

Four women: *Chesed shel emet* changed who they are

“I was told I have what it takes to do this mitzvah. It meant the world to me.”

By day they traverse the length and breadth of Staten Island as they respond to the demands of family and work life. By night they transform themselves into a “band of sisters” who perform *chesed shel emet* — an act of lovingkindness — for complete strangers who died alone, impoverished or estranged. They are the women of HFBA’s *chevra kadisha*, ready at a moment’s notice to ritually prepare bodies for Jewish burial.

Four of these “sisters” spoke with *Chesed* about the bond that has grown up among them.

How we embraced *chesed shel emet*

“Some of my favorite people on this planet are the ones I work with on a *tahara*,” says Shoshana, referring to the purification procedure the women perform on the deceased.

Shoshana, Esther, Debra and Golda* are among forty-four women who have signed on to the HFBA women’s *chevra kadisha*. The four express a feeling of togetherness that transcends synagogue affiliation, career path and daily routine.

“I got into this *mitzvah* because of my mother,” Shoshana says. “In Siberia, where she and her mother survived the Holocaust, she told me her mother showed respect for murder victims by covering them with snow. I strive to show that kind of respect for the women we serve.”

“I was always intrigued with *chevra kadishas* and

taharas,” says Esther, who serves as the group’s “*rosh*,” or head. “My husband’s grandmother was on a *chevra*. So was his uncle. When I joined the HFBA *chevra*, I had to overcome some initial discomfort. But once my instruction in washing and shrouding the body began, I knew: you either have it in you to do this or you don’t. I had it in me.”

We got past the fear

“On my way home from a *tahara*, one of my teammates said, ‘Shoshana, you have it. This is something you should be doing.’ I remember walking into my house, hysterical. My daughter asked, ‘Ma, why are you crying?’ I said, ‘I was told I have what it takes to do this *mitzvah*.’ It meant the world to me.”

“I didn’t become observant until I was an adult, and I didn’t know anything about *taharas*,” Debra says. “I actually accompanied my daughter to a meeting of the HFBA *chevra*. The day before she got married, a *chevra* member asked

me to come in. I said, ‘Give me ’til next week and I’ll be there.’ I went and I haven’t stopped.”

“I worked in an office with a man who would run out in the middle of the day to participate in the HFBA men’s *chevra kadisha*,” Golda says. “I was intrigued. In time, I joined the women’s *chevra* — and by my second *tahara*, I was washing and shrouding the *mes* (‘body’ in Yiddish). There’s no way to know what to do unless you do it and do it and do it.”



“Placing the deceased into the casket”

Courtesy of Karen Benioff Friedman • www.karenbenioffriedman.com

Four women *continued from page 1*

Many women's and men's *chevra kadishas* throughout New York City performed a modified version of *tahara* during the COVID pandemic.

"Word got out that our *chevra* was essentially doing full *taharas*, and other *chevras* called us for help," Golda says. "Pre-COVID, we might do fifteen *taharas* a month, but in April 2020, I believe we did fifty-two. I remember Esther saying secular people didn't even know we existed until we started going out seven times a day."

The impact of *chesed shel emet* on our lives

All four women also cite experiences with the *chevra kadisha* that have brought them closer to their ancestors or to their religious commitments.

"Because of HFBA's mission, we have seen what many *chevras* never see," Esther says. "I did a *tahara* one morning for a Russian woman who died at a nursing home. She had choked on a piece of meat and asphyxiated. The meat came with her. The experience might have been grisly except that the daughter and son came to mourn their mother. The depth of emotion

I felt, I had never experienced that before."

"I've been on *taharas* for young people and Holocaust survivors," Debra says. "Whenever I get home from a *tahara*, I ask myself, 'Did we do everything we possibly could?' It's so important to get this right."

Golda shares a similar feeling. "After a *tahara*, I would dream about the *mes*," she says. "I would wonder, 'Who was their family?' One time the *mes* before me was another *chevra* member. I had helped train her. This was the most difficult *tahara* I have done so far."

Golda concedes that most people have to get past the fear factor. "Doing this work at first *is* scary," she says. "Let yourself feel the fear — and soon your mission outshines your fear."

Shoshana, and her teammates, believe that participating in the HFBA women's *chevra kadisha* builds a bridge between our temporal world and whatever comes next, where, as Shoshana says, "the *neshamas* (souls) of our deceased are going."

"When the *nifteret* I bathed and dressed arrives in the 'next world,' I want her to tell my parents, 'Your Shoshana took care of me. You can be proud of her.'" ♦

New York-area students mix heart and elbow grease in *chesed* day projects



The **Ma'ayanot** Class of '23 shows a certificate indicating its charitable contribution to HFBA. The donation was the result of a day-long teach-in about poverty in America.



Students from the **Stella K. Abraham School for Girls** in Hewlett, NY participated in an early autumn clean-up at Mount Richmond Cemetery.



Nearly 60 eighth-graders from the **Rosenbaum Yeshiva of North Jersey** disposed of leaves and fallen branches on a November 2022 *chesed* day at Mount Richmond Cemetery.

On November 21, 2022, eleventh and twelfth graders at **Central**



High School for Girls honored those buried by HFBA's Mount Richmond Cemetery.



Sixth- and seventh-grade students at **ASHAR** set aside November 29, 2022 to perform an act of *chesed* at Mount Richmond Cemetery. In addition to raking leaves, the students joined a *minyán* for a family observing a *yahrzeit*.

HFBA Helps

Names, details and images have been anonymized to preserve confidentiality



Shelley E., 64, a native New Yorker and former teaching assistant, passed away last year at her home in North Carolina. Her son, Alan, arranged for her burial in Mount Richmond Cemetery alongside her husband, whom we buried at age 38 in 1990. This year we received a call from Leo, another one of Shelley's four children, whom she raised as a single parent. Leo told us his brother Alan — who worked as a bread delivery driver — had various health issues and suffered a heart attack shortly after his mother died. Now Alan is buried in Mount Richmond as well.

Henry K., 70, suffered from cancer and ultimately died from cardiac arrest at a rehab-nursing home. HFBA had buried Henry's aunt in 2012 and, at that time, reserved graves for him, his brother Martin and his mother. Henry and Martin were cognitively impaired and lived with their mother. While she was alive, she was their sole caretaker, and arranged for the family to receive assistance from SNAP/Catholic Charities/Department for the Aging. When Henry got cancer, she applied for Medicaid so he could have home-care. After her death (and burial at Mount Richmond Cemetery), her

sons were moved into an assisted living facility. HFBA assured Martin's social worker that a grave had been reserved for him. The social worker promised to let us know when Martin needs our services.

Madeline R., 64, was a psychotherapist working with trauma survivors when she died as a result of a fire in her Queens apartment. HFBA learned about Madeline through her friend Kwame, who contacted the Queens Public Administrator to say Madeline was Jewish and hoped she could receive a traditional Jewish burial. It took several months for the PA to release Madeline to HFBA, which indeed provided her with a dignified burial honoring her and her life's work. Kwame also put us in touch with Madeline's ex-husband, who told us, "Madeline did the best she could with the hand she'd been dealt. I hope the next part of her journey is as good as it can be for her."

Wayne T., 68, had a hard life. He entered the foster care system at age five and suffered from cerebral palsy his whole life. His "foster cousin" Brenda had stayed in touch with Wayne, but she could tell us nothing about the first five years of his life. As an adult, Wayne had lived in several nursing homes as well as a state-funded adult home. Wayne's last care facility reported that he had just a few hundred dollars to his name. Three people attended his burial in February: two hospital volunteers and a care facility worker (who is also one of HFBA's *chevra kadisha* volunteers).

HFBA introduces itself to a new generation of leaders

More than 100 people gathered at a Manhattan cocktail reception on Wednesday, November 16, 2022 to get acquainted with HFBA and its mission to give every Jew, regardless of financial status or religious affiliation, a traditional Jewish burial.

The event, held at the Moise Safra Center on East 82nd Street, featured a welcome by Eric Goldstein, CEO, UJA-Federation of New York, in which he explored HFBA's long-time importance to the New York Jewish community. He spoke movingly about his personal experience with HFBA as well.

The evening's roster also included a conversation between Dan Senor, co-author of *Start-Up Nation: The Story of Israel's Economic Miracle*, and Daniel Bonner, executive director of the Paul E. Singer Foundation, which brings young people and business leaders to Israel to learn about the country's tech innovation.



From left: Daniel Bonner and Dan Senor

"Our chief goal was to inform a new generation of Jewish leaders about the role they can play in one of New York's oldest Jewish mutual aid organizations," says Amy Koplou, HFBA executive director.

While the evening was not an official fundraising event, many attendees were touched by the stories of economic hardship, illness and cultural disorientation in HFBA's caseload and donated generously. ♦

Четыре женщины: «Заповедь милосердия к усопшим изменила нас самих»

Днём эти женщины ездят по всему Стейтен Айленду, работая и заботясь о своих семьях. Ночью же они преображаются в «се-стринский отряд», исполняя заповедь милосердия к усопшим – заповедь доброты – по отношению к чужим для них людям, зачастую бедным и оторванным от родственников. Эти женщины – часть женского «святого отряда» (хевра кадиша) Еврейского Благотворительного Похоронного Бюро (HFBA). Они готовы в любое время провести ритуал подготовки тела усопшего к еврейскому погребению.

Шошана, Эстер, Таль и Голда (имена изменены) – часть группы из 44 женщин, подписавших обязательство регулярно проводить ритуальное омовение тел усопших (обряд тахара). Эти четыре женщины, имеющие столь разный жизненный опыт, часто работают вместе.

Шошана: «Я стала выполнять эту мицву благодаря моей матери. В Сибири, где она с моей бабушкой оказались, избежав Холокоста, мать рассказывала, как бабушка всегда оказывала уважение жертвам убийств, укрывая их снегом. И я стремлюсь поступать как моя бабушка делала по отношению к незнакомым умершим, брошенным у обочины дороги»

«Меня всегда привлекала работа «святых отрядов» и сам процесс омовения» - говорит Эстер, которая возглавляет всю группу в HFBA. «Бабушка моего мужа и мой дядя были в своё время в «отряде». Начав работать в HFBA, я поначалу испытывала некоторый дискомфорт, но когда меня обучили как правильно делать омовение и как одевать тело для погребения, я поняла, что справлюсь».

«Ты это делаешь, и ещё, и затем ещё раз»

«Как-то по пути домой после очередного тахара, одна из подруг мне говорит, Шошана, у тебя уже получается, ты должна продолжать. Я помню, как вошла к себе домой в слезах, и моя дочка спросила, «Мам, почему ты плачешь?» и я ответила, что смогу всё-таки выполнять эту мицву. Это очень много для меня значило и тогда и теперь».

«Я не была соблюдающей до тех пор, пока не стала уже взрослой, и ничего не знала о ритуальных омовениях», рассказывает Таль. «Я провожала подростковую дочь в HFBA на встречу «святого отряда». А за день до свадьбы дочери одна из членов «отряда» предложила мне присоединиться к ним. Я пообещала прийти на следующей неделе, и вот делаю это с тех пор не останавливаясь».

«Работала я в офисе с человеком, который вдруг в середине рабочего дня уходил, чтобы присоединиться к мужскому «погребальному братству» HFBA. Мне стало любопытно, и через какое-то время я вступила в женский «отряд». И уже во время второй церемонии тахара я сама участвовала в омовении и заворачивании тела. Чтобы понять, что нужно делать, надо повторять ещё и ещё».

Воздействие мицвы милосердия к усопшим на наши жизни

Все четыре женщины утверждают, что работая в женском «святом отряде», они почувствовали более тесную связь со своими предками и стали по-новому относиться к заповедям.

Послушаем Эстер: «Более чем когда-либо я ощущаю, что этот наш мир – переходящий, и что мир грядущий обладает тем постоянством, к которому мы должны стремиться».

Таль: «Как бы поздно я ни пришла домой после проведения тахара, я задаюсь вопросом: а всё ли мы сделали, что могли? Ведь очень важно провести обряд по всем правилам».

Голда признаёт, что большинству членов хевра кадиша приходится вначале преодолеть чувство страха. «Не надо бояться испытывать страх. Через короткое время осознание важности нашей миссии просто отодвигает эту боязнь на задний план».

Шошана соглашается с подругами, говоря, что участие в женском «отряде» HFBA «протягивает мост от нашего мира к тому, что настанет после». Она добавляет: «Когда усопшая, которую я омыла и одела к погребению, появляется в мире грядущем, я хотела бы, чтобы она сказала моим родителям: «Ваша Шошана обо мне позаботилась. Вы можете гордиться ею».

Печальные истории

Уэйн Т., 68-и лет, прожил нелёгкую жизнь. Он всю жизнь страдал от церебрального паралича и с пяти лет жил в приёмных семьях. Его приёмная двоюродная «сестра» поддерживала связь с Уэйном, но она ничего не могла рассказать нам о первых пяти годах его жизни. Став взрослым, Уэйн жил в нескольких центрах по уходу. Его последний дом престарелых сообщил HFBA, что у Уэйна на счету осталось только несколько сотен долларов. На его похоронах в прошедшем феврале присутствовали трое: два волонтера из госпиталя и сотрудник дома престарелых (который также состоит в хевра кадиша HFBA).

Дарительница благодарит HFBA за достойные похороны её друга

Уважаемая г-жа Коплоу,

Мой давний друг Джей был найден в своей постели, в запертой квартире, после того как общий знакомый позвонил в полицию и попросил проверить, что с Джейм. Мы узнали, что тело Джея будет передано общественному администратору Бруклина. Это подразумевало, что его похоронят без всякой церемонии на кладбище для городских бедняков. Тогда я связалась с Вашим офисом, поскольку Джей был евреем.

Мы очень благодарны за помощь, оказанную нам Еврейским Благотворительным Похоронным Бюро при разбирательстве с общественным администратором Бруклина, офис которого передал тело Джея для похорон спустя целых два мучительных месяца.

Нам очень понравилась обстановка на кладбище Маунт Ричмонд, и мы глубоко благодарны за торжественный обряд похорон, проведённый вашим раввином, г-ном Плафкером. Мы покидали кладбище взволнованными, зная что Джей был похоронен в точности так, как он бы этого желал.

Роберта Гробель Интрейтер

Счастливого Песаха: как если бы мы сами вышли из египетского рабства

Пасхальная Агада говорит: «В каждом поколении мы обязаны видеть себя как если бы мы сами вышли из Египта».

Вскоре, когда мы будем планировать то, как провести пасхальный седер, давайте помнить о евреях, которым меньше повезло в жизни, чем нам.

От всех сотрудников HFBA, желаем вам кошерного и радостного праздника Песаха!



In the Mail

Letters have been edited for purposes of clarity and confidentiality

Dear Ms. Koplou:

I couldn't let another season pass without thanking you and HFBA for the kindness of your mission and the extremely helpful way your staff — Polina, Yelena and Rabbi Plafker — handled the burial of my dear friend Jay Winer.

Jay was found in his bed in his locked apartment last July after a mutual friend called the NYPD to do a wellness check. Jay had no immediate family but he had close friends who loved him for his brilliant mind, creative spirit, sense of humor and, most of all, his kindness, patience and willingness to listen. He had numerous physical ailments, but he never complained, never asked for help. As these

issues worsened, his anxiety increased. He rarely left his apartment, although he remained in close contact with us by phone, email and texts.

We learned that Jay's remains and estate would be handled by the Kings County Public Administrator's office. Very likely, he would be buried without ceremony in the City's potter's field. Fortunately, I was advised to contact your office because Jay was Jewish.

We were very grateful for HFBA's help in dealing with the King's County PA's office, which took an excruciating two months to legally identify and release his body for burial. We were delighted with Mount Richmond Cemetery's bucolic setting, and we deeply appreciated the moving funeral service performed by Rabbi Plafker.

All who attended walked away with a feeling of exhilaration. We knew we had laid Jay to rest exactly as he would have wanted, in a place we were sure he would have chosen himself.

Roberta Grobel Intrater

QCD donations are a tax-free way to underwrite HFBA's work

Baby Boomers: Are you looking for a way to support Hebrew Free Burial Association while also relieving your tax burden?

Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCD) could be right for you, especially if you already have IRA investments.

A QCD lets people 70½ years old or older donate up to \$100,000 to one or more charities directly from a taxable IRA instead of taking their required minimum distributions.

So, if you make a donation to HFBA directly from your IRA by December 31, your contribution is not taxable. Once you make your contribution, you can't cancel it. When money leaves your IRA, it can't be put back in.

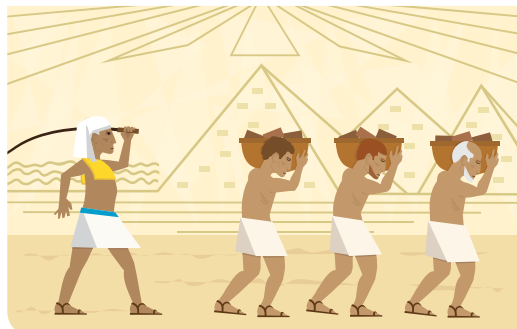
Note that if you rely on your IRA for your daily needs, a QCD might not be the way to go. But if you have other

funds for your living expenses — and you'd like some tax relief — a QCD could be right for you.

"When making a charitable donation, your starting point should be, 'I want to donate to HFBA, or some other charity,'" says Hillel Jaffe, vice president, The JH Group at Morgan Stanley. "Your donation should be driven by the desire to be charitable, not by a financial decision to mitigate your tax burden."

Jaffe advises that you speak with a financial or tax advisor

before choosing the QCD option. "With a QCD, you'll do social good while lessening your tax consequences," he says. "But understand that HFBA, or any other 501(c) (3) organization you cherish, will be grateful for your financial support, whether it comes in cash, appreciated stock or QCD."



Happy Passover

As though we were slaves in Egypt

The Passover *Haggadah* says, "In every generation, we are obligated to see ourselves as though we personally came out of Egypt."

As we make our *seder* plans, let's also remember to walk a mile in the shoes of Jews less fortunate than we are.

From all of us at HFBA, a kosher and joyous Passover to you!

We need your help now more than ever



Donate online at www.hebrewfreeburial.org/donate

Giving on our secure website is easy and efficient!

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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Save the date

HFBA's Annual Riverdale Community Breakfast

Join us as we honor

Susan Cohen Lisa and Danny Hirsch

Shira Silverman Dina and Andrew Kramer Phil Clarke

Sunday, May 7, 2023 • 9:30 a.m.

Hebrew Institute of Riverdale

3700 Henry Hudson Pkwy, Bronx, NY 10463

For more information, visit www.hebrewfreeburial.org/riverdale

Mount Richmond Cemetery hours of operation for Passover and Shavuot

Passover

Wednesday, April 5	9 AM - 1 PM Sharp
Thursday, April 6	CLOSED
Friday, April 7	CLOSED
Tuesday, April 11	9 AM - 1 PM Sharp
Wednesday, April 12	CLOSED
Thursday, April 13	CLOSED

Shavuot

Thursday, May 25	9 AM - 1 PM Sharp
Friday, May 26	CLOSED

Yizkor is recited on the last days of Pesach and Shavuot: Thursday, April 13 and Saturday, May 27.

Расписание работы кладбища Mt. Richmond на время Песаха и Шавуота – весна 2023

ПЕСАХ

Среда 5 апреля	9 AM - 1 PM
Четверг 6 апреля	ЗАКРЫТО
Пятница 7 апреля	ЗАКРЫТО
Вторник 11 апреля	9 AM - 1 PM
Среда 12 апреля	ЗАКРЫТО
Четверг 13 апреля	ЗАКРЫТО

ШАВУОТ

Четверг 25 мая	9 AM - 1 PM
Пятница 26 мая	ЗАКРЫТО

Поминальная молитва ИЗКОР читается в последний день Песаха – в четверг 13 апреля, и в последний день праздника Шавуот – в субботу 27 мая.