



The Hebrew Free Burial Association

Chesed

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HFBA has Moved!

Visit us at our new office at:
224 W. 35th St., Room 300
New York, NY 10001
Our phone number remains the same.

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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 send us email at hebrewfreeba@aol.com

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UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK

Acts of Chesed A Letter Returned...

In another office, a letter returned to sender would have been discarded. At HFBA, attention to such a letter set off a string of events leading to the proper Jewish burial of a Jewish body.

In 1999 a hospital contacted HFBA regarding burial of Norma K.,* a retired nurse who had lived with her sister in a residential hotel in Manhattan. HFBA quickly arranged a dignified funeral according to the strictures of Jewish law. But HFBA's commitment to *chesed* extends beyond tending to burials. When we learned that Norma's unemployed sister Sylvia had been surviving off of Norma's Social Security checks and was now in danger of being evicted from her apartment for lack of funds, we contacted a Jewish social services agency to advocate on Sylvia's behalf.

With an agency now looking after Sylvia's welfare, HFBA maintained contact with her through regular mailings, as we do with families of all of our clients. This past October, one of our letters to Sylvia was returned to us. Instead of ignoring the common occurrence of a returned letter, HFBA's tireless office manager, Rhonda Stein, sensed that something was amiss. Out of concern for Sylvia, Rhonda quickly contacted the social services agency in charge of the case and learned that Sylvia's mail had been returned to sender because she had passed away two weeks earlier.

Rhonda's immediate concern was whether Sylvia, who had no living relatives, had received a proper Jewish burial. In speaking with the agency she learned that a non-Jewish

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Message from our President

Bjorn Bamberger

In a few weeks we will observe the holiday of *Pesach* - also known as *Zman Cheiruteinu*, the Festival of our Freedom.

Our Rabbis teach that our forefathers struggled to preserve their identity and sense of community as *Bnei Yisrael* in Egypt by maintaining their distinctive names, manner of dress, and Hebrew language during nearly two centuries of oppression. Nevertheless, the licentiousness and depravity of Egypt was so pervasive that despite heroic efforts, *Bnei Yisrael* descended to the 49th of 50 levels of impurity. One more step and their assimilation would be complete, irreversible.

That is why we were commanded to leave Egypt abruptly in the middle of the night. There was barely enough time to hastily prepare matzah before God liberated us and took us from slavery to freedom, from mourning to great festivity, from servitude to redemption.

The Torah instructs us "Seven days shall you eat matzah" (Exodus 13:6), and again, "Matzah shall be eaten for seven days" (Exodus 13:7). These seemingly repetitive verses teach us that it is not enough to observe the commandment of eating matzah for seven days - we are also obligated to make sure even the poorest and least knowledgeable among us also have the opportunity to perform the mitzvah.

Along with the commandment to eat matzah comes the commandment to look out for our neighbors. We are instructed by God to show compassion, to care, and to actively meet the needs of others.

The ninth plague visited upon the Egyptians was thick darkness. The Torah tells us "No man

could see his brother, nor could anyone rise from his place" (Exodus 10:23). While meant as a literal description of the plague, this phrase can be interpreted in an allegorical sense as well. Sometimes we go out of our way to avoid seeing the plight of others. Sometimes we fail to rise in action to relieve the suffering of our fellow man because of a lack of compassion. Sometimes, unfortunately, we simply do not care.

Thus, the Torah reminds us it is our obligation to care. We have a definite mandate to observe what is happening to our neighbor, to be aware of his or her needs, and to act to meet those needs.

The Hebrew Free Burial Association has been caring for indigent Jews for well over a century. As often as four hundred times a year we are called upon to perform the ultimate *chesed shel emet* - the greatest act of loving kindness - by providing a traditional interment in our Mount Richmond cemetery in Staten Island, New York. No matter how poor or abandoned, we extend the same honor and respect to the deceased as any other Jewish man or woman would receive from a commercial funeral home.

As I have done in the past, I would once again like to invite you to come and visit our cemetery and see for yourself how well we care for these hallowed grounds. We really do care - and we joyously invite you to join with us in this mitzvah of caring.

Only in this way can our observance of the holiday of Passover be truly complete.

May you and your loved ones have a sweet and kosher Pesach!





Viewing Our Past and Present: A Trip to Mount Richmond Cemetery

On November 12, 2001, twelve people interested in the work of HFBA gathered for a visit to our historic Mount Richmond cemetery. Young and old, some were very familiar with our organization, while others were exposed to it for the first time. All came to see for themselves our mission of caring.



*Participants in HFBA's trip to
Mount Richmond Cemetery*

The visitors were greeted in the chapel by HFBA's officiating rabbi, Rabbi Shmuel Plafker, who spoke of the history of the cemetery. Procured in 1909, Mount Richmond served New York's Jewish community through decades of difficulty, and is still in use today. Walking through the grounds, the visitors stopped at the site where numerous victims of the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Company fire are buried. The words "Died at the Fire" marked on their headstones serve as a reminder of the ways many of our immigrant parents and grandparents struggled in this country. The visitors were able to view the progress of our Leave Your Mark campaign, which provides monuments for unmarked graves. Thus far, we have provided grave markers for the graves of hundreds of children, many of whom died of disease in the early twentieth century. Seeing that children

who perished in anonymity are now remembered by name greatly moved our participants and helped them realize the importance of our work.

One of the most poignant moments of the visit was when a number of the participants visited the graves of loved ones buried in the cemetery. An elderly woman returned to visit the grave of her mother, and a Russian immigrant was able to visit the grave of a close relative for the first time. Seeing the emotion of those who visited the resting place of loved ones demonstrated that in helping the deceased, HFBA deeply touches the living as well.

All the visitors were greatly impressed with the condition of the cemetery. HFBA president Bjorn Bamberger pointed out that HFBA's indigent clients receive the same respectful care that any other Jew would

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receive. Such care extends from a dignified funeral in full consonance with Jewish tradition to upkeep of the grave and cemetery grounds.

Visitors saw recent improvements that have been made in our cemetery, such as a new road and paths between plots to allow easier access to individual gravesites. The effort we put into tending to our grounds was readily visible to our guests.

A visit to our cemetery shows that after one hundred and fourteen years, HFBA is still committed to its original mission of providing a respectful burial for indigent Jews. We look forward to organizing more trips to Mount Richmond so that visitors may share in our past - and present.



In Their Own Words: **Letters to HFBA**

Dear HFBA,

Last Friday at approximately 1:00 P.M., I received a frantic phone call from my eighty-seven year old mother, informing me that she had just been told that my aunt had just passed away. Since my aunt had made no burial arrangements for herself we were beside ourselves with worry as we had no idea what to do and there was little time left before the start of the Sabbath. We called the nursing home where my aunt had last resided and finally found someone who located her records and saw a notation to contact your organization at the proper time. We did so, and received a phone call from a wonderful, caring woman, Rhonda Stein, who gathered the necessary information and told us that the funeral was scheduled for Sunday morning and that everything would be handled according to strictest Orthodox traditions. I can't begin to express how grateful we are to your marvelous organization for coming to our aid in our frightening hour of need. We are not people of means, but wanted to make a small donation to recognize the invaluable service you are providing to the Jewish community. Thank you from the depths of our hearts.

Sincerely yours,
Mrs. Chavie Zelmanowitz

Dear HFBA,

On behalf of Congregation Ohab Zedek, I want to thank you for your heroic efforts on behalf of *a met mitzvah*, Miss Rose Wagschal. Thanks to your efforts we were able to have a *leviah* a little more than a day after we first spoke.

Rose had a dignified funeral and many family members were in attendance. I have informed them of your very meaningful and sincere assistance.

Thank you again.

Most Sincerely,
Rabbi Allen Schwartz
Congregation Ohab Zedek

Dear HFBA,

Thank you so much for all of your help in providing our beloved "Uncle" Lester Levine with a dignified Jewish burial. Please accept this small donation (if we could have given more at this time, we would). Perhaps you can send me an HFBA Tzedakah box. I am a notary and instead of taking a fee I ask that my clients donate to their favorite charity. I would like to collect on behalf of HFBA. Thank you again!

Debbie Weiss

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A Letter Returned...

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funeral home had conducted Sylvia's funeral, and that she had been carelessly buried in a non-Jewish cemetery.

Committed to the notion that every Jew, irrespective of their means, deserves to be buried as a Jew, HFBA quickly mobilized its resources to ensure that Sylvia's body would rest with her sister's in a Jewish cemetery. Through contact with other social service agencies and legal authorities we were able to secure the disinterment of Sylvia's body so that she could receive a dignified Jewish burial.

At 7:00 A.M. one blustery morning this winter, Rabbi Plafker arrived at the non-Jewish cemetery to supervise Sylvia's disinterment. "Though she has no relatives, she is part of our Jewish family," said Rabbi Plafker. "I wanted to make sure her body was treated with respect." While Jewish burial custom dictates that only one coffin be placed in each gravesite, Sylvia's coffin had been placed on top of several others. That very same morning, Sylvia was reburied next to her sister in her own grave at our Mount Richmond cemetery. Serving as both rabbi and mourner, Rabbi Plafker recited the traditional funeral prayers. There were no other attendees present to answer *Amen*.

"This funeral pointed to the stark difference between the way HFBA cares for its clients and the way others do," commented Rabbi Plafker. "When there is no family and no one left to care, HFBA is there." Sylvia's story illustrates the lengths to which HFBA will go to fulfill its mission of caring. As a caring organization, we follow up on every case and attend to every detail. As a caring organization, we are committed to ensuring that no Jew is left forsaken in their time of greatest need.

** All names have been changed to protect the privacy of our clients.*

Our Staff:

Anne Leist Retires After Over Three Decades of Service

After over three decades of exceptional service to HFBA, Anne Leist has recently retired. Anne provided comfort to families while expertly organizing the technical details of a burial. We thank Anne for her dedication and wish her a *mazal tov* on this milestone.



HFBA Letters

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Dear HFBA,

I hope that this letter and enclosed donation can in some way express my personal appreciation for all you have done throughout the years on behalf of my family and so many others.

On September 26, 1909, HFBA accepted the application for burial of my grandmother, Minnie Schwartz Deitchman Rosenberg, who died at a very young age. I found her well-tended grave at Mount Richmond cemetery, section twenty-two, row five, grave six. This was accomplished with the very special assistance of Rhonda in your office, and with the tireless and outstanding efforts of Rabbi Shmuel Plafker.

Please extend to Rhonda and the Rabbi my most sincere appreciation for all of their efforts in helping me locate my grandmother.

Sincere thanks,
Muriel Emerling

HFBA Hosts Successful Breakfast

Over one hundred and thirty people attended HFBA's annual Long Beach breakfast! The breakfast was held on November 11, 2001 at the Young Israel of Long Beach. Guest of honor Mr. Herman Neuman received HFBA's *Anshei Chesed* Award, and participants enjoyed the words of guest speaker Rabbi Eliahu Rominek. HFBA extends a hearty mazal tov to Mr. Neuman, and thanks all those who organized and attended the event. Your participation enables us to carry on our work of caring for Jews in their time of need.



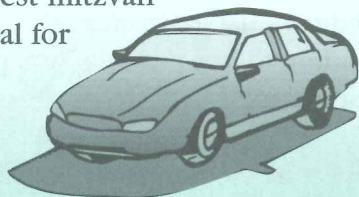
Bjorn Bamberger and Andrew Feinman present Herman Neuman (center) with the Anshei Chesed Award

Donate Your Car to HFBA

Perform the greatest mitzvah by providing burial for indigent Jews.

Receive an IRS tax deduction as allowable by law.

HFBA will arrange pickup of your car. To participate in this mitzvah please contact Amy Koplow at 212-239-1662



We are pleased to announce that the following names have been added to our *Leave Your Mark Donor Plaque in the Weinberg Chapel at Mount Richmond Cemetery:*

In memory of all those who perished in the World Trade Center 9/11/01

In memory of Daniel Berman

Ruth B. Cowl

Aaron & Debbie Cywiak

Ms. Hana L. Fuchs

Doris P. Radow

Irving and Leonard Schlusel Foundation

Jack and Phyllis Schwartz

Facts and Figures

Established in 1888, HFBA has a long and distinguished history of seeing that New York's indigent Jews receive a respectful Jewish burial. Below are some numbers that illustrate our commitment to the important mitzvah of burying the dead.

Number of burials since HFBA was founded:	54,990
Number of burials in the last five years:	2,015
Number of headstones marked:	10,550
Number of children's headstones marked:	3,910