jewish thinkers tended to regard the afterlife, both what will happen after death as well as what will happen at the end of time, as mysterious and as a subject to be approached warily. Jewish sources most often focused on “this world,” the one we know and live in, and those that do confront the idea of the afterlife present different and often irreconcilable views.

The basic concept, accepted by Jewish philosophers, is that there is life after death for the soul which, after leaving the body, goes to *olam habah*, “the World to Come,” a parallel universe to our current universe. The righteous live in a perfect place, perhaps the primeval Garden of Eden, and the evildoers have their souls purged in *gehenom*, usually translated as “hell.” Some sources describe a purgatory to which all souls go prior to paradise or to eternal torment. There is a difference of opinion as to whether the soul is quiescent,

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HFBA HISTORY HIGHLIGHTS:

Did you know...?

In **1888**, the Hebrew Free Burial Association was incorporated as *Chebra Agudath Chesed Shel Emeth* (The Society of the Brotherhood of True Charity) by a group of Ashkenazic Jewish businessmen on the Lower East Side, the densely populated locus of Jewish life in America. **Its original mission was to “aid and assist deserving persons in case of sickness or distress, and to bury the dead.”**

Difficult working and sanitary conditions and poor medical care led to a high mortality rate and poverty prevented many Jews from being buried according to Jewish tradition. Bodies were often buried in mass graves in Potter's Fields. In **1892**, to assure that any Jew, no matter how poor, could receive a Jewish burial, HFBA purchased property in Staten Island for its first **cemetery**, Silver Lake. In 1909, it developed nearby property for Mt. Richmond Cemetery which still serves as HFBA's primary burial space. Significantly, in 1911, HFBA arranged for the burial of 21 young victims of the **Triangle Shirtwaist Fire**.

By **1916**, HFBA had grown to an organization of 4,000 members, most of whom contributed less than \$5 annually. That year, the annual meeting attracted 500 participants and received coverage in the New York Times. **HFBA was able to proudly announce that since its inception, no Jew had been buried in Potter's Field.**

All those who support HFBA should be proud to continue its mission of burying impoverished Jews.

The “Afterlife”

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residing with G-d, or if the dead have a consciousness of the world they left behind. Reflecting the latter view, there is a strong tradition of petitioning the soul of an ancestor to intervene with G-d on behalf of the living.

Jewish eschatology envisions a world which will follow the Messianic era, itself an age of a just, abundant, peaceful society heralded by a descendent of King David. At the end of time, believed Nachmonides and others, there will be a perfect world enjoyed by the resurrected righteous. Maimonides and other medieval philosophers did not believe in bodily resurrection but in a spiritual existence of pure joy, enveloped by the divine presence, and immortality involved the soul's journey toward a union with G-d.

The path to righteousness involves adherence to the *mitzvot* (commandments), both those between man and man and between man and G-d. Among the *mitzvot* to which Jews are committed is *kavod hamet* (dignity for the deceased.) This involves the covering of the body immediately following death and not leaving a decedent alone from the moment of death to the time of burial. There is no distinction made between the rich and the poor—the deceased is bathed and clothed by a *chevra kadisha* (benevolent society), prayers are recited to ease the soul's journey and the body is placed in a plain wooden coffin.

For well over a century, the Hebrew Free Burial Association has arranged for the transition from this world to the next for large numbers of indigent Jews. We arrange the funeral and the burial with a careful adherence to the principles of *kavod hamet*. If you know of anyone who might benefit from our care, please contact our office. Pre-need arrangements may also be made. HFBA may be reached at (212) 239-1662.



FROM THE Mailbox

Letters such as these remind us that every person has a story, even when the end is sad and solitary.

Over the years I have received regular mailings from the Hebrew Free Burial Association...The time eventually came when that pamphlet was needed. It happened when N. passed away. He was one of the caretakers at our synagogue, having worked there for several years. N. was a bit of a character, well-liked by people of all ages. A couple of years ago, N. developed some health problems. He was no longer able to do physical work. However, he would still come by the synagogue and visit on a regular basis.

One day, the synagogue's head caretaker, Ronald, realized that he hadn't seen N. for a few days...Ronald tried telephoning N. but there was no answer. He then went to N's apartment...and received no response when he banged on the door. Finally, the building's superintendent came and broke down the door. N. was lying dead on the living room floor. It was obvious from the circumstances that he had already been that way for a few days.

...N., I knew, had no immediate family. I contacted his closest relative, a niece. She informed me that N. had been penniless and there was no one who could assist with the expenses for a funeral...

I contacted the Hebrew Free Burial Association...It [the funeral and burial] was all done with dignity and with respect for both the deceased and the Jewish tradition...the Association's rabbi, through his explanatory

remarks, made the funeral more meaningful for the few people in attendance...

I don't know what I would have done for N. had I not had the Hebrew Free Burial Association to turn to...

*Rabbi Asher Vale
Manhattan Beach Jewish Center
Brooklyn, N.Y.*

I have supported your organization for many years because of the uniqueness of its mission. However, because of my role in arranging for the funeral of a relative, I only recently became aware of the actual costs involved. I was astounded that even though the body was handled by the *chevra kadisha* and the funeral itself was held in a synagogue, the fees were astounding!

At the *shiva*, I put out a collection plate marked "Hebrew Free Burial Association" among the other *tzedakahs* (charitable organizations). Enclosed please find a check for the amount collected.

I suggest that anyone in the unfortunate position of arranging a *shiva* consider doing the same. It is not only in honor of HFBA's work, but of one's loved one as well.

R.G.

My friend and partner, Paul G.*, died...(and) your organization was one...he supported. He frequently spoke of your good work for the Jewish community...

I know of at least two occasions when he called on (you) for assistance...a Holocaust survivor who was so poor that her utilities had been cut off, died leaving no means for a proper burial. You stepped in and took care of it...The other was when another neighbor committed suicide and his widow did not know where to turn. Paul turned to you and you gave the man a proper burial...

I am enclosing a check for \$5000 as a memorial to Paul G. I know you will use the money to continue your excellent work for the Jewish community.

G.D.*

** Identifying information has been changed to protect the privacy of the letter writer.*

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Upon request, a copy of our annual report may be obtained from our office,
224 W. 35th Street, Room 300,
New York, NY 10001
or from the
Attorney General, Charities Bureau,
120 Broadway, New York, NY 10271.

Our New Website www.hebrewfreeburial.org is Now Up and Running!

You can access information about our history, cemeteries, current projects and volunteer opportunities, make a secure online donation, as well as view past editions of the *Chesed*.



*The Russian Digest, translated summaries of the
articles appearing in this issue of Chesed, appears below.*

РУССКИЙ ДАЙДЖЕСТ

ВВЕДЕНИЕ

Еврейский взгляд на жизнь после смерти
Первые упоминания в еврейской литературе о жизни после физической смерти встречаются в разделе Священного писания «Пророки». Основной принцип еврейской философии гласит, что после физической смерти душа человека, покинув тело, продолжает жить в «грядущем (духовном) мире», который существует параллельно физическому миру. Праведники живут в совершенном параллельном мире, видимому в раю, а души грешников попадают в ад. Некоторые источники упоминают чистилище, куда души попадают прежде чем отправиться в рай или на вечные муки. Существуют различные мнения по поводу того, пребывает ли душа в покое, оставаясь со Вс-вышним, или умершие обладают сознанием, подобным тому, которое они имели в покинутом ими мире. В связи с последним утверждением, существует традиция просить души предков «заступиться» перед Вс-вышним о ныне живущем.

Еврейская эсхатология предполагает существование мира, который придет на смену эре Машиаха, являющейся в свою очередь эпохой справедливости, миролюбия, изобилия, которая будет провозглашена потомком царя Давида. Нахмонид и другие каббалисты считали, что наступит совершенный мир, в котором будут жить воскресшие праведники. Маймонид и другие средневековые философы верили не в воскресение тела, но в существование чистой духовной радости, наполненной божественным присутствием, и в бес-смертие души на ее пути воссоединения со Вс-вышним.

Из нашей почты

Многие годы я получаю письма и брошюры из Еврейского Благотворительного Похоронного Бюро (HFBA). И вот однажды настал тот момент, когда мне понадобилась информация, содержащаяся в одной из таких брошюр. Это случилось, когда скончался N. Он был одним из работников нашей синагоги. Это была сильная личность; его любили все — от мала до велика. Несколько лет назад у него появились проблемы со здоровьем. Он более не мог выполнять физическую работу. Но частенько продолжал заходить в синагогу.

Однажды габай Рональд обратил внимание на то, что вот уже несколько дней как N. не приходит в синагогу. Рональд попытался дозвониться к N., но никто не снимал трубку. Тогда он пошел к нему домой и стал стучать в дверь, но никто не открывал. Наконец Рональд позвал суперинтенданта дома, где проживал N.,

и тот взломал дверь. N. лежал на полу в гостиной, он был мертв. Судя по

обстоятельствам, он скончался несколько дней назад.

Я знал, что N. был одиноким человеком. Ближайшей родственницей была племянница. Она сообщила мне, что N. не имел сбережений, и что не было никого, кто бы мог помочь с расходами на его похороны.

Я позвонил в Еврейское Благотворительное Похоронное Бюро. N. был достойно похоронен в соответствии с еврейской традицией. Раввин HFBA наполнил похороны большим значением в глазах немногочисленных присутствующих, объяснив суть происходящего с точки зрения еврейского закона.

Если бы не Еврейское Благотворительное Похоронное Бюро, я бы не знал как помочь N.

*Раввин Ашер Вейл
Еврейский Центр Манхеттен Бич
Бруклин, Нью-Йорк*

Из истории Еврейского Благотворительного Похоронного Бюро (HFBA)

В 1889 г. группа еврейских бизнесменов ашкенази, проживавших в Нижнем Ист-Сайде, районе средоточения еврейской жизни в Америке, зарегистрировала Еврейское Благотворительное Похоронное Бюро (HFBA). Его первоначальным назначением было «оказание помощи нуждающимся членам общины в случае их болезни, тяжелого положения, смерти».

Тяжелые условия труда, антисанитария, плохое медицинское обслуживание являлись причиной высокой смертности; а бедность не позволяла многим евреям похоронить близких в соответствии с еврейской традицией. Людей хоронили в массовых могилах на городском кладбище. В 1892 г. Еврейское Благотворительное Похоронное Бюро (HFBA) приобрело участок земли на Стейтен Айленде для организации первого кладбища Силвер Лейк, с тем чтобы каждый еврей, независимо от материального положения, был похоронен в соответствии с еврейской традицией. В 1909 г. Бюро приобрело соседний участок земли для кладбища Маунт Ричмонд, где производятся захоронения и в настоящее время.

В 1916 г. Еврейское Благотворительное Похоронное Бюро заявило, что насчитывает 4000 членов, и что с момента основания HFBA ни один еврей не был похоронен на городском кладбище.

Доноры Еврейского Благотворительного Похоронного Бюро могут гордиться тем, что продолжают благородную миссию материальной поддержки погребения неимущих евреев.

We are pleased to announce
that the following names have
been added to our

Leave Your Mark

Donor Plaque in the
Weinberg Chapel at
Mt. Richmond Cemetery:



Donald R. Coran

Joseph Gershenov

Saul Miller

Igor Muntyan

Jacob and Michelle Plotsker

James P. and Emilia C. Roberts

Barbara and Marvin Schwartz

*Please consider adding your name by sponsoring
four grave markers for unmarked graves for \$600.*

Chesed Shel Emet — How You Can Help

- **Place** HFBA *tzedakah* boxes in a house of *shiva* or in your home, school or local kosher restaurant.
- **Celebrate** a *simcha* or commemorate a loss with HFBA cards. Cards cost \$10 and can include a personalized message.
- **Enroll** a Bar/Bat Mitzvah in our “Mitzvah Circle” by suggesting a gift to HFBA to your guests. The generous child who shares his/her *simcha* in this way receives a framed certificate.
- **Donate** your property, used vehicle or boat to HFBA.
- **Establish** an HFBA Forever Gift Annuity or Charitable Trust Plan. In addition to the guaranteed income and tax benefits, these plans ensure that HFBA’s promise of a Jewish burial to future generations of indigent Jews will be fulfilled.
- **Remember** HFBA in your will with a bequest.
- **A donation** sent with the appropriate information will ensure that HFBA will send out a *Yahrzeit* reminder letter.
- **“Leave Your Mark”** by sponsoring a grave marker for an unmarked grave for \$150 and you will receive a framed certificate. Sponsor four markers and a plaque with your name will be added to our roster at the Weinberg Chapel at Mt. Richmond Cemetery.
- **Arrange** for *kaddish* to be said for the eleven month mourning period following a death of a relative or friend for a donation of \$360.
- **Establish** a Perpetual *Yahrzeit Kaddish* for your loved one for a \$180 donation.
- **Sponsor** Perpetual Grave Care for an indigent’s grave for \$500.
- **Help out today by sending a donation in the enclosed envelope.**

As always, we welcome your comments.

Please write to us at: **224 W. 35th St., Room 300, New York, NY 10001**,
call **(212) 239-1662** or email us at: **info@hebrewfreeburial.org**