

## Levaya: Escorting the Dead

### A Reflection On Our Customs

***These are the things whose fruits we eat in this world, but whose full reward awaits us in the World to Come... accompanying the dead (Talmud tractate Shabbat 127a).***

There is no Hebrew word for “funeral.” The Hebrew word *levaya* means to accompany the dead on their last journey. We accompany the dead to their final resting place, just as we walk a beloved visitor to the door as we say good-bye.

How do we properly escort the dead? Our traditions guide us. These ancient Jewish rituals teach us about death – and how we can best live our lives.

The Bible tells us that even one who has been executed for a crime must be buried by nightfall (Deuteronomy 21:22). We show respect to the body, even after the soul has left it.

*All too often, an elderly person passes away in a nursing home or hospital, without next-of-kin. The resulting paperwork and bureaucracy can be overwhelming. The Public Administrator or Medical Examiner must authorize HFBA to claim and bury the body. This can take weeks, even months.*

Judaism respects both the body and the soul. Cremation is anathema in our tradition. We return the body to its Creator.

*Sometimes, family members choose cremation, simply because it is cheaper – or because they are apathetic. HFBA steps in and offers burial at reduced cost or free of charge. This is our commitment to every indigent Jew.*

Before burial, the body is washed and immersed in a *mikvah*, a ritual bath. We physically clean the body. Since the body is lent to each us, we clean it before returning it to its Owner. We also purify the body, spiritually, to symbolize a cleansing of impurity and sin. This ritual is called a *tahara*.



*HFBA performs a tahara before each burial at Mount Richmond Cemetery. Several years ago, we built a specially designed facility at Mount Richmond for this purpose.*

After cleansing, the body is wrapped in the traditional shrouds, *tachrichim*. The shrouds have no pockets, to remind us that we can take nothing with us – except our deeds. The same is true for the casket: a simple pine box. The idea behind these customs is very ancient, dating back to the second century C.E. Rabbi Gamliel asked to be buried in the simplest wrap, demonstrating that all Jews are equal in death.

*HFBA buries the poor with the same dignity and respect that every Jew deserves. Each year, nearly 400 individuals – many very old, some just infants – are buried at Mount Richmond Cemetery.*

According to custom, some soil from Israel is placed in the shroud or underneath the head. For hundreds of years, pilgrims would bring back soil from their trips to the Holy Land for this purpose. This small act symbolizes the Jewish eternal love for its ancestral homeland.

*continued on page 2*

### 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.

## Levaya continued from page 1

A funeral service may be held in a chapel or at graveside. Family members and friends are encouraged to speak about their loved one. Some people ask forgiveness for any offense they may have caused.

*At Mount Richmond Cemetery, Rabbi Shmuel Plafker, HFBA's chaplain encourages friends and family to recount their memories and express their sorrow. He conducts nearly 400 graveside funerals each year.*

A *minyan* is present as the *kaddish* is recited and the

traditional *Kel-maleh* prayer is chanted. Those at graveside shovel earth onto the coffin until it is completely covered. This is part of the "*levaya*," accompanying the dead to their final resting place.

*Volunteers from Staten Island and New Jersey make up HFBA's minyan, when there are no friends or family present. They participate in this last act of kindness for the deceased.*

At HFBA, no one is buried alone. No one goes anonymously into the grave. We accompany and remember each individual Jew; that is our sacred mission.

### Dear Friend:

Thank you so much for your support. Your contribution makes it possible for us to bury every Jew with dignity and in accordance with our tradition. You make possible each one of these steps, as we say our final farewells to those who have passed away. These good deeds are your good deeds!

If you would learn more about Jewish funeral traditions — or to visit Mount Richmond Cemetery and learn more about our work — please contact me at: [akoplow@hebrewfreeburial.org](mailto:akoplow@hebrewfreeburial.org).



## HFBA Second Annual Bergen County Community Breakfast

HFBA's Bergen County Community Breakfast, held on April 23 at Congregation Beth Aaron in Teaneck, attracted 150 people to support the work of HFBA and to honor HFBA's Director of Operations, Andrew Parver. In 2004, Andrew took a summer job with HFBA after his first year at Yeshiva University, and quickly became an essential part of the HFBA staff, recently becoming a licensed funeral director. He lives in New Milford, NJ with his wife and three children.



Guest speaker Rabbi Mordechai Willig spoke about the *mitzvah* of *chesed shel emet*, the essence of HFBA's mission.

*Rabbi Mordechai Willig, guest speaker*



*L to R: HFBA Board members, Robert Mendeles, Daniel Pilarski, Richard Fishman; Amy Koplow, Executive Director; Paul Nagelberg, HFBA President; Andrew Parver, Director of Operations; Bryan Alter, breakfast co-chair.*

## Thank you to the student volunteers from the following schools for helping to clean and clear Silver Lake Cemetery



The Frisch School  
Shalhevet High School  
Yavneh Academy

Torah Academy  
of Bergen County



# HFBA Helps



**Carol and Ben** had been devoted to each other during a childless 47-year marriage. A decade ago, Ben suffered a stroke which left him permanently disabled. At the age of 84, Ben died and Carol called her nephew Saul, her next of kin, to inform him of Ben's death. At the time, Carol herself was ill and was distressed because the couple had no burial plots nor money to purchase them. She was panicked that she could not afford a burial for her husband. Suddenly, two weeks later, with Ben's body still unburied, Carol died. Although Saul had not been close to his aunt and uncle, he authorized the burials, and husband and wife were interred side by side in HFBA's Mount Richmond Cemetery.

**Marcus**, 71 years old when he died, had immigrated to the United States from the former Soviet Union 30 years ago. His body was unclaimed in the Kings County morgue for two months before his estranged daughter, Fran, sent notarized letters to both Coney Island Hospital and the Medical Examiner requesting burial in city cemetery. A rabbi intervened and Fran agreed to let HFBA arrange a Jewish funeral for her father. Although she maintained that Marcus was a "wheeler-dealer," and owned properties in Brooklyn, his health care agent was finally located and she insisted there was no money to bury him. HFBA buried Marcus with only the HFBA volunteer *minyán* in attendance.

**Howard** passed away at the age of 70 after residing in an assisted living facility for ten years. In college,

Howard became mentally ill and received a diagnosis of schizophrenia. He came to terms with his condition and openly spoke about how he coped with the voices only he could hear. He enjoyed long, solitary walks and reading the newspaper, was friendly to his neighbors, but quiet and reserved. Although Howard had two sisters and a brother, he had lost contact with them. No one attended Howard's burial.

**Michelle** was born in 1929 in France from which she and her family fled in 1941. She graduated college, earned a doctorate in psychology, married and divorced. Michelle had a professional practice but had to stop working because of severe health problems. She had no family left after her mother died. Although her mother had left her an inheritance, the funds were stolen and Michelle had to survive on her small SSI allowance. Horrifically, Michelle died in a fire, started when she fell asleep with a lit cigarette.

Rabbi Plafker performed the funeral with no one else to mourn Michelle's passing.

As of the end of May, HFBA buried **175** people, **15** more than we did in the first five months of the previous year. We averted **11** cremations and buried **14** people who otherwise would have been buried anonymously in city cemetery.

**Two** married couples were buried side by side in the last nine months.



*Edited excerpts of letters to HFBA. Names have been changed to protect confidentiality.*

*We would very much like to thank you and Rabbi Plafker. The levaya (funeral) was simple, dignified and very much in keeping with Jane's sensibilities. The rabbi and the Staten Islanders who showed up to make the minyan, were sensitive and respectful. We are profoundly grateful to you for the work of chesed shel emet that you do.*

**H.L. and F.T.**

*My name is Terri and seven years ago you helped me bury my brother Seth. I can never thank you enough. I live in Florida and my late brother lived in New York. I was in no position to bury him and with your help he got a Jewish burial and I was able to hear the entire service over the phone. I will forever be grateful. G-d bless your wonderful organization. Thank you for everything.*

**T.H.**

# РУССКИЙ ДАЙДЖЕСТ

BELOW ARE TRANSLATED SUMMARIES OF THE ARTICLES APPEARING IN THIS ISSUE OF *CHESED*.

## **Леваяя: проводы усопших**

*И вот из дел, плоды которых мы вкушаем в этом мире, но полная награда за которые положена в мире грядущем: проводы усопших (Талмуд, трактат Шаббат 127а)*

В иврите нет слова «похороны». Слово леваяя на иврите означает сопровождать усопших в последний путь. Мы провожаем умерших в место их успокоения так, будто ведём дорогого гостя к двери перед тем как попрощаться. Как это полагается делать? Наши традиции учат нас. Эти древние еврейские обряды помогают нам понять смерть и то, как полнее прожить нашу жизнь.

Тора говорит, что даже казнённые за тяжкие преступления должны быть похоронены до наступления ночи (Второзаконие 21:22). Мы оказываем уважение телу даже когда душа уже покинула его. Иудаизм предписывает оказывать уважение и телу, и душе. Например, кремация идет полностью вразрез нашей традиции. Мы должны вернуть тело Тому, Кто его создал.

Перед погребением тело обмывают и погружают в микву – небольшой бассейн для ритуального омовения. Поскольку тело дано как бы взаймы каждому из нас, мы физически очищаем его перед тем, как вернуть Творцу. Мы также очищаем тело духовно, символизируя избавление от греха и нечистоты. Эта часть обряда называется тахара.

После омовения тело заворачивают в традиционное покрывало, тахрихим. У этого куска ткани нет карманов, что напоминает нам о том, что мы ничего не можем взять с собой за исключением наших поступков. То же относится и к гробу: это простой деревянный ящик. Эти обычаи древние, они восходят как минимум ко второму веку нашей эры. Так Рабби Гамлиэль просил похоронить его, завернув в самое обычное полотно, этим подчёркивая, что все евреи равны перед лицом смерти.

Согласно традиции, немного земли из Израиля кладут в покрывало или под голову усопшего. Многие века еврейские паломники приносили именно для этого частицы земли из своих поездок в Страну Обетованную. Этот обычай символизирует вечную любовь евреев к стране предков.

Погребальная служба проводится либо в синагоге, либо рядом с могилой. Очень желательно, чтобы друзья и близкие рассказали о жизни и делах усопшего. Некоторые просят прощения за нанесённые обиды. Во время чтения *кадиша* и традиционной молитвы *Э-ль Мале* обязательно присутствует *миньян* (по меньшей мере десять мужчин). Затем присутствующие с помощью лопат забрасывают гроб, пока его не станет видно. Все это – часть *леваия*, сопровождения усопших к месту их последнего успокоения.

В HFBA, никто не бывает похоронен одиноким. Никто не уходит в мир иной безымянным. Мы сопровождаем и помним каждого отдельного еврея, в этом священная миссия HFBA (Еврейского Благотворительного Похоронного Бюро).

## **HFBA помогает**

· Маркус, скончавшийся в возрасте 71 года, иммигрировал в США из бывшего Советского Союза 30 лет назад. В течение двух месяцев никто не забирал его тело из морга графства Кингс (Бруклин). Наконец его дочь Фрэн, давно не общавшаяся с Маркусом, послала заверенные письма в больницу Кони Айленд и городскому патологоанатому, прося разрешения похоронить Маркуса на общественном городском кладбище. После вмешательства раввина Фрэн согласилась позволить HFBA организовать для её отца еврейские похороны. Фрэн вначале утверждала, что её отец – «делец», и у что у него несколько владений в Бруклине. Но душеприказчица Маркуса, уполномоченная решать вопросы, связанные с медициной, заявила, что денег на похороны нет. HFBA оплатило похороны, на которых присутствовал *миньян* из наших волонтеров.

· Мишель родилась в 1929 году во Франции, откуда её семья бежала в 1941-м. В Америке Мишель закончила колледж, защитила диссертацию по психологии, вышла замуж, развелась. У неё была собственная практика, но ей пришлось прекратить работать из-за серьёзных проблем со здоровьем. После смерти матери у Мишель не осталось никого из родных. Мать оставила ей наследство, но деньги были украдены, и Мишель перебивалась, живя на небольшое пособие социального страхования. Мишель трагически погибла в пожаре, начавшемся когда она уснула с зажжённой сигаретой. На похоронах присутствовал только раввин HFBA, Р. Плафкер, проводивший Мишель в последний путь.

**Наши хлопоты** По данным на конец мая HFBA организовало похороны 175-и человек, то есть на 15 больше чем за первые пять месяцев прошлого года. Мы помогли избежать 11-и кремаций и похоронили по еврейскому обряду 14 человек, которым грозили безымянные похороны на городском кладбище. За последние девять месяцев мы также похоронили две супружеские пары в двойных могилах.

## **Наша благодарность**

Дорогой друг,

Благодарим Вас за Вашу поддержку. Ваше пожертвование делает для нас возможным похоронить каждого еврея с достоинством и в соответствии с нашими традициями. Именно Вы обеспечиваете все шаги обряда, в течение которого мы говорим последнее прощай нашим ушедшим. Эти добрые дела – *Ваши* добрые дела !

Если Вы хотите побольше узнать о еврейских похоронных традициях, или хотели бы посетить кладбище Маунт Ричмонд и посмотреть на нашу работу, пожалуйста свяжитесь со мной по электронному адресу: [akoplow@hebrewfreeburial.org](mailto:akoplow@hebrewfreeburial.org)

С уважением,  
Эми Коплоу



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Amy Koplow  
Hebrew Free Burial Association  
125 Maiden Lane  
Unit 5B  
New York, NY 10038

June 1, 2017

Dear Amy Koplow:

On behalf of Charity Navigator, I wish to congratulate Hebrew Free Burial Association on attaining the coveted 4-star rating for demonstrating strong financial health and commitment to accountability and transparency.

The nonprofit sector is advancing and expanding. As our organizations evolve, so do the desires and interests of our supporters. Astute donors are yearning for greater accountability, transparency, and for concrete results from us. With more than 1.5 million American charities, Charity Navigator aims to accentuate the work of efficient and transparent organizations. The intent of our work is to provide donors with essential information to give them greater confidence in both the charitable decisions that they make and the nonprofit sector.

Based on the most recent information available, we have issued a new rating for your organization. We are proud to announce that your organization has earned a 4-star rating. This is our highest possible rating and indicates that your organization adheres to sector best practices and executes its mission in a financially efficient way. Attaining a 4-star rating verifies that Hebrew Free Burial Association exceeds industry standards and outperforms most charities in your area of work. This exceptional designation from Charity Navigator sets Hebrew Free Burial Association apart from its peers and demonstrates to the public its trustworthiness. Approximately only a quarter of rated charities have achieved this distinction!

*Forbes*, *Business Week*, and *Kiplinger's Financial Magazine*, among others, have profiled and celebrated our unique method of applying data-driven analysis to the charitable sector. We evaluate ten times more charities than our nearest competitor and currently attract more visitors to our website than all other charity rating groups combined, thus making us the leading charity evaluator in America. Our data shows that users of our site donated more than they planned to before viewing our findings, and in fact, it is estimated that last year Charity Navigator influenced approximately \$10 billion in charitable gifts.

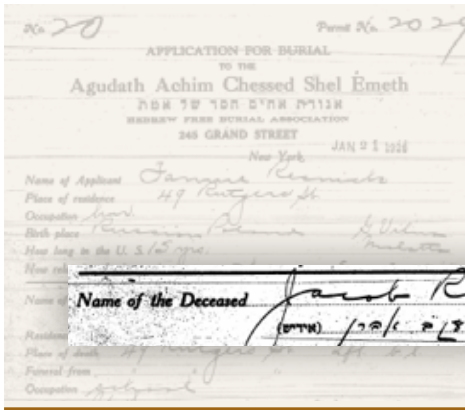
Your achievement and the 4-star rating will enhance your organization's fundraising and public relations efforts. Our favorable review of Hebrew Free Burial Association's financial health and commitment to accountability & transparency is now visible on our website.

We wish you continued success in your charitable endeavors.

Sincerely,

Michael Thatcher  
President and CEO

[www.charitynavigator.org](http://www.charitynavigator.org)



## From the Mapping Files

# Two Tragedies Within Eight Years

While mapping Section 21, a children’s section at Mount Richmond Cemetery, we discovered the case of Jacob Resnick who was 7 years old when he died of diphtheria. While looking at his burial application in our archives, we found that Jacob’s Hebrew name was Yaacov Aharon bar Yaacov Aharon. This boy’s father died before he was born, and tragically, his mother had to bury two Yaacov Aharons within eight years.

## Chesed Shel Emet – How You Can Help

**REMEMBER** to include HFBA in your will with a bequest.

**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.

**CELEBRATE** a *simcha* or commemorate a loss with HFBA cards. Cards cost \$18 and can include a personalized message.

**CONTRIBUTE** to HFBA to ensure an annual *yahrzeit* reminder for your lost loved ones.

**INSTITUTE** a perpetual *yahrzeit kaddish* for your loved one for a donation of \$180.

**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.

**DONATE** unused graves. If the graves are not part of a burial society or family plot and are located in New York or New Jersey, please consider donating them to HFBA and receiving a tax deduction for your gift.

**SPONSOR** perpetual grave care for an indigent’s grave for \$600.

**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.

**VOLUNTEER** with your friends, classmates, fellow group members, or family at Silver Lake Cemetery Chesed Days.

**GET INVOLVED** as a professional with HFBA by donating your expertise and skills in an area that can help us.

**DONATE** your property, used vehicle or boat and receive a generous tax donation.



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

THE HEBREW FREE BURIAL ASSOCIATION was formed in 1888 on Manhattan’s Lower East Side by a group of philanthropic and community-minded Jews who were committed to burying their indigent dead according to Jewish tradition, rather than having them buried in a mass grave in city cemetery. Since its inception HFBA has interred over 65,000 Jews in its two cemeteries. HFBA is also committed to retrieving the identities of those interred and is attempting to provide a gravestone for each unmarked grave.



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