

Chesed



How working at HFBA brings me closer to a Jewish life

Lena Samofal went from hiding her Jewishness in the USSR to celebrating her life in the American Jewish community



As a young girl growing up in Kiev, Lena Samofal was aware of two Jewish holidays: Passover and Yom Kippur.

"I remember how my parents would sneak out of the city at night before Passover and come home with a box of matzah," Samofal told *Chesed*. "They undertook a dangerous activity and, if caught, they would have been arrested and imprisoned. My mother made me promise not to tell anybody about it."

The family's Jewishness had already sustained a horrific blow in World War II when the Nazis arrived in Kiev, arrested her rabbi-grandfather, and transported him to the killing fields of Babi Yar.

Even before she emigrated to New York with her husband and children in the early 1990s, Samofal, HFBA coordinator of cemetery operations, came to see that in the face of extreme danger, "Jewish people nonetheless were committed to celebrating their roots."

Today Samofal is grateful for the impact that HFBA has on her relationship to Judaism and the Jewish people.

"When I think that the Soviet Union forbade traditional Jewish

burials, and that all I can recall about my grandmother's death is her coffin, I realize how effective this totalitarian regime was in alienating me from myself and my people," Samofal said.

Living openly as a Jew has been America's greatest gift to Samofal and her family.

"Still clear in my memory is the ledger my teachers kept," Samofal said. "On the last page was a list of our names and our nationalities. Whenever the teacher left the room, the children would sneak a look at that page to check their grades. I was terrified they would see my nationality and find out I was Jewish."

Samofal was just as afraid to bring a schoolmate to her home.

"The last thing I wanted my friends to hear was my grandmother speaking Yiddish," Samofal said.

With the restrictions on her Jewish identity in the past, Samofal says that from day one at HFBA in 2011, she has been happy to "give back" to the Jewish community.

"Through my work, people tell me how they overcame the difficulties of just being Jewish, and how in spite of the hatred they encountered, they have passed on our traditions to the next generation, Samofal said. My story is just one of millions. This really humbles me." ■

Silver Lake Cemetery campaign asks donors to "say their names"

Underwriting opportunities exist for a wall of remembrance to ensure that no Jew is forgotten

HFBA is in the midst of an ongoing campaign to memorialize the thousands of 19th- and 20th-century Jewish immigrants laid to rest in Staten Island's Silver Lake Cemetery between 1892 and 1909.

When Silver Lake Cemetery began operations, the HFBA founders anticipated a need for 4,000 graves. Within 17 years, some 13,600 indigent Jews had been crowded into the cemetery. More than half the burials were infants and children.

To this day, 10,000 graves at Silver Lake Cemetery remain unmarked. You can help underwrite a wall of remembrance at HFBA's original burial grounds bearing all of the cemetery's names by choosing among these dedication opportunities:

\$36,000 to dedicate one panel (1080 names)

\$18,000 to dedicate one-half panel (540 names)

\$3,600 to dedicate one column (75 names)

\$1,800 to dedicate one-half column (36 names)



Donate via QR code or contact Amy Koplow at akoplow@hebrewfreeburial.org. We appreciate a gift of any amount.



Unmarked children's graves at Silver Lake Cemetery

In her own words: New HFBA board member Stefanie Ruch



After the worst of the COVID-19 pandemic, my good friend Shari Safra told me about an organization that does extraordinary work: the Hebrew Free Burial Association. I was surprised I'd never heard of it. When she told me that HFBA provides funeral and burial services for poor, often unaffiliated Jews, I signed up immediately.

As a luxury real estate agent with Douglas Elliman, I meet many people, and I'm constantly looking for ways to promote the causes I care about. In 2022, Shari and I co-hosted an HFBA awareness event at Manhattan's Moise Safra Center. We featured Dan Senor, author of *Start-Up Nation* and host of the "Call Me Back" podcast, in conversation with Daniel Bonner, chairman of the Paul E. Singer Foundation. It was a powerful evening. We introduced many in our community to HFBA's mission of *chesed shel emet* — true kindness shown to those who can never repay it.

Some people avoid conversations about death, but I believe it's essential to talk about completing life with dignity. As a new board member, I'm committed to getting the word out about this remarkable organization where the staff serves Jewish New Yorkers who, sadly, pass away without a connection to the Jewish community. I've been moved by the stories of HFBA navigating the city's systems to make sure that even the most isolated individuals receive a traditional Jewish burial.

We're planning for the future

It's no coincidence that a real estate professional would be deeply invested in the future of a historic Jewish cemetery. My background lets me be strategic, particularly when it comes to planning for future burial property. HFBA must remain financially strong and raise its visibility to attract support from philanthropic individuals and institutions. I'm energized by the opportunity to help HFBA prepare for this future.

My experience with not-for-profit organizations is extensive. I also serve on the board of the Abraham Joshua Heschel School and volunteer with UJA Federation — organizations that encompass every stage of the Jewish lifecycle. By joining HFBA's board, I'm making a statement about the significance of upholding our Jewish traditions through every chapter of life — including the final one.



HFBA mail bag

Dear HFBA,

Our sixth grade class at Temple Beth Abraham has been collecting *tzedakah* throughout this past school year. *Tzedakah*, the Jewish value of charitable giving, is one of the many ways we strive to make the world a better place. Our students brought in coins, bills, or spare change — all with the intention of donating to a cause they care about.

After thoughtful discussion, the 6th grade class has chosen Hebrew Free Burial Association as the recipient of their class *tzedakah*. We are proud to support the meaningful work you do and hope our donation will make a positive difference.

With gratitude,
The sixth grade class
Temple Beth Abraham
Tarrytown, NY

Dear HFBA,

When you get a call you were not expecting — that your loved one has passed — it's shocking. You want to do the right thing for them. The call to Hebrew Free Burial Association was a godsend. HFBA's professionalism and care made all the difference. When they provided a *minyán* of men, whom I consider *melachim* (angels), it just added to my comfort level that I did what I could according to *halacha* (Jewish law).

Thank you for all you do for the Jewish people. It's a great need, which you fill so well.

Gratefully,
J. Akselrod

Cousins make commitment to HFBA a family affair

Ruth Freedman: "My family has a bond with HFBA"



It's said that ancestors farther back than great-grandparents are lost to the fog of time. This was true in part for Ruth Freedman, the great-granddaughter of HFBA co-founder Barnett Freedman. His name and reputation as a Pale of Settlement immigrant who prospered in the new world was part of the family

lore. What was virtually unknown to the extended Freedman clan, however, was Barnett's contribution to the New York Jewish community — a gift that continues to this day.

"HFBA executive director Amy Koplow tracked me down ten years ago to my home in Ann Arbor, Michigan with the news that my great-grandfather was the lead founder of Hebrew Free Burial Association," Ms. Freedman told *Chesed*. "The news came as a big surprise. My brother, who began investigating our family genealogy, learned that Barnett had acquired some wealth and then lost most of it by the time he died in 1926 at 69. It wasn't until Amy spoke about HFBA in Ann Arbor that I became aware of Barnett's philanthropy."

Ms. Freedman, now retired from a long career as an administrator in the Michigan Neuroscience Institute in Ann Arbor, believes that her great-grandfather's philanthropy, as well as her mother's activist values, inspired her involvement in organizations devoted to peace and social justice.

A legacy that echoes down through the generations

"The fact that my great-grandfather founded an organization that keeps Jews from ending up in an anonymous potter's field grave fills me with pride," Ms. Freedman said. "It means that Barnett's goodness filters down to me and my family 99 years after his death."

Ms. Freedman has shared Barnett's legacy with her own daughter and grandsons.

"I am by no means a wealthy person, but helping out wherever we can is a value I talk freely and proudly about with my family," she said. "HFBA, or Agudath Achim Chesed Shel Emeth as it was known until 1965, was so dear to my great-grandfather that he was its president until the day he died."

Ms. Freedman credits HFBA's organizational resiliency with meeting the needs of every new generation.

"In addition to handling traditional burials for the marginal, unknown, or unclaimed, HFBA has introduced Jews of the Former Soviet Union emigration to Judaism's highest form of charity," Ms. Freedman said. "Just walk around HFBA's two cemeteries and you'll feel it: the spirit of Barnett Freedman's great mitzvah."

Abbe Raven: "A proclamation shed light on Barnett"

A proclamation acknowledging the death of Barnett Freedman, founder of Chebra Agudas Achim Chesed Shel Emeth, was secreted away for decades in Abbe Raven's childhood home. Calligraphed on sepia-colored parchment, it referred to Freedman as a man whose "counsel was always wise and whose friendship knew no class or bounds." Max Tarshes, the organization's president, signed his name after expressing his "deep personal bereavement in the loss of a noble soul."



When Raven's mother understood what the proclamation represented, she displayed it with pride.

"Even though my mother told me that Barnett was her grandfather, it took me several years to appreciate the impact he had on generations of Jews buried by the organization we've come to know as Hebrew Free Burial Association," Raven told *Chesed*.

The proclamation ultimately spurred Barnett's descendants to investigate where the Freedman and Raven family members were buried. After the death of Abbe Raven's father, her mother and husband set out to research cemeteries.

"My mother knew where her parents were buried," said Raven. "But she couldn't remember where her grandparents were buried." Enter Raven's cousin Ruth Freedman.

"Ruth got in touch with Amy Koplow at HFBA," Raven said. "We were stunned to learn that our great-grandfather was buried in a derelict cemetery. What a terrible irony."

Raven said when the HFBA executive director told her how many tens of thousands of Jews had been served by HFBA, "I knew our entire family would make this organization one of our philanthropic projects."

Descendants try to fathom their great-grandfather

No official biography of Barnett Freedman was ever undertaken during or after his life, and Raven regrets knowing so little about the great-grandfather she reveres.

"We think he ended up buying real estate in Manhattan or Brooklyn, even though a *New York Times* obituary said he'd once owned a clothing store," Raven says. "As time went on, though, Barnett lost most of his money. He and his family seem to have suffered a lot."

Raven also considers the possibility that her ancestor may have been inspired by the social activism of his day, and wasn't actually a wealthy man at all.

"Maybe Barnett was creative, and when the Silver Lake property became available, he and his co-founders figured out how to turn it into a cemetery."

This exceptional ancestor will always be a mystery — and a source of pride — for Raven, her son, sister, nieces, cousins, and husband. Meanwhile, Barnett Freedman's contribution to the New York Jewish community shines on. ■

РУССКИЙ ДАЙДЖЕСТ

Translated summaries of articles appearing in this issue of Chesed

«Как работа в HFBA приближает меня к еврейской жизни»

Ещё в детстве в Киеве, Елена Самофал, координатор работы принадлежащего HFBA кладбища, знала два еврейских праздника: Песах и Йом-Кипур. «Помню, как вечером перед праздником Песах мои родители потихоньку выезжали куда-то загород и возвращались с коробкой мацы», – рассказывает Лена газете Chesed. «Если бы их поймали, то могли арестовать и посадить в тюрьму. Мама взяла с меня страшную клятву, что я никому об этом не скажу».

Еврейская семья Самофал ещё во время Второй Мировой войны получила ужасный удар: когда нацисты заняли Киев, они арестовали деда Лены, который был раввином, и отправили вместе со всеми киевскими евреями на смерть, в Бабий Яр.

Но ещё до отъезда в Нью-Йорк с мужем и детьми в начале 1990-х, Самофал видела, что перед лицом крайней опасности «евреи были преданы своим традициям и праздникам.»

В наши дни Самофал благодарна Еврейской Благотворительной Похоронной Ассоциации (HFBA) за возможность ещё больше приблизиться к иудаизму и к еврейской общине.

«Когда я думаю о том, что в Советском Союзе были запрещены традиционные еврейские похороны, и что всё, что я могу вспомнить о смерти моей бабушки – это её гроб, я понимаю, насколько сильно тоталитарный режим отдалил меня от моих корней, от моего народа», – говорит Самофал. «Жить, не скрывая своё еврейство, – вот величайший дар Америки для меня самой и моей семьи». Поэтому с 2011 года, то есть с первого дня своей работы в HFBA году, Лена счастлива, что может поработать на благо еврейской общины.

«Работая в HFBA, я слышу истории евреев со всех концов света и из всех слоев общества», – говорит Самофал. «Люди рассказывают, как они терпели лишения просто из-за своего еврейства, и как, несмотря на ненависть, с которой они зачастую сталкивались, они сумели передать еврейские традиции следующему поколению. Моя история – лишь одна из миллионов подобных историй. Это помогает мне смотреть на жизнь с долей смирения».

HFBA помогает

Мы узнали о кончине 87-летнего Хершеля Т. только когда наши сотрудники увидели его имя в базе данных Национальной системы пропавших и неопознанных лиц (NamUs). У нас были данные Хершеля, поскольку HFBA организовала погребение его жены в 2022 году.

Как же случилось, что мы пропустили его кончину в 2024 году? Хершель и его жена жили в одном и том же доме престарелых. Когда жена Хершеля умерла, HFBA попросила дом престарелых подготовить документы, необходимые для того, чтобы похоронить Хершеля рядом с женой. Однако дом престарелых не сделал даже малости – не добавил контактную информацию HFBA в файл Хершеля. Поэтому тело Хершеля 15 месяцев находилось в городском морге.

Когда мы обнаружили имя Хершеля в базе данных NamUs, то сразу потребовали выдать тело для традиционного еврейского погребения. Раввин HFBA, г-н Сэмюэль Плафкер, и наш миньян добровольцев провели достойную, хоть и запоздалую погребальную службу и похороны Хершеля.

Филипп С. скончался в возрасте 60-и лет в начале этого года в штате Вашингтон. Мы узнали о его смерти, когда городской судмедэксперт нашел нашу визитную карточку среди личных вещей Филиппа и позвонил нам. Наши сотрудники объяснили, что мы хотели бы провести традиционные еврейские похороны Филиппа, взяв на себя транспортировку его тела в Нью-Йорк.

Неожиданно объявился двоюродный брат Филиппа и выразил намерение кремировать тело. Но через недолгое время HFBA узнала от судмедэксперта, что брат отказался от тела Филиппа. Мы сразу же организовали транспортировку останков Филиппа в Нью-Йорк. После того как наша хевра кадиша совершила обряд омовения (тахара), наш раввин г-н Плафкер провел погребальную службу на кладбище HFBA Маунт Ричмонд.

С Новым Годом – и да будете вы записаны в книгу жизни!

Мы все в ответе друг за друга

В еврейской молитве «Ки Ану Амеха» (Ибо мы – Твой народ), произносимой на Рош Хашана, мы говорим: «Потому что мы Твой народ, а Ты – Б-г наш». Это простое утверждение обобщает завет, который наш праотец Авраам заключил с Вс-вышним на заре возникновения еврейского народа. Но эта фраза выражает и нашу ответственность за исполнение завета.

В HFBA наша приверженность завету (брит на иврите), а также ощущение взаимной ответственности определяют цель нашей работы: соблюсти достоинство и оказать уважение, даже в его последний день на земле, каждому члену «народа Твоего».

Когда мы молимся о безопасном, мирном и способствующем самопостижению 5786 годе, мы благодарим всех вас за помощь HFBA в выполнении нашей миссии хесед шель эмэт (милосердие к усопшим) по отношению к тем евреям, которые в этом больше всего нуждаются. Пусть вся еврейская община HFBA удостоится сладкого и огромного по значимости нового года. ■



SCAN TO DONATE

WE ARE SO GRATEFUL FOR YOUR ONGOING HELP!

You can support HFBA's mission by making a donation at www.hebrewfreeburial.org/donate, or use our QR code.

HFBA HELPS

Herschel T., 87, became known to us only after our team saw his name in the National Missing and Unidentified Persons System (NamUs) database. Herschel was familiar to us because we buried his wife in 2022. How did HFBA lose track of him by 2024? Herschel and his wife lived in the same nursing home. When Herschel's wife died, HFBA asked the nursing home to do the paperwork necessary to have Herschel buried next to her. The nursing home, however, dropped the ball: it did not add HFBA's contact information to Herschel's file. Herschel died in April 2024. For the next 15 months, His body languished in the city morgue. When we saw his name on NamUs, we pushed for the immediate release and burial of his body. HFBA's Rabbi Shmuel Plafker and our volunteer *minyán* gave Herschel a dignified — and long overdue — funeral and burial.

Phillip S., 60, died in Spokane, Washington earlier this year. We met Phillip three years ago when we worked with him to bury his mother at Mount Richmond Cemetery. Shortly thereafter, Phillip left New York. We learned of his death after Spokane's medical examiner found our business card among Phillip's personal effects and called us. Our staff explained that we wanted to give Phillip a traditional Jewish burial and were prepared to pay for his body to be flown to New York. Suddenly, a cousin stepped forward and said he would have the body cremated. A month later, however, HFBA got word from the medical examiner that the cousin had abandoned Phillip's body. We arranged for Phillip's remains to be flown to New York. After our *chevra kadisha* performed the *tahara*, HFBA's Rabbi Plafker conducted the funeral service at Mount Richmond Cemetery. HFBA's volunteer *minyán* also attended.

Underwrite HFBA's work with a tax-free QCD donation

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

Qualified Charitable Distributions (QCD) could be right for you.

A QCD lets an individual 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.

If you make a donation to HFBA directly from your IRA by December 31, your contribution is not taxable. Note: when money leaves your IRA, it can't be put back in.

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 — consider going the QCD route. Talk to your financial or tax advisor.

HFBA is deeply grateful for your financial support, whether it comes in cash, appreciated stock, or QCD.

We are all responsible to each other

As the new year prayer reminds us, "We are Your heritage, and You are our destiny"

In *Ki Anu Amcha*, the Jewish prayer we recite on Rosh Hashana, we assert, "For we are Your people, and You are our G-d." This simple affirmation sums up the covenant our patriarch Abraham entered into with G-d at the beginning of our peoplehood. It also signifies the responsibilities that come along with it.

At HFBA, our commitment to the covenant, or *brit*, as well as our sense of mutual responsibility, guides our conviction that every member of "Your people" deserves dignity and respect, even to their last day on earth.

As we pray for a safe, peaceful, self-reflective 5786, we thank you for helping HFBA uphold its mission of *chesed shel emet* to our fellow Jews most in need of it. May our HFBA community have a sweet and meaningful new year.

FALL HOLIDAY CEMETERY SCHEDULE

It is traditional to visit the graves of our ancestors and loved ones before and during the High Holiday season.

Mount Richmond Cemetery

Кладбище Маунт-Ричмонд

ROSH HASHANA | РОШ АШАНА

Monday, September 22 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM
Понедельник, 22 сентября

Tuesday, September 23 CLOSED
Вторник, 23 сентября закрыто

Wednesday, September 24 CLOSED
Среда, 24 сентября закрыто

YOM KIPPUR | ЙОМ КИППУР

Wednesday, October 1 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM
Среда, 1 октября

Thursday, October 2 CLOSED
Четверг, 2 октября закрыто

SUKKOT | СУККОТ

Monday, October 6 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM
Понедельник, 6 октября

Tuesday, October 7 CLOSED
Вторник, 7 октября закрыто

Wednesday, October 8 CLOSED
Среда, 8 октября закрыто

SHEMINI ATZERET AND SIMCHAT TORAH

ШМИНИ АЦЕРЕТ И СИМХАТ ТОРА

Monday, October 13 9:00 AM - 1:00 PM
Понедельник, 13 октября

Tuesday, October 14 CLOSED
Вторник, 14 октября закрыто

Wednesday, October 15 CLOSED
Среда, 15 октября закрыто

Silver Lake Cemetery

Open Sunday, September 21 and 28 9:00 AM - 3:45 PM

Yizkor is recited Yom Kippur, October 2 and Shemini Atzeret, October 14.

Молитва Изкор читается на Йом Кипур 2 октября и в Шмини Ацерет 14 октября.

Mount Richmond Cemetery closes at 1:00 PM on Fridays throughout the year.

В течение года кладбище Маунт-Ричмонд закрывается по пятницам в 13:00.

Donate your appreciated stocks

If you've got appreciated assets and you're looking to provide immediate support to our community, you can maximize your impact while also maximizing your savings by donating to HFBA. When you cash out your stocks, you are required to pay capital gains tax. If you transfer the stock directly, however, you will be able to deduct the full amount of your stock, completely avoiding capital gains tax.

For more information visit: www.hebrewfreeburial.org/stocks

A lasting impact with HFBA

FREEWILL 

You can include Hebrew Free Burial Association in your estate plan at no cost to you. A legacy donation in your will helps HFBA in its mission to treat every Jew with the respect so integral to Jewish law and tradition, regardless of financial status. Get started by visiting www.hebrewfreeburial.org/freewill. If you've already included us in your will, let us know by visiting the same site. We are deeply grateful to you for your support.

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

PHONE (212) 239-1662 • FAX (212) 239-1981

EMAIL info@hebrewfreeburial.org

WEBSITE www.hebrewfreeburial.org

FACEBOOK www.facebook.com/hebrewfreeburial

