

Visiting the Cemetery

Why We Go and What We Do

Entering cemetery gates, we may be both eager and sad. Judaism encourages us to visit our departed loved ones, but not overly much. We visit on the *yahrzeit*, the anniversary of death. We may also return on days around *Rosh Hashana*, using this solemn occasion to ask the Almighty for mercy and for a good year.

As we walk to the section where our loved ones are buried, we may pass by the graves of family and friends. Standing at the gravestones, there is much to share about our lives; the ties between the living and the dead can be very strong. So many memories well up, pangs of love and loss.



Still, our sages believed that life is for the living. Excessive visits discourage mourners from moving on and from finding joy in life. That's why we don't go to cemeteries on days of joy, on the Sabbath and on holidays.

Not everyone may enter a cemetery. *Cohanim* – *cohen* in the singular – are male descendants of the Jewish

priesthood, which originated with Aaron, the brother of Moses. Because of their need for ritual purity, *Cohanim* may not be in contact with the dead, except in situations involving close relatives. *Cohanim* are often buried at the cemetery's edge, so that family members can stand just outside the gates and visit easily.

Cemetery visits begin with a blessing that encompasses the entire scope of life and death:

*Praised be the Eternal, our G-d,
the Ruler of the Universe
who justly formed you,
and justly nourished and sustained you,
and justly brought death to you,
and justly knows you, one by one,
and is one day justly to bring you back and revive you;
blessed are You, Lord,
who revives the dead.*

While it's not appropriate to eat or drink at the cemetery, visitors may spend some time sharing their thoughts and recollections. Appropriate readings include several chapters of the Psalms as they reflect deep emotion. The traditional ones include chapters 23 (*The Lord is my shepherd*); 91 (*He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High*) and 130 (*Out of the depths I call to you*). Psalm 119 is an alphabetical acrostic; some find comfort in spelling out the deceased's Hebrew name by reciting the corresponding verses.

The blessing which initiates the cemetery visit addresses a G-d of justice, but the prayer said at the end of the

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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.

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visit, *Kel Maleh Rachamim*, comforts us: *Lord, full of compassion, Who dwells on high, grant true rest upon the wings of the Shechinah (Divine Presence)...*

While *Kel Maleh Rachamim*, may have its origins in the wake of the Crusades – when entire communities were destroyed – the earliest published reference comes just after the Ukrainian Chmelnitzky massacres (1648). Deeply stirring, our liturgy has adapted this communal mourning prayer for personal grief.



Before we leave, an ancient custom directs us to place stones on the graves of family and friends. Flowers are ephemeral; stones are permanent. The pebbles let others know that we have visited and that our beloved are not forgotten.

The origins of this rite are shrouded in history. Some say that it goes back many millennia. Mourners would put a stone on top of a grave to mark the site, so that others would know it was there. As time passed, stone would be piled on to stone, creating a more permanent marker of burial.

A more poetic explanation plays on the Hebrew word for pebble, “*tzror*.” It is a homonym for the word “bond.” Traditional gravestones carry the inscription,

תִּנְצַ'ב'ה'

תהא נפשו/ה צרורה בצרור החיים

May his/her soul be bound in the bonds of life.

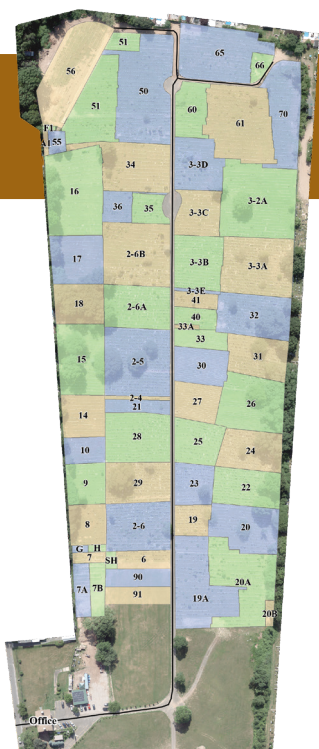
As the words for “pebble” and “bond” are the same in Hebrew, we remember that we too are bound forever with our loved one.

To mark the transition between the living and the dead, there is a ritual washing of hands either before we leave the cemetery or before we enter our homes. With a cup, we pour water over our hands, three times alternating right and left. This ritual can also be seen as a kind of spiritual purification. Many cemeteries have sinks or washing stations just outside the cemetery gates for this purpose.



These rituals and prayers are designed to bring inspiration and meaning to cemetery visits. We cherish those who have left us, but still must return to the land of the living. In its wisdom, Judaism has given us a pathway forward.

Margy-Ruth Davis



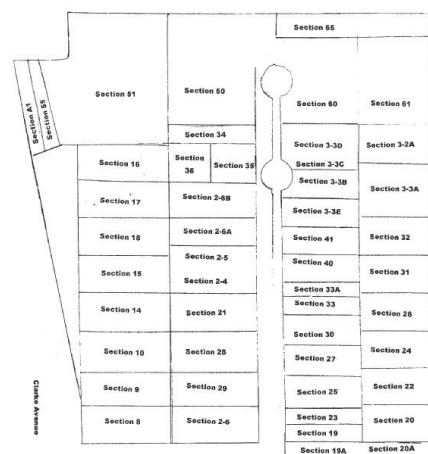
Mount Richmond Cemetery Mapping

UPDATE

Our extensive project to map Mount Richmond Cemetery continues.

We have completed the overview map of the entire cemetery. Visitors to Mount Richmond now receive a properly scaled map, printed in color. This is a major improvement from the old black and white map which was not drawn to scale.

Over 80% of the cemetery has now been mapped in detail, with maps showing all of the graves within each section, which should make it easier for visitors to find their loved ones.



HFBA *Helps*



Born into a middle-class family, **Robert B.** lived in Brooklyn with his parents and brother. Starting at a young age, Robert suffered from depression and needed medication to control his illness.

Despite his depression, Robert tried to live a normal life. He met Nancy, his wife of 50 years, during an early hospitalization, and they had one son, Michael. Robert served in the U.S. Army, but only briefly, as he was medically discharged. He attempted to earn a degree but was expelled from college in his freshman year. He held several sales positions over a 10 year period until his condition became so serious that he made several suicide attempts and underwent shock treatment.

Sadly, Michael became estranged from his parents, and Robert lost all contact with his brother. When Nancy died in 2012, Robert's condition deteriorated even further and he stopped paying his rent. He was evicted from his apartment and was homeless for four years. Robert was finally assigned to a men's shelter after a horrific suicide attempt in which he tried to grab the "third rail" by jumping onto the subway tracks.

In 2017, Robert moved into a nursing home where he lived until this year, when he died of a heart attack on his

78th birthday. HFBA buried Robert in Mount Richmond Cemetery with our volunteer *minyán* at his graveside. No one who knew Robert attended his funeral.

Nanette O. died at age 84 with only \$160 to her name. She languished in the city morgue for six months waiting to be buried. Her only relative, a brother in a nursing home, had dementia and could not give HFBA permission to bury Nanette. The Medical Examiner notified us about Nanette because she was Jewish and the Public Administrator released her body to us with the understanding that they would contribute nothing towards HFBA's costs.

Nanette received a dignified Jewish burial in our cemetery.

Eli L.'s mother abandoned her son and husband shortly after his birth. Eli was completely orphaned at the age of three when his father tragically died. He was adopted by his aunt and uncle as a brother to his cousin Andy. Sadly, Eli suffered from mental illness and became addicted to drugs. He was unable to hold a job and became estranged from his family, existing on a small amount of public assistance.

When Eli was found dead in his apartment at the age of 34, Andy wanted to provide a funeral but did not have the money. HFBA stepped in and Andy and nine friends attended Eli's funeral at Mount Richmond Cemetery.

Names and details were changed to protect confidentiality.

Annual HFBA Riverdale Breakfast

Thank you to the more than 175 people who attended our annual Riverdale Community Breakfast on March 31.

We were pleased and proud to honor:

Andrew Eisenberger and **Jennie Goldress** who received the *Chesed Shel Emet* Award, **Alicia Solan-Teglasi** and **Victor Teglasi**, honored with the HFBA High Impact Award and **Deborah and Steven Berkowitz**, the Young Leadership awardees.

We'd especially like to thank **Andrea Harris**, the event's indefatigable chairperson.



*Breakfast honorees – l to r:
Andrew Eisenberger and Jennie Goldress, Steven and Deborah Berkowitz,
Alicia Solan-Teglasi and Victor Teglasi.*

РУССКИЙ ДАЙДЖЕСТ

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

Что мы делаем во время посещения кладбища и зачем

В иудаизме поощряется посещение могил близких во время йорцайт (годовщина смерти) и в дни Рош Хашана. По этим торжественным случаям принято просить Вс-вышнего о милости и об удачном годе. Наши мудрецы считали, что «живым следует жить» и предостерегали от слишком частых посещений кладбища, поскольку они могут помешать скорбящим принять утрату и постепенно начать вновь испытывать радость. Поэтому у евреев не принято посещать могилы близких в дни торжеств и праздников, а также в шабат.

Не все должны заходить на территорию кладбища. Например козны – потомки по мужской линии из рода священников, ведущего начало от библейского Аарона, брата Моисея – не участвуют в обрядах погребения, за исключением похорон своих близких.

На кладбище не принято есть или пить, вместо этого посетители проводят время, делясь мыслями и воспоминаниями. Часто читают определённые псалмы, которые особенно глубоко выражают глубину чувств пришедших на кладбище. Традиционно произносят псалмы Давида 23 («Г-сподь пастырь мой»), 91 («Те, кто покоится в убежище Пр-святого») и 130 («Из бездны воззвал я к Тебе»). Псалом 119 представляет собой акrostих по буквам еврейского алфавита, и многие находят утешение, произнося еврейские имена усопших и соответствующие строки акrostиха.

Согласно древнему обычаю перед тем как покинуть кладбище, оставляют на могиле близких камешки (но не цветы). Эти кусочки гальки дают понять посетителям, что кто-то уже был здесь, и что близкие люди не забыты.

Чтобы особо отметить возвращение из обители смерти во владения жизни, евреи, после того как покидают могилы близких, совершают ритуальное омовение рук. Прямо за воротами большинства еврейских кладбищ есть раковины или фонтанчики для мытья рук, именно для этой цели.

Эти обычаи, ритуалы и молитвы предназначены для привнесения смысла и духовного подъёма в наши посещения кладбища. Мы дорожим памятью о тех, кто ушёл, но мы должны вернуться в область жизни.

HFBA помогает

• Роберт Б* родился в Бруклине. Его родители вели обычную жизнь среднего класса со своими двумя сыновьями. С детства у Роберта были проблемы с психикой, и он часто попадал в больницы. Несмотря на хроническую депрессию, он старался вести нормальную жизнь. Однако его служба в американской армии быстро закончилась увольнением по медицинским показаниям, и затем его отчислили с первого курса престижного колледжа.

Роберт был продавцом и часто менял работу, пока его состояние не ухудшилось настолько, что он сделал несколько попыток самоубийства, после чего ему был назначен курс шоковой терапии.

Со своей женой, с которой он в итоге прожил 50 лет, Роберт познакомился, когда оба были в лечебнице. У них родился один сын, который стал наркоманом и полностью перестал общаться с родителями. В 2012-м году жена Роберта скончалась, его состояние ухудшилось ещё больше, и он перестал платить за квартиру. Его выселили, и четыре года он был бездомным. В конце концов его поместили в приют для мужчин, после того, как он пытался покончить с собой, спрыгнув на рельсы метро и пытаясь схватить «третий рельс», по которому подаётся высокое напряжение.

Два года назад Роберт переехал в еврейский дом престарелых (New Jewish Home). Когда ему исполнилось 78, Роберт скончался от инфаркта. Он был похоронен на кладбище Маунт Ричмонд. Присутствовал наш миньян добровольцев. На похоронах не было никого из знавших Роберта при жизни.

** имена изменены*

Нам пишут

«Я состою в группе женщин, раз в месяц мы вместе обедаем и даём друг другу немного денег. По очереди одна из нас забирает себе накопившуюся сумму. После этого мы жертвуем эту сумму любой благотворительной организации по нашему усмотрению.

Наконец-то настала моя очередь! Я хотела бы пожертвовать свою долю Еврейскому Благотворительному Похоронному Бюро. Чек на 56 долларов прилагается».

П.Т.

Новости о проектах на наших кладбищах Маунт Ричмонд и Сильвер Лейк

Продолжается наш многолетний проект по картированию кладбища **Маунт Ричмонд**. Мы завершили обзорную карту всего кладбища. Посетители кладбища Маунт Ричмонд теперь получают удобную карту, в цвете и с точным масштабом.

На кладбище **Сильвер Лейк** удалены дикие деревья агрессивных пород (всего 171 ствол), а также закончены работы по укреплению цементом внутренней стены и стены вдоль бульвара Победы (Victory Blvd.). Новые металлические ограды по верху обеих стен повторяют изначальный дизайн XIX века, в чём можно убедиться, взглянув на старые фотографии кладбища.



In the Mail

Letters below have been edited for clarity and to protect confidentiality.

I would like to thank everyone at HFBA for the invaluable assistance and support that was provided to me in the burial of my neighbor, Nat F.

Nat was an 81-year-old man living on SSI without relatives or friends. He could not afford a burial plot. When he was brought to the hospital, the doctor said it was only a matter of time before his heart stopped functioning. As the only person he communicated with, I did not want Nat buried as a nobody in potter's field.

I called HFBA and spoke to Rhonda who graciously explained the process to me. Without her I would not have known what to do. HFBA took care of getting the body released and only two weeks later I got a phone

call from HFBA telling me the date of Nat's funeral. The efficiency and generosity of HFBA is miraculous.

Once again, my heartfelt thanks to this incredible organization.

C.S.

I belong to a group of women who meet for lunch every month and we each give a small donation at that time. When the money adds up it goes to one of us at a time. The person whose turn it is to get it can donate to any place of her choosing.

It has reached my turn and I chose to send my share to the Hebrew Free Burial Association.

Enclosed is a check for \$56 which I am sending to my choice!

P.T.

Silver Lake Cemetery Restoration Project Updates

In Silver Lake Cemetery, 171 invasive wild trees have been removed and mortar work on the interior retaining wall and Victory Boulevard wall is nearly complete. The new fencing on the front wall replicates the design of the original 19th century fence as seen in historic photos of the site.

The new drainage system to direct water out of the cemetery and into New York's sewer system includes two efforts. The low lying areas in the cemetery have been raised and drainage pipes will be placed under the cemetery's center road leading to the sewers.

Thank You!

HFBA is grateful for the donations of talsim in response to our request in the last issue of the Chesed.

Individuals, synagogues and facilities responded and we would like to especially acknowledge the following:

Chabad of Upper East Side, NY
Congregation Beth El, Rutherford, NJ
Congregation Israel of Kings Bay, Brooklyn
Congregation Shaarey Israel, Suffern, NY
Dix Hills Jewish Center, Long Island
Great Neck Synagogue, Long Island
Jewish Center of the Moriches, Long Island
Northern Metropolitan Residential Healthcare Facility, Monsey, NY
Young Israel of Century City, Los Angeles

"I saw your need for, and request, in the HFBA newsletter and I am donating the tallit of my husband B.B.

He would have been pleased to have known that it would be used and handled properly. Thank you for your worthy efforts."

S.B.



If you have a story about your own experience with HFBA or a memory about friends or family members buried in our cemeteries, please send it to stories@hebrewfreeburial.org.

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.
- **COMMEMORATE** a loss or an honor with HFBA cards. Cards cost \$18 and can include a personalized message.
- **CONTRIBUTE** to HFBA to ensure an annual *yahrzeit* reminder for your departed loved ones.
- **INSTITUTE** a perpetual *yahrzeit kaddish* for your loved one for one-time a donation of \$180.
- **ARRANGE** for *kaddish* to be said for the eleven month mourning period following the 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.
- **VOLUNTEER** with your friends, classmates, fellow group members, or family at Silver Lake Cemetery Chesed Days.
- **PARTICIPATE** as a professional 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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