

HEBREW FREE BURIAL ASSOCIATION

CHESSED

Volume 8/No. 6

June 1999 / Sivan 5759

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Chesed is published by the Hebrew Free Burial Association, 363 Seventh Avenue, New York, NY 10001. Telephone 212 239-1662



UJA-FEDERATION OF NEW YORK

HFBA Helps HANC Students Understand Free Burial and True *Chesed*

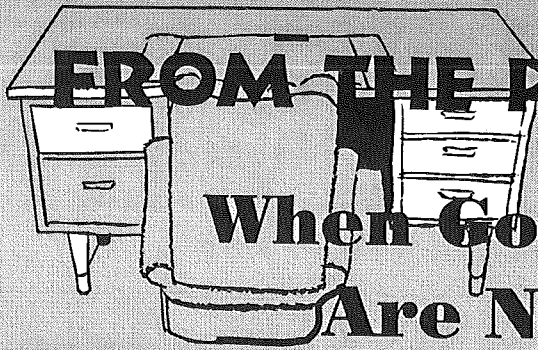
The sixth grade girls of the Hebrew Academy of Nassau County (HANC) and their principal of religious studies, Rabbi Gidon Goldberg, have successfully initiated and completed a comprehensive *tzedaka* project that utilized both the Torah and the work of the Hebrew Free Burial Association to teach the *mitzvah* of Jewish burial.

In many schools Jewish burial is discussed only in its relation to the actions of Abraham, who purchases a burial plot and mourns for his beloved wife, Sarah. Rabbi Goldberg chose to develop a curriculum with practical applications to many *mitzvot*. In addition to speaking about burial, the girls, all of whom live in comfortable circumstances, learned that some of their brethren live in conditions that prevent them from receiving a dignified Jewish burial. They also learned about the *mitzvot* of *chesed*, kindness towards others, and of *chesed shel emeth*, doing a

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Sixth graders Chava Skolnick and Naava Stern explain the *mitzvah* of *chesed shel emeth* and collect funds for the HFBA from two kindergarten students.



FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

When Good Intentions Are Not Enough

Most organizations, like most people, like to focus on their successes when describing their work to others. No one likes to dwell on failures. But at the Hebrew Free Burial Association, we are sometimes reminded that success is achieved one step at a time, and often comes after we think we may have failed.

Dana Blum and her daughter, Cindy (we've changed the names of Dana and Cindy to protect their privacy), lived in separate apartments in the same rent-controlled building. Cindy was severely emotionally disturbed and depended on her mother for both financial and emotional support. Her dependency was so great that when her mother fell ill, Cindy was paralyzed. She did not know to whom she could turn. She approached the Queens Jewish Community Council, but was so confused she eventually refused their aid. She moved her mother into her apartment as the older woman became more ill. Alone, distrustful of everyone, afraid and isolated, she refused to open her door. She had no telephone, and therefore no means of either reaching out or accepting aid.

In the midst of her mother's illness, the building superintendent began eviction proceedings against Cindy, claiming that she had allowed her apartment to fall into disrepair. The younger woman, already

confused and emotionally wrought, slumped lower into despair and confusion and she attempted to understand both her mother's worsening illness and the impending eviction.

When Mrs. Blum passed away, Cindy's plight came to the attention of HFBA's rabbinic advisor, Rabbi Elchonon Zohn, who immediately got us involved. Ordinarily, this would seem like a simple case, but Cindy could not accept the fact that her mother had died. Instead, she directed her attention to the impending eviction proceedings. When Sandra Wiesel, our executive director, took the unusual step of making a home visit, Cindy could not answer the door. By chance, Ms. Wiesel encountered Cindy as she was leaving the apartment one day. "My mother was everything to me," she confessed. "She was my life. I feel so badly putting her into the ground." Then Cindy said something that chilled Sandra's bones. "I have to decide now if I want to go into the box with her."

With that statement, Sandra knew that the issue of Mrs. Blum's burial had to take a back seat to preserving Cindy's life, helping her to accept her mother's death and going on with her own life.

We can't pretend that it will be easy. Cindy was already emotionally disturbed and is now in an

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Kew Gardens Hills Welcomes HFBA For The Second Year



Rosabelle Meltzer, a head of the Women's *Chevra Kadisha* (Burial Society) of the Vaa'd HaRabanim of Queens, and Rabbi George Rushfield, the treasurer of the *Chevra Kadisha* of Young Israel of Kew Gardens Hills, were honored for their years of service at the second HFBA breakfast, Sunday, May 2, 1999.

Mrs. Meltzer and Rabbi Rushfield were lauded for their selfless devotion to one of the most important and difficult *mitzvot* in our lives: preparing the dead for burial. Both were acclaimed for the tremendous *anivot* (modesty)

(Above): Rosabelle Meltzer receives her award. Pictured are Karin Feldhamer, Rabbi Ralph Pelcovitz and HFBA President Gerald E. Feldhamer. (Right): Rabbi George Rushfield is congratulated as he receives his award from HFBA. First row (l-r), Rabbi Ralph Pelcovitz, Rabbi Emeritus, Congregation Kneseth Israel; Rabbi Rushfield; Gerald E. Feldhamer, president, HFBA; Rabbi Shmuel Plafker, Associate Executive, HFBA. Second row (l-r), Jack Rapp, Chairman of the Kew Gardens Hills breakfast; Howard Millendorf, HFBA Board of Directors; Andrew Feinman, HFBA Board of Directors.

with which they approach this and other aspects of their lives.

Rabbi Rushfield has been associated with the Young Israel of Kew Gardens Hills since 1955. He has always involved himself in Torah education, serving as the synagogue's Talmud Torah principal over forty years ago, to his establishment of a daily study group for retirees that draws almost two dozen participants regularly. He is the administrator of Adath Israel of Brooklyn, a communal burial society founded in 1914.

Mrs. Meltzer is often called upon to speak to other groups in New York and Long Island on topics relating to Jewish burial. She is admired for her positive, optimistic outlook in the face of adversity.

The breakfast was chaired by Jack Rapp, chairman of the Young Israel of Kew Gardens Hills *Chevra Kadisha*. Rabbi Ralph Pelcovitz, Rabbi Emeritus of Congregation Kneseth Israel, addressed the overflow crowd.



HANC Students Learn About *Chesed Shel Emeth* Firsthand With HFBA

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kindness without hope of a reward in this world.

In addition to the classroom lessons, the sixth grade girls took to the hallways and classrooms of HANC, collecting money for the Hebrew Free Burial Association in specially designed "pushkas" or charity boxes. They visited the younger grades to spread the lessons of *chesed shel emeth*. In the higher grades, the students explained the *mitzvah* of Jewish burial in greater detail and the tragedy of poverty that can keep people from receiving a Jewish funeral. The girls also involved their families, writing letters to their parents explaining the project and asking for their support.

"Most of these girls were unaware of the need for a free burial society," said Rabbi Goldberg. "They had no idea that there were people who could not afford to bury their parents or other family members."

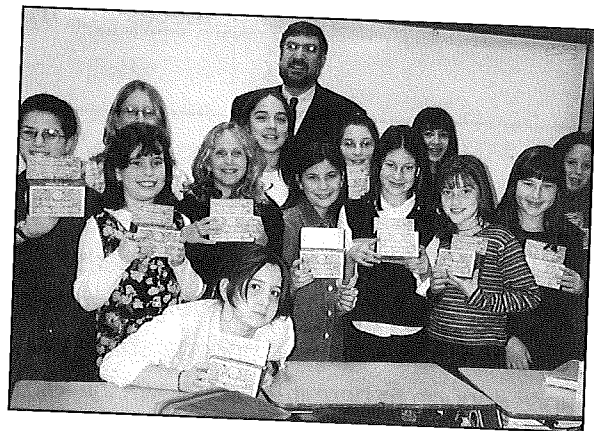
"This was a really important project," agreed Stacy Shelly. "I have grandparents who died. I know how hard it would have been if there would have been no money to bury them. I was glad that I have the means to help other people."

Penina Gold added that, "Although the little kids didn't fully understand (about the need for a free burial society), they got a taste of the *mitzvah*. They will understand better when they

are older. And the money contributed was a big help in fulfilling our goals.

The teachers echoed the children's appreciation of the unit. "The concept of burying the dead, and especially, of taking responsibility for burying the Jewish poor, was new for the students. Through our involvement with HFBA, we not only gained the tremendous merit of participating in the *mitzvot* of Jewish burial and *tzedaka*, but also learned and taught others of the value of this special type of *chesed*," said one of the sixth grade teachers.

More than \$600 was collected by the girls and earmarked for the "Leave Your Mark" campaign. Four new monuments will be erected over the graves of Jewish poor as a result of the girls' extraordinary campaign.



HANC's principal of religious studies, Rabbi Gidon Goldberg, poses with a group of proud sixth grade girls, all holding their HFBA pushkas.

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Our affiliation with a reputable concern that buys and sells used cars gives you a great, new option when you are ready to buy a new car. Instead of selling your old vehicle to the dealer or going through the hassle of selling it yourself, you can donate it to the HFBA and realize maximum value.

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forms to facilitate claiming your deduction.

What's in it for us? HFBA receives a fee based on the value of the donated car. Your contribution will help us continue our mission of providing a free burial to New York's poorest Jews.



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This ad is appearing in Jewish newspapers in our area.

FROM THE PRESIDENT'S DESK

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extremely fragile state of mind. Her mother's remains are being held at a local morgue, and we can only hope that Cindy's emotional state will advance enough to permit her to allow HFBA to bury her mother before regulations demand that the woman be buried in Potter's Field.

Though we have not yet succeeded in burying Mrs. Blum, we can be solaced that our existence may help save a young woman's life. Sandra's intervention put a network of social services into motion for Cindy. I'm sure you join us in hoping for a speedy resolution to this tragedy.

Gerald E. Feldhamer



From The Mailbox...

As children, we were all taught that *mitzvah goreret mitzvah*, one mitzvah leads to another. The following letter, received only recently, demonstrates the wisdom of the philosopher who first uttered those words.

Dear HFBA:

I lecture on topics of Jewish interest to a group of senior citizens. Most of the people are interested, respectful and curious, with the exception of one man. Any references I made to Orthodox traditions, customs or observances elicited comments from him that ranged from condescending to hostile — until he approached me with an experience that changed his attitude.

A dear friend of his was dying. He spent as much time as he could with his friend, who confided that his last illness had been so costly that he was now penniless. By the time the friend passed away, there was no money to pay for even a simple funeral. The family sadly prepared to bury him in Potter's field. He remembered I had once mentioned your organization. He was incredulous at the time, but discovered that all I had told him was true.

Not only did the Hebrew Free Burial Association bury his friend with dignity, your organization gave this man a new, more positive attitude towards everything Jewish.

Keep up the good work; the ripple effect is unpredictable, reaching to places even you could not anticipate.

Yours truly,

Perrie Nordlicht