

A Home for Eternity: Consecrating a Jewish Cemetery

Jews have always taken care of their cemeteries; they are holy ground. The Jewish cemetery in Worms, some 35 miles southeast of Frankfurt, is the oldest one extant in Europe. It dates back to the early 11th century and burials continued there until the 1930s, some nine centuries later.

To become holy ground, a Jewish cemetery must be consecrated, that is set aside and dedicated for this sole purpose.

As an essential prerequisite, a Jewish cemetery is owned by its community. After its boundaries are set, at least ten of its members join in a solemn ceremony to mark its purpose.

The consecration ceremony includes three components.

The group walks the cemetery grounds seven times, setting its physical demarcation. The walk represents the physical act of separation.

Psalms are recited, linking the ground to a spiritual purpose. They reflect both our longing for G-d's shelter and its eternal presence. The psalms acknowledge our frailty and our weakness, our complete dependence on the Almighty.

And charity is pledged, perhaps reflecting the well-known phrase, "*tzedakah tatzil memavet.*" Charity redeems from death. The *tzedakah*, the charity, links

the cemetery to the living community and its needs.

The participants fast on the day of the consecration, then come together on the site. Standing at the cemetery's southeast corner, they begin by reciting the first four chapters of Psalms. There they also recite Psalm 102. It reads in part,

My days are like a lengthening shadow; and I am withered like grass...

When He hath regarded the prayer of the destitute, and hath not despised their prayer.

Rabbi Elchonon Zohn, HFBA's rabbinic advisor and the president of the National Association of Chevra Kadisha explains, "We begin with the

prayer for the poor, for there are no more impoverished than the dead."

From the southeast corner, the group moves to the northeast corner and continues until they have walked the cemetery's circumference. Rabbi Zohn notes that seven is the number of completion in Judaism. It mirrors the Biblical seven days of creation and the seven years of the Jewish agricultural cycle.

As they move from corner to corner, they all recite Psalm 91, repeating it until they have traversed the

continued on page 2



The Jewish cemetery at Worms, Germany

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.

An HFBA Story

Recently, HFBA supporter Mike Moskowitz shared some of his family history with us, as it is part of our history as well. Mike's grandfather, Ben, and his family are the subject of the story below.

On March 14, 1905, a fire started at 3:45 in the morning in the basement of 105 Allen Street, a crowded tenement filled with over one hundred fifty people on New York's Lower East Side.

According to news reports, there was enough blame to go around for the large number of fatalities and injuries. The fire escapes were illegally blocked, the fire alarm was not sounded quickly and the firefighters had a hard time dousing the flames because of the elevated train across the street. The police and Tenement House Department were also held responsible.

The New York Times reported that nineteen people died in the fire, including one family that was completely wiped out. Twenty people were severely injured and most of the dead were children.

One of those who died was ten-year-old Haia Moskowitz (originally Moscovici), who was also known

Consecration ...continued from page 1

entire area seven times. This is the psalm that is recited during a burial, as the coffin is carried to the grave. For you [said], "The Lord is my refuge"; the Most High you made your dwelling.

As each tour of the cemetery is completed, the participants pledge to contribute a sum to a specific form of charitable purpose. First, funds are designated to the poor, then to Torah study and Jewish education. At the end of the third procession, charity is pledged



Consecration of South Florida Jewish Cemetery

as Ida. She had been in the United States for only three months and ten days, having arrived from Rumania with her parents, Hers and Brana, and two brothers, Ben and Moise. Because the Moskowitzs were indigent, they appealed to *Chebra Agudas Achim Shel Emeth* to bury their child as have so many people before and since.



Ida Moskowitz's grave in Silver Lake Cemetery

Hebrew Free Burial Association still bears the name under which it was founded in 1888, just as waves of Jewish immigrants were arriving in New York from Eastern Europe.

Do you have a story to share about how HFBA helped your family? Please send it to us at stories@hebrewfreeburial.org

to enable impoverished brides to marry. Charity after the last four rotations are given to clothe the destitute, create sanctuaries for prayer, redeem captives and to visit the sick. These seven causes represent the range of obligations for which the community is responsible.

Once consecrated, the cemetery's holiness proscribes behavior. Only Jews may be buried within its borders and only Jews may officiate in burial ceremonies. *Cohanim*, Jews descended from Aaron the Priest, are biblically prohibited from entering a cemetery area where there are graves. We don't eat or drink in the presence of the graves; being in a cemetery requires respectful decorum. We don't visit cemeteries on the Sabbath or on Jewish holidays. Cemetery funds and the grounds are overseen by representatives of the community or by burial societies.

In 1892, Silver Lake Cemetery was the first burial grounds consecrated by the Hebrew Free Burial Association. By 1909, a second cemetery – Mount Richmond Cemetery – was needed and duly dedicated. For 127 years, HFBA has fulfilled the sacred obligations that come with these *batei olam*, homes for eternity.

Margy-Ruth Davis

HFBA Helps



David called the HFBA office about his mother, **Trudy**, 90 years old, who was on home hospice and was expected to die imminently. Trudy's only income was from Social Security. She had no savings and was on Medicaid. David and his sister Karen were unable to contribute to the cost of the funeral and burial as Karen had been unemployed for several years and David worked as a contractor, job to job. When their mother died, they were so short of funds that a friend gave them money for a cab to Mount Richmond Cemetery. At the funeral, Karen recalled that her mother wrote poetry in English and Yiddish. A cousin, Samuel, remembered Trudy as the person who had given him the support and encouragement that he had not received from his parents. The HFBA volunteer *minyán* was in attendance.

Ninety-year-old identical twins, **Lyudmila** and **Zinaida**, were found dead in their apartment by their landlord. Living in the apartment at the time was Zinaida's daughter, Sofia, who had not reported the deaths. While the remains of the decedents were removed, Sofia was taken to the psychiatric unit of a local hospital. After Sofia was declared mentally incompetent and unable to provide authorization for the burial, the Public Administrator investigated and released the bodies. HFBA buried the sisters, side by side, as the volunteer *minyán* responded to the rabbi's recitation of *kaddish*.

The e-mail in the HFBA general mailbox read, "My sister **Denise** passed away about six weeks ago (at age 71) and her body is being held in central Florida. The county has not buried or cremated her yet. She left no will or money for a burial and I was wondering if your organization can help me get her buried. I know that she wanted to be cremated but I want her to have a Jewish burial. Unfortunately, I do not have money to bury her with." A member of the HFBA staff quickly replied to Joan, the surviving sister who had been estranged from Denise for 40 years. Joan preferred a burial in Florida but the cost was much higher than it would have been to send the remains to New York for burial in Mount Richmond Cemetery. Besides the challenge of the funding, the remains had been held at the county crematory for six weeks and had to be released. Fortunately, we reached out before the cremation was done, Joan signed the

paperwork and a funeral home was contracted to send the body to New York. Joan made it very clear that besides not contributing to her sister's burial costs, she had no intention or interest in putting up a monument on Denise's grave. A stone will be provided through our Leave Your Mark program.

Liat called HFBA after she found her estranged husband dead in his apartment. **Feliks**, 44 years old and a heavy smoker and alcoholic, had had a heart attack. He worked odd jobs, most recently as a short order cook and Liat had no consistent employment. There were no funds for the burial which was attended by a few friends, the volunteer *minyán*, Liat and their young daughter. Sadly, the girl's birthday is the same date as her father's death.

Names and details have been changed to protect confidentiality.

Leave Your Mark

On September 16th, HFBA's 2019 order of 207 grave markers arrived at Mount Richmond Cemetery from Georgia. The HFBA team checked each stone for accuracy and damage and organized the stones according to the cemetery section in which they will be placed.

Many thanks to Dana Riess, HFBA's assistant office manager who is in charge of the Leave Your Mark program, Andrew Parver, HFBA's Director of Operations, volunteer Sally Raudon, Mount Richmond Cemetery staff members Rabbi Shmuel Plafker and Lena Samofal, and Ira Epstein and his efficient workers from Sanford Epstein, Inc.

Most important, thank you, to our donors whose contributions ensure that every grave in our cemetery is marked with the name of he or she who lies beneath.



Delivery of HFBA monuments

РУССКИЙ ДАЙДЖЕСТ

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

Дом для вечности: освящение еврейского кладбища

Чтобы еврейское кладбище стало особым торжественным местом, оно должно быть освящено. Проводится обряд выделения некоего места исключительно в качестве будущего кладбища. Группа из не менее чем десяти мужчин обходит территорию семь раз, отмечая её границы. Участники обряда читают псалмы, связывающие землю и духовную цель будущего кладбища, и объявляют намерение сделать пожертвования.

После освящения кладбища вступают в силу особые правила поведения на нём. Так, на кладбище могут быть погребены только евреи, и только евреи имеют право проводить погребальный обряд. Коэны – евреи, ведущие свою родословную от первосвященника Аарона, брата Моше, не могут посещать те участки кладбища, где находятся могилы. Рядом с могилами запрещено есть или пить, а также нельзя посещать кладбище в шабат и еврейские праздники.

В 1892 году кладбище Сильвер Лейк стало первым кладбищем, освященным Еврейским Благотворительным Похоронным Бюро (HFBA). К 1909 году понадобилось и было должным образом освящено ещё одно кладбище – Маунт Ричмонд. И вот уже в течение 127 лет HFBA выполняет священные обязанности, связанные с этими домами для вечности (батей олам на иврите)

HFBA помогает

Девяностолетние сёстры-близнецы Людмила* и Зинаида* были обнаружены мёртвыми в своей квартире их лендлордом. С ними в это время проживала София, дочь Людмилы, но она не сообщила об их смерти. Пока останки сестёр выносили из квартиры, Софию поместили в психиатрическое отделение местного госпиталя, где она была признана недееспособной. Поскольку София не могла дать разрешение на похороны сестёр, общественный администратор Нью-Йорка провёл необходимое расследование и велел передать останки Еврейскому Благотворительному Похоронному Бюро (HFBA). Сёстры были погребены рядом друг с другом в присутствии нашего миньяна из добровольцев и раввина, прочитавшего кадиш.

* имена изменены

Нам пишут

...Я хотел бы поблагодарить вас за помощь со всеми деталями, касающимися похорон моего отца. Пожалуйста, передайте мою особую благодарность г-ну Плафкеру за памятную церемонию и, разумеется, добровольцам, пришедшим в большом количестве чтобы обеспечить миньян. Со своей стороны я обязуюсь выслать пожертвование в память о моём отце. С. А.

Новости кладбища Маунт Ричмонд

В отличие от других кладбищ, могилы на кладбище Маунт Ричмонд в основном образуют сплошные ряды, с отдельными рядами для мужчин и женщин и с секциями для тех, кто хочет быть похоронен рядом с супругом или супругой. Каждые два-три года возникает нужда в новых участках, по мере того как заполняются старые. Эти участки создаются прорывтием траншей в 166 футов в длину и 2 ½ фута в ширину. Траншеи намечают ряды новых могил и служат основанием для могильных отметок. Это позволяет пронумеровать и отметить каждую могилу. Осенью 2019 года мы создали две новые секции, 92 и 93, которые вместят 658 новых могил.

Еврейское погребение – это ускоренное погребение

Сара Г* скончалась 12-го октября. Через пять дней её двоюродная сестра Рут связалась с HFBA, но не была готова дать разрешение на похороны, тем самым оставив проблему нерешённой. В конце концов HFBA смогло забрать тело Сары из морга, хотя и без чёткого разрешения на похороны, выданного кем-либо из родственников. Ещё через несколько дней, 24-го октября, Рут дала наконец формальное разрешение на похороны сестры. HFBA немедленно связалось с городским Департаментом Здравоохранения и мобилизовало похоронную команду для проведения обряда тахара (обмывание тела) в нашем специальном помещении при кладбище. Сару похоронили в 12:30, то есть всего через два с половиной часа после получения разрешения.

Хотя каждое проводимое HFBA погребение уникально, всё же есть особые случаи, которые намного сложнее остальных. Но по мере возможности мы следуем еврейским законам и традициям, проводя каждое погребение максимально быстро.

New Ways to Support Hebrew Free Burial Association

Your support makes it possible for hundreds of indigent Jews in our community to be buried each year.

To help you make your own wishes known – and to provide you with some smart giving choices – HFBA is partnering with FreeWill to give you three new planning and philanthropic tools.

YOUR LEGACY

Including a gift in your will can help ensure that every Jewish person receives a dignified, traditional Jewish funeral for generations to come. You can now create your will at no cost and build your legacy at Hebrew Free Burial Association by visiting www.hebrewfreeburial.org/freewill. This resource is free to you whether or not you choose to include Hebrew Free Burial Association, and we're happy to help you prepare for your future no matter what you choose to do.

DO YOU HAVE A TRADITIONAL IRA?


If you do, and you are 70 ½ years old, you are eligible to make a tax-free donation called a Qualified Charitable

Distribution (QCD) from your IRA directly to Hebrew Free Burial Association. According to the law, when you turn 70 ½, you must take money out of your IRA (your Required Minimum Distribution, RMD), otherwise you will incur a hefty tax penalty. If you do withdraw that money, it will still be taxed as income, incurring up to 37% at the federal level plus applicable state and local taxes. But if you choose to donate directly from your IRA, the gift is always tax free, regardless of whether or not you itemize deductions on your tax return. **Visit www.hebrewfreeburial.org/QCD to calculate how much you want to take out of your IRA this year, and how that amount can be turned into a tax-free gift.**

GIFTS OF STOCK

If you have appreciated stocks, they represent your best opportunity for giving back. When you cash out your stocks, you are required to pay capital gains tax. However, if you transfer the stock directly, you will be able to deduct the full amount of your stock, completely avoiding capital gains tax. **Visit www.hebrewfreeburial.org/stocks to transfer your stocks today.**

Thank You to
The Jewish Center
 (New York, NY)



Andrew Parver, HFBA's Director of Operations, speaks to volunteers from The Jewish Center who helped clear seasonal debris at Mount Richmond Cemetery

Traditional Jewish Law: **Burying Soon After Death**

HFBA follows the *halacha* (Jewish law) of not delaying a burial and burying as soon after death as possible.

Sarah G. died on October 12. Her cousin Ruth contacted HFBA five days later but was hesitant to authorize the burial, leaving the situation unresolved. Although HFBA was allowed to pick up Sarah's body from the morgue, we still did not have clear permission to bury her.

On October 24, Ruth finally consented to the burial. HFBA instantly filed the necessary paperwork with the NYC Health Department and mobilized the *chevra kadisha* to perform the *tahara* in our on-site facility. Sarah's burial took place at 12:30 pm, less than 2 ½ hours after consent was granted.

Every case HFBA handles is unique but some are more complicated than others. Whenever feasible, we follow Jewish law and tradition by performing the burial as quickly as possible.

Names and details have been changed to protect confidentiality.



Mount Richmond Cemetery

UPDATE

Unlike at other cemeteries, burials at Mount Richmond are generally done in continuous rows, with separate rows for men and women, and "couples sections" for those who wish to be buried next to a spouse.

Every two or three years, new sections need to be developed as older ones are filled. This is done by pouring 2 ½ -foot by 166-foot foundation trenches which create the rows of graves and provide a stable foundation for the grave markers. On each, the graves are numbered and marked. This fall we created sections 92 and 93 which will provide 658 graves.

**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.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

| | |
|-------------------|---------------------------|
| Herbert Block | Yitzhak Pastreich |
| Richard Fishman | Daniel Pilarski |
| Charles Greinsky | Shari Safra |
| David Knapp | Minna Monte Seitelman |
| Paul Lowenthal | Rabbi Dr. Henry Sheinkopf |
| Paul H. Nagelberg | Norman Weisman |
| Deborah Newborn | |

| | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|
| RABBINIC ADVISOR | CEMETERY CHAPLAIN |
| Rabbi Elchonon Zohn | Rabbi Shmuel Plafker |

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Amy Koplow

CHESED IS PUBLISHED BY THE HEBREW FREE BURIAL ASSOCIATION

Renée Septimus, *Editor* Adam Rawson, *Designer*
Printed by Spencer and Worth, Ltd.

125 Maiden Lane, Unit 5B
New York, NY 10038

Phone: (212) 239-1662

Fax: (212) 239-1981

info@hebrewfreeburial.org

www.hebrewfreeburial.org

www.facebook.com/hebrewfreeburial



In the Mail

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

Enclosed please find a donation in honor of Rabbi Plafker for the New Year. He has taken care of my family for many, many years. Please be good enough to tell him.

*Thank you kindly,
K.L*

Enclosed please find a donation towards the costs of my late, life-long friend, G.J.'s final resting place. In the future I will have other contributions to HFBA which is doing such an important job!

*Thanks for everything!
C.V.*

I wanted to thank you for your assistance with all particulars regarding my father's funeral arrangements. Please extend my gratitude to Rabbi Plafker for a memorable ceremony and, of course, to the volunteers for coming out in strong numbers to be sure we had a minyan. I pledge to send a donation in memory of my father.

C.A.

Chesed Shel Emet How You Can Help

Contact us for more information,
212-239-1662 or
info@hebrewfreeburial.org

