



THE HEBREW FREE BURIAL ASSOCIATION

chesed

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Acts of Chesed

A Jewish Daughter Returns To Her People

One of the saddest responsibilities HFBA has, and has had since its inception, is the burial of young people.

Recently our organization was called upon to assist in the burial of Laurie, who was discovered dead at the age of twenty-seven. The Callahan family was a generous, loving Catholic family with several children. When their friend, a Jewish woman, died and her daughter, Laurie, whom they had known since birth, was left alone, they graciously welcomed the seven-year old into their home. They subsequently adopted her without converting her to Catholicism. Laurie grew into a troubled young woman who gave her adoptive mother "joy and sorrow at the same time." At the time of her death, Laurie was living with her own very young daughter on public assistance.

Each year, on *Shabbat Parshat Chayei Sarah*, the HFBA has a fundraising drive in which local

synagogues participate by educating the community about HFBA and raising tzedakah for the burial of indigent Jews. During this year's drive, a Mrs. Hertz heard about our organization and mentioned it to her sister, Sarah, a social worker. Soon after, Sarah heard about the death of her friend's adopted child. Knowing that Laurie had been born to a Jewish mother, Sarah contacted us, spoke to the Callahans and acted as an intermediary until the Callahans called us to arrange for the burial of their Jewish daughter.

With gratitude, Laurie's adoptive mother expressed her thanks to HFBA for "(the) wonderful way (you) handled this very sad situation...If it wasn't for (you) in paving the way for our daughter to be buried in the same cemetery as her mother, Mt. Richmond Cemetery, we would not know what to do..."

Names have been changed to protect the privacy of our clients.

HFBA Mission Statement

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

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

Chesed is published by **The Hebrew Free Burial Association**

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UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK

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

Message from our President

Bjorn Bamberger

We are now busy preparing for Pesach – the Festival of Freedom. We are cleaning our homes, shopping for matzah and the other traditional Passover foods, and making arrangements for gathering our families across the generations – grandparents, parents and children - to sit together at the *seder* table.

No generation gap here. To the contrary, the gathering of the family to discuss our history and pass on our sacred teachings and traditions is the very essence of the *seder*, as we are commanded in the Torah, “You shall tell your child [and grandchild] on that day, it is because of this - the matzah and the Pascal Sacrifice - that G-d acted on my behalf when I went out of Egypt.” (Exodus 13:8) That is why the *seder* is actually a dialogue between the generations, the youngest child asks, and the oldest man present answers the questions of the child. And that is why, in a highlight of the *seder*, we invite the prophet Elijah to join us – as we read in the *haftorah* of the Sabbath before Pesach – and “turn the hearts of the parents towards their children, and the hearts of the children towards their parents.” (Malachi 3:24)

Indeed, our Rabbis teach us that our forefather, Abraham, wished to emphasize the importance of handing on the tradition from generation to generation when he minted a coin with the image of an elderly couple on one side, and a young couple on the other. And it is for this selfsame reason that Moses insisted on leaving Egypt “...with our youngsters and our elders, with our sons and our daughters...”(Exodus 10:9) when Pharaoh offered to allow only the able bodied adults to leave.

Our elders represent our living history – our unbreakable bonds with the past – while our children represent our future. And Judaism has survived for so many thousands of years because we have always been taught to respect our tradition, honor our elders, and treat our young with compassion.

For 114 years The Hebrew Free Burial Association has represented these three unvarying principles of our faith perhaps better than any other communal organization. For over a dozen decades we have lovingly performed the final rites for some 55,000

Jewish souls of every age, in full compliance with the strictures of Jewish law.

In 1911 we were called upon to bury many of the victims of the Triangle Shirtwaist fire – and to this day the tombstones in our Mount Richmond Cemetery bear the names and ages of these young girls who were unable to escape the fire in the factory building. In 1918, when a virulent and deadly influenza epidemic decimated the population of New York City, we buried 1,000 people – 592 of them children, 168 stillborn – sparing their grieving parents the additional anguish of having the remains of their precious babies thrown into mass graves in Potters’ Field. And in just the past decade, we have interred increasing numbers of indigent Jews who have come to these shores seeking refuge from the former Soviet Union.

The Hebrew Free Burial Association has always been there for the poorest amongst our brethren, ready to confront the gravest of calamities, ready to offer the traditional *taharab* and *k’vurah* (ritual purification and burial) to those in need, both young and old, with the greatest dignity and respect.

Today, the need is as great as ever, and this year we expect to be called upon to bury more than 350 penniless Jews. Yet difficult economic conditions have placed us under increasing financial strain. As you prepare to gather the generations of your family to celebrate the *seder* this Pesach, I urge you to add even greater meaning and significance to the occasion by becoming a partner with us in this true *chesed shel emes*.

At the very beginning of the *seder* we stand, hold up the matzah, and declare, “Let all who are in need find their needs met here!” (Haggadah). Let us live up to that pledge by putting a generous contribution to the Hebrew Free Burial Association at the top of our “to do” lists – let us teach our children the importance of respect, honor and compassion *through our actions* as well as our words, in this most beautiful and joyous season of the year.



Students Perform *Chesed Shel Emes* at Silver Lake Cemetery

Many yeshiva high schools have “*chesed* projects” by which the students learn, not by sitting in class, but by performing community service. One of the most meaningful ways of “doing *chesed*,” is by visiting HFBA’s Silver Lake Cemetery to tend the graves and to assure that the remains of the many people buried there rest in dignity. Recently, two groups from the HALB high schools in Long Island, N.Y. came to do their part. The boys, from the DRS Yeshiva High School for Boys, visited on a freezing cold day in December, accompanied by HFBA president, Mr. Bjorn Bamberger. Two months earlier, students from their “sister school” had come.

On that crisp autumn day in October, a group of teen-age girls walked hesitantly, yet purposefully, into Silver Lake Cemetery. The eighty-five students from Stella K. Abraham High School for Girls had been prepared for their visit prior to their arrival. They had attended a *shiur* (lecture) to learn about this *chesed shel emes* and learned what they “could, couldn’t and should do,” as one put it, as well as which chapters of *Tehillim* (Psalms) were appropriate to the occasion.



Students and faculty from DRS High School for Boys at Silver Lake Cemetery.

Clutching their own work gloves and gardening tools, the sixteen year old students were visiting HFBA’s cemetery to clean around the gravesites, remove debris and visit those for whom no visitors come. Their emotions were visible on their faces and were apparent from how they went about their tasks.



SKA High School students clearing graves

With seriousness of purpose, they worked for hours removing overgrown ivy from headstones. With a sense of accomplishment they were able to clean off graves which had been invisible to them when they began their work. With feeling and poignancy, they recited *Tehillim*, whispering the names of the decedents, sometimes tracing the carved letters with a finger.

“Their eyes were opened to a whole new spectrum of needs,” said SKA *Chesed* Coordinator Atara Segal. “They began to realize that the end of life is a stage of life, too. They felt a connection, not only to someone who died long ago, but also to the whole Jewish community. They had a sense of continuity,” of being part of their history and their people in a way never felt before.

As the girls left the cemetery, it was clear that this *chesed* project was different from others and affected

“With feeling and poignancy, they recited Tehillim, whispering the names of the decedents, sometimes tracing the carved letters with a finger.”

them in a profoundly different way. They had done *chesed*, not for the living, by visiting the sick or delivering food to the poor. They were rewarded, not with a smile or “thank you”, as student Adina Feinberg remarked, but with a “sense of accomplish-

ment, a realization that a person was in this place, not just a grave” She added, “We felt good about what we were doing and were sorry that there was still so much to do there. We wanted to come more often to help out as much as we can.”

These young women had performed an act of loving kindness for a *nesbama* (soul), and by remembering and caring, they honored and elevated not only the souls of the deceased, but their own souls as well.

To arrange for your group to visit and help out at Silver Lake Cemetery, please call Amy Koplou at our office, (212) 239-1662.



Mailbox

...This morning I attended a burial service held at Mt. Richmond Cemetery. I cannot say enough positive things about the service and the way it was conducted by the rabbi.

He took the time to explain the rituals and reasons behind them in a way that was enlightening without lecturing. He was patient and considerate of all present and showed utmost respect for the deceased, a humble woman, who had led a difficult life.

Afterward, all who attended indicated that they had had an uplifting spiritual experience. The work that your organization does is, indeed, a blessing.

Yours most sincerely,
C.R.
Program Associate,
Consumer Advisory Board, W.C.

Only weeks ago, I experienced one of the saddest moments in my life, as I attended my oldest and dearest friend's funeral, only days before her 59th birthday, at Mt. Richmond Cemetery. Although I have buried my parents and grandparents in Orthodox ceremonies, none was as clear, simple and complete as the one officiated by Rabbi Plafker that beautiful, warm September morning...

I will grieve for my friend, but will also remember her passing as a memorable occasion for contemplation, as Rabbi Plafker added so much to that day.

Sincerely,
Helene Meyerowitz

...I wanted to thank your organization sincerely for the free burial service for R.R. My client came from Europe and witnessed many atrocities during WWII. I know she didn't want to tell people too much about her faith and culture, but it was important to her. So, again, my deepest thanks for your service.

Sincerely,
Susie Choi, CSW

The above is an example of the many cases in which no family or funds remain to mark the grave. You can help by purchasing a marker for \$150 as part of the "Leave Your Mark" Campaign. You will receive a certificate acknowledging your donation. Please call Amy Koplou at (212) 239-1662

To make sure that our Russian members feel fully a part of the HFBA community, we have initiated a new feature of Chesed, the Russian Digest, which includes translated summaries of the articles printed in each edition of the newsletter. The Digest appears below.

Русская версия Бюллетеня

В нижеследующих параграфах вы можете найти суммарную сводку статей, которые печатаются на английском языке в этом издании информационного бюллетеня. В нашем офисе имеются русскоговорящие сотрудники, поэтому пожалуйста присылайте свои письма и предложения!

Поступок of Chesed - еврейская дочь возвращается к своему народу

Одна из самых грустных обязанностей HFBA имела с момента образования было захоронение молодых юношей и девушек.

Недавно в нашу организацию позвонили с просьбой помочь в захоронении молодой еврейской девушки, которая была удочерена католиками в возрасте 7 лет после того как ее мать умерла. С помощью знакомой, которая только недавно узнала про миссию HFBA, эта молодая девушка, имевшая проблемы в жизни и найденная мертвой в возрасте 27, была захоронена на еврейском кладбище рядом со своей мамой. Ее приемная мама испытала большое облегчение и была очень благодарна за "чувственный подход (Вы) справились с этой грустной и нелегкой ситуацией."

Послание от Президента Vjorn Vamberger

Вскоре мы будем готовиться к празднику Пейсах - Фестивалю Свободы и также делать необходимые приготовления для встречи наших семей с разных поколений – дедушек и бабушек, родителей, детей, внуков – с целью сесть всем вместе за Сейдер столом. Наши старейшины являются представителями нашей живой истории – в переносном смысле это небьющиеся и нестареющие кости из прошлого, в то время как наши дети являются представителями будущего времени. Иудаизм выжил в течение многих тысяч лет потому, что нас всегда учили уважать наши традиции, почитать наших старейших и относиться к нашим молодым с состраданием.

В течение 114 лет HFBA представляла эти три бесценных принципа нашей веры и мы с заботой и любовью исполняли последний ритуал для 55,000 еврейских душ любого возраста с

полным соблюдением еврейского закона и традиций.

В то время как вы готовите встречу разных поколений вашей семьи чтобы отметить Сейдер этого Пейсаха, я настоятельно советую придать большее значение и весмость к идее стать нашим партнером в этот настоящий акт of Chesed.

Помощь студентов на Silver Lake кладбище

В один из свежих осенних дней в Октябре месяце, 85 учеников из Stella K. Abraham высшей школы для девочек пришли на HFBA кладбище. Они привезли с собой свои садовые инструменты и приступили к заданию по очистке могильных мест от обломков и другого мусора. Студенты отнеслись к этой работе достаточно серьезно убирая дикорастущий плющ с надгробных камней и очищая могильные места, которых было не видно с момента когда ученики начали свою работу. Студенты говорили Psalms, тихо шептали имена умерших, иногда водили пальцами по высеченным в камнях буквах. "Их глаза были открыты к полностью новому спектру нуждающихся людей," сказал Chesed координатор Atara Segal. "Они начали понимать, что конец жизни это также и стадия жизни. Они почувствовали соединение, связь не только к отдельно взятому человеку, который давно умер, но также ко всей Еврейской общине в целом. Они ощутили сенс непрерывности, продолжения, будучи частью своей истории и своего народа."

Когда девушки покинули кладбище, стало ясно, что данный Chesed проект координально отличался от других заданий и затронул их до глубины души. Студенты были вознаграждены не только улыбкой или "спасибо," как заметила ученица Adina Feinberg, но "с чувством законченности и завершенности." Эти молодые девушки исполнили акт любви и доброты для души, и помня и заботясь, они удостоили чести и возвысили не только души умерших, но также свои собственные души.

Пожалуйста поддержите нашу очень важную миссию посылая пожертвования уже сегодня, используя приложенный конверт или позвоните Amy Korlow чтобы узнать больше информации. Наш телефон (212) 239-1662.

Chesed Shel Emes — 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.
- **Organize** a fundraising event in your community.
- **Donate** your property, used vehicle or boat to HFBA.
- **Double** the dollar value of your contribution through your employer's Matching Gift Program.
- **Establish** an HFBA Forever Gift Annuity or Charitable Trust Plan.
- **Remember** HFBA in your will with a bequest.
- **A donation** sent with the enclosed card will ensure that HFBA will send out a *Yahrzeit*.

reminder letter. An additional call to our office can arrange for *kaddish* to be said for the eleven month mourning period.

- **"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.
- **Establish** a Perpetual *Yahrzeit Kaddish* for your loved one for a \$150 donation.
- **Sponsor** Perpetual Grave Care for an indigent's grave for \$500.
- **Help out today by sending a donation in the enclosed envelope.**

For more information, please call Amy Koplow at our office (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:

Mr. Jerome Berko
Dr. Egon and Rhonda Brenner
Mrs. Marilyn Butler –
Marilyn and Marshall Butler Foundation
Paul H. Cohen and Louise Derzansky
Joe and Miriam Gelb
Mr. Raymond Gindr – ERG Foundation
Dr. and Mrs. Arnold M. Illman
Mr. Ernest Kahn
Ms. Barbara Heyman Lorber
Alan and Phylis Newman
Leonard and Irving Schlussel –
Jack Shelly Foundation
Ms. Beatrice Singer
Mr. Jay H. Ziffer

HFBA Long Beach Breakfast Honors Leonard and Lorraine Kunin

On Sunday, November 3, 2002, friends and family of Leonard and Lorraine Kunin gathered to honor them at the annual *Parshat Chayei Sarah* Breakfast in Long Beach, N.Y., where they received the *Chesed Shel Emes* Award. An overflow crowd attended this most successful event at which Rabbi Wakslak, of the Young Israel of Long Beach, and Jeffrey Kunin spoke about the honorees many accomplishments as *gomlai chesed* (those who devote themselves to *chesed*). The speakers also emphasized the importance, and unique character, of the HFBA's work, *chesed shel emes*.



(l. to r.) Lorraine Kunin,
Leonard Kunin, Rabbi Chaim Wakslak,
HFBA President Bjorn Bamberger