

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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Neo-Natal and Pregnancy Loss: How HFBA Helps

Although modern medical technology has significantly reduced the frequency of neo-natal morbidity and pregnancy loss, it is unfortunately inevitable that miscarriages, stillbirths and infant deaths will continue to occur.

In the late 1800's, when the Hebrew Free Burial Association was founded, as many as 25% of infants died before reaching the age of one year and only 50% of children reached the age of five. This was largely due to poor sanitary conditions which allowed the easy spread of lethal diarrheal diseases and other illnesses such as small-pox, measles, and cholera. Over the years, improved environmental and living conditions, as well as the development of vaccinations, eradicated many causes of infant and child mortality. Additionally, many causes of fetal death, such as congenital abnormalities, maternal diabetes, infection and toxemia were prevented, or diagnosed and treated.

Over the decades, HFBA has buried thousands of infants and children. A sad stroll through our cemeteries reveals tombstones marking the location of small bodies. Many fetuses rest in unmarked graves in a special part of the cemetery. Although the numbers have significantly decreased over the last century, it is remarkable that since 2001, the Hebrew Free Burial Association has been called upon to bury over a dozen fetuses. According to *halacha* (Jewish law), traditional Jewish mourning practices do not apply to a fetus or to a baby who has lived fewer than 30 days. Although a

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fetus is buried if it is recognizable as a baby, and receives a name at the burial and a *bris milah* (circumcision) if possible, there is no funeral service, *shivah* (week of mourning), or *kaddish* (memorial prayer). Among the reasons for this is the merciful and compassionate nature of *halacha* since, in centuries past, pregnancy loss and neo-natal mortality was a common occurrence. Had the mourning practices not been restricted, families might have been in recurrent states of formalized grieving.

In contemporary times, hospitals usually dispose of the remains of pregnancy loss. Although Jewish

law does not consider a fetus or an infant less than 30 days old to have the same status of a full human being, *halacha* does mandate that they be treated with full *kavod hamet* (dignity due the deceased). HFBA sensitively works with the parents at this difficult time so that the medical facility does not dispose of the remains as medical waste.

Fortunately, infant death is a rare occurrence today. However, when it does happen, HFBA can be relied upon to deal with this tragedy with empathy, sensitivity, and compassion.

HFBA HISTORY HIGHLIGHTS: *Did You Know...?*

The last edition of the Chesed (available online at www.hebrewfreeburial.org) chronicled HFBA's inception. The story continues...

Whether observant or secular, most Jews in the early part of the 20th century wanted to be buried as Jews. In 1918, HFBA buried many Jewish victims of the infamous worldwide flu epidemic and in the 1920's and 30's HFBA provided burials for many immigrants arriving from Europe. As survivors fled Europe following the end of World War II in 1945, many ended their lives in New York City and were buried by HFBA. Reflecting the Americanization of the Jewish community, HFBA finally changed its official record-keeping from Yiddish to English at a meeting in 1945.

In 1957, HFBA moved its office from the Lower

East Side to uptown quarters at 1170 Broadway and in 1965, reflecting its further Americanization, the organization added "Hebrew Free Burial Association" to its official name, *Chebra Agudas Achim Chesed Shel Emes*.

During a Sabbath in 1979, **vandals** struck Mt. Richmond Cemetery and overturned 450 monuments. Plainclothes police officers were assigned to deter further destruction.

In 1981-82, HFBA received significant grants from the Federation for Jewish Philanthropies and in 1987 HFBA launched its "**Second Century Campaign**," a major outreach effort to agencies dealing with indigent Jews. A newsletter, later named the **Chesed**, was launched and a major public relations drive was initiated to publicize the unique work of HFBA. The **Leave Your Mark** campaign was established to raise funds for simple stone markers to be erected on every unmarked grave in Mt. Richmond Cemetery.

*All those who support HFBA should be proud of their commitment to its unique mission of providing a Jewish funeral and burial for all Jews. Please see page 6 for the many ways **you** can help HFBA.*

HFBA Helps: From Our Files

Laura F.'s mother had been buried by HFBA following her death in 1992. When she was informed of her aunt's death in Arizona, Laura, her aunt's only living relative, arranged to have her remains brought to New York. The sisters are now buried in close proximity in HFBA's Mt. Richmond Cemetery.

Learning that someone's remains have been undetected after death is a particularly upsetting experience for those who knew the deceased and for the Jewish community which prides itself on taking care of its vulnerable, isolated members. Flora R., a woman in her 60's who had lived alone, occasionally attended services at the local synagogue but, for the most part, kept to herself and apparently died that way, undiscovered for several days. When members of the synagogue learned of her death, they were horrified and distressed. HFBA, in cooperation with the synagogue's *chevra kadisha* (burial society), arranged for her funeral and burial. The synagogue's rabbi performed the service at the HFBA cemetery, and emphasized the importance of outreach to marginalized members of the community.

Bodies which remain unclaimed often go to medical institutions for research and dissection. Since Jewish law prohibits such use of a cadaver, HFBA makes every effort to claim



Jewish bodies for burial. Mr. K., an elderly Jewish widower, died and the Public Administrator put a "hold" on the body for HFBA. Instead, the body was retrieved by a funeral director who is also the chief of the anatomical gifts program at a prestigious New York hospital. The staff of HFBA spent many hours contacting the medical center, as well as city and state officials, to regain custody of the body before it was desecrated. Fortunately the body was located and pressure was put on the hospital and the "body-snatcher" to allow HFBA to reclaim the body for a Jewish funeral and burial.

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

Thank You to Our Volunteers...

On March 16, the sophomore class from the Yeshiva University High School for Boys (MTA) participated in HFBA's Cemetery Clean-Up Project. Several weeks later, we received a call from a senior class faculty member, requesting to arrange another trip, as his students were inspired by the work of their younger schoolmates. This is a classic situation of "performing a *mitzvah* leads to additional *mitzvot*." One never knows how one's positive actions will inspire others to emulate his or her ways, as was the case here.

In addition to these two grades from MTA, the following other schools volunteered this spring at Silver Lake Cemetery:

- 11th grade—Ma'ayanot Yeshiva High School for Girls (Teaneck, NJ)
- 7th and 8th grade—Yeshiva Har-Torah (Queens, NY)
- Students from the 9th, 10th, and 11th grades—SAR (Riverdale, NY)
- 12th grade—Yeshiva University High School for Girls (Central) (Queens, NY)

Tizku l'mitzvot! (May you merit the performance of more mitzvot)



Students from Yeshiva University High School for Boys (MTA)



Students from Ma'ayanot Yeshiva High School for Girls



Students from Yeshiva Har-Torah Elementary School



Students from SAR High School

To view additional photos of our volunteers, please visit our website at www.hebrewfreeburial.org.

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

РУССКИЙ ДАЙДЖЕСТ

Помощь Еврейского Похоронного Бюро в случае кончины новорожденных или недоношенных детей.

Современная медицина достигла больших успехов в области выхаживания недоношенных и ослабленных детей. Однако к сожалению все еще имеют место случаи, когда женщины не могут доносить плод, есть случаи мертворождения и смерти новорожденных.

В 80-ые годы XIX века – в годы основания Еврейского Похоронного Бюро (HFBA) – смертность детей в возрасте до года достигала 25%, и лишь 50% детей доживало до 5-летнего возраста. За более чем столетнюю историю, Еврейскому Похоронному Бюро пришлось к сожалению похоронить много детей. На нашем кладбище установлены сотни детских памятников; имеется и специальная секция для захоронения выкидышей, где нет надгробных плит. Следует отметить, что с 2001 г. к нам обратились за помощью для захоронения более 10 выкидышей. Еврейский закон и традиция формально не обязывают семью скорбеть по кончине новорожденного, прожившего менее 30 дней (не говоря уже о случаях выкидышей). Одним из объяснений такого подхода является принцип милосердия и сострадания, присущий еврейским законам, поскольку на протяжении столетий ранняя детская смертность была широко распространена. Если бы не эти «послабления», период скорби в семьях мог бы продолжаться чрезвычайно долго.

В настоящее время госпитали обычно выбрасывают останки выкидышей. Но поскольку по еврейскому закону все части тела мертворожденных и/или скончавшихся должны быть захоронены, Еврейское Похоронное Бюро объясняет родителям в это трудное для них время, что госпитали не должны выбрасывать останки.

Помощь HFBA: из наших архивов.

- Мы похоронили мать Лоры Ф. в 1992 г. Когда умерла Лорина тетя, она была похоронена на нашем кладбище недалеко от своей сестры.
- Флора Р. время от времени посещала синагогу, но в основном вела замкнутый образ жизни. Когда члены ее конгрегации узнали, что она скончалась и пролежала в квартире много дней, они пришли в ужас и отчаяние. Еврейское Похоронное Бюро совместно с похоронным обществом ее синагоги организовало погребение Флоры на нашем кладбище, где раввин синагоги провел соответствующую службу, подчеркнув при этом важное значение работы HFBA с членами общины, не имеющими семьи.
- Когда скончался мистер К., престарелый вдовствующий еврей, предполагалось, что Еврейское Похоронное Бюро организует его погребение. Однако директор коммерческого похоронного дома, который одновременно возглавлял программу пожертвования человеческих органов в одном из Нью-Йоркских госпиталей, забрал тело мистера К. в морг указанного госпиталя. Еврейское Похоронное Бюро приложило много усилий (включая множество звонков в госпиталь, в уполномоченные службы города и штата Нью-Йорк), чтобы похоронить мистера К. с достоинством на еврейском кладбище.

Из истории Еврейского Похоронного Бюро

В предыдущем выпуске нашего информационного бюллетеня Chesed, который Вы можете найти на нашем сайте www.hebrewfreeburial.org, мы начали рассказывать об истории возникновения Еврейского Похоронного Бюро. Здесь Вы найдете продолжение этой истории.

В начале XX века большинство евреев, независимо от того, придерживались ли они религиозных традиций или нет, хотели быть похоронены в соответствии с еврейским законом. В 1918 г. Еврейское Похоронное Бюро организовало погребение многочисленных американских жертв эпидемии гриппа «испанка», свирепствовавшего во всем мире. В 20-ые – 30-ые гг. XX столетия мы похоронили много еврейских иммигрантов из Европы, а в 40-ые гг. – переживших вторую мировую войну.

В 1957 г. офис Еврейского Похоронного Бюро переехал из Нижнего Манхеттена в район 30-х улиц. В 1979 г. вандалы осквернили кладбище Маунт Ричмонд, что привело к необходимости дежурства на кладбище полицейских в штатском для предотвращения дальнейших разрушений. В 1981-1982 гг. Еврейское Похоронное Бюро получило существенную финансовую помощь (в виде грантов) от Федерации Еврейских Филантропов, а в 1987 г. мы начали кампанию (вторую по счету на протяжении XX столетия) по установлению связей с другими агентствами, работающими с малоимущими евреями. В этом же году был впервые издан наш бюллетень, который в последующем получил название Chesed (Акты Доброты), и который позволил нам донести информацию о нашей работе до широкого круга людей. Также была начата кампания, получившая название «Leave Your Mark», по сбору средств на установку памятников на могилах людей, не имевших родственников.

Наша благодарность волонтерам...

... за помощь по уборке кладбища, за помощь в офисе, а также за помощь по сопровождению (на машине) тех, кто хотел посетить могилы своих родных и друзей.

HFBA's Riverdale Breakfast

The Riverdale community again proved its loyalty and generosity to HFBA by hosting its annual HFBA Breakfast on Sunday, March 26th. This year the annual event was held at the **Riverdale Jewish Center** with nearly 200 people in attendance.

On behalf of HFBA, **Rabbi Jonathan Rosenblatt** presented the Chesed Award to **Dr. Tzvi Bar-David** and **Rabbi Avi Weiss** presented the Community Service Award to **Justice Israel Rubin**. Speakers included **New York City Councilman G. Oliver Kopell** and **New York State Assemblyman Jeffrey Dinowitz**. Thank you to our many supporters from Riverdale!



HFBA Riverdale breakfast honorees: Dr. Tzvi Bar-David (l), Justice Israel Rubin (r).

If you would like to arrange for a fundraising breakfast in your community, please contact HFBA Executive Director Amy Koplw (212) 239-1662.

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**.
Visit our website: **www.hebrewfreeburial.org**.

Chesed Shel Emet — How You Can Help

- **Place** HFBA *tzedakah* boxes in a house of *shiva* or in your home, school or local kosher establishment.
- **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** to include HFBA in your will with a bequest.
- **Contribute** to HFBA to ensure an annual Yahrzeit reminder for your lost loved ones.
- **“Leave Your Mark”** by sponsoring a grave marker for an unmarked grave for a donation of \$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.
- **Institute** a perpetual *Yahrzeit Kaddish* for your loved one for a donation of \$180.
- **Sponsor** perpetual grave care for an indigent's grave for \$500.

HELP OUT TODAY BY SENDING A DONATION IN THE ENCLOSED ENVELOPE.