



chesed

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Acts of Chesed

Jonathan Mark, Associate Editor of the *New York Jewish Week*, was the recipient of the "Chesed Award" at the recent HFBA Riverdale Community Breakfast. (See article on page 6.) Below are excerpts from his remarks:

...At the Hebrew Free Burial Association, we can only be judged by how much we love, we love at a time when we cannot be loved back. At one out of three Hebrew Free burials there is no one there but the casket and the crows.

Reb Nachman says we're all sentenced to death. The only road to *olam habab* (the world-to-come) goes through the grave. Philosophers can debate it, but I'll tell you how to get to Heaven. You go down the Henry Hudson Parkway

to the Brooklyn Battery Tunnel, take the Interstate West to the Verrazano Bridge, or you can take the ferry, get off Mount Richmond exit, go some lights, past the Exxon station, and turn left at our cemetery. That's the road to Heaven...

...Hebrew Free Burial says to an unclaimed, unwashed body in the morgue, you poor, sweet, lonely Jew, you mean something to me. You mean nothing to the world who'll dump you in a mass grave in Potter's Field, but you mean something to us.

The Hebrew Free Burial people say to a baby who died eighty years ago, you mean something to me, I want to tuck you into bed, after eighty years of sleeping in an unmarked grave, I want to tuck you in by buying you a tombstone so you can sleep like a *mentch* in our Hebrew Free cemetery.

Do we redeem them? They come to redeem us.

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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.

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

Message from our President

Bjorn Bamberger

In my remarks in this column, I frequently refer to the *Yomim Tovim*, the Jewish holidays in which all of us rejoice and offer special thanks to G-d. With your indulgence, in this issue I would like to tell you about a very special, very personal *Yom Tov* my family and I are celebrating—for this October marks the 60th anniversary of the rescue of Danish Jewry from the hands of the Nazis.

My parents, my brothers and sister, and I were living in Copenhagen, Denmark when the Germans occupied our country on April 9th, 1940. At first the occupation was “friendly,” and we Jews managed to survive under rapidly deteriorating conditions along with our Christian neighbors. Then, in October 1943, Hitler decided to round up all of Denmark’s 8,000 Jews and ship them to a concentration/extermination camp.

A great deal has already been written about George Duckwitz—truly a Righteous Gentile—who at that time was the shipping attaché in the German embassy in Copenhagen. He risked his life by secretly meeting with Danish Social Democratic leaders, informing them about the imminent deportation of the Jews. He also went to Stockholm in order to have Sweden extend an invitation to the Danish Jews to seek refuge there.

On the eve of *Rosh Hashbanah* 1943, the Danish people helped their Jewish fellow citizens find places to hide—in private homes, in schools, in hospitals—anywhere that could be found. My family and I found refuge with a Danish grocer, in two small rooms above his store.

Meanwhile, the Danes were organizing a secret exodus of the Jews across the *Oresund* to Sweden, a neutral country where we would be safe. Thousands of Jews needed transport, the seas were rough, and if anyone were to be caught, they would be shot. Nevertheless, two days before *Yom Kippur*, my family and I arrived in Sweden on a small, overcrowded fishing boat. Despite the danger, virtually all of Denmark’s 8,000 Jews were saved.

But the story does not end there.

Several weeks after the war ended in 1945, we returned to Copenhagen. We found our house—with a synagogue on the first floor—intact and untouched

by the Nazis. My father was friendly with the Police Commissioner, and he had placed a seal on the front gate. By a miracle, the Nazis respected this seal and during our two long years of exile in Sweden, they had not entered the house even once!

I will never forget the *chesed* the Danish people performed—at the very real risk of their lives—during those dark hours sixty years ago. Today, thanks to their bravery and kindness, I am able to thank G-d that I am alive and healthy, and can tell of this great miracle to my children and children’s children, in the freedom and safety of America in 2003. Many books have been written about why the Danes helped the Jews get to Sweden and helped them return to Denmark after the war—but, in the end, it is an act of selflessness and valor that, at its core, remains inexplicable and unparalleled in all of human history.

Each time I visit our hallowed and well-kept cemeteries on Staten Island, I cannot help but be reminded of the heroism of the Danes, and of the fate that awaited six million less fortunate European Jews who were gassed or starved to death in the charnel houses of the evil Nazi regime. They have no graves, no headstones and no hallowed resting place.

Yes, the indigents interred by the Hebrew Free Burial Association lived arduous and difficult lives, even here in the “*goldene medinah*” with little or no money for food and shelter, no family or friends to comfort them or offer them support. Yet, in a way they were lucky. Thanks to your generosity, they had a proper burial, a rabbi at their gravesides, tombstones marking their names and the dates of their lives.

Today, few of us are ever called upon to risk our lives for our fellow human beings—to literally risk death and the deaths of our families—to save the lives and preserve the dignity of other children of a loving G-d. But we can emulate their nobility, their generosity of spirit, by giving, and giving generously to the Hebrew Free Burial Association, so that fellow Jews less fortunate than we are can find their final resting place in a respectful and gracious manner, in full compliance with Jewish law and tradition.



Spotlight on:

Emily Burns and the Bar/Bat Mitzvah Circle

The HFBA Bar/Bat Mitzvah Circle includes some very special young adults who elect to celebrate this rite of passage by sharing their good fortune with others.

Emily Burns, a seventh-grader at Lawrence Middle School, joined the "Circle" as part of becoming a bat mitzvah on January 25, 2003. At the suggestion of her grandfather, Murray Spitzer, and with the encouragement of her mother, Terry, Emily chose to donate a portion of her gifts to the HFBA as a bat mitzvah project. She decided that the work of the HFBA, "helping people who can not afford a funeral," sounded "interesting" and worthwhile. She hopes to inspire others to follow her very generous and compassionate example.



When *bnot* and *bnai* mitzvah join the HFBA "Circle," they enhance the meaningfulness of their celebration by participating in acts of tzedakah. They begin their "adult" years with a concrete, immediate commitment to "doing *mitzvoit*" and their generosity reinforces the Jewish principle of responsibility for the less fortunate. In appreciation, HFBA sends them a framed certificate acknowledging their philanthropy.

Mazal Tov, Emily! We salute and thank you on behalf of all those who will benefit from your act of *chesed*.

Please consider having your child join the "Circle." Call Amy Koplou at the HFBA office, (212)239-1662, for more information.

Acts of Chesed ...continued from page 1

The *Gemara* says the reward is in the World-To-Come. We're saying that death is not the end of the story. We're saying to G-d, Daddy in Heaven, You mean something to me, so I'll take care of these souls who are the image of You...

...The roads are muddy and narrow at the Hebrew Free Burial cemetery. I saw this old man there, this old retired steamship worker, who was putting down bumpers and reflectors along the lanes so that you

Acts of Chesed

Limelight and Shadow

In the New York Times' two-column obituary about Jim Singer,* the article did not include a description of the sad end to a flamboyant life.

Singer was a legendary press agent and publicist who was willing to do anything to promote his famous clients and, at the same time, himself. And promote he did—garnering publicity over many decades for an ever-changing list of celebrities in the sports and entertainment industries. He lived high and hobnobbed with friends from movie studios, television networks, large corporations and government agencies. His circle included Walter Winchell, John Wayne, Marlene Dietrich, the Shah of Iran and Joe Namath.

Although he lived an exciting life in the limelight, his demise was sad and solitary. He died impoverished and estranged from his only daughter. At the funeral arranged for him by HFBA, no one came to mourn him.

**The name has been changed to protect the privacy of our client.*

Did you know that...

...a large portion of our caseload are Jews recently arrived from the Soviet Union? Although denied their Jewish heritage in life, their loved ones want them buried among Jews, a right denied them in their old country. HFBA raises the funds to pay for the burial of poor Jews who live out their last days in freedom.

don't drive or walk on the graves. What a lonely, holy job. I can read you names, old world names like Gussie Schon, 1916-1917 her stone says; and this name, this sweet dream of an American name, Woodrow Wilson Fox, 1918-1918...

In the End of Days there'll be a rising, on the Edge of Town, in that Field of Stone, all the recipients of love from the Hebrew Free Burial Association...

As we say each dawn, "Blessed is the G-d Who restores souls to dead bodies."



Mailbox

... In August, one of the people I work with, Ms. R.C., became ill at her day program and died a few days later. R. was in her early 50's, a survivor of the Willowbrook Institution where she lived almost all of her life until coming to a community residence. As a result, R. accumulated neither money nor assets and upon her death had no arrangements for funeral or burial costs. I searched and searched for options to help her and was told to call your organization. Not only did you take the burden of the funeral and burial off my shoulders and shared in the preparations with me, the rabbi who presided at the service is a man I will always remember... This rabbi, along with the Hebrew Free Burial Association gave me personal peace of mind that a Jewish indigent woman of limited cognitive abilities could still be honored with a Jewish funeral and burial...

With gratitude, C.R., MSW

...Recently you took care of the funeral and burial arrangements for E.D. whose mother you had also buried one year ago. As you probably know, Mrs. D. supported her three adult disabled children on her meager Social Security and disability benefits. When she died, her daughter entered a nursing home and the two mentally disabled brothers were left to fend for themselves. I was very impressed that when E., the higher functioning of the two, died, you not only cared for the deceased but you contacted social service agencies to make sure that T., the remaining brother, would be cared for...

Sincerely, M.K., CSW

Riverdale Community Breakfast

On Sunday, March 9th, an appreciative audience gathered to celebrate this year's awardees at the annual HFBA Community Breakfast at the Riverdale Jewish Center. The crowd of 250 people once again attests to the popularity of this annual event.

Nancy Klein, this year's recipient of the "Aishet Chayil Award" is the chairperson and an active member of the *Rosh Pina Chevra Kadisha* of Westchester County. The "Community Service" awardee, Mark Semer, is involved in a number of organizations but devotes much of his energy to the Riverdale Jewish Center. Jonathan Mark, who received the "Chesed Award," is Associate Editor of the New York Jewish Week and focuses his journalistic lens on the truthful exposition of Israeli and religious issues.

Rabbi Elchonon Zohn honored the group with his presence as guest speaker. Rabbi Zohn is a renowned expert on matters of death and burial according to the Jewish tradition, is the head of



Left to Right: Jonathan Mark, Nancy Klein and Mark Semer

the *Vaad Harabonim* of Queens' *Chevra Kadisha*, and is also a frequent national and international consultant on "*chevra*" work.

HFBA appreciates the support of all those whose attendance demonstrated their commitment to the ultimate act of *chesed*, providing indigent Jews with a dignified Jewish funeral and burial in consecrated Jewish earth.

If you can organize a breakfast to benefit HFBA in your community, please call Amy Koplrow at the HFBA office at (212) 239-1662.

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

Русская версия бюллетеня

В нижеследующих параграфах вы можете найти суммарную сводку статей, которые печатаются на английском языке в этом издании информационного бюллетеня.

Поступки Chesed

Jonathan Mark, который получил "Награду Chesed" на недавнем HFBA Riverdale завтраке общины, включил следующее в свои заметки:

... В HFBA мы можем только быть оценены тем, как много и сильно мы любим, так как мы любим в то время, когда мы не можем быть любимы взаимно. В каждом одном из трех похорон при содействии Hebrew Free, нет никого рядом с могилой, только сам гроб и вороны... Мы говорим Богу, Отец на Небесах, ты значишь кое-что для меня, поэтому я позабочусь об этих душах, которые являются твоим отображением (образом).

Riverdale завтрак общины

В воскресенье, 9-ого Марта почетная аудитория собралась на ежегодном завтраке общины при Еврейском Центре в Riverdale чтобы почтить лауреатов, награжденных HFBA в этом году. 250 гостей засвидетельствовали в популярности ежегодного события, и спикер лейтмотива был раввин Elchonon Zohn, уважаемый за его обязательства к работе с обществами похорон.

Bar/Bat Mitzvah Круг

Особенная группа молодых людей решает присоединиться к "Кругу" путем пожертвования HFBA части своих подарков. В Январе, Emily Burns, ученица седьмого класса, решила сделать это, когда ее дедушка рассказал ей о работе HFBA. Она надеется вдохновить других с ее состраданием, великодушием, и щедростью.

Поступки Chesed

В некрологе газеты "New York Times" о J.S., заметка не включила описание грустного конца его яркой жизни.

J.S. был легендарный агент прессы для многих известных людей последней половины прошлого столетия. Хотя он жил пристойную, богатую жизнь в центре всеобщего внимания, его смерть была грустной и уединенной. Он умер в бедности и отчужденным от своей единственной дочери. Никто не пришел оплакать его на похороны, устроенные для него HFBA.

Почтовый ящик

... В августе, женщина с которой я работала, R.C., умерла. R., в начале своих 50-ых, была оставшейся в живых после Willowbrook учреждения. Мало того, что Вы сняли бремя захоронения и похороны с моих плеч... Раввин, наряду с HFBA дали мне личное успокоение души, что еврейские нуждающиеся женщины с ограниченными познавательными способностями могут все еще быть удостоены еврейских похорон с еврейским погребением... C.R., MSW

Недавно Вы позаботились об устройстве похорон для E.D., чью мать Вы также захоронили один год назад... Когда Mrs. D. умерла, ее два умственно отсталых сына были оставлены заботиться о самих себе. Я был очень впечатлен, что когда E., более высокое функционирование среди них двух умер, Вы не только побеспокоились об умершем, но Вы вошли в контакт с агентствами по социальному обслуживанию, чтобы удостовериться что T., оставшийся в живых брат, получит соответствующую заботу... M.K., CSW

Thank You to Our Volunteers!

Our thanks go to two recent groups of volunteers who visited our cemeteries in May to clear the gravesites and remove accumulated debris. Students from the junior class at Stella K. Abraham High School for Girls on Long Island worked at Silver Lake Cemetery and the freshman class from Torah Academy of Bergen County (TABC) in New Jersey directed their efforts towards a clean-up at Mount Richmond Cemetery. These were repeat visits from

these two *yeshivot* and we salute their dedication to this *chesed shel emes*.

To arrange for your school group to visit and help out at the cemeteries, please call HFBA Executive Director Amy Koplou who will conduct an educational workshop, at your site, about HFBA and the cemetery visit prior to the event. (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 Koplou 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:

Batsheva and Daniel Aaron

Miriam K. Braun

Robert Feldman

Richard and Susan Herzberg

Robert and Lillian Preis

Mimi Rosenblatt

Sally F. Samuels

Doris Travis

Frances Fish Tompkins

Dr. Jeffrey S. Willner

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 Koplou at 212-239-1662

