

THE STORCH EDITION

FROM THIS WORLD TO THE NEXT

*Amazing True Stories
about Jewish Burial and the Afterlife*

Edited by

ROSALLY SALTSMAN
& ROBIN MEYERSON

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Dedicated in loving memory of:

MENACHEM BEN AVRAHAM PESACH

MENACHEM HIRMES,

PAUL NADEN,

&

AVRAHAM BEN CHANUCH LEIB

ARNOLD ROTHMAN

zichronam livracha.

May their neshamos have an aliyah.



*By the Storch, Bregin, Gross, Hirmes, Kauffman,
Nieman, Spetner, and Rothman families*

DECEMBER 2016

*This book has been dedicated in part by an
anonymous donor:*



TO MY FATHER

MAY HE MERIT A REFUAH SHLEIMA
(COMPLETE RECOVERY)

AND LIVE AND BE WELL TILL 120

AND MAY HE THEN MERIT

A JEWISH BURIAL

IN ACCORDANCE WITH

JEWISH LAW AND TRADITION.

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May we merit long life and be reunited with all our loved ones when *Mashiach* (the Messiah) comes. May it be soon. *Amen!*

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FOREWORD



he book you are holding contains beautiful and inspiring true short stories written by men and women from all over the world. Some of these stories have already been published and others are being printed for the first time.

Rosally Saltsman and Robin Meyerson, the editors of this collection of short stories, have done a magnificent job putting these stories together to inspire readers with their profound, important and timeless message.

In our fast-paced and often frenetic world of work and technology, a world focused on materialism and uncomfortable with spirituality, we tend to remain unaware – or become so busy we forget – that besides our minds and bodies we possess a soul that is eternal.

In the story of creation we are told that when God fashioned Adam from the earth, “He blew into his nostrils a *Neshama* – a soul of life.” (Genesis 2:7) Since our soul emanated from Hashem it must be eternal, just as He is eternal. This knowledge helps us understand the significance of caring for and respecting the body even after the soul departs at the time of death. Even more compelling are the Jewish traditional beliefs that the soul remains with the body until it is returned to the earth from which it was created and that a vestige of that soul remains at its grave forever. This is why there is such great concern to maintain cemeteries respectfully, to visit graves, and, why a cemetery in Hebrew is called “*Beit HaChaim*” – home of the living.

These amazing stories reflect these beliefs in very real terms and should help us slow down and recognize the deeper meaning and miracles in our lives. We can see our souls existing in dimensions of time and space beyond this world. We can better understand the need to provide great respect to the body which contained the

God-given, eternal soul, and which served us throughout our lives as the vehicle with which to fulfill life's purpose and express our spirituality.

According to Jewish tradition, which has been followed for thousands of years, in order for the soul to find its perfect rest in The Next World, the body must be buried. No other form of disposal of the body, like cremation, is respectful enough, and permits the body to return naturally to its source, allowing the soul to return to God, which is its source. (See Ecclesiastes 12:7)

This book has incredible value, even if it will only help us focus on the transformative fact that we have an eternal soul, and what that implies about the way we choose to lead our lives. These stories allow us to glimpse beyond the veil of the afterlife as apparent miracles unfold, and the unbelievable happens again and again. We are shown that death is not the final end. Rather, it is a bridge between this life's journey and the journey to a spiritual and eternal world.

I am sure you will benefit greatly from this book as you gain knowledge as well as inspiration which will help guide you to choose meaningful and respectful traditional Jewish burial for your own body and soul and to likewise honor your loved ones as well.

I would like to thank Rosally Saltsman and Robin Meyerson, as well as all the contributors to this book, who volunteered their time to write, edit, fundraise, proofread, design, grant permission and bring this book to publication.

May you all merit God's blessing for all things good in This World and The Next,

Rabbi Elchonon Zohn
Founder and Director,
National Association of Chevra Kadisha – NASCK

As long as the soul is within me, I gratefully thank You Hashem, my God and the God of my forefathers, Master of all works, Lord of all souls. Blessed are You, Hashem, Who restores souls to dead bodies.

– Elokai Neshama, morning prayers.



As long as a person is unsuccessful in his purpose in this world, the Holy One, blessed be He, uproots him and replants him over and over again.

– Zohar I 186b



Why should we be startled by death? Life is a constant putting off of the mortal coil - coat, cuticle, flesh and bones, all old clothes.

– Henry David Thoreau



Behold, God does all these things with man two or three times, to bring back his soul from the grave, to bask in the light of the living.

– Job 33:29-30

INTRODUCTION

*A Buddhist saying reads,
“What the caterpillar perceives is the end,
to the butterfly is just the beginning.”
But what happens to the butterfly
if you destroy the cocoon?*

A BURNING ISSUE

Jews bereft of Jewish knowledge can hardly be faulted for not appreciating the concept of *kvod hameit*, the mandate to show “honor for the deceased,” a concept that underlies the Torah’s opposition to cremation, the very opposite of honor. They do not understand that the fact that human beings are created “in the image of God” entails, among much else, that human bodies whose souls have departed be consigned to the earth in as undisturbed a state as possible.

Many contemporary Jews, sadly, cannot even be expected to be familiar with the Jewish belief in the resurrection of the dead—even though it is one of Judaism’s most basic teachings, subtly evident in the Written Torah’s text and prominent in its Oral Tradition. The Mishnah assigns so much gravity to the concept that it places its deniers first among those who “forfeit their share in The World to Come” (*Sanhedrin*, 11:1).

What shouldn’t be surprising, though, to any Jew—or non-Jew, for that matter—is that our bodies are invaluable. After all, they

are the means by which we accomplish what we do on earth; if our lives are meaningful, then the flesh-and-blood vehicles that harbor our souls and wills in this life are the indispensable means of creating that meaning—most importantly, by performing God’s will. It is through employing our bodies to do good deeds and opposing their gravitations to sin that we achieve our very purposes.

And so, Jewish tradition teaches, even though we are to consign our bodies to the earth after death, there is a small “bone” (Hebrew: *etzem*) that is not destroyed when a body decays and from which a person, if he or she so merits, will be rejuvenated at some point in the future.

The idea that a person might be recreated from something tiny—something, even, that can survive for millennia—should not shock anyone familiar with contemporary science. Each of our cells contains a large and complex molecule, DNA that is essentially a blueprint of our bodies; theoretically, one of those molecules from even our long-buried remains holds the code needed to reproduce our physical selves. (Intriguingly, the Hebrew word *etzem* can mean not only “bone” but “essence.”)

To be sure, the Creator is capable of bringing even ashes to life again (as the ashes of the Nazis’ crematoria victims will demonstrate one day, may it come soon). But in Judaism, consciously reducing something to ashes is a declaration of utter abandon and nullification. Jews burn leaven and bread before Pesach, when the Torah insists no vestige of such material may be in their possession. The proper means of disposing of an idol is to pulverize or burn it.

And so, to actually choose to have one’s body incinerated is an act that, whether so intended or not, expresses denial of the fact that the body is a holy vessel, that it deserves respect, that it retains worth—indeed that it contains the seeds of future life.

All of us who understand those things need, today more than ever, to share them with those who, tragically, may not.

Rabbi Avi Shafran

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PART I

FROM THIS WORLD TO THE NEXT



THUS THE DUST
RETURNS TO THE
GROUND AS IT WAS,
AND THE SPIRIT
RETURNS TO GOD
WHO GAVE IT.

— Ecclesiastes 12:7

TRIP OF A LIFETIME

BY ADAM ELIYAHU BERKOWITZ



Life is a near-death experience.

– George Carlin

*No matter how bad things get, you've got to go on living,
even if it kills you.*

– Shalom Aleichem



Moshe was a pushy New Yorker with a raucous laugh, looking to be in his thirties but actually sneaking out the back door of his forties. His flashy clothes were out of place in a Breslov yeshiva where material concerns are downplayed. Moshe stood out with a multi-colored *tallit* (prayer shawl) and sparkly *kippa* (yarmulke), flashing his pinky ring and designer watch. He wore his salt-and-pepper hair long and curly, helped with liberal amounts of styling gel. Despite the tendency towards flashy appearances, it quickly became clear that Moshe was a soul brother. He had worked for years as a lighting technician for Broadway plays but before that, in the ever important “60s”, he had done all the lighting for every major rock concert put on. He told us stories and dropped names of people who were legends outside the Yeshiva walls. Moshe wasn’t bragging. He told the stories because we liked to hear them. We all liked him but a little voice kept nagging at me that something was wrong. He was comfortable in his flashy lifestyle but he was making some uncomfortable changes in order to live a Torah life. And he wasn’t making a big deal about it. He took on mitzvahs with a simplicity and willingness that made it all look way too

easy. Something didn't fit and it piqued my curiosity. Everyone else in the yeshiva was burdened with politeness but I was too old and had made too many changes in my life to stand on ceremony.

One day I was alone in the Yeshiva kitchen and Moshe walked in. He was fixing a coffee and I blurted it out. "Moshe, what's an old guy like you doing here?"

He flashed me his party-guy smile and shrugged off the dig. "You aren't so young yourself."

I shrugged right back. "You didn't have to pack your Gucci bags and come all the way out to this bunch of beat-up caravans. You could've found all the spirituality you could handle five minutes from your Greenwich Village brownstone. And you wouldn't have to scrape the mud off your designer hiking boots when you got there."

He looked down at his coffee, stirring slowly with a smile on his face, laughing at a private joke. He picked up the chipped mug and motioned for me to follow. As we sat at the table, I felt like it was about to be his turn to laugh at me.

"Let me tell you a story. I'm divorced for a bunch of years. I have a nice Jewish girlfriend now but I have a son and daughter from my non-Jewish ex. When I was doing rock concerts, I was on the road a lot so I didn't see too much of my kids. I got too tired to be a roadie so I started doing Broadway shows. Now that I'm settled down, I got to thinking it would be nice if my kids came around and visited more so I bought a bigger apartment and fixed up a room for them. I was up on a ladder painting the ceiling when I lost my balance and fell flat on my back. The back of my skull caved in. Go figure! Twenty years on stage scaffolds, in varying states of consciousness and I never got worse than a busted finger."

I had to close my mouth to start speaking. "But a crushed skull means dead."

Moshe smiled and nodded. "I watched it happen like something on TV filmed from the top of the ladder. I watched my girlfriend run out of the room and grab a bottle of seltzer. She poured the entire bottle on my face and I watched myself not move. I heard a sound like a freight train creeping up on me. It came from above

the room but pretty soon the sound was coming from everywhere. I kind of saw my girlfriend grab the phone but my perspective started rising and I went through the ceiling, leaving the apartment and my body behind. I felt my back arch back and I started flying upwards in a tight arc. I saw a point of white light that grew bigger as I flew towards it. That light was the most beautiful thing I'd ever seen and I wanted to just fly right into it. I guess that was when I knew I was dead. Just as I was about to fly through, I gave out the biggest scream and put on the brakes. I was being pulled into the light but I fought it with everything I had. A voice came out of the light and asked me why I was fighting. I screamed that I hadn't prepared my children to take this journey and they wouldn't be able to if I never taught them how. Suddenly, whatever was pulling me forward stopped and I went limp. The voice spoke as I drifted back. "Then you must go back." I went through the same things in reverse but when I came down through the ceiling, I saw the paramedics working on me. I watched as my body started convulsing violently but gradually the convulsions turned into slow wavelike motions. I was in the hospital for two months but I spent the next year learning how to walk and talk. As soon as I could hold a conversation, I called my ex-wife and said that I wanted the kids to convert to Judaism and I wanted them to come visit me every Shabbat. She agreed and every Friday night she brings them around, staying for candle lighting and Kiddush."

My mouth was still hanging open. I had heard stories like this before but never firsthand accounts. Despite my shock, my brain was buzzing a message, telling me that something didn't quite add up. And then it hit me. "Why would your non-Jewish ex-wife agree to all this?"

Moshe shrugged. "Her father was Jewish. She figures, it's part of who they are."

"So, I guess your Jewish ex-father-in-law was happy when his daughter married a nice Jewish boy."

Moshe got a sour look on his face and took a sip of his coffee as if washing away a bad taste. "He hated me. He thought it was a sin that I converted the kids."

I let that sink in for a minute. “You know,” I said, “when he dies, he will make the same journey you did. The same voice will ask him if he prepared his daughter for the journey; he’ll have to answer, ‘No.’ But you will be his answer. You fixed it for him one generation later with his grandchildren.”

Moshe nodded. “I guess I saw the light,” he said with a smile.

A DATE WITH DESTINY

BY DEVORAH STONE



Righteous souls may pass away, but they never die. Their energy remains alive and accessible to us in this world.

– Zohar

Burial in Israel is like burial under the altar of the Temple.

– Talmud, Ketubot 11a



It was a question without an answer. If there was an answer, it lay beyond the parameters of physical reality. There was no one on earth who could tell me if I made the right decisions. Even the most expert medical authorities held conflicting opinions. After all their expertise, they were still just human.

The thought that I may have erred in supervising my mother's medical care vexed a corner of my soul that I didn't know existed. Was I right in refusing some medical procedures? Was I right in consenting to others? The thought that I may have caused her harm, and Heaven forbid shortened her life, however inadvertently, challenged not only my conscience but my spiritual equilibrium.

How could it be that the woman who, during the course of her life exercised uncommon efforts in order not to harm another person, would be harmed herself in a way that seemed avoidable?

As a child I had witnessed her going way beyond the standard in not answering someone who deserved to be put in their place.

She refrained from responding, not because she didn't have an answer but because she didn't want to embarrass the person who was embarrassing her by pointing out their error. The wonder with which I witnessed this as a child, grew even more awesome from my vantage point as an adult. She went beyond her natural inclination to avoid hurting anyone in word or in deed.

How was she able to exercise such uncommon restraint? This fortitude stemmed from her strength not her weakness. Once she took apart a broken fan and wrapped up each piece before she put it in the garbage. She wanted to make certain that the garbage collector would not get hurt handling the broken pieces and that no one would take the unworkable fan out of the garbage and try to use it and mistakenly cause damage. She actually cut herself accidentally when taking the fan apart but it didn't matter. Her resolve not to hurt another remained an unwavering part of her personality. It just didn't seem right that a person who avoided hurting another in any way might be hurt "by accident".

The turmoil in one's soul is not easily assuaged by logical maneuvering however impeccable its presentation. There seemed to be no resolution; no consolation for my doubts. Had I made the right choices regarding my mother's medical care? Who could expect or believe that the answer to this unanswerable question was sitting in a drawer for decades. A message from Heaven, planted in writing years before the question even arose.

My Grandmother believed in the Resurrection of the Dead in the most literal terms. Tradition says that the people who will be buried outside of Israel will have to roll in underground tunnels to the land of Israel where they will rise. The people who are buried in Israel will not have to engage in this arduous underground trek but will arise immediately. Decades ago, burial in Israel for people who lived elsewhere was much less common than it is today. It took great expense and commitment to purchase burial places in Israel. That was the generation when a trip to Israel was a once-in-a-lifetime experience - certainly not a regular vacation destination.

My mother assured her mother that her wish to be buried in Israel would be granted. And so my father arranged for his mother-in-law's burial in Israel despite the fact that his ability to pay

for it presented a formidable challenge. He then purchased burial plots for himself and his wife as well. It took years for him to pay for these plots. Each plot that was reserved had a contract with the dates of each payment.

The *parsha* (Torah reading) of my grandmother's *yahrzeit* (anniversary of death) ended up being when the patriarch Jacob asked his son Joseph to bury him in Israel, not in Egypt.

When my mother was being sent to Israel for burial, decades after her plot had been reserved and paid for, we needed to locate her original burial contract. There were three different dates on her contract. The final payment date for her plot was the same as the date of her *yahrzeit*.

This date was clearly a message from Heaven that this was her Date with Destiny. It was an answer to my unanswerable question. It was the balm that quelled the inexorable torment that ravaged my conscience and my soul. This date told me that this was her destined time and it wasn't because of my decisions.

This precious, unwavering answer to my question, which could not be answered by any human, came from Heaven. The answer was written years before and remained a seemingly irrelevant date that was posted on a contract that stayed in a file cabinet - Heaven's irradiant message to me that was revealed when I needed it and could comprehend the message.

The latest, state-of-the-art, cutting-edge technology compares not one bit to the Heavenly wireless modem.

I even got it in writing!!!

NATURE'S ASHES

BY ROBIN MEYERSON

*Never shall I forget the little faces of the children
whose bodies turned into wreaths of smoke
beneath a silent blue sky.*

— Elie Wiesel

Just as I was beginning the journey of exploring my Jewish heritage, my father's sister Hazel died suddenly. I asked my dad if I should go to the funeral in Hawaii. He said no, that there wouldn't be one. Instead Aunt Hazel's ashes were dumped in the Pacific Ocean off an island in Hawaii. Cremation and ash scattering is a Hawaiian custom and my Aunt Hazel was enamored with Hawaiian culture knowing practically nothing of her own rich Jewish heritage.

At the time, I had no real knowledge of what a Jewish burial was like anyway, but I didn't know the details of a cremation either; yet, somehow, I was unsettled about the whole cremation thing. When my father also mentioned in passing that he might want a cremation, something just didn't sit right with me. I could not explain my uneasiness. It was only as I became aware of the Jewish view of cremation versus burial several years later that it became imperative for me to share the knowledge with my other relatives.

I have several fond memories of my mother's sister, Aunt Sandy. She lived in Northern California near the Redwood Forest. When I was a little girl, and would visit, she would take us exploring in the forest and point out all the huge trees and tiniest snails. Aunt Sandy had a PhD in some sort of "snail science" and knew a tre-

mendous amount about every single kind of snail in the world. She was super fun to be around. When I grew up and got married, she came to my wedding with plastic red noses to light up the party with her hysterical sense of humor.

As my family grew, Aunt Sandy developed a close bond with my children, taking them to science museums and bookstores. She was super scientific and intellectual yet she had had a hard life. As a child, she suffered. Despite having a wonderful marriage for nearly fifty years, she struggled for most of her life to raise a special needs child. She also knew practically nothing about Judaism.

Before she died, my aunt confided in me, sharing her plans for cremation. I was devastated as I could not imagine my jolly aunt burning in a crematorium. I looked online and searched for books on the subject, but could not really find anything that explained the choices in a comprehensive manner that would be personally meaningful to her. I found both religious and secular reasons for both choices online but they were all commercial in nature. Since it was all I had, I went ahead and shared this information, but it did not really speak to my aunt. I wrote her an email which she promised to read and think about. But she called me back one day to tell me that she didn't really believe in God, that she had considered my email, but that her papers were already made out and her mind was made up.

A few months later, she was diagnosed with cancer and, to my horror, Aunt Sandy was cremated and her ashes scattered across the California Redwood Forest.

Aunt Sandy, with her limited information, believed cremation was better for the environment – but it is not. One time I remember Aunt Sandy telling me she didn't think there was enough land in America for cemeteries. She thought it was a waste of land to bury her. But it didn't make any sense. "There is so much land," I responded!

Environmentalists worldwide prefer green burial - never embalming because of all the toxic chemicals that leak into the ground or using metal caskets (both forbidden in Jewish law). Discarding ashes even damages soil. Environmentalists report that cremation uses a tremendous amount of fossil fuel and pollutes the air and

water when mercury and other toxic chemicals are released as the body burns for several hours. Crematoriums are not situated near suburban neighborhoods for this very reason.

While I can do positive things in Aunt Sandy's memory now that she is gone and remember her favorably, I and several other close relatives are extremely saddened that we can never "visit" her place of rest - ever. And we have nightmares thinking of Aunt Sandy's body burning for several hours at 1800 degrees and her bones being pulverized and crushed. Her arms and body had cuddled and kissed us and made us laugh but instead of a gentle burial, she had a violent end. I later learned that ashes can be mixed up and there is no way to tell whose ashes are whose since there is no DNA in ashes. Ashes are just ashes and can be put in the garbage.

My kids loved their Great-Aunt Sandy very much. She made us all laugh. My kids asked me about visiting her soul at the cemetery because they thought that would bring them some measure of comfort. Unfortunately, they can't. There is no one to visit and no comfort to be had because she chose cremation. It was so painful to tell my sweet children this as they looked up at me with confusion, shock, fear and tears in their eyes.

To this day, so many years later, my mind relives those last days with her on the phone and I still think regretfully, "If only I had been able to change Aunt Sandy's mind."

THE LAST MITZVAH

AS TOLD TO ROSALLY SALTSMAN

A good name is better than good oil, and the day of death than the day of birth.

Ecclesiastes 7:1

his story, which appeared in *Small Miracles from Beyond* by Yitta Halberstam and Judith Leventhal is as true as it is unbelievable. Robin Meyerson, who lives in Scottsdale Arizona, was already volunteering at The *Chevra Kaddisha* (Jewish Burial Society) there. One *Shushan Purim* (the day after Purim), she called her aunt in Las Vegas. Her aunt informed her that her uncle had just died and they were going to cremate him. Robin tried to convince her aunt not to do this and then called his children. For two weeks, while the body lay in the crematorium and miraculously hadn't been prepared or cremated yet (they usually remove pacemakers and artificial joints) Meyerson campaigned relentlessly trying to move Heaven and earth to change the decree while the family vacillated.

On a Tuesday morning, she called Rabbi Haikins of Chevrach Lomdei Mishnah in Lakewood (a group that learns for the merit of the deceased) and asked that he arrange saying *mishnayot* (verses from the Mishnah) for the deceased. That night, the deceased's daughter, Valerie, had a dream. Her father, Arnold, came to her in the dream and asked her not to cremate him. Two days later, the

siblings were having a family meeting at a restaurant in Las Vegas, still trying to decide what to do. The restaurant had a fireplace. Suddenly, Valerie looked into the fireplace in the restaurant and ran out extremely distraught. The next day Valerie signed the papers to allow for her father to be buried. Meyerson arranged for Rabbi Fromowitz in Las Vegas to conduct the burial on Rosh Chodesh Nissan, the first day of the month of Nissan.

On the way to the cemetery, Meyerson, who'd just flown in, was taken by her cousins to a kosher restaurant. In the restaurant, she told the Jewish waiter why they were in Las Vegas, and added that she was afraid that they would not have the required ten men for the prayer services. The waiter volunteered to gather friends to help make a *minyan* at the funeral!

At the funeral, her aunt came over to hug Robin and thank her. "This is your calling," she said. "God is going to repay you for this." Her blessing came true. A couple of months later, forty-three-year-old Meyerson was feeling queasy before setting out on a trip to Colorado to visit cousin Valerie and her family with her husband and four children, the youngest of whom was five. Meyerson had had a miscarriage a couple of years before and was sure that at her age, her childbearing years were over. But apparently her uncle was praying for her. A pregnancy test revealed that she was pregnant. On Shushan Purim, the first *yahrzeit* of her uncle Arnold, Robin gave birth to a boy, two weeks after her due date. Rabbi Haikins flew in from Lakewood to be the *sandak*, the godfather. She named her new son in honor of her uncle, Azriel Mordechai. A Purim *nahafochu* (turnaround) story if ever there was one.

Meyerson went on to fulfill the second part of the blessing by increasing awareness of the importance of Jewish burial with her website.

May we all find peace in this world and the next. May *Mashiach* come soon so that we all reconnect, body, soul and with each other.

Robin's website: <http://www.peacefulreturn.com>

THE SHADCHANIT ON ROLLER SKATES

BY DEVORAH STONE

*Actually, I have only two things to worry about now:
Afterlife and reincarnation.*

– Gail Parent

he *shadchan* (matchmaker) was dragging his feet. Mr. Adler, the neighborhood butcher, would have liked to make this *shidduch* (match) but there were all sorts of reasons why the potential *chatan*'s (groom) family wasn't jumping the gun. The *chatan* was quite young and also had an older single brother and sister.

So though the families appeared to be suitable, there seemed no compelling reason to rush.

The prospective *kallah* (bride) had a young sister, Chanie. She needed a place to hide her roller skates from her mother who didn't want Chanie to get hurt skating. The most convenient place to keep her skates was her skating companion's downstairs neighbor where they could pop in-and-out of the ground floor apartment whenever they wanted to retrieve or deposit their roller skates for safekeeping. The redheaded Chanie was a familiar figure in that apartment. The family allowing her to keep her roller skates in their apartment seemed a favor hardly worth mentioning. But who could imagine that even such an unwitting seemingly irrelevant kindness would be paid off with interest?

So what happens when the *shadchan* spins his wheels and doesn't seem to be getting things going? Simple, you use a *shadchanit* on roller skates.

The family where Chanie had been parking her roller skates was “coincidentally” the prospective *chatan*'s family so Chanie simply asked the young man if he would be interested in meeting her sister. And as they say, the rest is history.

How in the world does someone express their gratitude and repay the one who was successful in bringing them together with their soulmate? It is hard to imagine a suitable payment. If it appears to be difficult to achieve in this world, it may be less so, beyond this world.

Before Chanie's mother died, she prevailed upon Chanie's sister to make certain that she would be buried in Israel. Her belief in *Techiyat Hameitim* (Resurrection of the Dead) was so profound and assured that she was worried how she would be able to roll in the ground from her burial place in the U.S. through the underground tunnels (the route that our tradition describes), to Israel where *Techiyat Hameitim* will occur, since she was unable to walk for years before she passed away.

When she returned her soul to her Maker, Chanie's sister and brother-in-law (the aforementioned *chatan* and *kallah*) made certain that she was buried in Israel, as she requested. They also purchased plots for themselves next to her. It took them literally years to pay for these plots.

Chanie's untimely passing in her middle age devastated her family. Chanie and her sister had always had an unusually deep bond that transcended the relationship of even the closest of sisters.

At long last Chanie's brother-in-law, the *chatan* whom she and her roller skates had brought together with her sister, was able to repay his debt to Chanie, in a way that was truly out of this world.

He did not hesitate and gave his own burial plot in Israel to Chanie. He then bought himself another plot nearby which took him several years to pay off.

It was a great consolation to have Chanie buried in Israel. Chanie always said that she would go to Israel for her twenty-fifth anni-

versary. In those years a trip to Israel was a once in a lifetime visit, for the average person. I think when she finally did go to Israel for burial it was close to her twenty-fifth anniversary.

There is one photo of Chanie, her sister and their mother. They are standing on a Williamsburg street in the 1940s; Chanie on the left side, her sister on the right side and their Mother in the middle. Their burial plots, not by any human design or forethought, on Har Hamnuchot in Jerusalem are in the same formation as their decades old photo. Chanie on the left side, her sister on the right side and their mother in the middle. May they rise soon in the time of *Techiyat Hameitim* and reap their eternal rewards for the *chesed* (kindness) that reverberated and fueled their lives.

Who can begin to fathom what eternities we build through these seemingly unremarkable acts of *chesed* that we do every day, every step or roll of the way.

PLOTTING A FUTURE MARRIAGE IN CEDAR PARK CEMETERY

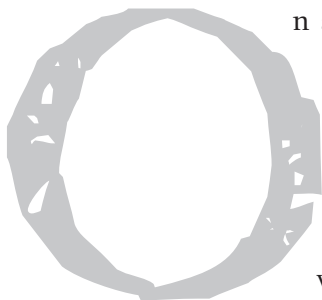
BY ROBIN MEYERSON



Rabbi Yehudah Ashkenazi writes in Be'er Heitev, his eighteenth century commentary on the Code of Jewish Law (O.C. 224:8), that the custom of placing stones on the grave is for the honor of the deceased person by marking the fact that his grave had been visited.

In a similar custom, the Code of Jewish Law (Y.D. 376:4) says that upon visiting a gravesite, you pull up grass and toss it behind your back. This shows our belief in resurrection: Just as grass that withers can grow again, so will the dead rise in the Messianic Era.

(source: Machzor Vitri 280)



On a trip to Brooklyn several years ago, we felt it important to squeeze in a visit to Cedar Park Cemetery. Now, it's true that most vacations don't start with a trip to a cemetery, but we wanted to pay our respects to Charlie's mother, who is buried in Paramus, New Jersey – a long way from our home in Scottsdale.

I mentioned our plans to my mother before we left and she commented that the name of the cemetery sounded familiar. She suggested we check to see if her grandparents were also buried there.

We left Scottsdale right after Shabbat and arrived in New York early Sunday morning. We quickly got our rental car and began our drive to Cedar Park. I had never been there, though Charlie visited just two and half years earlier for his beloved mother's burial. As we approached the cemetery, I felt a sense of awe and reverence, leaving us in silence for the last few moments of the ride.

When we pulled up to the office, I went inside to inquire as to the possible whereabouts of my mother's grandparents, Sadie and Solomon Markowitz, while Charlie stayed in the car to collect his thoughts before approaching his mother's *kever* (grave). The Markowitzes were my grandfather Max's parents and had passed away in the early 1950s. The cemetery official looked through the records and, lo and behold, they were indeed buried there. I wrote down the location of their graves and returned to the car.

We drove to a very old part of the cemetery, toward the back of the large grounds, where Charlie's mother, grandmother, great grandmother and various aunts and uncles are buried. Charlie seemed to know his way around and did not need to follow the map I had taken from the office. We got out of the car in silence, and after Charlie tucked in his *tzitzit* – small prayer shawl (it is a custom not to “flaunt” mitzvot in a cemetery), we began the walk among the headstones up the little hilly path to where his mother is buried.

I was amazed at Charlie's piousness and how easily he knew exactly where to go. I just followed, carrying our four-month-old daughter Chaya Liora, who had fallen asleep in her car seat. We found the *kever* and, while Charlie said his heartfelt prayers for his mother's soul, I began to look around. Nearby were all of Charlie's other family members' gravestones, including that of his great-grandmother Ida, whose Hebrew name was Chaya. I carried my little Chaya Liora over to her *kever* and said a little prayer as best as I could to thank her for making the journey across the sea from Lithuania to attain religious and economic prosperity. I “showed” her our little Chaya, who is her namesake.

Tears began to pour down my cheeks as I was struck by the magnitude of our visit.

A few moments later, after we collected ourselves emotionally, I asked Charlie if he would mind if we tried to find my mother's grandparents, since they probably had not been visited in decades. I was hoping we could pay our respects and say a few prayers for them, too. Charlie agreed and, looking at the map I handed to him, he exclaimed, "Actually, they should be right near where we are right now!"

After no more than a few steps, to my utter surprise, I found myself looking at the tombstones of Bernie Morchand and Olga Morchand. "Whoa," I thought, "these are my mother's maternal grandparents." I became confused, because we had come looking for her paternal grandparents. I looked to my left, and saw several more Morchands – my grandmother's siblings. And then, just a little further to my left, I saw their names: Sadie and Solomon Markowitz. "Oh my gosh!" I thought. Both sets of my mother's grandparents were in the very same cemetery as my husband's entire family – and just a few steps away!

We stood in shock and awe, imagining visits to this very spot by both sets of our ancestors so many times before, never knowing their descendants would marry each other. This place had belonged to both our families, who had stood here to pay their last respects, to recite *Kaddish* (the Mourners' Prayer), to lay stones on the gravesites. And here we were, almost one hundred years later (in some cases), with our little baby, saying prayers and crying tears near the resting place of our departed loved ones. How eerily odd that our families, so many worlds apart in life but neighbors in death, would later be connected in The Next World by our marriage. Who knows? Perhaps it was their souls who had been our secret matchmakers in Heaven.

A GRAVE SITUATION

AS TOLD TO ROSALLY SALTSMAN

*Our dead are never dead to us,
until we have forgotten them.*

– George Eliot



At fourteen, Arieh had already lived through a lot. It was 1939. He had lost his mother to tuberculosis and was driven from his home by the Germans, *yimach shmam* (May their names be blotted out), who had begun to divest Poland of its Jews. He spent the war in Russia and came to Israel as soon as he could. Though he had faithfully said *Kaddish* for his mother Esther, he had never done so at her grave. It was the *minhag* (custom) not to visit the grave during the first year before the tombstone was set but before this could be done, the Germans had invaded. Adding to the loss, the Germans had also widened the railway tracks that ran adjacent to the cemetery in the village of Rozwadów where Arieh's mother was buried. The cemetery was destroyed. Arieh longed to visit his mother's grave but Communist rule made it all but impossible until the 1980s. Arieh travelled with his siblings but couldn't locate the cemetery or the grave, which in any case had never been properly marked by a monument.

His daughter Chani travelled with Arieh again in the late 1990s. This trip made Arieh's daughter aware of how much her father wanted to find the grave. He kept restlessly trying to double back to the site though the odds were he could not locate it. Upon their

return to Israel, Chani contacted a Polish man who knew the vicinity and then a few years later, when ArieH was already in his 80s, following the old Pole's directions, they came with a bus of relatives to the spot where the cemetery was supposed to have been.

The hour was late, it was raining and there was a barricade that didn't let them go through. But there in the rain, overlooking the site of the long destroyed cemetery, ArieH finally said *Kaddish* over his mother's grave.

Today he's in his 90s, with grandchildren and great grandchildren. That trip left an indelible impression on a busload of relatives who all saw ArieH standing saying *Kaddish* for his mother with tears flowing and mingling with the rain. And his sisters' children and grandchildren who witnessed this scene named their progeny in memory of his mother, Esther.

A circle was closed. But a legacy continued, as Esther regained her rightful crown as the matriarch of her family.

CREMATION BAAR NONE

BY ROSALLY SALTSMAN

Repent one hour before your death.

– *Ethics of the Fathers*

And if you should survive till 105...

– *Carolyn Leigh*



ethel Paletz was born in Grand Forks, North Dakota, in 1905, a daughter of immigrants, a respected, religious Jewish family from Lithuania. The family lived with sixty other Jewish families making a Jewish enclave within the windswept village. When she matured, Ethel heeded the siren call of the big city, leaving both her rural and Jewish roots behind. She married Jacob Baar, an assimilated Jew, and they lived together until his passing in 1987, at which time he was cremated, in accordance with his wishes.

As Ethel grew older she was lonely and needed increasing assistance. In 1996, her great-nephew, James Pollak, moved to New York from Chicago. She invited him to stay with her, glad to have company. While James was living in Manhattan, he started learning Torah, and became involved with the vibrant Orthodox Jewish scene there. Ethel would reminisce with him about her upbringing in a religious home as a niece of the region's rabbi. Her home contained the community's *mikveh* (ritual pool), which her mother ran, and their table was always open to traveling Jews in need of a

kosher meal. Her father ran a general store, although, apparently it was actually run by Ethel and her mother, as her father was more often found in the back room, engrossed in the Talmud.

In 1999, James went to live in Israel and subsequently married. In 2004, he brought his wife to the United States to meet his family. They knew of Ethel's plans to be cremated like her late husband, and tried to dissuade her, even offering to pay for the funeral. She listened politely but made no move to change her plans. A year later she moved into the Hebrew Home for the Aged in Riverdale New York, where she lived until her death at the age of 105.

One day in 2006, Pollak was speaking to his great-aunt by telephone from his office in Jerusalem when she agreed to be buried according to Jewish law. She said, "OK. Go ahead and do what you wish with me. After all, I'm not going to be here anyway." He asked if it was okay if he would change the arrangements with her executor and nephew. She agreed, but the nephew refused, perhaps because he was named as chief executor and beneficiary of the will and wanted to leave well enough alone. A will notarized by the beneficiary is suspect under the law, which also explains why he hesitated presenting it to the court as evidence after her demise.

When Ethel died, the day following Rosh Hashanah in 2010, her relatives refused to hear of her wish to be buried. The will hadn't been changed (even though later in court its validity was questioned), and the slew of non-religious relatives wanted nothing to do with Jewish burial rites.

After a long court battle of many months, during which Ethel's body languished in the freezer of the memorial home, the court ruled that her wishes to be cremated should be respected even though there were affidavits given by James and by Ellen Gordon, the daughter of Ethel's close longtime friend. Ellen was a frequent visitor to Ethel's home, and testified that Ethel had confided to her that she had changed her mind and wanted to be buried. Ellen had also offered her the grave next to her own mother as a gift. Ironically, the verdict reached in January 2011, was handed down by a judge named Solomon.

James Pollak had lost the months-long bitter battle, with the family waylaying and delaying him at every turn, and the media

vilifying him for trying to uphold his great aunt's dying wishes against the anti-religious relatives.

The case was laid to rest even if Ethel Baar's body was not.

In Jewish sources, we are told to repent one hour before we die. This gives us hope as there is always a chance of redemption for our souls no matter how far we seem to be from our spiritual Source. There is always a chance for a change of heart. On the other hand, no one knows when that hour will be. And if we have a change of heart about something that is not in our hands, we may be hard pressed to act on it.

Ethel's decision to have a Jewish burial might have appeared to have stemmed from a wish to placate her great nephew, whom she was very fond of. More likely the seed of the idea grew from the Jewish roots of her religious childhood in the secular desert of North Dakota.

A childhood of which nothing remains but ashes.

LAND OF THE FREE

BY RAHEL

She thought about what Billy had said, about throwing on the clod of dirt, of releasing something of the memory into the earth. What did one release with a cremation? Where was the ritual, the ending of the story, when there was no grave to visit, no place to set down a posy of primroses or an armful of fresh daffodils?

– Jacqueline Winspear, *Maisie Dobbs - An Incomplete Revenge*

 s the words on the base of the Statue of Liberty imply, the United States took in the huddled masses from all over, opening its doors to dreamers from around the globe. Many who came escaped terrible fates of persecution and poverty in their countries of origin. The goal was to form a new people steeped in freedom and a just society - a land of golden opportunity. And so, regardless of ethnicity and religion, Americans were legally free to marry each other in this melting pot.

My mum did not receive a formal Jewish education but she did absorb American values. In 1948, after her observant mother had passed away, my beautiful Jewish mum, a bat Levi, daughter of Polish and Russian immigrants, married my handsome Catholic Dad, also the son of Polish immigrants, in a civil ceremony.

In 1960, they remarried in a Catholic ceremony. Mum never converted to Catholicism but promised the priest that her large family would be raised Catholic. By doing this, Dad could return to Catholic practices and ensure he receive a Catholic burial.

We were raised, prior to their second wedding, in a wholesome environment with old-fashioned American values: the public school system, frugality, hard work, patriotism, love of family, morality, respect, humor, and song. After the Catholic ceremony, we attended Catholic schools.

We were not taught about the mitzvot of Judaism in our home, although Mum shared a few Jewish songs, an interest in Jewish entertainers, a few Yiddish words and childhood memories of her observant mother. In fact, neither parent, nor we, even knew that according to *Halacha*, Jewish law, we siblings are all Jewish.

Mum, was a kind, humble, loving, hardworking, generous, selfless, giving, funny woman, a beautiful soul who received joy from many “little things”. Her *middot* (good qualities) were extraordinary. She was the best of the best. She loved us each equally but uniquely. All of us adored her as a mother and miss her - and Dad - terribly. She was an incredible grandmother to her many grandchildren, and that included my foster sons.

We siblings eventually each chose different religious and philosophical paths. The family loyalty instilled in us by our parents remains strong. Mum believed everybody had to seek what made her or him happy; she believed in the words of the ingenious and tolerant Declaration of Independence - each person was entitled to “life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness”. My brothers and sisters are all exemplary people. We aging siblings are helpful and loving to one other, even to this day.

After I became observant in the 1980s, Mum gave me a little note that said, “I want a Jewish burial.” She also gave the note to another sister. By this time, my parents had separated. Born a Jew, Mum told me, she would die a Jew. I am personally very thankful she had the foresight to write that note. The Jewish practices added layers of meaning, historical roots and comfort to the deep pain of her loss. It was elevating for her soul and for ours.

Mum’s brother was the president of a Jewish philanthropic organization, and while Mum was living, he purchased a gravesite for her in its section of the Jewish cemetery. Several of the family rest there and there are spaces for more of us.

Spring was coming and Mum was anticipating the flowers. Mum lived with one of my sisters and that sister took my mum shopping on a Friday in 1998. Mum had a happy day. And then that evening, an *Erev Shabbat* (Sabbath eve) in Adar, the Jewish month symbolic of increasing joy, she left us in her sleep. To die on Shabbat is an honor, the kiss of *Hashem*, according to tradition. My sister found her in the morning.

I didn't live in the same town as Mum so I was unaware of what was going on. However, there was an invisible yet physical bond of consciousness extending beyond space between my mum and myself.

Still, while she was transcending, I could barely move as I prepared for Shabbat. It felt as if I was having a heart attack (and I have no cardiac issues). My darling husband was worried; he urged me to rest, stop preparations. Falling, holding on to the wall after the brief meal, I kind of staggered to the couch, unable to function.

To say we were anguished with grief is such a mild understatement of the paralyzing pain we each felt. How could we live without Mum? Unimaginable.

My siblings came from across the country. One of my brothers sought out the Chabad rabbi.

"What was her Hebrew name?" asked the rabbi. I said I didn't know her Hebrew name but she was called Lake or Lakie. "Lakie is a form of Leah," replied the rabbi. So Mum was Leah bat Rahel and Yakov HaLevi.

A traditional Jewish burial is very different from cremation or embalming. A body, the vessel of the soul that does the work of Hashem in the lower world, is treated with utmost respect. A *shomer*, watcher from the Jewish community says *Tehillim* (Psalms), in the presence of the departed person night and day until he or she is buried. No light conversation is permitted. While saying *Tehillim*, the women volunteers of the *Chevra Kaddisha* washed (this is called *tahara*) and wrapped our darling Mum in a white shroud. The belt of the shroud is tied in the form of the letter *shin*, standing for *Shaddai*, a name of *Hashem*. Forgiveness is asked for any unintentional disrespect or embarrassment caused. Soil and herbs from the Land of Israel are placed on the body. There is no

public showing. “The *tahara* was so beautiful,” one woman volunteer gently told me after it was finished.

In the funeral home, the Chabad rabbi explained *kriah* and we all wept as we tore our garments. Our hearts tore too. Even now, eighteen years later, I weep as I type. *Baruch Dayan HaEmet...* Blessed is the True Judge.

The rabbi, one of my brothers and my husband spoke very touchingly and lovingly of Mum during the *hespedim*, eulogies, at the funeral home.

My Mum had wanted my brothers to carry her coffin and so they did. The coffin was a traditional, simple pine box.

It was raining very hard that day. The heavens sobbed and wailed with us. When the last thud of dirt heartbreakingly hit the coffin, the rains ceased. The storm clouds parted. A ray of light danced through the gray. My Israeli friend told me there is an ancient tradition that teaches that the sunbeam after a rain symbolizes the welcoming back of a soul who served *Hashem* well. Welcome home, *Neshamale*, little soul.

My brothers, those sweet former altar boys, joined with my sisters and me and the rabbi in reading a transliteration of the *Kaddish*, the ancient Aramaic prayer exalting God. There is no mention of death in the *Kaddish*, only praise, glory, and magnification of *Hashem*.

After the ceremony, at my sister's home, the rabbi explained to our family that neither physical nor spiritual energy is created or destroyed. The soul is eternal, he taught. Love never dies. Our mother's mission on earth was done but she would continue to be a mother to us from the world beyond; she was forever our advocate and forever connected. While in a body, a soul can only be in one place at a time but now Mum could be with each of us at any time or place. We would one day rejoin her and in some future time in the days of *Mashiach* there would be *Techiyat Hameitim*, the Resurrection of the Dead, to reward the body for enabling the soul to do her work. He told us to do mitzvot in Mum's memory and when we visit her grave, there would still be a spark of her that remained on earth. She would live on in our acts, in our good deeds, in our love, in our soul and memory. I have found this to be very true

and so have my siblings. She is a beloved living presence. Even her perfume scent lingers periodically in her former bedroom and we each have taken on some of her kind ways.

Months later, on a cold day in late fall, we had the unveiling of the *matzeva*, gravestone. The Chabad rabbi, who helped us bury Mum, and many of my siblings gathered while we read more Jewish meditations on Mum and more prayers. The date of the unveiling fell on my little son Jon's birthday and he was happy to honor Mum on his day. Her gravestone has piles of stones on its ledge, showing countless visits from loved ones.

Mum had a prayer written by Phyllis Ingram tucked into the corner of a family photo.

*"It seems like only yesterday we crossed the street together
And with his little hand in mine we faced the stormy weather.
We shared the laughter and the fun and sometimes there were
tears,
And I was happy to be there to chase his childhood fears.
In retrospect, I can't believe how quickly time has flown,
And with a mother's pride I see how fine my son has grown.
No longer shall I lead the way, his hand is larger than mine,
And so, dear Lord I place his hand forever into Thine."*

I believe it revealed how she felt about us and about God.
May her memory continue to always be for a blessing.

I AM TO MY BELOVED

BY RAHEL



*Fear not, for I have redeemed you, I have called you by
thy name, you are Mine.*

*When you pass through the waters, I will be with you,
and through the rivers, they shall not overflow you;
when you walk through the fire, you won't be burned,
neither shall the flame kindle upon you. I am Hashem
your God. You are Mine.*

– Isaiah 43



*When you love someone, don't ever ignore them. When
you love someone, it means you exist. Because when you
ignore someone, it means, "In my book you don't exist."*

*If you love someone and in their book you don't exist,
that really hurts.*

– Reb Shlomo Carlebach



My honey and I became religious Jews after a decades' long path. I am so grateful for having had my wonderful husband and long, loving marriage but, to be honest, I'm still learning daily to cope with widowhood. With Judaism, one does not ignore their loved ones, even after death; they still exist and death is a mirage.

It is a cold winter of 2015. Here we are, both very ill, near state forest land, far from a Jewish community, far from any community.

Suddenly, I see you, honey, and you are unconscious. I breathe into your mouth, push on your chest. You look serene but you are not responding! Oh, no. We were just talking; we were just setting the table together! This cannot be. God, please!

With an illness that has kept me in bed a couple days, I can barely walk, talk, breathe or hear, but thanks to *Hashem*, thanks to 911, help comes quickly.

“He’s going to make it,” says Jason the young ambulance driver. You have known Jason since he was a child, honey. The ambulance staff try to revive you, give you oxygen and soon we’re at the hospital.

Why won’t they let me sit with you in the ER? I don’t belong in this waiting room, I belong with you. Doctors and nurses rush about. In my fog, I pray. As long as there is life, there is hope.

There is a blizzard outside. Slowly, family and friends trickle in from around the state.

“He is brain dead,” says the doctor in the ER finally.

“No! He can’t be! We were just talking! My husband has a genius IQ, he is gifted; he has a very good brain,” I cry. “Do everything to keep him alive, to save his life.”

The doctor looks resigned to doom.

You are then put on life support. Sepsis from a kidney infection is shutting your organs down. I won’t believe it though. Please, *Hashem*, don’t let this happen. My family believes you’ll pull through, Honey. You have pulled through so much before, so many times. Doctors are not prophets.

Yes, my honey had many illnesses, accidents, surgeries and procedures, and two near-death experiences (NDE) subsequent to a terrible car accident. The NDEs were long before he and I met in 1976. Because of them, this rational man thoroughly believed in *Hashem*, in an afterlife filled with love that surpasses anything that exists on earth.

In the first NDE experience, his soul rose above the bed and he saw the doctors working on him on the operating table. This proved to him there was a conscious soul that could see. This soul was his real self, the soul saw without the benefit of physical eyes.

In the second NDE, Barak had an experience where he went through the tunnel and was greeted by “the light”. He said it was a bliss, a love, like nothing on earth. It communicated telepathically that this love, God, would always be with him, inside him and also surrounding him like a womb. Barak did not see relatives, like many people do. He sensed only what he described as God within the Light. Barak was told he had to return to physical life, though. He was told he had something yet to accomplish. It was not his time to die. Barak would want everybody to know this about life after life and I’m happy to share his story. He was sent back to This World. He chose life all his days but was unafraid to die. My honey knew he would never be alone.

We had discussed “rational” people who discounted NDEs. Barak felt they were ignorant in this matter. For instance, he pointed out that in an NDE, people with out-of-body experiences (sometimes even blind people) could see details of what occurred in the emergency room while they were clinically dead. They were above, looking down, as he was.

I read to him the conclusions of Dr. Sherwin Nuland (author of *How We Die*), who had written that NDEs were due to anoxia which triggered endorphins, producing euphoria. The doctor thought imagination fostered visions of deceased loved ones. Oxygen deprivation might cause stupor or confusion, believed Barak, but not what happened during an NDE. Endorphins do not cause those types of visions, he stated, and, sometimes, a person who had an NDE would meet a relative from “the other side” who, unknown to the dying person, had just passed away. Sometimes they could access a deceased relative of whom they never heard, perhaps one who had died as an infant or in the womb. Chemicals cannot account for this, my husband stated emphatically.

At your bedside, we sing to you, read *Tehillim*, read your beloved verses from Isaiah 43. You seem to hear my love song, hold my hand. The doctor disagrees. There is no way the doctors can save

you and in hours the struggle is over. My heart rips.

We call the shocked rabbi who tells us to cover your face immediately out of respect. Arrangements are made to transport you to the funeral home two counties away for a Jewish burial.

We can't leave you alone in this sterile hospital room. I know your soul still hears and sees. My brother and I read *Tehillim* by your side. Our distraught son drives home in the snow to get your *tallit* for the burial.

More time passes. You, my brother and I travel the snowy long ride with the funeral director to the funeral home in Rochester. The funeral director later invites us into the lounge.

"No, I want to sit by my husband, by his coffin." I insist. The director looks surprised but complies. Soon I can't be near you, Honey. Every moment together is so important. I will not ignore you. I touch your coffin lovingly.

My brother and I say more *Tehillim* and just sit together by you until the *Chevra Kaddisha* come to respectfully prepare you for burial. The *Chevra Kaddisha* cannot remove your wedding ring. Your arthritis has made it too tight around your swollen finger. We are bound forever, Sweetheart.

The *hespedim* are moving. Your life was so courageous, holy and loving. There really was never anybody like you...a faithful, funny, heroic, loving genius who was gifted literally in all matters from Astronomy to Zoology, who could repair anything, an inventor, a botanist and an organic gardener, a car mechanic, a computer technician, an electrician, a plumber, a carpenter, a student of history, physics, chemistry, math, health, Hebrew and Greek. You stopped a robbery once. You restored land and almost finished our old home. Together we took in foster children and traveled galore. Together we treasured and defended Israel through advocacy. You had many medical issues which you bravely confronted. You had a religious journey where you studied many religions and finally converted to Judaism in 1992. What a full life, Darling.

To my siblings, you are their brother, not brother-in-law. To our foster sons, you are their only Abba. To the rabbi, you were a friend and somewhat like a Yitro (Moses' father-in-law). And oh, Honey,

to me you've been my life, my soul. From the time we met, we knew we belonged together. We saved each others' lives, protected each other, taught each other, did good together, kept mitzvot together, sang and danced with each other. Even when we could not talk well because of illness, we loved each other. We were greater as two joined than we ever could have been alone. I adore you, Honey and before the throne of God, I declare you a *Tzaddik*, a righteous and God-fearing man.

On that cold February day, the family and the Jewish community helped us tuck you in the earth of the cemetery, not far from my Mum's sleeping place. It has been one of your special mitzvot to help bury others at Jewish funerals and we do the same for you. The praise-filled *Kaddish*, Psalm 23 and (K)El Maleh Rachamim, the prayer of God's compassion, are said.

Chabad provided food and a place for me to sit the seven days of Shiva. My siblings were moved by the great kindness. The many people from the Jewish community, and my large extended family, gave immeasurable comfort, sharing memories, giving me time to talk at length about you, my wonderful husband.

At the end of Shiva, I tell my brother what words to say: "Shiva has ended. Rise."

At the *Shloshim*, marking thirty days since your passing, I am no longer ill and I recount multitudes of your mitzvot before God and the congregation. A rabbi reads from the Mishnah. The words Mishnah and *neshama* (soul) have the same letters and Mishnah study is beneficial for a soul. True, the official acts of mourning end at only thirty days for spouses, but the yearning never ends.

We gather with the rabbi and family to share memories when your stone is unveiled. There are monthly visits to your *kever*, saying *Yizkor* (a beautiful remembrance prayer) on *chaggim* (Jewish holidays). There is the annual *yahrzeit* candle on the anniversary of your ascending, and the rabbis say *Kaddish* for you. As long as I breathe, you will never be forgotten.

Chabad's Rebbe Schneerson taught, "Ultimately, the good deeds and increased observance of those left behind are central to memorializing a deceased loved one. The greatest act you can do to memorialize your loved one is to continue his or her good deeds."

And so, my dear Barak, we try. We are definitely not as skilled as you in many ways but we rebuild your *succah* (a temporary dwelling used on Succoth), host the Seder, we try to fulfill your dreams and be kind to those whom you loved. I pass out food for the needy, visit the sick and bury the dead, like we did together. We give *tzedaka* (charity). I try to tell your awesome story to honor you and, God willing, I will write it. I go back to Israel like you wanted to do, passing out *tzedaka* there. It gives me purpose to know that I'm doing your work here, on earth. God in His mercy still gives me life each morning and I choose a life of *chesed*.

And sometimes, beyond the veil that physically hides you from me, you metaphorically wink. You are both in dreams that seem multisensory and dreams that are like shadows. We used to sing "Daisy a Day" and a daisy might entangle itself in my shoe when I hike. Or the music box turns on for "no reason", playing "Love Story". Or I cry, "Where are you?" And lightning, *barak*, pierces the sky. I know you join me for the "Eshet Chayil" prayer *Erev Shabbat*.

The soul is likened to a sunbeam - part of it is on high in the realm with *Hashem* and a part connects on earth, plus everything in between.

The rabbis and their wives said to me, "Before birth, your souls were one. They separated and they found each other here on earth, reuniting to do *Hashem's* will. Your souls are still connected and someday, you will be together again in *Gan Eden* and even more so at *Techiyat Hameitim*. You are one. Whenever you think of him, he is here."

Then you are always with me, Hon, for you are always in my thoughts. Our love is eternal.

L'hitraot, (I will see you again) my forever love, my answered prayer, my soulmate from Heaven. The words of Reb Shlomo touch me deeply... I will never ignore you and I know you exist waiting for me, Barak. Beyond time and space. Beyond death.

THE BLESSING OF CLOSURE

BY SHAYNA HUNT

*Dying? Not the end of everything. We think it is.
But what happens on earth is only the beginning.*

– Mitch Albom

I suppose it would be easier to simply say that all our relationship issues stemmed from the fact that I had started to become *frum* (religious) at the age of sixteen. However, that wouldn't be altogether true. Suffice it to say, a relationship with my mother was never easy to cultivate. Even so, somewhere in the mix of our virulent relationship there were beautiful pockets of tender affection – of love. Nevertheless, finding them was always the trick and as the years went on they became harder and harder to find.

About a year and a half ago my husband and I made our usual appointment with Rav David Hanania Pinto of France. He visits Chicago about once a year and meets with people and gives out blessings. In the last four years we hadn't missed one appointment to see him. The meeting usually lasts several minutes and we always leave with a good feeling. On that particular visit it began like usual. We gave the Rav (Rabbi) our Hebrew names, and the names of our children and waited for the usual *bracha* (blessing) so we could be on our way.

"Have you seen your mother recently?" The Rav asked me and I nearly fell off my chair. My heart began to pound and I heard the blood rushing in my ears. The Rav repeated his question to me.

"I...that is...I mean....no, actually, I haven't. It's a long story but we haven't spoken in a long time now. It's very complicated," I barely managed to explain, feeling that old familiar shame of having a dysfunctional relationship with my mother.

The Rav directed his pure eyes into mine and very carefully stated slowly, "You need to go see her!" I was dumbfounded. I never mentioned my rocky relationship with my mother, but I hadn't seen her in a few years.

"I don't think I can. I mean, she won't see me. I've tried before to make peace, but she's an angry person and she won't see me," I tried to explain, hoping he'd understand a situation even I barely knew how to describe.

"She's very sick. And you need to go see her," was all he said.

"What if she won't agree to see me?" I asked fearing rejection, fearing a fight, fearing the fact that I might open a can of worms I would never be able to close again!

"Go see her!" The Rav exclaimed and proceeded to give us our *brachas*. The discussion about my mother was over.

I was an emotional mess for the next few days. About four days after seeing Rav Pinto, I made an appointment to see my own Rav regarding all this. I explained the situation and further explained how no one in my family spoke to my mother anymore because she suffered from a severe anger and relationship issue. My Rav was kind and listened to my reasons and fears about seeing my mother, or even just calling her up. I detailed to him my previous attempts and the toxic outcomes they had produced. He personally felt that regardless of the emotional duress I might suffer by contacting my mother, the question wasn't his to fully answer. He suggested I write to Rav Pinto and explain in detail my reasons for not wanting to start something with my mother that in the end I might not be able to handle. So I did.

Rav Pinto's response was simple and kind. He agreed that I should only do what I felt I could do, and he added that he will give me another *bracha* that things should work out. When I read his letter back to me I felt immense relief. I was off the hook. I didn't feel obliged to contact my mother. That was at the end of November, 2004.

However, over those next few weeks, my mind kept replaying over and over when the Rav had initially told me that my mother was sick. My fear was overshadowed by the regret I would feel if in fact what the Rav had said was true, and I had done nothing. Spiritually something inside me shifted. My fear was somehow less overwhelming and I made plans to contact my mother. On December 29th, her birthday, I arranged to have flowers delivered and a few days before I sent a card and pictures of my children through the mail – they were due to arrive on her birthday. That day I was more nervous that I had been in a long while. Each time the phone rang I jumped. *Had she gotten them yet? Was she angry? Would she be nice?*

By dinnertime that night she called. I answered the phone and she was cordial. Not necessarily nice, but she thanked me for the flowers and asked to speak with my children. Before I passed the phone over to them I asked after her health. She was vague but said she hadn't been feeling well. I asked if it was serious and she didn't answer me one way or the other. She didn't want to discuss it with me.

After that day, I continued to send her cards asking if we could come to see her. She called once and asked me to stop sending her things; that she didn't want to see me. Her anger was back. Nonetheless I continued to send her pictures and cards. The following fall my husband and I went back to see Rav Pinto. We received our *bracha* and there was no mention of my mother.

That December, like the previous one, I sent flowers and a picture gift. My mother was enraged and out of control. Her manic issue was full force and what I had feared was happening. A week after things cooled down, I had made a decision. I prayed to *Hashem* that He would have to help soften her heart – I could do no more from where I stood. The rejection left such a bad taste in my mouth. I found myself thinking of her more than usual and I longed for something that I had never had with her.

Then *Erev Pesach* (Passover, 2006), out of the blue, I received a note in the mail from my mother. It was surprisingly simply and devoid of anger. She wanted to see us...me and my husband and our children. I was scared but happy. I wrote her back and gave her

some dates when we would be available to go to her house. She wrote back the date that was good for her and offered to pay for lunch if we picked it up from somewhere kosher before we drove out to her house. I was impressed with her consideration and her willingness to have us over.

Pesach came and went and our lunch date was soon approaching. Then I got a call from my aunt. She hadn't talked to my mother in a while as well, but my mother called her to call me and let me know our lunch date would have to be postponed; my mother was in the hospital with a kidney infection. It didn't seem life threatening at all but she was unsure of when she'd be going home. My oldest daughter called my mother and they spoke for a little while. My mother didn't feel up to speaking with me. I kept up with the situation through my aunt. Apparently, my mother was released to go home, and wound up right back in the hospital three days later. It was around then that my mother called me and left a message on my answering machine. I called her that night. We spoke for nearly four hours. When she headed the conversation into an area that I knew would end in a fight, I tried a new approach. I honestly told her how much I enjoyed speaking with her and that I enjoyed when we got along.

"Let's avoid topics that get you angry," I told her. "I don't want to make you mad. I like being your friend!" She replied she did too, and I sensed her vulnerability.

My mother's health continued to decline. The doctors were not sure what was wrong with her and at first they suspected something serious like leukemia. I kept asking her to let me come to see her but she would get angry and told me she didn't look good and refused to let me come and see her like that. So we began to speak with each other on the phone a couple times a day. When the doctors ruled out leukemia, I began to get suspicious of her medical care. She was clearly getting sicker. When I questioned it, she remained steadfast and independent. I was informed that at sixty-five years old, she could "take care of myself, thank you very much!"

A week later, my mother informed me that they believed her illness to be psychosomatic. My aunt called me and was confused

at the turn of events. My mother was herself unwilling to really talk about it, compounded with all the other emotional issues she already had, I could tell she was slipping into a depression. I felt the icy fingers of fear clutch at my heart.

I replayed Rav Pinto words to me from over a year and a half earlier, “Your mother is very sick, you need to go see her!”

That afternoon, despite my mother’s protests, my husband and I drove an hour and a half to the hospital where she was. I informed my mother, the nurses and all her doctors that I was taking over my mother’s care. I was overwhelmed at my mother’s willingness to relinquish control of her care to me. She went as far as requesting to see her lawyer to legally give me power of attorney. From that point on, every hour in my day was spent on my mother from making sure she was well taken care of, to fighting the doctors to test her further to find out what was wrong with her. I insisted she was sick and I demanded that they get to the bottom of it and not simply blame all her symptoms on her emotional issues.

They finally did find out what was wrong with her but regretfully, it was too far-gone to treat her. She was diagnosed with aggressive liver and lung cancer in the middle of June. For the next three weeks I barely did anything else but take care of my mother. I moved her to a kosher nursing facility closer to my home. I spent my days settling her affairs to satisfy her wishes and spending time with her. Quality time. At the end, there was nothing left between us but that precious love that had always been so hard to come by. We talked a lot. Every moment we spent together was not wasted. We declared our love to each other over and over both verbally and physically. I relished each bonding hug and each sweet kiss we exchanged. I said things to my mother I had always wanted to say and she in turn gave to me emotionally everything I had ever needed and wanted to hear from her for all the thirty-seven years of my life! I regret nothing except not having her like that with me for longer.

The night before my mother passed away, I had come to her room in the nursing facility around dinner-time. I had been there earlier, and she had been in a lot of pain but had been alert. When I walked in that evening, I remember feeling something different in

the room. There was a charge of energy all around and, regardless of how strange this sounds, I actually felt my father, *a"h* (may he/she/they rest in peace), and my grandparents, *a"h*, energetically in the room as well. As I made my way to my mother from the doorway I felt as if unseen energies were parting to let me go past. I took one look at my mother and began to cry. I knew that she wasn't long for this world. She was leaving me soon and I was sad.

I took a chair and pulled it close to her and, as I picked up her cold hand, I told her I was there. I kept telling her how much I loved her and that I was right there with her. Even though she looked like she was sleeping I could tell she was somewhat aware. I asked her if she was afraid of dying.

"No!" she barked out. "Are you?"

"Am I afraid of you dying?" I clarified.

"Yes!" she replied, the pain in her voice evident.

I began to cry, sobbing so much I could barely answer her clearly for a few minutes. "Yes, I'm afraid to let you go," I managed to say while the tears poured down my cheeks.

"Don't hurt for me!" she said firmly, bravely.

"Okay, I'll try not to," I told her, knowing that I would anyway.

I kissed her soft cheek and continued to hold her hand for a while. A child survivor of the Holocaust, Mother lived her life angry at everyone but especially at God. I was afraid for her. She never studied the beauty of Torah; she didn't know the meaning of her birthright and the peace it would have offered her at this time - the end of her life. As her only Torah-observant relative, I suppose I felt a protective duty to share with her and help her over to the other side. I began to speak without clearly thinking through my thoughts. They tumbled out, straight from Hashem, and out of my mouth.

"Ma," I began. "when you leave your body, don't get confused. Don't stop to think about the fact that you died. Don't look back. Go straight to God. See the light and just run toward it. Dad will be there and your parents will be there, too! And all anyone has left for you is love, pure beautiful love. You just go to God. Follow Dad and he'll take you where you need to go."

"I will!" she promised me. "He's here now," she ended.

My heart skipped a beat. "Dad? Dad is here?"

"Yes, he's here now," she explained what I had felt when I walked in earlier.

Taking her lead I added, "And your parents are here now, too. There is so much love here for you. They are all here for you."

"Yes," she agreed as she fell asleep.

She slept for about ten minutes and it was quiet and peaceful in the room. I was silent as I held her hand and stroked her arm with my other hand. Soundless tears rolled down my cheeks and I tasted their grief-filled saltiness on my lips. I closed my eyes and in my mind I saw my dad and my grandparents at the foot of her bed.

Pulled violently out of my peaceful meditation, my mother screamed with an unbelievable strength. "NOW!" she yelled. "SAY IT NOW! AIMEEEEE!" she yelled my English name. "SAY THE JEWISH PRAYER! RIGHT NOW!" The urgency and panic in her demand paralyzed me. I couldn't move. I couldn't speak. Her hand gripped mine hard and she yelled again.

"SAY THE JEWISH PRAYER NOW!!"

And then I did. "*Shema Yisrael*," I began my body shaking.

With wonder I listened as she fervently repeated each word after me with such a powerful voice. This from a woman who lived her life scoffing at prayers and religion.

"...*ECHAD*!" she yelled at the end of the first recitation. "AGAIN!" she demanded, and again I complied. She repeated it and yelled AGAIN after I finished. Five times over and over we did this spiritual dance of prayer. On the fifth time she fell asleep as her mouth uttered "*Echad*". She slept quietly after that for another ten minutes.

Then she awoke, and with her eyes closed, she called out over my shoulder, "Ma? Ma?" she called to her mother. I answered her in Yiddish, her native language, and speaking as if I was her mother, I told her I was there with her.

"Oh, Ma!" she sighed, relieved, and fell back asleep. I held her hand for another hour or more and then, realizing it was late and

she would most likely continue sleeping, I left, planning to come back the next morning.

That night I came home and e-mailed Rav Pinto a letter.

To Rav Pinto,

About a year and a half ago my husband and I met with the Rav in Chicago for a bracha. The Rav mentioned my mother and asked when I had seen her last. I explained briefly how because of certain issues my mother suffers from, we had not been in contact for a long while. The Rav explained how important it was for me to go see my mother. Though it was one of the hardest things for me to do, I began to contact my mother several weeks after meeting with the Rav. My mother stayed resistant to a meeting. However, I continued to periodically send her things in the mail. Finally, about three months or so ago, my mother finally agreed to see me, my husband and our children. However, several days before our scheduled meeting, I was informed by an aunt that my mother was in the hospital. My mother has yet to come out of the hospital. She was misdiagnosed repeatedly until finally, three weeks ago, I was informed that she had untreatable, aggressive cancer of the liver and lung. Each day, she slips farther and farther away. However, amid the deep regret and sadness of this situation lies the true bracha that both my mother and I have been honored with. Because of my mother's issues, she has driven most of her family and friends away. Holding on to the Rav's precious words said to me when I received my bracha, I pushed through my mother's hard exterior and have been with her everyday through this horrible experience. She was no longer able to care for herself and I alone have made my life around hers and have legally taken full action to be the one to take care of her. Through doing all of this, somehow my mother has been able to see past her issues for stretches at a time to offer me true love from her heart. That is all I ever wanted from my mother. And it's a miracle to be a recipient of it now. From this, I have learned the true meaning of forgiveness and have embraced it fully. I have no doubt that the Rav petitioned the Almighty on my behalf and on my mother's behalf. My mother is so ill now

that she has mostly stopped talking in the last few days. However, before, when she was talking, she kept telling me that it was a real miracle from God that we reconnected to each other before she got so very sick. My mother did not know I had received a bracha a year and a half earlier, but knows nonetheless that Hashem's hand truly repaired this relationship enough to find healing closure. On behalf of my mother and I, I would like to sincerely thank the esteemed Rav for his part in our own personal miracle.

*Most sincerely,
Shayna Hunt*

The next day, as I was getting ready to go see my mother, she slipped from this world – no doubt into the love that I had promised her. We were so connected, that I knew the instant she left because an overwhelming sadness had come over me as I was getting ready that morning and I wondered to myself at that moment if she had died. The phone rang minutes later confirming the news. The weeks leading up to her death and the weeks since have been overwhelmingly hard, but they have only served to enrich my life. I had been given the beautiful and precious gift of closure along with a renewed faith in *Hashem* from the magical power of the miracle He bestowed upon my relationship with my mother!

I feel her sometimes during the day – a fleeting emotion – like the gentle caress of butterfly wings. I savor them because they are beautiful pockets of tender affection from her – of love!

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BODY AND SOUL

BY MANUEL SAND

*The soul comes from without into the human body,
as into a temporary abode, and it goes out of it anew.
It passes into other habitations,
for the soul is immortal.*

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

he holiness of a Jew is comprised of a combination of body and soul.

Created by the Almighty, and destined to be a light unto the nations a Jew must act and behave in a manner which shows the world an example of Godly behavior among humans, one towards the other no matter who that other may be.

This behavior is carried on throughout one's life and only terminates upon death.

Kindness, mercy, love, and Torah study, are but a few of the traits a Jew should practice and the result of this behavior should show an example to the world.

Unfortunately, we have in this past generation seen a reduction in observance of our Jewish behavior, and many Jews have taken on habits of other nations, thereby lowering their observance of Torah and mitzvot as they were intended by the Almighty.

I recall an incident that happened to me about fifty years ago when I accompanied a colleague of mine to pay a Shiva call. He was not someone you could call religious but he did know he was

Jewish, and while walking towards our destination, he said to me, “You know, it’s so nice when you’re Jewish and you have to pay a condolence visit to your client; you always know he’s there awaiting you during the Shiva.”

He explained to me that many of his clients were non-Jews and he never knew if he would arrive at an appropriate time at their home. Sometimes there was no one home. Other times, many were totally inebriated (drunk) at the wake, and he said it was good to know that when he visited a Jewish home he always knew the time was right.

What is it with us Jews who concentrate so much on proper observance of custom when we mourn?

Jews who might not attend a synagogue more than once a year, if at all, suddenly become observant at the loss of a parent, sibling or spouse; they sit Shiva, recite the *Kaddish*, observe the *Shloshim* by growing beards, and in general their mourning is clearly seen and felt by their friends and family.

Mourning for our parents is a continuation of parental respect, as we are commanded by our Torah, and is a show of homage for those who are about to give an accounting of their life’s deeds to the Almighty seeking their place in The World to Come.

We feel that the respect shown our parents after their demise helps elevate them to a position of holiness by their offspring fulfilling commandments taught us by our parents.

Not the least of these observances is the burial ceremony in a Jewish cemetery with all the customs due the deceased: comforting the bereaved after the burial, preparation of food for the mourners, organizing a *minyan* (group of ten men) of prayer, learning *mishnayot* in honor of the deceased.

The respectful ceremonies carried out honoring the deceased are in sharp contrast to customs adopted by pagan cultures, such as cremation, putting the body out on the roof so the birds can dispose of it, and even gruesome behaviors which demand burning the spouse with the deceased.

Another reason we are careful in treating a deceased person is the belief in the resurrection, *Techiyat Hameitim*.

Our Sages say that all Jews have a portion in The World to Come, where the righteous will sit learning Torah with crowns on their heads before the Almighty.

Our people have for thousands of years treated our dearly departed with the respect we know they deserve, and we will continue to do so until the arrival of *Mashiach*, may it be soon.

The word cremation contains the letters of the word Creation. The difference is the letter M found in one word and missing in the other.

The M represents Man in whose power it is to create or destroy.

We Jews have been eternally known for our creativity, and ability to create and develop, everything for the betterment of mankind. How terrible is it to use this ability to destroy.

Although the cremation of an individual is only symbolic because the deceased is already dead, we Jews should follow our traditions and not destroy the vessel which the Almighty has given us to use on this earth to do good and perform deeds of *chesed*. Disposing of it by fire leaves no trace, not even a symbol of the creativity and goodness it performed in its lifetime.

Our heritage is built on the fulfillment of mitzvot, all of which are for the betterment of this world, and surely our bodies are worthy of disposal in a fashion of dignity and respect rather than being consumed by a match.

Let us never forget whence we emerged and how our Creator put us here for a purpose, which we appreciate and honor.

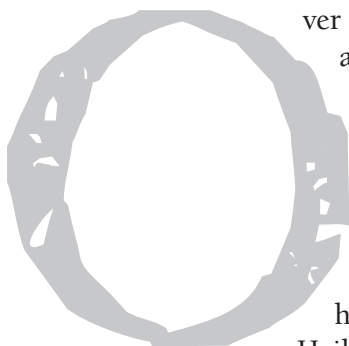
May we continue to follow our traditions of burial forever.

ONE DEGREE OF SEPARATION

BY ROBIN MEYERSON

*All that live must die,
passing through nature to eternity.*

– William Shakespeare



ver the last ten years, I have studied on and off with a Partner-in-Torah over the phone. My partner is a British woman who lives in Brooklyn and has taught me various Torah subjects, from Jewish holidays to how to keep kosher to the rules of proper speech, and so much more. During this same time, I have also worked with Rabbi Moshe Haikins of Chevrah Lomdei Mishnah in Lakewood, New Jersey, and have assisted him in various marketing efforts to promote his organization. I have even used his organization's services on several occasions.

I was speaking to Rabbi Haikins one day, and he asked me if I had heard of the recent house fire in Brooklyn that took the life of a single woman. I had not heard of the tragedy. Rabbi Haikins was very upset, since the lady had been in touch with him just a week before her untimely demise to ask that Mishnah be studied as a merit for her departed father. Now, just one week later, she was gone, as well, and Rabbi Haikins felt it was important that he get in touch with the family. Unfortunately, he did not have any contact information for her relatives, nor did he have any ideas

about how to find them. As he recounted the terribly sad story to me, I asked the name of the woman who had died, which he said was a Ms. Jidel.

I recognized the name immediately, as Ruchie Jidel is my Partner in Torah, with whom I'd been studying on the phone. Shocked, I immediately hung up the phone and called Ruchie, who told me the woman was her sister-in-law. I connected her with Rabbi Haikins, and also offered to sponsor Mishnah study for her soul through Chevrah Lomdei Mishnah.

God moves in mysterious ways.

BURIED TREASURE

HEARD FROM A HOSPICE RABBI

We bury treasure, we burn the trash.

— Doron Kornbluth

 Rabbi Levi (not his real name) is a hospice chaplain busy with the duties associated with this somber but important task helping ease the burden of families who are saying their final farewell to their loved ones. In the course of his duties, he has come across many families whose knowledge of the importance of Jewish burial has been thin on the ground (forgive the pun) and has had to talk them out of a final and odious decision.

“But Rabbi, we have no funds,” they would protest.

“I’ll do the service for free,” was his answer.

“But the burial, it’s so expensive!” they’d counter.

“I’ll raise the funds,” he’d say.

And so Rabbi Levi raised the money for hundreds of burials so that the bodies of the patients whose last rites he’d administered wouldn’t go up in smoke.

But the burden of raising the money weighed heavily on him. Finally, he had to use his own funds to make up the difference when he couldn’t raise enough money. But even as his savings dwindled, Rabbi Levi’s determination stayed strong.

Then one day his fortune changed.

Rabbi Levi won a settlement in a lawsuit that made him much, much richer. Obviously the Judge of all men liked his work. And where others might have used that money for a vacation well-earned, or maybe towards early retirement from a very draining job, Rabbi Levi now uses this newfound wealth to invest in more burials for recalcitrant Jews who otherwise would choose cremation.

You might say that Rabbi Levi has buried his treasure.

RESERVED PARKING

BY ROBIN MEYERSON



The reward for attending a funeral is limitless.

– Talmud, Sota



Knowing my proclivity for finding final resting places for Jewish souls, or at least their bodies, Rabbi Shoshan contacted me. A woman in Jerusalem had called him about the recent death of her ninety-eight-year-old aunt in Arizona whom no one wanted the dubious honor of disposing of. Apparently no one among her children or her grandchildren liked the deceased and no one cared one way or the other how she was going to be sent from this world as long as they didn't have to take care of it. But a Jew is a Jew is a Jew, and although no one else seemed to think she was worthy of any respect, God seemed to because he made miracle after miracle to make sure this woman was buried according to Jewish law.

First, while all the family politics were going on, she was waiting at a non-Jewish mortuary where her non-Jewish volunteer aide had sent her. I called the mortuary and asked them not to touch her until we sorted this out and they agreed.

Then, I guided her niece to ask her aide to look around her home to see if she could find a will. She did indeed find the will, which named a nephew in another state executor, who was to take care of her final arrangements. Only thing was, he didn't want anything to do with the situation and he was partial to cremation. So he agreed to sign over power of attorney to the religious niece in Jerusalem.

That accomplished, Rabbi Zohn in New York agreed to give this truly abandoned Jewish lady a free burial if her body were flown there. That would cost \$1,700 which was half the price of the cheapest, no-frills burial in Scottsdale. The Jewish free-loan society was ready to give a loan for the cost of the flight but the loan had to be signed for by a family member, none of whom, as mentioned, wanted anything to do with their recently deceased aunt or Jewish burial. The niece in Israel was willing to sign for the loan but she wasn't a resident of Arizona. I was ready to sign, as a resident, but I wasn't a relative.

While I was stewing over this, it was time to pick up my son from preschool. I was very distracted and was walking around the preschool parking lot, wringing my hands, trying to think of a solution. Rabbi Brisky was behind me in car pool and he said, "Are you always in the habit of pacing around the parking lot like this?"

"No," I said, jolted out of my thoughts, and then I told him the story. When I finished, he looked at me in the way rabbis do before they say, "You're not going to believe this, but...."

"You're not going to believe this," he said, not disappointing me, "but I just spent two hours on the phone with this exasperated donor who is trying to donate money to the Jewish free-loan fund to offer money for a burial and he hasn't been able to get through. Give me a minute," he said and flipped open his cellphone to call the guy back.

Later that afternoon, I was able to pick up the check from the rabbi who got it from the donor for the exact amount for the airline, and by evening, Aunt Dorothy was on her way back, not to Kansas but to her eternal resting place in New York.

And as I was driving home from preschool, tears coursing down my face from the huge relief at the serendipity of events, I looked at the car ahead of me and read the sticker in the back window, which said in big letters:

GOD LOVES YOU!

And my tears of relief turned to tears of joy and wondrous awe.

A JOURNEY TO THE PAST

BY SHAYNA HUNT



*The earth does not belong to us,
we belong to the earth.*

– Chief Seattle

*Traveling—it leaves you speechless,
then turns you into a storyteller.*

– Ibn Battuta



How many times have you looked back on something profound in your life, and come to realize that at the time of that event, the whole picture had yet to even come about? Personally, I can tell you that that has happened to me before. Situations are like artwork. They must be precisely made up, intricately having every purposeful brushstroke all work together to complete the final picture.

The year before I became *frum*, my parents presented me with a high school graduation gift too large to wrap. They were taking me on an adventure. A trip to Hawaii, New Zealand and finally the topper of it all: Australia. My mother's family originally came from Europe. After surviving the Holocaust most of her extended family came to America and Canada and the other part went to Australia and England. So this really was to be an adventure. I was going to meet aunts, uncles and cousins that I had never met before. I was

so excited. Of course it wasn't until we hit the sandy beaches of Hawaii that I realized my mom plus my dad plus me did not equal an adventure. The generation gap was felt loud and clear. We did fun tourist things geared for people over the age of fifty. After all, I was only eighteen. To this day if I even see a T-shirt that says 'Aloha Hawaii' I get that "Enough with the souvenirs already, let's go to the beach!" antsy feeling inside. We had purchased enough Macadamia nuts to open our own shop back in Chicago. I certainly didn't expect anything more exciting to happen at the next destination unless I was the one to shake things up a bit. So by the time we landed in New Zealand I was plotting my mutiny. Even if it was only to infuriate my parents a little bit, anything was better than another bus tour with boring souvenirs and tour guides that thought they were stand-up comics!

Our plane set down in New Zealand on a dreary drizzly cold day. I instantly missed 85 degrees and swaying palm trees. 'Aloha Hawaii' t-shirts looked better than my first glimpse of Auckland did. So, as we loaded onto the transport bus that was to take us from the airport to our hotel I put on my pouty face and Walkman headphones determined to look like a spoiled American teenager to punish my parents for our lack of adventure. As the bus rode on and on for over an hour stopping at other peoples hotels along the way, I kept my sullen face turned toward the raindrop streaked bus window. After a while I became enthralled with all the old cemeteries I saw along the way. As I mindlessly hummed along to a song, I was finding my own adventure.

The farthest I had ever been away from home before was Canada, and for some reason this old historical place had my romantic heart beating faster than the music blaring in my ears. Despite the cheerless day, the emerald green fields and ancient old gravestones had a dramatic effect on me that the drizzly day only enhanced. Before we reached our hotel, I resolved to visit an old cemetery before we left. Something seemed to tug at me. I was determined to imagine myself the heroine in a mystery novel. To solve some delicious mystery, I had to endure a creepy visit to a haunted old cemetery. I had never craved to do such a thing before, but mixed with the melodrama and my parent's possible reaction to it, I had my mission mapped out.

Imagine my thrill when the bus finally stopped and right across from our hotel was yet another ancient cemetery. I nearly rubbed my hands together with anticipation. When we had finally settled in our rooms, I noticed that one of our windows looked out over toward the cemetery. I could see the decrepit gray shadowed tombstones as they jutted out of the ground like eerie statues. Caught up in my own plot, I imagined them beckoning me to visit. So I loaded up my old snapshot camera and told my parents I was going out.

“Where are you going?” My mother wanted to know.

“To visit the cemetery across the street,” I sprung it on her.

“Did you hear that?” She shrieked to my father. He pretended to ignore her. “She is going to a cemetery of all places. We took her around the world so she could visit a cemetery of strangers?”

I am embarrassed to say I didn’t win that round. I was forced to go sightseeing around the town with my parents instead of my longed for chapter in a mystery novel. Yet on our way back from touring, fate was on my side. We were walking back toward the hotel on the same side of the street as the cemetery. Outwardly I was calm. However, as my mother and father discussed the strange, hard to understand accents from the locals, I was planning on running ahead and escaping into the creepy graveyard. We were nearly upon it when a weird gust of wind blew so hard that all three of us had to stop. Right in front of us the gate to the cemetery swung open from the blast and its frightful creaking prevented us from continuing on. I had changed my mind. This was not a novel and I certainly wasn’t a heroine solving some mystery. I would have given anything to be buying an ‘Aloha Hawaii’ t-shirt at that moment!

Just as I was ready to bolt toward the hotel, my mother yelled, “Oh my gosh!”

My father and I lost all color in our faces and for a moment forgot how to speak. We waited for her to point and scream at the ghost that only she saw. But my mother continued on in a matter-of-fact voice void of any fear.

“I can’t believe it. Right here in the middle of New Zealand is a Jewish cemetery!”

Relieved there was no ghost, I found my voice and flippantly quipped to cover up my previous fear, "Gee mom, Jews die too you know."

Ignoring my sarcasm, my mother who earlier thought I was a tad off balance for wanting to visit a cemetery, proceeded to enter the eerie domain. Quietly my father and I followed her. All around us the branches of the large tall trees cloaked the yard like wide wings of a bird. Protecting it somehow. What we saw was so grievous. Old decayed stones with Hebrew and English written on them, decorated the overgrown patch of grass. Most of the birth dates dated back to the 1700s, some later. Most of the tombstones were dilapidated and they lay so forlorn, scattered in several pieces. Somehow the fact that it was a Jewish cemetery in the middle of a place that was not widely known to have a Jewish settlement seemed to us very profound. Profound enough for all three of us to silently stay in that cemetery working at putting the fallen stones together and pulling out the overgrown weeds so that the hidden markers could be seen. We worked together steadily for perhaps over two hours. Anyone watching us carefully would have interpreted our respectfulness and care in doing our task as us having a close relative there. Which of course we didn't. However, the feelings I had with my parents shifted while we worked quietly together. There was an unspoken bond that developed that day, bringing us closer together for a higher, very spiritual cause.

The sense of peace we felt that day, after having put such effort into tidying up the old forsaken graveyard, was still with us when we flew on to Australia. I had managed to snap some pictures of the stones before we left Auckland. I had gone after breakfast on our last day, perhaps to say goodbye to the now endeared souls who lay in their neat and tidied-up graves. This time my mother wasn't upset in the least that I was going to take pictures of an old cemetery. In fact, later that morning after our luggage was loaded onto the bus, my parents joined me there for a peaceful goodbye.

Something deeply spiritual touched us that day in a positive way. What was odd was that I couldn't get the experience out of my mind. What nagged at me was that I didn't know who those buried people were. Granted, they had lived and then passed on

hundreds of years earlier, but my curiosity bothered me, and left an unsettled taste in my mouth.

Two months after I had been back in the States, I was becoming *shomer Shabbat* (Sabbath observant) and each weekend I would stay with a *frum* friend in the city of Chicago – about an hour from my home. One particular Friday night meal, my friend and I were at friends of hers. We, along with our hosts – a married couple and their children, all sat around the Shabbat table talking. It had been a nice evening and at one point the father of the family asked me what I had been doing since I had graduated high school. Simply telling them about my menial job working at a store seemed too boring, so I told everyone about the trip I had taken with my parents. They all seemed so interested, and it prompted me to recount for them the interesting graveyard story. During my retelling of it, the host got up and left the table. He returned with a current Jewish magazine. He handed it to me. On the cover in thick black print it said: NEW ZEALAND'S FIRST JEWISH SETTLEMENT.

In silent wonder, I carefully paged through and read about the people whose graves my parents and I had cleared out. The names of the Rabbis, men and women I read were the same names on the headstones from the pictures I had at home. They had been a small community that didn't last very long in New Zealand. In the article it detailed who the buried people were. They had finally become real to me. Reading that article I felt as if they were reaching out to me letting me know their gratitude and mutual affection from that one, strange and wonderful connection we had had. My adventure had become complete and I felt better than any mystery novel heroine ever did. When I had finished reading the article, I was able to glean the bigger picture and I smiled at life's mysteries. Only then had I been able to see the final applied brushstroke that turned a mere painting into a timeless masterpiece!

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AT PEACE

BY DEBBIE SCHAFER

*Seeing death as the end of life is like seeing the horizon
as the end of the ocean.*

— David Searls

y name is Debbie Schaffer and I live with my family in Perth, Australia. Perth has a small Jewish community of about 8,000. Although I do not define myself or my family as religious, we are traditional but attend an Orthodox *shul* (synagogue) and we firmly support Israel.

I lost my first child, a little boy named Ashley when he was a toddler. The nurses at the hospital asked me to see him, so that I'd believe that he was truly gone, and what struck me was how beautiful my little boy looked, how peaceful. That image has stayed with me for thirty-four years.

Twelve years later, one month after my second son's Grant's Bar Mitzvah, my brother died of a massive heart attack. The *Chevra Kaddisha* told the family he didn't look good and that due to the swiftness of his passing, his color was disturbing, as if he had held his last breath and never let it out. I went to identify the body with his wife and four children instead of my parents. I did not think he looked awful. He looked as if he had been away on vacation. Again, I was struck by how peaceful he looked.

The next holiday was Passover and while I was sitting in shul, the rabbi was speaking about *tzedaka* and how the *Chevra Kaddisha* was looking for new members to help prepare the bodies

for burial. (The Perth *Chevra Kaddisha* is run solely by volunteers and women always do the *tahara* for women and men do the *tahara* for men). So I volunteered. That was twenty-two years ago and I still do it. It gives me pleasure that the person cannot say, "Thank you."

Of course, although I'm not Orthodox, there are certain *halachic* rules – rules of Jewish law - which we all abide by. To perform the *tahara*, out of respect, I cover my hair, and wear a skirt and long sleeves. After we've finished, we ask forgiveness from the person in case we have shown them any disrespect or hurt them in any way.

The first time, I did a *tahara*, the woman teaching me took me out for coffee to ask how I felt afterwards. I have since done that for the women I teach too. For me, *tahara* is not disturbing or traumatic. It is peaceful. That's the pervading feeling. I choose to never do a very young person, or someone who has been in a terrible accident. I know I could do it. However, I choose not to. Performing *tahara* is not for everyone. Many of my girlfriends say that they just could not touch a dead body, and I tell them that that is okay, there is no shame; there are many others who will.

My sister and I nursed our mother in her final months. I said to my mother, "I'm happy to take you to Heaven's door, but I can't cross over with you. That is the path you must travel on your own." My mother loved that we helped her and we know that she is in a much better place now.

The woman who did my mother's *tahara* told me she was smiling. "No, she wasn't," I said. I knew how much pain my mother had suffered and her face had showed it. But, like when I saw my brother, and the man from the *Chevra Kaddisha* had said he didn't look good, perhaps she saw something I did not. Maybe my mother was smiling because she was at peace and she knew she was going to a better place. I will never know.

In my job, I work as the Chairman of Visibility and Guide dogs of Western Australia and Tasmania. I work to ensure that the lives of blind and vision-impaired people of Western Australia and Tasmania are met with services to provide a better life. Sometimes we are blind to things and think they're not there because we don't see them. I do believe that the soul exists. I believe that the soul goes

to a place of peace when it leaves This World. I feel privileged that I play a part in helping the soul on its journey by preparing the body for burial, where it rests in the earth while the soul moves on.

My third son Todd and his wife had a little girl eight weeks ago. They named her Ashley in memory of the baby I lost. She is one special *motek*, a sweetheart!

Death does not frighten me. I don't approach death with trepidation because I know that my *Neshama* will find its rightful place.

THE JOY OF BURYING MY MOTHER-IN-LAW

BY HENYA STORCH

*Your people are my people, and your God is my God;
where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried.*

— Ruth 1: 16–17

There are so many mother-in-law jokes and stories, enough to fill hundreds of shelves in the library, but none of them will come close to what you are about to read. Just so you don't misunderstand, let me preface this by saying that I loved my mother-in-law deeply and the feeling was mutual. Although the relationship was short-lived because of her sudden illness, we spent several wonderful years enjoying each other's company, laughing together, shopping, sharing holidays and family time. I cherish those memories. I was the fortunate recipient of many exotic and rare gifts from her worldwide travels. In exchange, I'd like to think that I also provided her with precious items, among them two wonderful grandchildren, my son and daughter. But in the end, the greatest gift I gave her was eternal life. This may sound like a paradox, but the moment that I witnessed her body placed in the ground, the profound sadness I felt about her loss was recast in a moment of true joy and solace.

Let's start at the very beginning. I remember my wedding day as a young, nervous bride, ready to make my grand entrance down that long aisle, looking ahead to a wondrous life with my new

husband. I can see the elegant wedding canopy and all the guests anxious for a glance at the hopeful bride escorted by her loving parents. Everything looked dreamlike from behind the long veil covering my face. Picture perfect, just as planned. My parents' supportive arms on either side of me, I take my first steps down the aisle, all eyes gazed upon me. I am elevated by the moment, lost in all the possibilities that lay ahead, focusing on the groom, my handsome husband, waiting for me under the flowered canopy. Halfway down the aisle, I am suddenly brought out of this euphoric state by a slight tug on the back of my wedding dress. What is that preventing me from moving forward? I slowly turn to my left and there is the matriarch of my husband's family, his aunt, Tante Becky, beckoning me to lean toward her. Tante Becky is quite a presence, even at ninety years of age. You don't continue down the wedding aisle when Tante Becky has something to say to you. She is a survivor of the pogroms in Russia, the eldest of all my husband's relatives and therefore the archivist of the family history. I stop walking and bend down to hear her heavily accented voice say to me, "Mazel Tov, dahling. We have a plot just waiting for you. Welcome to the family! Mazel Tov!!"

Now, I want to believe that Mazel Tov, the Yiddish pronouncement of congratulations, was meant on my nuptials and not on receiving an honored burial plot in the prestigious Ennis Family Circle Burial Society, but to this day, I'm still not sure. The Ennis Family Circle was no ordinary burial society. Actually, it was quite renowned and had made the cover of the *New York Times* magazine section and was highlighted in an article about Jewish genealogy. I didn't know it then, but this renowned property in the middle of the New Montefiore Cemetery in Long Island would play a very important role in my marriage.

I married into a very large family. The New York contingent of relatives would get together often, sitting around a sumptuous table overflowing with traditional Jewish "appetizing" — fresh bagels, lox, whitefish, herring, kugels and an assortment of rugelach — to discuss all the latest family news: who got married, who got divorced, and, of course, who passed away. No meal would be complete without the latest news about the Ennis Family Circle — who didn't pay their dues, who couldn't be buried in the family

plot according to the bylaws, who had reserved locations and who didn't want to be buried next to whom. The Ennis Family Circle Burial Society, as morbid as it may have seemed to an outsider like me, was the glue that held the family together. It was, I always maintained, a very interesting family.

Similarly, my mother-in-law was, as they say, "one of a kind". She had an interesting outlook on life; some might even call her eccentric. She was a cultural Jew, not particularly religious, but she was sure of her heritage. She enjoyed her Brooklyn life in the "shtetl" of Sea Gate, spoke an excellent Yiddish, always had a political opinion and was a true humanitarian. As an office manager at Tower Records, she was always surrounded by rock 'n' roll celebrities. She was very conscientious about her diet, and her passion about healthy foods drove others to be more aware of their own nutrition. She was a lot of things, but ordinary was not the word one would use when describing her. When she married her second husband, she gave up her New York life and moved across the country to the ski resort town of Taos, New Mexico, into an exquisite custom-built dream house where she enjoyed sitting in her backyard Jacuzzi, inhaling the fresh mountain air.

She was happy and so we were happy for her. She and her new husband opened up a very successful store called The China Trade Shop that allowed her to travel back and forth to the Far East frequently. They became very well connected and politically involved and enjoyed a sort of celebrity status in Taos. It seemed a perfect life for her and we enjoyed our visits to New Mexico, where we would ski, ride horses, visit the Pueblo Indian reservation and enjoy the beauty of the mountains.

Not long after we were married, we received one of those dreaded late night phone calls from New Mexico. It was my new father-in-law calling to tell us the disastrous news that my mother-in-law was diagnosed with lymphocytic lymphoma. There were no obvious symptoms, so the prognosis of six months seemed unbelievable. Since both my husband and I were immersed in the medical field — he being a doctor of internal medicine and a PhD fellow of nutritional medicine at MIT/Harvard, and I being the head nurse at the 725-bed Hebrew Rehabilitation Center in

Boston and later serving directly under the Bostoner Rebbe as the coordinator for ROFEH International organization — we immediately went into professional mode, using every connection we had between us to get my mother-in-law the best care, traditional, innovative and alternative. We consulted with Sloan-Kettering, Beth Israel, MD Anderson Cancer Center and many world-renowned professionals dealing with this fatal form of cancer. We were fortunate to be able to spend another six years together, far exceeding the original diagnosis.

During those years, we all flew back and forth between Boston and New Mexico as frequently and easily as people travel from New Jersey to New York. At some point, all four of us were in Boston eating at a Chinese restaurant, trying to avoid talking about the impending details we knew we were going to face very shortly. A discussion about funeral arrangements and final wishes is the last thing you want to do with anyone, let alone someone you love so much, but we knew it had to be done. We assumed she would take her plot in the Ennis Family Circle at The New Montefiore Cemetery, the same place that I was promised on my wedding day, but we needed confirmation. She said, “Of course, that’s where I’m going to be buried,” as if there were no further discussion necessary. Then her husband interjected something that gave my heart such a knock, I thought I was going to lose my meal. He said in a very dismissive manner, “Why are we talking about this nonsense? She’s going to be cremated. People waste so much money and energy on funerals. Burial is such a hassle. Cremation is efficient and final.” My mother-in-law looked at him and said, “Don’t be ridiculous. I don’t want to be cremated. I’m going to be buried near my daughter in the Ennis Family Circle.” Her husband kept pushing the issue, saying that she’s going to be cremated, but she held firm, stating that she had no intention of being cremated and wanted to be buried in the family plot as she had always planned. End of discussion. They returned to New Mexico and we thought that the matter was (forgive the pun) put to rest.

As her condition worsened, my husband and I moved to a beautiful large home in Hillside, NJ, where there would be enough room for my mother-in-law and her husband to move in while she was going through the worst part of the treatment. We knew she

was getting weaker, her body ravaged with intravenous medicine and feeding tubes. As she became more and more frail, she relied on a walker to move just a few feet. We arranged for hospice care so she could be surrounded by family in her final weeks. Everything was in place for her transfer from New Mexico to New Jersey when we got an ominous phone call from her husband saying she is too weak to travel and he was admitting her to a facility in Santa Fe, about an hour away from her Taos home. He gave us no other information and then hung up.

We called back numerous times, only to get his voicemail. We left messages, but they were not returned. We had no idea how to reach her. For two grueling days we were in the dark, panicking. We realized then that this was not the end of the discussion at all. In fact, our worst nightmare was about to come true and my dear mother-in-law's last wishes of a proper burial in the family plot would not happen, and worse, she would be cremated. Amazingly, God's hand showed. We received a call from a Catholic nursing home in Sante Fe with the sad news that my mother-in-law had passed away. Here's where the miracles come in.

Since she was married, it was her husband's name that was listed as her emergency contact, not my husband's. However, one of the nuns noticed that my mother-in-law was Jewish and was scheduled to be cremated. Knowing that this was not a typical Jewish tradition, she wanted to be sure this information was correct. In reviewing the records, she saw my husband's name with an indication that he was a doctor and she decided to call him. She also told him that his mother's body was scheduled to be transferred to the local crematorium. "What? No! Absolutely not! That's not what she wanted!" we screamed into the phone. "Under no circumstances is she to be cremated!"

What could we do? We are on the other side of the country! Her husband had total control over her body. I grabbed the phone and said, "I'm her nurse and I totally forbid this. Don't move that body. I'm calling a rabbi right now. Under no circumstances are you to allow that body to be removed." I immediately called my rabbi, Levi Yitzchak Horowitz, the Bostoner Rebbe, for help and he got the gears moving with lightning speed. His first call was to his contacts in Sante Fe, Rabbi Hillel Goldberg and the Hebrew

teacher, Sara Yehudis Fishman. We had to get her body out of the nursing facility and onto a plane to head back to JFK and then to the New Montefiore Cemetery and the Ennis Family Circle plot so that we could bury her body within the 24-hour requirement — all without letting her husband know. We literally were going to kidnap her body.

How fortunate for us that the Bostoner Rebbe's son, Rabbi Mayer Horowitz, himself a Chassidic rabbi, owned the Nesher Travel Agency and was able to make last-minute travel arrangements. Rabbi Goldberg stayed with my mother-in-law, reciting the Psalms of David, and Sara Yehudis Fishman performed the ritual cleansing according to Jewish law. They remained with her body until she was put on a plane in Albuquerque. The plane made a stop in Colorado, where it was delayed because of a blizzard. Meanwhile, back in New Jersey, we felt like thieves in the night but knew we had God on our side. We were doing the right thing. While trying to make sense of all of this, the only thing I could think about was Jewish law and how it is so common that secular Jews, like my father-in-law, misunderstand how detrimental cremation is.

Jewish law requires that the deceased's children go to extreme lengths to respect the last wishes of the parent. A proper burial was my mother-in-law's wish. Cremation was not. Jewish law states that our bodies don't really belong to us. The body belongs to God and must be returned as it was given. Cremation represents a total rejection of God's laws. I learned that in the Messianic Age, with the coming of Mashiach, all souls will be redeemed and resurrected. Cremation, the ultimate destruction of the body, signifies that once the body is gone, so too is the soul. Jewish law tells us that the soul lives on and the body returns to God. Had we not interceded, my mother-in-law's beautiful soul would have been gone forever. What my husband and I, along with these wonderful complicit angels all around the country, were doing was giving my mother-in-law eternal life.

We drove out to JFK to meet the plane and see that her body and coffin were transferred to the waiting hearse, then led them to the *New York Times*—famous Ennis Family Circle at Montefiore Cemetery. I was still looking over my shoulder, shivering with nerves, afraid that her husband would make a sudden appearance and stop

us from fulfilling our mission. The gravesite had been prepared for interment, ready to receive my mother-in-law. Still shaking and fearing that something else might befall us, I screamed to the workers, "Please, please. Hurry, hurry, fill the dirt in. Cover her. Please, hurry up!"

One of the workers looked up at me and said with a smirk, "Boy, you must have really hated your mother-in-law."

"No," I responded, now satisfied, "Not at all. In fact, I loved her very much. So much that I've just given her soul eternal life."

We received a call from her husband once he discovered his wishes had been betrayed. He told us what a horrible thing we had done and as a result we were cut out of any inheritance, which was quite substantial. We have no regrets. There is a saying that goes, "You may lose the battle but win the war." We may have lost a great inheritance, but our reward will be in the World-to-Come when our souls will be reunited with my mother-in-law's. We won the war. She rests within her beloved family circle.

Rest in peace, Mom. Rest in peace.

SHROUDED IN HOLINESS

BY ROSALLY SALTSMAN

*Our Father in Heaven, Rock and Redeemer of Israel...
Strengthen the hands of those who defend our holy
land, grant them deliverance and adorn them in a
mantle of victory.*

– From The Prayer for the State of Israel

Eliyahu Chakim and Eliyahu Beit Tzuri (“the two Eliyahus”) were two boys who fought with the LECHI (Fighters for the Freedom of Israel) under Yitzhak Shamir and were sentenced to death in 1945 and hung in Egypt under the British Mandate. In 1944, they had killed Lord Moyne, who had been preventing Jewish refugees from reaching the Holy Land, closing the gates on the possibility of saving Jews, and had been declared an enemy of the Jewish people after stating they had no right to the Land of Israel. The two Eliyahus sang “Hatikvah” as they were led to their deaths.

Thirty years later, as part of the peace agreement with Egypt, Menachem Begin requested that their bodies be returned and buried in a Jewish grave. Yitzhak Shamir was part of a delegation to receive the bodies. The caskets were handed over in an impressive military ceremony headed by the Chief Rabbinate under the direction of the IDF Rabbi, Gad Navon. They opened the caskets to ensure that bodies were indeed in there and to identify the re-

mains. Everyone exclaimed in awe as the caskets were opened; the delegation saw that the bodies of the two soldiers had not decomposed at all and were completely intact, so much so that the curl of their mustache was in place and they even had a blush on their skin. They looked like they were sleeping. A representative of the rabbinate recalled a saying of the Talmudic Sages that the bodies didn't compose because they had died a martyr's death.

In June 2014, three Israeli high school boys – Naftali Frenkel (16, from Nof Ayalon), Gilad Shaer (16, from Talmon), and Eyal Yifrah (19, from Elad) – were picked up at a hitchhiking post while on their way home from yeshiva by three Arab terrorists. For three weeks Israel hoped and prayed for their safe return. Their mothers — Iris Yifrach, Bat Galim Shaer and Rachel Frenkel — became a universal symbol of motherhood and faith as they appeared together to speak to rallies and appealed the UN to intervene and condemn the terrorism and to the nation of Israel to do mitzvot in the merit of their sons' return.

Eighteen days later, IDF search teams found the bodies of the three missing teenagers in a field northwest of Hebron. The whole country rallied together and mourned the three young boys, pure innocent young souls who had been the victim of inhumane terrorism.

Although they had been shot immediately and thrown into the ditch, and although it was summer in Israel when temperatures are daily in the 80s and 90s, the boys' bodies were found intact. They had died a martyr's death *Al Kiddush Hashem*, sanctifying God's name.

When there has been cause to move a *tzaddik's* body for reburial elsewhere, it has been noted that their exhumed bodies had not decomposed but rather remained whole. They served God completely, with body and soul, and so their bodies remained unsullied and as pure as their souls. The vessel, the body, had become holy, too, and did not need the purification that burial provides when separated from the soul.

The righteous and those who died a martyr's death, sanctifying God's name, were already shrouded in holiness and merited purity of both body and soul.

PART II

FROM THE NEXT WORLD TO THIS



IT IS THE SECRET
OF THE WORLD
THAT ALL THINGS
SUBSIST AND DO NOT
DIE, BUT RETIRE A
LITTLE FROM SIGHT
AND AFTERWARDS
RETURN AGAIN.

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

MESSAGE FROM THE GARDEN

BY HOWARD GARFINKLE

*There are only two ways to live your life.
One is as though nothing is a miracle.
The other is as though everything is a miracle.*

– Albert Einstein

y father Shimon Garfinkle went into the hospital when he was seventy-eight-years-old, to check why he had recurrent shortness of breath. My mother, Edith, had just been released from treatment for a similar condition. They always did everything together. We figured it was par for the course for getting older. But my father wasn't released; he died several days later from a heart condition we didn't even know he had. It was a blow to the family because it was unexpected and because he was our patriarch. We loved my father.

Several days later, during the Shiva, the whole family was together talking about how much we missed him already - you know that stage where you can't really believe the person's gone but you reminisce anyway - when I got a notification of an incoming email on my cellphone. It was from my father!

The message read: "I found a nice garden with good Wi-Fi."

It took a few minutes for the shock to wear off and for us to realize he had sent the message from the hospital. Meir Hospital, in Kfar Saba in Israel, does have a nice garden. It's happened before, on many occasions actually, that I would get annoyed at my children for not sending messages telling me when they want me to pick them up only to get them hours, even days, later.

This message was obviously sent days earlier and its transmission was delayed. Or was it? After all, my father did say the reception was good there.

MY MOTHER-IN-LAW, WATCHING OUT FOR US ON HER YAHRTZEIT

BY ROBIN MEYERSON

*We are not physical beings having a spiritual experience;
we are spiritual beings having a physical experience.*

— Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

t seven months pregnant, I decided it was time to take a sabbatical and retire my publishing business. I had been publishing Jewish Spirit magazine for nearly seven years. I had nursed two babies during those seven years and worked almost around the clock to make the magazine work while taking care of my home, family and community. After seven years, I decided, I needed a spiritual and physical break to focus on myself and my new baby. It was not a selfish decision. Rather, it was a necessary health-related decision.

But there was the money aspect to think about. We had a mortgage. We had four very high tuition bills for Jewish day school and we had all the other expenses that everyone else has for food, cars, summer camp and so much more. We would just have to have faith and let God provide.

Our faith was definitely not misplaced. In December, we got a letter in the mail from our mortgage company offering us a no-cost refinance at a lower interest rate and payment. It seemed like

a blessing and a wonderful opportunity. But we had reservations. For two years I had tried to refinance with this very company and they had lost my papers, dismissed my requests and generally failed to provide us with adequate customer service. So we decided to shop around. We found another bank with another much better offer. The only caveat was that we had to pay for an appraisal. And if the appraisal came back too low, we would not be approved for the refinance and would lose the appraisal fee.

We decided to take a chance. For five days, the whole family removed clutter from the house, painted, swept, cleaned and planted fresh, new flowers. It was like we were getting ready for royalty to come. The date set for the appraisal came out on the ninth of Tevet, my mother-in-law's *yahrzeit*. My mother-in-law was a real estate agent, and she was also a devoted, loving mother. She would tell anyone who was willing to listen – including the postman, grocery check-out clerk and many others – how great her son was! She was a hoot!

As Charlie lit the *yahrzeit* candle the day before the appraisal, I sat at the dining room table and said to him, "I'll bet your mother's flame will chase the appraiser around the house and tell him how great you are. I can just hear her now, saying, 'You better give them a good appraisal since my boy really deserves it!'" I really did visualize the flame chasing the man around the house!

The next day, the appraiser came and left. He stayed barely twenty-five minutes. Our five days of cleaning and sorting and de-cluttering were evaluated in a mere twenty-five minutes! I tried to remain hopeful and we were all on pins and needles as we waited the week until we would get the appraisal results. Then the news arrived. We got it! And not only did we get an excellent appraisal but since the appraisal was so good we got an even better deal on the refinance than expected.

I know the credit goes to my mother-in-law.

Thanks, Mom!

'TWIXT DREAMS AND WAKING

BY SHAYNA HUNT

Clarity is God's blessing.

— Ladino Proverb

When I was twenty-one, and due to have my first baby, my father was gravely ill. It was a hard time for my family. I was young with a fairly new marriage and then the wondrous news of a baby. Given the situation with my father, my good news was overshadowed by the harshness of life, my father's impending death. My mother was having a difficult time accepting the situation, and our relationship had not been smooth to begin with. Accompanied by the added pressures of my father's condition, we were not getting along.

Eventually my father passed away when I was in my sixth month of pregnancy. He never got to see his first grandchild. It was a very difficult time for me. My overwhelming grief brought on complications in my pregnancy that worried my doctors. I was consumed with the lack of closure. Things had been so strenuous between my mother and I, that at the end of his life I was not welcome by my mother to visit my father, who was at that time more unconscious than conscious. I loved my father and I knew he knew I did. But I had so wanted to talk with him just one more time. It nearly drove me over the edge.

However, life goes on and my beautiful baby girl was born on a hot day in August. Motherhood was a great balm for my grief and I poured all my love into my precious little girl. The days went by quickly. Nevertheless, it was the nights, when all would be quiet that I allowed myself to wallow in my grief. I rarely showed it to others. Life had gone on as usual, but I still held on to my irrational hope to have one last conversation with my father.

One particular night started out normal. My husband and I went to bed after the baby, who was then already eight months old, did. My husband fell asleep first, while I stayed awake letting my thoughts flow. Eventually I started to go over all the events leading up to my father's death. I remember that I cried myself to sleep.

Then I began to dream. I was in a gray place. It was not light, and it was not dark, just gray everywhere. All around me I saw shadows of people walking past me. None of them seemed real. Then out of the shadows of people, came my father who didn't seem gray at all. In fact he looked good. He seemed so real. When he approached me he was smiling at my confusion and held out a hand to me.

I automatically took it and blurted out, "I can't believe this is happening. I don't feel like this is a dream. You seem so real."

He smiled just like he used to and said calmly, "For now this is real. And we have to talk. It's very important."

Amazed that his hand felt real and warm and full of life, I couldn't contain my excitement. "This is wonderful! You are real. I missed you so much. I don't want to stop holding your hand!" I placed my other hand on top of our clasped hands. It felt wonderful.

"Amy," he said my name very seriously. "We need to talk. I don't have much time and I have to tell you something."

I looked at his beautiful face with wonder at this whole thing. "Okay, go ahead."

"I need you to know that everything is okay between us. There is no reason for you to be upset. I know you love me and I love you. It's all okay. Everything that happened, I understand and it's all okay. You don't have to worry anymore. I love you."

I was crying with relief and I clung to him saying over and over, “Thank you, thank you, I love you. I really do...”

Then he stood up and said he had to go, and that I had to go back. I was angry and I wouldn’t let go of his hand. I told him I needed to stay with him a little longer. But he was very insistent that we needed to part ways at that moment. He pulled his hand from mine and again told me he loved me, and he disappeared into the many shadows that were walking past. I sobbed and sobbed so hard that I woke up.

I was not making any noise, but tears were raining down my face from my wild experience.

All of a sudden, my husband yelled out, “Oh my gosh, what was that? What was that??” He was pointing over my head. When I looked, nothing was there.

He flipped on the light and I could see he was really shaken. He proceeded to tell me that something had woken him and when he looked towards me he saw a white light glowing over my head. Then it vanished. It really scared him.

I felt the most amazing peace. “Don’t worry,” I told him. “It was my father. Everything is okay now.” And it was.

A HUG FROM HEAVEN

BY DANIEL GORDIS

*Everything has its season, and there is a time
for everything under the heaven:
A time to be born and a time to die.*

– Ecclesiastes 3: 1-2

*Making the decision to have a child - it is momentous.
It is to decide forever to have your heart go walking
around outside your body.*

– Elizabeth Stone

It's been almost a year since St.-Sgt. Dvir¹ Emanuelof became the first casualty of Operation Cast Lead, losing his life to Hamas mortar fire just as he entered Gaza early in the offensive. But sitting with his mother, Dalia, in her living room last week, I was struck not by loss, but by life. And not by grief, but by fervent belief. And by a more recent story about Dvir that simply needs to be told.

This past summer, Dalia and some friends planned to go to Hut-zot Hayotzer, the artists' colony constructed each summer outside Jerusalem's Old City walls. But Dalia's young daughter objected; she wanted to go a week later, so she could hear Meir Banai in concert.

¹ The name Dvir means Holy of Holies, the interior sanctuary in the Jewish Tabernacle and Temple where the Ark of the Covenant was kept.

Dalia consented. And so, a week later, she found herself in the bleachers, waiting with her daughter for the performance to begin. Suddenly, Dalia felt someone touch her shoulder. When she turned around, she saw a little boy, handsome, with blond hair and blue eyes. A kindergarten teacher by profession, Dalia was immediately drawn to the boy, and as they began to speak, she asked him if he'd like to sit next to her.

By now, though, the boy's father had seen what was unfolding, and called over to him, "Eshel, why don't you come back and sit next to me and Dvir?" Stunned, Dalia turned around and saw the father holding a baby. "What did you say his name is?" she asked the father.

"Dvir," responded Benny.

"How old is he?" Dalia asked.

"Six months," was the reply.

"Forgive my asking," she continued, "was he born after Cast Lead, or before?"

"After."

Whereupon Dalia continued, "Please forgive my pressing, but can I ask why you named him Dvir?"

"Because," Benny explained to her, "the first soldier killed in Cast Lead was named Dvir. His story touched us, and we decided to name our son after him."

Almost unable to speak, Dalia paused, and said, "I'm that Dvir's mother."

Shiri, the baby's mother, had overheard the conversation, and wasn't certain that she believed her ears. "That can't be."

"It's true."

"What's your last name?"

"Emanuelof."

"Where do you live?"

"Givat Ze'ev."

"It is you," Shiri said. "We meant to invite you to the *brit milah*, the circumcision, but we couldn't."

"It doesn't matter," Dalia assured her, "You see, I came anyway."

And then, Dalia told me, Shiri said something to her that she'll never forget - "Dvir is sending you a hug, through us."

At that point in our conversation, Shiri told me her story. She'd been pregnant, she said, in her 33rd or 34th week, and during an ultrasound test, a potentially serious problem with the baby was discovered. After consultations with medical experts, she was told that there was nothing to do. The baby would have to be born, and then the doctors would see what they could do. A day or two later, she was at home, alone, anxious and worried. She lit Chanukah candles, and turned on the news. The story was about Dvir Emanuel, the first soldier killed in the operation. She saw, she said, the extraordinarily handsome young man, with his now famous smile, and she felt as though she were looking at an angel.

A short while later, Benny came home, and Shiri said to him, "Come sit next to me." When he'd seated himself down next to her, Shiri said to Benny, "A soldier was killed today."

"I heard," he said.

"What do you say we name our baby after him?" Shiri asked.

"Okay," was Benny's reply.

They told no one about the name, and had planned to call Dalia once the baby was born, to invite her to the *brit milah* (circumcision). But when Dvir was born, Shiri and Benny were busy with medical appointments, and it wasn't even clear when they would be able to have the *brit*. By the time the doctor gave them the okay to have the *brit*, it was no longer respectful to invite Dalia on such short notice, Shiri told me. So they didn't call her. Not then, and not the day after. Life took its course and they told no one about the origin of Dvir's name, for they hadn't yet asked Dalia's permission.

So no one knew, until that moment when a little blond-haired, blue-eyed boy - whom Dalia now calls "the messenger" - decided to tap Dalia on the shoulder. "Someone's looking out for us up

there,” Shiri said quietly, wiping a tear from her eye, “and this no doubt brings Him joy.”

It was now quiet in Dalia’s living room, the three of us pondering this extraordinary sequence of events, wondering what to make of it. I was struck by the extraordinary bond between these two women, one religious and one traditional but not religious in the classic sense, one who’s now lost a husband and a son and one who’s busy raising two sons.

Unconnected in any way just a year ago, their lives are now inextricably interwoven. And I said to them both, almost whispering, “This is an Israeli story, *par excellence*.”

As if they’d rehearsed the response, they responded in virtual unison, “No, it’s a Jewish story.”

They’re right, of course. It is the quintessential Jewish story. It is a story of unspoken and inexplicable bonds. It is a story of shared destinies.

These are not easy times. These are days when we really could use a miracle or two. So perhaps it really is no accident that now, when we need it most, Dvir is sending us all a hug from Heaven above.

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PERFECT TIMING

BY MARNI LEVIN

In Jewish history, there are no coincidences.

— Elie Wiesel



For the past few years my husband, Shea, has developed an interest in researching his family tree. He believes he is a descendant of a great rabbi and keeps searching for conclusive evidence. Our oldest son, Meir, who shares his interest, has been extremely helpful and encouraging in this endeavor. Once they made a special trip to Ellis Island to try to obtain information about their ancestors who emigrated in the 1870s from Prague, the capital city of Czechoslovakia, to New York City. However, to their deep disappointment, they were not able to locate any of their records.

Meir soon discovered the reason. “Ellis Island began keeping immigration records only from 1891,” he pointed out. “Dad, it looks like our relatives arrived in America fourteen years too early!”

The family established itself in the large, thriving city of New York and quickly prospered. Unfortunately, their religious beliefs, as was the case in so many other Jewish immigrant families, were left by the wayside. Out of all my husband’s many cousins, Shea is the only one who became religiously observant and reconnected the severed link in the long family chain.

Then Meir heard about an old Jewish cemetery in Newark, New Jersey, where he thought one of their ancestors might be buried.

However the cemetery is now located in such a crime-ridden area it isn't safe to visit except for ten days of the year between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, when police protection is provided there. Waiting for the day after Rosh Hashanah, Meir drove out to Newark, found the cemetery and located the grave he thought might belong to his relative. The last name was the same as ours but, unfortunately, the first name was incorrect.

Despite these disappointments, Shea and Meir were not quite prepared to give up their quest. During a visit to New York, last Chanukah, Shea managed to obtain a copy of the death certificate of his great-grandfather, who had passed away on January 9, 1944. World War II was still raging then and several of his grandsons were far away serving in the U.S. army. The possibility that anyone in his assimilated family had actually said the *Kaddish* prayer for his soul was probably nil.

Back home again in Israel, one evening Shea experienced a strong, sudden impulse to discover the equivalent Hebrew date of the death of Leib, son of Asher Yosef, this forefather he'd never known. Then, staring at a perpetual calendar, he couldn't believe his eyes.

"This is absolutely amazing!" he exclaimed aloud. "January 9, 1944 means that the anniversary of his death is the 13th day of the month of Tevet!"

"Why is that amazing?" I asked.

"Because the 13th of Tevet happens to be *tonight!*"

Out of all the days in the year, Shea discovered the anniversary of his great-grandfather's passing exactly in time. So he lit a memorial candle for him and, at the synagogue, he faithfully recited the *Kaddish* prayer.

After seventy long years, his great-grandfather's death was finally being observed in this time-honored way by one of his very few observant descendants.

Shea still hasn't given up trying to determine if his ancestor was indeed that great rabbi from Prague. Meanwhile, watching the tiny flame of the memorial candle as it flickered, he sensed that the soul of Leib, son of Asher Yosef, was finally at peace.

GRADUATING WITH HONORS

BY MORDECHAI BULUA

Death ends a life, not a relationship.

– Mitch Albom

When my wife and I first got married, we befriended a lonely elderly widow who lived in our apartment building. We invited her to eat Shabbat meals with us on a regular basis. She enjoyed the company and the camaraderie. After many years, she told us one Shabbat that she was engaged! We were thrilled for her, but saddened that she was moving away and would not get to see her again. Years went by, and being busy with a young family, we forgot about her.

One day in *shul*, an elderly friend of mine approached me and asked if I knew this lady. When I answered affirmatively, he told me that she had just passed away and that he was the executor of her estate. Being that she never had children of her own, she had written in her will that I should recite the *Kaddish* for her and that I would be remunerated. I told my friend it would be my honor, but that I didn't want the money. My friend smiled and told me not to worry. I said the *Kaddish* for eleven months, three times a day. I was touched that she thought of me after all these years incommunicado.

The week after I finished saying *Kaddish*, we celebrated the high school graduation of our youngest daughter from Beis Yaakov. This Beis Yaakov is a large girls' school and there were many graduates. Besides the diploma, which every girl received, most girls also received a certificate of excellence, either in a particular subject or for displaying good character traits. Every certificate was sponsored by a different individual. My daughter was among those who received a certificate. When we returned home after the ceremony, we unrolled the certificate. We couldn't believe our eyes. There, at the bottom of the certificate, was the name of the woman for whom I had just concluded saying *Kaddish*! She was the one who had sponsored our daughter's certificate! There was no way that she could have planned this before she passed away. She sponsored the certificate the year before while she was still alive. She had no idea which girl would get the certificate she sponsored. What were the chances that out of all the girls graduating, it would be my daughter that she sponsored? In reality, it was *Hashem's* way of showing us that no good deed goes unrewarded.

King Solomon, in *Ecclesiastes* 11:1, said it best: "Send your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it." Most commentators explain that this verse is telling us that we should do good deeds and charity even for people who, like the departed, we will never see again. The generosity will not go unrewarded. *Hashem* will see to it that it is repaid.

OTHERWORLDLY GPS

BY ROSALLY SALTSMAN



Death - the last sleep? No, it is the final awakening.

– Walter Scott



n a recent visit to Montreal, I went to visit my parents at the cemetery where they are buried. I hadn't been to Montreal in thirteen years. Being mid- January, the cemetery was mid-calf deep in snow.

Since I hadn't been there in a long time, I wasn't exactly sure where the graves were located, but I set off in the general direction. When I had searched a few minutes, suddenly my knee buckled and I fell in the snow. I got up and tried again and the same thing happened. When it happened a third time, I was worried I might have to crawl out of the cemetery but I also assumed someone was trying to tell me something. I decided I would try and find my uncle's grave first and then try and locate my parents. I turned in the direction of where I thought it was and as I came out between two headstones, I turned and saw my parents' graves. I had fallen right behind them. I paid my visit, went to visit my uncle's grave and then left the cemetery. There was no problem with my knee, which, for a few minutes, had been turned into an otherworldly GPS.

In memory of Moshe Lazer ben Baruch, Chana bat Kalman and Yisrael ben Kalman

THE ROCK

BY SHAYNA HUNT



Angels don't leave footprints.

— Rabbi Abraham J. Twerski, M.D.



I would describe myself as a pretty spiritually minded person who embraces the ethereal world, all the while, having two feet planted firmly on solid, tangible ground. As a writer I like to delve into the magical beauty of this world, and sometimes, ponder the mysterious spiritual world of the hereafter. And that's pretty much as far as it goes. I also should let you know, that I like things to all work out nicely, predictably, and most importantly, to be explainable. But sometimes -and in my life the *sometimes* seems to happen a lot, having things be thoroughly explainable... well, that just isn't always possible.

Before my mother, *a"h*, died, we had an eruptive conversation. She began to talk to me about what preparations she wanted me to be in charge of after she was gone. I became spooked and didn't want to speak to her about any of it. However, she pushed the subject and explained what she wanted nonetheless.

My mother was not religious, and so I found it odd that she was entrusting a religious person - *me!* - with the job of doing something she clearly knew was against my core belief. She told me she wanted to be entombed in a memorial wall that a Reform Jewish cemetery had just built. And then she requested that I exhume my father (who had passed away sixteen years earlier) and bury him there as well next to her.

Horried doesn't even come close to how I reacted! To say we argued is putting it mildly. By the end of the day, however, we had made peace with each other - with me setting the firm ground rule that our explosive topic was completely off limits.

My mother died a bit over a month later and I had been the sole person named legally in charge. So, regardless of my mother's verbal request about what we argued over, she had willingly left her only Orthodox relative, me, completely in charge of all the arrangements.

Of course I saw to it that my mother had a kosher funeral. And of course my mother was buried next to my father, *a"h*, as well as being next to both her parents, *a"h*, as well. I must admit, that even though I knew 100 percent that this was the right thing to do, it bothered me a tad that she wasn't there to tell me herself that, *It was the right thing to do*.

When the fast of Tisha B'Av came about a month later, I felt the desire to visit my parents and my grandparents at the cemetery. My youngest daughter, eleven-year-old Netanya, wanted to go with me. I asked her if she could find some rocks that we could place on the graves. Honored, she eagerly went about the neighborhood, looking for just the right stones to hand pick for these special relatives. She found eight, one set of four for her to leave, and one set for me to leave. She handed them to me in a small zip-lock baggie.

We arrived at the cemetery, visited the graves and placed the rocks on their gravestones then sat on the bench, said some *Te-hillim*, and connected with them energetically. It was calm and peaceful and very loving there. Then I noticed that my parents' grave stones had some dirt splattered on the surface and I asked my daughter to bring me a bottle of water and some tissues from the car so that I could clean them. She did, and I carefully cleaned off their markers. Then we said our goodbyes and left to go to the office to arrange for my grandmother's grave to have new sod laid down - the grass had withered and it didn't look nice.

On the ride back to get to the main gate, we needed to drive back past my family's graves. I drove slowly past and looked over to where they were and noticed I had accidentally left the wadded up tissues on the bench. I quickly stopped the car and told Netanya

that I would be right back. I put the car in park and headed over to collect the tissue. I was drawn emotionally to sit back down on the bench for just a few more minutes. I paused before getting up. I looked at how right it looked that my mother was laying beside my father and, God forbid, not as she had so adamantly argued for. I silently asked my mother if she felt okay about how I handled things. And then I also said to the group of them that I hoped that they liked how often I had been coming. Then I walked back to the car.

Once there, I put my key in the ignition, and that's when I saw it. A perfectly round stone, more in the pebble category. It sat silently on my dashboard directly in front of the gear shift and gas gauge. It had not been there before, I was sure of it! I turned to look at the backseat while Netanya played serenely with her dolls.

I cleared my throat and asked, "Hey sweetie, how come you left me a rock?"

Netanya looked up with an innocent, confused look on her face. "What rock?"

A strange feeling began to curl and take hold in my belly. I felt the unease of icy fingers dance down my spine. Nervous of her answer, I asked anyway, "This one, right here!" I said while pointing to the pebble that still sat on the dash, untouched.

She shrugged her shoulders and nonchalantly said, "I didn't put that there."

Then she went back to playing and I was left with my silent questions. Many questions. All of them swirling around in my mind, trying desperately to avoid the one answer that it might be.

My analytical mind couldn't come up with one plausible winning argument.

I know I originally had eight rocks, all in a zip-lock bag that I never opened until at the grave site.

That pebble had not been on the dashboard before I came back from collecting the tissue from the bench.

Netanya had not put that rock there.

Then who did!?!

The more I mulled it all over, the more it made sense, but still it was quite hard to believe. But if indeed someone from the other side was trying to give me a message to answer the questions I asked at their grave, then that pebble was quite a meaningful answer.

I picked up the pebble, and held its perfect, rough, cool roundness in my hand and carefully placed it in the cup holder to my right. Then I placed the car in drive, and before I left, closed my eyes and quickly acknowledged the answer I received before driving away.

It's been a while since that incident and I've tried everything short of standing on my head to see this scenario differently, trying to come up with another plausible reason and cause that the rock appeared on my dashboard.

The day I sat down to write this, I had talked at length to my husband earlier in the day about the rock and its meaning. I kept saying how hard it was for my brain to wrap itself around the mysticalness of it all. Then, later that night, I was cleaning up the kitchen before planning to spend an hour or two writing. I found hidden under some papers on the table a fortune cookie from Chinese takeout we'd had a few nights before. The cookie, or what was left of it, wrapped in its sealed clear bag, was all but crumbs now. I threw it into the garbage can and the minute I did I thought I almost heard someone say, *get the fortune!* I laughed at my silliness, but grabbed up the cookie out of the trash nonetheless, ripped it open and retrieved the rectangle of paper with its message written on it. I read it, and my heart skipped a beat. It read...

"The mystical is not how the world is, but that it is."

I saw now how it was okay to simply believe. That I had left my family the rocks, and that they, *perhaps*, had really left one for me! I smiled, and my internal argument melted away and was replaced by a loving gentle semblance of comfort and peace that had been delivered from the beyond as an unmistakable, tangible, rock-solid answer I will always cherish.

SOUL SISTERS

BY MIRIAM COHEN



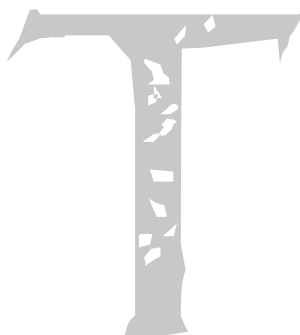
If you have a sister and she dies, do you stop saying you have one? Or are you always a sister, even when the other half of the equation is gone?

– Jodi Picoult



A sister is a gift to the heart, a friend to the spirit, a golden thread to the meaning of life.

– Isadora James



hey were a large family. There were three brothers, Hirsh'l, Harry (Yehoshuah), and Itzel (Yitzhak), and six sisters, my mother, Rivka a"h and five others. The family came to Montreal, Canada from Pilvishok (Piv-iškiai), Lithuania. One of them, Rochke, made *aliyah* (moved to Israel) in 1930 and became one of the founders of Kibbutz Ein Hashofet. The rest stayed in Canada.

Chienka and Rochke were almost like twins, ditto my mother and Sorke. Leah, the teacher, was the eldest, and Raizel was born right after her.

Back in the 1990's, when I was in my sixties, I had a strange dream. I was in some sort of space which was of a brilliant, sparkling white. It was all stone - a kind of roadway with walls on either side. I wondered, and kept asking myself, whether I was in

a tomb or in a temple. Eventually I came to the end of the roadway and could not continue further. Then I saw that on the other side of the wall was a green field - an indescribably, vivid and brilliant green. Superimposed on that field was a kind of composite of my mother and my Tante Sorke. I woke up puzzled. I knew the dream held significance, but couldn't figure it out. A little later, my Uncle Mottel called me to tell me that my last surviving aunt, Tante Chienka, had died. My mother and my Tante Sorke had died many years earlier, in 1976. I realized they had come to tell me, "We are not gone. We are in a different wonder-filled place."

And now my Tante Chienka would be joining them, and all six sisters would be reunited.

FAMILY TIES

BY ROSALLY SALTSMAN

*The dust returns to the earth as it was,
and the spirit returns to God Who gave it.*

– Ecclesiastes 12:7

To sleep, perchance to dream.

– William Shakespeare

I have a colleague at work, Sharon, who has started taking an interest in religion. She, like many people, is experimenting with connecting to her roots. And she's very spiritual!

Recently her father came to her in a dream. It was the first time in the twelve years since he'd died. Two nights in a row he visited her asking her to visit him at his home. She wondered what he wanted. Did he have a home she didn't know about? Was he calling her to The Next World? Then she realized! She opened her diary and saw that it had been his *yahrzeit* and she had missed it! That Friday, she went to visit his grave, lit a candle and paid a synagogue to learn for him.

Saturday night, Sharon went to a class on *hafrashat challah* (separating dough from the Challah). The Rabbanit (teacher) there was telling people all kinds of things she had no way of knowing, as if reading them. Suddenly, she called out, "Who here has a Yossi?" One woman said her father is called Yossi. The Rabbanit waved her away and asked again, "Who here has a Yossi?" One

woman said she had a friend named Yossi. Then suddenly Sharon said, “My father, his name was Yossi! And I forgot his *yahrzeit*.” Satisfied she had found the Yossi she was looking for, the Rabbanit said a prayer and then told Sharon to do something as a merit for his soul. A month later, her mother came to her in a dream to ask for her help. Sharon realized that she had forgotten her *yahrzeit* as well, having mixed up the date. She called a Chabad Rabbi who told her to have a memorial service. She organized the family and held a service for her mother and visited her father’s grave. She also decided to take upon herself to light Shabbat candles every Friday night on a regular basis. The service at the cemetery was the first time in twenty-four years that the family was all together, including members who hadn’t spoken to each other in years because of a quarrel.

We’re not as separated from our loved ones who have left this world as we think. And our actions in this world help them in The Next World in ways we can’t imagine. Sometimes, they come to remind us of this if we should forget. And if we recognize our obligation to honor their memories, we can grant them a merit for their soul that we can’t even dream of.

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IN DETAIL

BY ROSALLY SALTSMAN

O Death! If men knew you, they would embrace you!

– Beth Middot

After all, to the well-organized mind, death is but the next great adventure.

– J.K. Rowling

There's an oft-told story about two women, good friends, who spent much of their time collecting charity for the poor in a small village in Eastern Europe over a hundred years ago. They made a pact that whichever one of them dies first, she would try to come back to the other and tell her what was beyond the grave.

One day, one of them died. A few days later, as she had promised, she appeared in a dream to her friend. "I'm not permitted to tell you much but I can tell you this," she began. "Do you remember when we went collecting for *so and so* (and she named a woman) and we saw *so and so* (and she named another woman) and you raised your finger to point her out to me? Well, that small act has given you spiritual rewards beyond your wildest dreams," (and this woman thought that this was her wildest dream). Her friend then bid her farewell, and the dream ended.

Her friend awoke with a new conviction to help the people of her village and a feeling of peace that her friend (and someday, she herself) merited riches beyond anyone's wildest dreams.

WONDERS OF CREATION

BY ROSALLY SALTSMAN



Who sings in this world will sing also in the next.

– Talmud, Sanhedrin



The highest form of wisdom is kindness.

– Talmud



My mother loved animals! All animals. Our house was home to a variegated menagerie, and she fed the birds loyally for so many years that I had two birds carved on her headstone, when she died. I have a picture of my mother in Yellowstone National Park with a baby black bear cub taken shortly before she spotted its mother and ran for her life. My mother bequeathed her love of animals to me and many stories will be told after I'm gone of how I used to sing to cats and try to pet the tigers at the zoo. I have a fondness for frogs; I'm not sure why. When I was little, I used to delight at the frogs I'd find in the garden on autumn evenings when my mother and I would go out to play with our St. Bernard.

Not long after my mother died, I was sitting on campus talking with a friend and I mentioned that it had been a long time since I had seen a frog.

The next day, I went to the cemetery to visit my mother's grave and I saw some movement on the mound of earth. I looked closely and it was a frog. I have never before or since seen a frog in a cemetery. What's more it was summer and the dirt on the grave was dry (frogs like wet earth). I had no idea where it had come from but I had no doubt that it was my mother's sense of humor winking at me from beyond.

Many years later, I was visiting Montreal with my son. Twenty years had gone by since my mother's death. I took him to see our old house. It had changed hands three times, I'd heard. Everything was different. The bushes had been taken away, my mother's rose beds were gone, the windows and doors had been changed and it was painted a different color. There was only one vestige from my childhood.

My mother had made a birdhouse for the birds in winter. She had built it herself and had tied it to the maple tree on our front lawn with a braided rope (our St. Bernard, Aurora's old leash). The birdhouse was gone but that rope was still there. I had sold the house ten years earlier, soon after my father had died, but none of the owners had removed the rope and it was quite an eyesore.

Thirteen more years passed, and I was back in Canada in winter for a wedding. Canadian winters do damage to almost every kind of material and structure, and repairs are frequently made on homes after the winter's devastation.

The rope was still there, testimony to the kindness my mother had demonstrated to God's creatures and perhaps a reminder to me that the mitzvah of that kindness survives for eternity.

This story also appears in A Portion of Kindness: A Weekly Portion of Chesed

LIGHT SLEEPER

BY ROSALLY SALTSMAN



If you are not a better person tomorrow than you are today, what need have you for a tomorrow?

– Rebbe Nachman of Breslov



The soul of man is God's candle.

– Proverbs 20:27



Irena immigrated to Petach Tikvah, Israel in 1964 with her husband and two sons from Dej in Rumania. She was thirty-eight years old and had survived three concentration camps where she had lost her entire family and then spent fifteen years waiting for an exit visa to immigrate to Israel.

After her children were born, she took upon herself to light six candles for Shabbat; two for herself and two for the two sets of parents she and her husband had lost in the Holocaust.

When they arrived in Israel, they had practically nothing and conditions were very difficult. Irena and her family lived on as little as they could, with Irena saving money however she could. Irena thought that maybe she could save some money by lighting only two candles on Shabbat instead of six. So that Shabbat, she lit only two.

That night, her mother-in-law Yenta, who was also her aunt, came to her in a dream and in an angry voice told her she should

continue to light six candles and not alter her custom. Apparently, she had brought light to the souls of her dear departed family and they were missing that light.

The next Shabbat she lit six candles and has been doing so ever since. And Yenta has never complained again.

NAMESAKE

BY ROSALLY SALTSMAN

Know what is above you.

– *Ethics of the Fathers 2:1*

A

friend of mine related that her ex-husband was born in a remote and primitive settlement somewhere in Russia, she herself didn't recall the name. His parents were already blessed with five girls and his mother prayed for a boy. Her prayers were answered. She was so overwhelmed by the responsibility of naming her only son that she didn't. Inasmuch as this was a spiritual desert despite being an agricultural settlement, and the parents, though Jewish, had no possibility of performing a *brit*, there was no rush to name the child.

Two months elapsed and the mother returned to work leaving her precious bundle in the care of her seventeen-year-old daughter. One day, men on horseback rode by. For the purposes of the story let us say there were three (an appropriate number given the rest of the story).

These were Armenian horsemen and they were thirsty. They stopped at the house for water and the daughter dutifully ran back and forth to fetch them water to quench their thirst. There is no mention of whether she watered the horses.

"Why are you running?" they asked her.

"There's a baby in the house," she answered breathlessly, "and I must care for him."

“How old is he?” they asked.

“Two months,” she answered.

“Ah, and what is his name?”

“He has none yet,” she replied, probably tired of hearing that unanswerable question.

“Then name him Shai Valad,” one of the horsemen told her and the three rode away kicking up dust as they went.

When the mother came home, her daughter related what had transpired. Taking this as a sign, she named her son Shai Valad, as the horseman had suggested. It wasn’t until later that she learned that the name in Hebrew means “Gift of an infant”. Yet it definitely sounds like a Russian name.

Incredible as it may seem, this young child was given a Hebrew name with deep significance by Armenians on horseback. Or were they? God sends His messengers literally to the ends of the earth to make sure that His people are looked after. The Talmud relates that a couple is Divinely inspired to give their child a name that reflects his essence and destiny. But if for some reason they don’t, they are sent thirsty messengers on horseback.

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A GIFT FROM BEYOND

BY SHAYNA HUNT

Forgiveness is the key to action and freedom.

– Hannah Arendt

During the day, I don't believe in ghosts. At night, I'm a little more open-minded.

– Anonymous

When my mother was very ill, and she knew that she would most likely not be recovering from her grave illness, she gave me her car.

“Take it and use it in good health. I want you to have it!”

I was hesitant to take such a gift due to my overwhelming sadness at the whole idea of her dying. How could she be blasé about my taking her car?

Sensing my sadness and my pause in outright accepting her gift, she clarified, “If I get better, you’ll give it back. Now will you take it?”

My mother didn’t get better. She died a week later and her car sat in her driveway unclaimed. The title had been transferred over to me, but I couldn’t bring myself to even pick up the car, let alone

drive it. My husband encouraged me. He had been in the room when my mother declared her intentions of giving me her car.

“She wanted you to have it!” he reassured me. How could he understand? It wasn’t that I thought my mother would disapprove or be upset if I drove her car. It went deeper than that. By making that car officially mine, I would thereby officially proclaim that my mother was gone and that she wouldn’t need her car anymore. The stages of grief are sadly funny. They run so deep and are so painful that there isn’t even a satisfactory word to describe the anguish. In my case, I just couldn’t bring myself to drive her car.

The day we planned to collect the car from my mother’s empty house, to bring the car to our house, was a hard day for me. All day long I knew I would be physically getting that car - bringing it into my world - never to be in my mother’s world again. I kept putting off the time we were to leave. My sister would be driving me to our mother’s house and then I would drive the car home. At the last minute, I just couldn’t go through with it and my husband, seeing my torment, agreed to ride with us to my mother’s house and drive the car back himself.

When we arrived at my mother’s house, I quickly left my husband at the driveway with a quick goodbye. I didn’t want to see him take off her custom license plate, replacing it with our new randomly chosen one. I, along with my sister slipped inside our mother’s house. Her energy was there, everywhere, and we felt her all around us. Her scent permeated every room. It was sad and sweet and surprisingly peaceful. While I meandered around her living room, looking at pictures of happy times, I heard my very spiritual sister call out from the other part of the room.

“Mom says that there is something here for you!”

My knees got weak and I did a double take at my sister. Is she serious?!

“What are you talking about?” I exclaimed as my stomach did somersaults.

“It’s a feeling, a sort of knowing that came into my head. I’m pretty sure the thought is from Mom,” she said. With that she

wandered over to a roll-top desk and stopped. “Whatever it is she wants you to have, it’s in here. Have you gone through this before?”

Slightly spooking me, I answered her honestly. “Yes, Joe (my husband) went through it a couple of weeks ago when we were looking for important papers Mom needed. There’s nothing in there but papers and miscellaneous junk.”

“Hmm...” she muttered as she began to open and go through the desk herself. “Did you see this when you went through the desk?” She asked, holding a beautifully gift-wrapped box.

“Yes, yes,” I told her. “I saw that before, but it has no name on it and she obviously intended to give it to someone. Put it away.”

“No,” my sister insisted. “This is what she wants you to have. I’ll open it up for you,” and with that she began to tear off the gold. “Oh my gosh!” She exclaimed a moment later when she had the box open. “It is for you!”

Handing me the open box I peered inside hesitantly. It was a key chain; a beautiful large *Hamsa* hand (sometimes called Hand of Miriam, it is an old and still popular lucky amulet for protection from the envious or evil eye). This particular one had a Hebrew prayer inside. I began to cry silent tears. There is no one else in my family but me that my mother would have gotten that gift for. I am the only one who is religious and she was often giving me Judaica gifts.

My sister interrupted my surprise when she added one last tidbit, “Mom wants you to put her car keys on this key chain. She wants you to drive her car.”

What my sister, who doesn’t read Hebrew, failed to understand, was that she was indeed right! This was a key chain specifically for car keys. The prayer inside the *Hamsa* hand was the prayer for a safe journey said before going on trips (particularly car trips).

That night I placed my new car keys on the key chain from my mother. And I drove my new car. Her energy was there, everywhere, and I felt her all around me. Her scent permeated the inside of the car. It was sad and sweet and surprisingly peaceful!

LISTENING TO MY MESSAGES

BY SHOSHANA HUNT

Though I walk in the valley overshadowed by death, I will fear no evil for You are with me.

– Psalms 23:4

How abundant are Your works, Hashem; with wisdom You made them all... there are creeping things without number, small creatures and great ones.

– Psalms 104:24-25

Sometimes listening is easy, but hearing can be hard. Applying that idea to Divine messages is where the real struggle lies!

My struggle starts about two years ago when I began to experience some medical problems. At first, just recurring colds, some seasonal allergies, sinus infections, migraines, and then a foot problem resulting in a minor surgery. The winter after the surgery, I developed an ear infection that never healed, and the eardrum repeatedly burst. Eventually I could barely hear out of that ear. The pharmacist began to recognize us by face, and my stress level close to bursting too!

Finally an ENT doctor diagnosed through extensive tests that there was a mass behind my eardrum that was quickly growing.

Left alone, it could cause more major problems. The solution was surgery to remove it, along with fixing my sinuses. The risk was that cutting into my eardrum could cause permanent deafness in that ear. The doctor set the date, and eerily it turned out to be the exact day, just one year after I had surgery on my foot! It began to seem too much like a coincidence, and as Jews, we are taught there is no such thing as coincidence, only *Hashgacha Pratit* (Divine Providence).

Thankfully I live in the Twerskis' community in Milwaukee, as well as having Rav Benzion Twerski as a teacher. I was able to speak with him and ask if he felt there was any meaning behind the dates or the illnesses. After listening to my questions, he said he felt I should pray by his grandfather's grave and all should be well.

So the *Erev Shabbat* before my surgery I visited the grave of Rabbi Jacob Twerski זצ"ל (May the *Tzaddik* be remembered for a blessing). His *kever* is housed in a stone building that stands tall in the innermost part of this small and quiet cemetery. Like a great rabbi, it is noticeable there in the center, yet humble, beckoning. Together my parents and I approached and started to *daven* (pray). It was there, as the beautiful words of King David flowed over my lips praying for my health, that I noticed it. It was small, furry, had stripes, a stinger, and was buzzing around. As I watched, horrified, it slipped into a hole in the stone of the *kever*. I was furious. Here was a great Rabbi's resting place and a simple bee had the chutzpah to simply slip into it? And as I stood (as far away from the hole in case the bee came back as I'm afraid of bees!) I started to *daven* again. As I did, my gaze fell upon the stones again, and I nearly froze. I couldn't believe it! This time there was a big hairy spider. (The second bug I'm most afraid of!) Why was *Hashem* showing me these things? I wondered. My mind wandered from the bugs to the *Tehillim* I was saying and then to the great King, who had written it. Suddenly, it was as if Rav Twerski, *a"h*, himself, was reminding me of something my teacher had taught us about King David. Everything became clear to me. Tears slid down my face, as I gave thanks to *Hashem* for putting the bee and the spider in my path so that I would notice them and hear *Hashem's* message to me.

What I had remembered was this: King David had questioned *Hashem*. He said he could see the beauty and purpose in all of

His creations, except for in three things, two being, stinging bugs and spiders! So *Hashem* answered David, in a lesson for all of us. When David was running from King Saul there was a time when he ran into a cave to escape the men chasing on his heels. Immediately after David entered the cave several spiders began to work furiously on making a web over the mouth of the cave. So when Saul's men came and saw the web they said, 'He couldn't have gone in there, the web would have broken and spiders can't make webs that quickly.' And so King David was saved because of the spiders. Again, while fleeing Saul, David found himself in danger of being caught. This time he was in Saul's camp while Saul and his soldiers slept. As David was making his way silently through the slumbering men, one of Saul's advisers, though still asleep, caught David in between his legs. There David stood literally in his enemy's grasp, unsure how to escape. At that moment *Hashem* sent a stinging bug to David's aid. This stinging bug stung the sleeping man's leg so that he moved his leg (while still asleep) and David could escape. This is how *Hashem* taught David a great lesson: Everything Has Purpose.

It was through all this, that God was telling me there was a reason for all my illnesses. I may not be privy to the reason, but there is a purpose for everything that *Hashem* does! A sense of peace came over me. I didn't have to worry about anything. I knew *Hashem* was taking care of me.

Several days later, as the anesthesia was wearing off, my mom's face came into my view. "Shoshana," she said, taking my hand in hers, "you won't believe it, the doctor went to take out the mass from behind your ear and found that there was no mass! He was shocked! It's a miracle! The tests were wrong. It was just a buildup of calcium. He didn't have to cut your eardrum!"

So you see, everything has a reason, a purpose, and only *Hashem* knows what it is, and when He lets us know what it is, it is up to us to make sure that we are listening to what He wants us to hear. And in my case, I am thankful to Him that in the end I was able to listen loud and clear to exactly what He had to say to me with both my ears!

BRAIN WAVES

AS HEARD BY ROSALLY SALTSMAN



I do not want followers who are righteous, rather I want followers who are too busy doing good that they won't have time to do bad.

– Rabbi Menachem Mendel of Kotzk



Thirty-one-year-old Raquel Marton Katz from the Five Towns went to visit her parents in Miami, Florida, in the first week of June. She has twin girls who are four and decided to finally take a vacation basically for the first time since they were born, since she hadn't wanted to leave them. The next day, she collapsed.

Her body shut down and she was put on total life support. Every critical organ was no longer functioning properly. The doctor told the family that they had better come to Florida and say goodbye. The family flew over, gathered and said *Tehillim*.

Raquel coded twice and was miraculously brought back to life. Then she stabilized and was slowly taken off life support. Her body began to recover but her brain didn't.

After four weeks in a Florida hospital, she had stabilized enough to be transferred back to New York so that her family could all do round-the-clock rotations closer to home. Her in-laws from Baltimore took the girls. And her parents sat by her all the time.

All the brain scans the doctors did showed that the brain had been deprived of oxygen for too long. There would be irreversible damage. Raquel looked like a ghost. The family again came to

say goodbye to the young woman, sister and daughter whom they knew and loved.

All this time, people were storming the heavens with their prayers.

This continued for another four weeks. Then one morning, her mother, who had an Amen group in her home (the women gathered every morning to pray and say Amen to each other's prayers), went to the Mount Judah cemetery in Queens to pray for Raquel at the graves of *Tzaddikim* (righteous men). Sixty women showed up. Raquel's mother also asked Rabbi Paysach Krohn to join them and lead the prayers. Rabbi Krohn spoke a few minutes, giving them heartfelt inspiration and then led them in *Tehillim*. And they *davened* with real intensity and fervor. It was an emotional experience for everyone. They prayed at the graves of the holy rabbis Rav Yaakov Kaminetsky, Rabbi Avraham Yaakov Pam, and Rabbi Henschel Lebowitz. Suddenly, Mrs. Marton's cell phone rang! It was her son-in-law. Her husband got on the phone and said, "There's someone here who wants to say hello to you." Raquel got on the phone and spoke to her mother. She had woken up. Not only that but she was coherent.

"How are you feeling?" her mother cried into the phone.

"*Baruch Hashem* (thank God)," she answered.

Everyone was crying! Rabbi Krohn was speechless.

The doctors said that people can wake up from comas but usually only those caused by trauma, not like this where the brain has been deprived of oxygen.

"It's always nice to be the first," Raquel's father said.

Amen.

PLACE OF HONOR

BY ROSALLY SALTSMAN

The higher the truth, the simpler it is.

– Rabbi Abraham Isaac Kook



have a girlfriend, we'll call her Esti (not her real name). She's forty-four and works for a *kiruv* organization, an organization that helps Jews connect with their religious roots.

During the summer semester, the program they gave was teaching history in a hands-on kind of way. They taught a subject for a week and the next week they went on a tour to the places discussed. For example, if they learned about the time of the Temple, they went to the City of David.

The tours were divided up among the leaders. My friend chose to go to the tour that focused on the Kabbalists and sixteenth century Tzfat. There they visited the synagogue of Rabbi Yosef Caro, author of the Beit Yosef, a book of Jewish law which later was shortened to the Shulchan Aruch.

"You could feel the *kedushah* (holiness) in the place," Esti said. "It was a very emotional experience."

While the guide started his talk in the synagogue, Esti stood outside speaking with a student. When she entered, she took a seat on an empty bench in the back.

"What's your name?" the guide asked her after a few minutes.

She thought he wanted the person in charge so she told him to speak to another woman.

“No, no, I want your name,” he said.

“Esti.”

“Okay, now everyone look where Esti’s sitting,” he said, pointing at the bench in the back of the room. “This is a very special bench. Whoever sits on that bench is blessed with a boy within the year.” It was the twenty-fifth of Av.

My friend was forty-three. She had had her last child five years earlier and had already started giving away baby clothes figuring she was done. Exactly a year later, on the twenty-fifth of Av, *Parshat Re’eh*, the family celebrated the bar mitzvah of one of her sons. They also celebrated the *Shalom Zachor* (a celebration welcoming a new baby boy before his *brit*) of her new baby boy and the naming of his twin sister.

“No one told me it was a two-for-one special,” Esti said.

The pregnancy was high risk and she had to be on bed rest. At one point she was in serious danger of losing the pregnancy. The doctor couldn’t believe it when he saw her condition had stabilized. He went to check with the ultrasound technician to be sure.

The secular doctor asked, “Did you go to pray at a *Tzaddik*’s grave?”

Well not exactly. But I guess it was the next best thing.

The synagogue of the *Tzaddik* Yosef Caro is located in the old city of Tzfat. Be sure to take a seat at the back.

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THE WIDOW'S KADDISH

BY YERACHMIEL TILLES

*This is the secret of how the Jewish people have created
a hedge against chaos in their partnership with God.
Sharing creates room in your life for more blessings to
come in. Giving creates an endless circuit. You earn, you
give, and then you earn more.*

— Celso Cukierkorn

P

ressburg was one of the most important cities in the Austro-Hungarian Empire, and its yeshiva was among the largest and most respected in all of Europe.

In the mid-1800s, there lived a wealthy merchant who had a large store in the center of the city. He was well-respected and active in the Jewish community, and also known for his generosity. One charitable custom of his was remarkable. Each day he would count the proceeds of his business, calculate how much was profit, and from that separate ten percent for *ma'aser* (tithe), which he would deliver daily to the yeshiva.

Tragically, this outstanding man suddenly took ill and passed away at a relatively early age, leaving behind a widow and five young daughters. His wife was a clever and energetic woman who had always helped her husband in the business and knew it well. After his death, she took it over and maintained its prosperity. She

was also careful to continue in her late husband's generous ways, and each day would deliver the *ma'aser* from the profits to the *rosh yeshiva* (head of the yeshiva), the illustrious Ketav Sofer.

Immediately upon her husband's passing, as she had no sons, she asked the *rosh yeshiva* to arrange for Torah scholars to say *Kaddish* for her husband for the entire eleven months, and also each successive year on the *yahrzeit*. She also requested that a second Kaddish be said each day, having in mind all those souls who have no one saying *Kaddish* for them.

This went on for nearly ten years. Sometimes the *ma'aser* would be as much as hundreds of kroner a day. But however much it was, she would always inquire to make sure that the yeshiva was keeping its side of the bargain.

But then the wheel turned. Instead of daily profits, there began to be losses. Even so, the widow maintained her schedule of appearing daily at the yeshiva, except that she would inform the *rosh yeshiva* that today, unfortunately, she had nothing to give. Still, she would persist to ask if they were still saying the *Kaddishes* even though she was no longer able to contribute financial support. They would assure her that of course they were, and she should not worry.

Day after day her situation got progressively worse, until finally she had to start selling some of her jewelry and other valuables in order to put food on the table for her daughters. No one was aware of her deteriorating situation, except for the senior students and staff of the yeshiva, who knew that her business was virtually bankrupt.

One day, a matchmaker came to her house and, after some pleasantries, said, "My dear lady, your daughters have all matured nicely and grown quite pretty. Perhaps because of your extensive involvement in the business, you haven't noticed that it is time for them to get married. I am confident that I can find many outstanding yeshiva students that would be interested in them for you to choose from; just tell me how much dowry you are willing to provide for each one."

She wisely decided not to admit her true situation to him, and instead merely said that she would think it over and then get back

to him about his offer. He left, and she burst into tears. Afterwards, she dressed and hurried to the yeshiva. She poured out her misery to the *rosh yeshiva*. Sobbing, she said, "I just don't understand why my situation deteriorated so." Again, she asked if the *Kaddishes* were still being said, and he comforted her that they were.

Suddenly the door opened. A distinguished-looking older man entered, turned to the widow, and asked her why she was crying. He told her that he knew of her desperate situation and that he was prepared to help. He then requested of the *rosh yeshiva* that they all go into his office, and that two scholars of the yeshiva join them. The *rosh yeshiva* acceded, and summoned two of his five great disciples present that year: his son, Rabbi Shimon Sofer, and Rabbi Yosef Chaim Sonnenfeld.

When they were all assembled, the mysterious guest said, "I know you have five daughters of marriageable age. Let's figure. Each one needs a thousand kroner for dowry money, and another thousand kroner each for the expenses of the wedding and for buying furniture and setting up a household. So, that is two thousand for each of the five, or ten thousand altogether. Plus, to put your business back on its feet, you need another ten thousand kroner, so that makes twenty thousand altogether.

"All right, then," he said, "I'll write you a check." Whereupon he took a checkbook out of his pocket, tore off a check, wrote the woman's name on it, inscribed it for twenty thousand kroner and signed it! Before handing it to her, however, he asked the two young scholars to sign on the back as witnesses to the transaction. He also asked them to take out their personal notebooks so he could sign in each a sample of his signature, in case the signature on the check would be challenged. Turning back to the woman, he told her that she should present the check at the government bank when it opened at nine o'clock, and they would honor it. Then he left as suddenly as he had come.

All present were shocked still in disbelief. It was as if they were sharing a dream. Then one of the young rabbis jumped up. "A man like that could really help the yeshiva," he said excitedly. "Let's go ask him." The two ran out and searched, but they couldn't find him or anyone who had seen him.

At nine the next morning, the widow was at the bank. The guard at the door directed her to one of the tellers, to whom she showed the check. He looked up the records and told her there were sufficient funds in the account to cover the check, but for such a huge sum he had to first get permission from the manager. He asked her to wait, and went to the administrative section. There he presented the check to the head of the bank, who took one look at it and fainted!

Pandemonium broke loose. People were running this way and that. The police came, and after questioning a few employees, confined the astonished businesswoman in a security room and locked the door, pending further investigation.

The doctor that was summoned quickly revived the bank manager. As soon as he gained consciousness, the manager asked that the woman who had brought the check be shown in to him. When told she had been locked up by security, he said that he must go to her; a great mistake had been made, to lock up such a righteous woman. He went quickly and, after apologizing, invited her to accompany him into his office.

“Tell me, please,” he opened, after they were seated, “how did you get this check?”

She told him of her difficulties and the sudden appearance of her unknown benefactor. She explained about her deceased husband and his practice of daily *ma’asser*, and of the *Kaddishes* she had arranged through the yeshiva for him and for those souls who had no one to say *Kaddish* for them.

He asked her: if she would see her benefactor again, or his picture, would she recognize him? She said yes. She added that two rabbis from the yeshiva were official witnesses to the whole episode, and that their signatures are on the back of the check, and that the man had also signed in their personal notebooks. The manager was excited to hear this, and after looking at their signatures, contacted the yeshiva to ask that Rabbi Sonnenfeld and Rabbi Shimon Sofer come to his office.

They came and confirmed all that the woman had said. The bank manager then told the three of them that he would personally honor the check, as it was drawn on his own family account, but

that his wife had to endorse it too. He then sent for his wife with the message that she should come quickly, because people were waiting for her, but first she should collect all the family photographs in the house and bring them with her.

Although the bank manager was a Jew, his wife was not. When she arrived, he asked the widow and the two rabbis to wait in a different room. He told his wife what was going on, and said, "Let's see if the woman can identify the man who signed the check from among these photographs." She declared that if it all turned out to be true, she would convert to be Jewish.

The manager then spread out all of the photos on his desk. He asked each of the three to enter separately and see if the man who gave the check appeared in any of them. Each one confidently picked out the same person.

The bank manager called everyone in. "Do you know who is this man who gave the check?" he asked. "It is my father, the manager of the bank before me. But he has been dead for ten years!

"I must confess," he told them, "that I never said *Kaddish* for him. Last night he appeared to me in a dream. He said that he had been saved from Purgatory by the *Kaddishes* that she had arranged for the yeshiva scholars to say for those souls for whom *Kaddish* was not being said, and now that she was in difficulty we must help her. He said that he would give her a check for twenty thousand kroner, and that if I didn't pay it, he would strangle me in my sleep.

"I woke up, frightened. In the morning I told my wife the dream, and she was disturbed too. When the check was shown to me at the bank, I fainted. I knew then that the dream was true.

"I will pay the twenty thousand my father promised, for it is certainly a deserving cause. Not only that," he added, turning to the woman, "I will add another twenty thousand of my own, because you fulfilled my obligation for me, and helped my deceased father's soul with the *Kaddish*-saying you arranged."

He addressed the three of them again. "I fully regret my lapse from Judaism. I see now that our God is the one true God, and He gives to all their just reward. I resolve that from now on I will ful-

fill His commandments as revealed in our Torah. My wife, too, has reaffirmed her promise to convert and to live in accordance with Jewish law. Please guide us to understand what we have to do.”

He instructed the teller to give the woman forty thousand kruner. The first thing she did was to give ten percent of it to the yeshiva. Soon thereafter, her business waxed prosperous again, and her five daughters made good marriages with God-fearing young Torah scholars.

Translated and retold from Otzar Hamaasiyos, vol. 1, pp. 42–47, in the name of Rabbi Y. Shapira, who heard it from Rabbi Sonnenfeld himself.

Some understand that the other Rabbi-witness besides Rabbi Sonnenfeld was Rabbi Yehoshua Greenwald, who became Chief Rabbi of Austro-Hungary.

In honor of the yahrzeit of the author's mother, Ella bas Sarah-Yehudis & Eliyahu HaLevi

The story is from the book “Saturday Night, Full Moon”

It was first published on the author's website: www.AscentOfSafed.com, in 5758/1997.

DIVINE UNDERTAKING

BY RABBI TUVIA BOLTON

*There are many plans in a man's heart
but God's counsel shall prevail.*

— Proverbs 19:21

H

ere is a story I heard from Rabbi Shmuel Hendel in Kfar Chabad, told to him by Rabbi Eliyahu Segal of Rishon L'Tzion. It occurred just recently in New York.

The phone rang one evening in the home of an Orthodox Jewish family with bad news; their ninety-plus year old mother, grandmother etc. who had been in a nursing home for the aged, passed away quietly in her sleep. Everyone wept, funeral arrangements were made, and early the next afternoon family and friends gathered from near and far to pay their last respects and bring their beloved relative and friend to her final resting place. After the funeral as everyone was leaving the gravesite it was announced that the family would 'sit Shiva' (observe the seven days of mourning) in their home and everyone was invited to comfort them and participate in the prayers thrice daily. The next few days were busy, the house was filled with visitors and those who were not able to come sent telegrams and called long distance. But on the afternoon of the third day one strange phone call stood out from all the others.

The phone rang, one of the children answered and the voice on the other end said, "Hello! Is this Avi? Is everything all right? Are

Mommy and Daddy there? What do you mean who is it? Don't you recognize your grandma? This is Avi, right? Nu! So let me talk to your mom or dad. Why don't you come visit?"

Her son got on the phone and....hesitantly said "Mom, is this you?"

"Of course it is!" she replied, "What's going on? Why doesn't anyone come to visit me for three days already? Is everything all right?" Mom was still alive! He burst out crying and joyously turned to everyone else, who already heard the boy's conversation.

"Grandma didn't die!" He said with a wild look of disbelief "She's on the phone.... She's alive!" The joy was great! He told her they were on their way to visit her and in no time they were by her side explaining the whole thing. It had obviously been a terrible mistake. But suddenly it dawned on them....they just had made a funeral and buried someone! Who was that someone? And who were her relatives? They had been so overwhelmed with their own living grandmother that they hadn't thought about the dead one! So they called the manager of the nursing home and when he heard what had happened he got the secretaries working and in a short time they got to the bottom of it.

Unfortunately things like this happen. In the same building was another patient with the same name as their grandmother. Both were Holocaust survivors, both were in their nineties and both were very similar in build. So somehow the management confused the identities, made a terrible mistake and informed the relatives of the living one instead of the deceased. The management apologized profusely, agreed to pay the price of the funeral, damages, missed work etc. begged them to understand and set to finding the relatives of the deceased woman. After a short investigation they discovered that she had only one relative; a son who lived not far away and they all agreed that it would be best if the family of the living woman would deliver the bitter news. After all, they reasoned, probably the son would be angry and they could calm him down by assuring that she was given the utmost honor and respect, show them the gravesite etc. But they were in for a surprise.

As soon as he picked up the phone and heard they were calling from the nursing home and would like to visit him he interrupt-

ed and said, "If you're calling to say my mom died no need to come. Just cremate her, throw away the ashes and send me the bill. Okay?" They were shocked. They had never experienced such callousness! But when they asked if they could come speak to him, he agreed and a half hour later they were sitting in his home trying to explain to him that cremation is forbidden according to Jewish law and that the custom is there should be a proper Jewish burial, there is the raising of the dead etc. But he wanted no part of it on principle. Not only was cremation cheapest, most efficient, and space and time saving it was realistic! All this business about souls, God, Judaism and raising of the dead was all nonsense as far as he was concerned. People were like plants or animals that live and die... it's nature. "THAT is reality!" He said emphatically.

Finally they had no choice but to tell him the truth. That, in fact, his mother died several days ago. But by mistake they were told it was their mother and so they not only gave her a Jewish burial but they already sat three days of 'Shiva' for her. They were about to add he doesn't have to worry about money but he didn't give them a chance. "What!?" He held his head in his hands and whispered, "Buried? Mom got buried?" He had this strange, stunned look on his face. They couldn't figure out what he was doing. He closed his eyes, his face contorted and suddenly he burst out weeping uncontrollably like a baby! From time to time he said, "Oy! Buried!" After ten fifteen minutes he calmed down, sat down, asked for a glass of water, wiped his eyes, and explained.

"My mother was a Holocaust survivor. All her family got killed by the Germans along with my father and all his family. But she got out with me. I was just a baby then but we moved to America and after all that happened to her..... she still believed in God. "At first everything was okay but as I got older, like fifteen sixteen, and didn't want to be different from everyone else so I dropped Judaism. She started bugging me about how we are different, I should marry only a Jewish girl and eat kosher food etc. but it just made me mad. "We used to have big arguments until I got so fed up I told her that I'm not going to live a life like hers. As far as I'm concerned there is no such thing as God or an afterlife or souls or Judaism and when I die I'm going to have my body cremated and that's what I'll do to hers also when she dies. I guess it was sort of

cruel but I thought it was for her good, that she should start living in a real world and leave the 'superstitions'.

"Finally I told her I'll make a deal. She should pray to God; if she's right and God exists then He'll see to it that she gets a burial but if not then... cremation. I was a hundred percent sure, no doubt at all, what the outcome would be. Now I see I was wrong! All this time she was right! Do you understand what happened!? God listened to her prayers! She was right!" And he began weeping anew.

On the spot he agreed to observe the seven days of mourning for her in the house of the previous 'mourners' and to begin learning about Judaism.

THE \$25 MILLION FUNERAL

BY DAVID DAMEN

He who loses money, loses much; he who loses a friend, loses much more; he who loses faith, loses all.

– Eleanor Roosevelt

It's good to have money and the things that money can buy, but it's good, too, to check up once in a while and make sure that you haven't lost the things that money can't buy.

– George Lorimer

t was just another routine day at one of the cemeteries in Central Israel. Dozens of family members walked, heads bowed sadly, behind their deceased loved one. A standard funeral, at first glance. Strangers who encountered the throng on its way out barely cast a glance at the group. Even the passionate sobs of the man leading the procession, who seemed to be the only son of the deceased, didn't transform the funeral into anything extraordinary in this land of the dead, where wails and sobs are the order of the day until that time when death will be forever vanquished.

No one could guess that this funeral, which was held about three months ago, was far from another routine funeral. It was the

closing of an amazing saga, a rare collusion of events stunning in their intensity, Divine in their essence, and containing all the elements of an almost inconceivable story. Had it not actually occurred, it is doubtful that anyone would believe the tale.

The first part of the unbelievable puzzle was woven in Auschwitz, during the terrible war years. The thousands of downtrodden human skeletons walking through the camp were joined one day by a father and son, named Moshe and Yitzchak (not their real names). The father, a householder from a certain well known town, clutched his only son tightly, desperately attempting to protect him from any harm. The Nazis separated the father from his son. They were taken to different places, and never met again.

A short while later, the war came to an end. The survivors, who were slated to be next in line for the ovens, rubbed their eyes in disbelief. Then they began their odyssey toward living a normal, free life. Moshe, the father, tried to locate his son. When he failed to do so, he quickly despaired. The boy must have been killed, he thought to himself. The loss overtook him and broke his spirit. In a moment of emotional weakness, he decided to abandon his religion and completely disconnect from the past. Wounded, angered, and filled with resentment, he decided to turn over a new leaf in a place where he would be unrecognized. He wandered through several countries, finally settling in a country in South America.

In his new home, Moshe began a new chapter, albeit not a smooth one. He married a local non-Jewish woman. The young son that he'd left behind in Poland, and the possibility that he might still be alive somewhere, didn't occupy his thoughts all that much. Perhaps covertly, when no one noticed, he thought about the child. But to his non-Jewish wife and son, he never revealed his secret memories. The son, a non-Jew, never imagined in his wildest dreams what his father was hiding in his memory box. His father's financial successes veiled his previous traumas. When it came to money, Moshe did quite well. He made many successful deals and amassed tremendous wealth.

A few months ago came his turning point. Moshe felt unwell, and at his advanced age he didn't want to take any chances. He visited the local doctor, and after comprehensive examinations, was

informed that his life was coming to an end. "You have just a few months left," his doctor told him with an impassive expression.

Distressed, Moshe's conscience began to trouble him greatly. Thoughts of his lost son began to race through his mind, and spurred him to take action before it would be too late. Lying on his sickbed, he summoned his non-Jewish son and recounted the untold portion of his history. "I never told you this," he said in a weak voice, "but you should know that there is a possibility that my other son, a Jew, is living somewhere in the world. I ask of you, try to locate him! When you do find him, give him twenty five million dollars." This sum was exactly half of Moshe's estate. Fifty million dollars was the sum that Moshe would be leaving behind. Now, he had decided to divide it into two.

Moshe supplied his son with two pieces of information: the exact name of his missing son and his birthday. With the help of those two minute details, the non Jewish son began a fascinating search attempt. It was a race against probability and a race against time. Any day now his father was apt to breathe his last.

A FEW HOURS TOO LATE

Aided by advanced electronic media, which hadn't existed in the days after Auschwitz, the son slowly drew closer to his goal. He searched throughout the United States, carried on to Europe, and ... did not find a trace of his half-brother. As a last alternative he tried searching in Israel. The name that he located was a perfect match to the name his father had mentioned. Not only that, the birthday was also the same. He didn't waste any time, and contacted the fellow, his new brother. The man, whom we'll call Yitzchak, a Torah observant Jew living in Tel Aviv, heard the stranger on the other end of the telephone and was moved to tears. "Father is about to die," his non-Jewish brother informed him. "The sooner you come, the greater your chances of meeting him."

The man, greatly moved, took the first available flight and flew to South America to meet his birth father, for whom he had recited *Kaddish* for the last sixty years. He reached his destination and was met in the airport by his brother, whose saddened face said it all. "I

am sorry to inform you,” the brother said, “that our father died last night in the hospital.” Yitzchak had arrived just a few hours too late.

The only thing left to do at that point was to arrange a respectable funeral. On the way to town, as the two discussed the tremendous inheritance waiting for them, Yitzchak tried to clarify the details of the funeral. “The funeral won’t be held for another few days,” the non Jewish brother said.

“Why?” Yitzchak couldn’t understand the reason for the delay.

“Because that’s, what I’ve already arranged with the church,” his brother answered serenely. After a few moments Yitzchak learned that his Jewish father was slated to undergo a non-Jewish burial with all the trimmings. The funeral would be held in the church, the priest would deliver a fiery eulogy, and then the corpse would be sent for cremation. His father’s body may have escaped the ovens of Auschwitz, but it would now be burnt in a magnificent non-Jewish ceremony.

Yitzchak was terribly disturbed. “How could you do this to Father?” he tried to reprimand his brother. “After all, he was a Jew!”

“Leave me alone,” the brother rejoined. “He never instructed me otherwise. He behaved exactly as a non-Jew. There is no reason that you, a newly-arrived guest, should spoil this ceremony for me.”

The biting argument spiraled into a serious fight, with each side staunchly defending its position. The non-Jewish brother could not understand what the Israeli Jew, the fellow who was supposedly his brother, wanted from him. Just a few days ago, he had informed the Jew that he was about to become a millionaire. Now that he’d arrived, this stranger was making his life miserable over such inconsequential matters.

EVERYTHING FOR A JEWISH BURIAL

Yitzchak didn’t waste any time. He telephoned his lawyer in Israel, one of the country’s top attorneys, and asked him to recommend a talented lawyer in the South American country where he was located. Yitzchak decided to prevail over his brother through the legal system. The Israeli attorney referred him to a local lawyer, and a hearing was quickly scheduled.

In the interim, a court order was issued forbidding burial until a final verdict would be reached. A few days later, the case was heard.

The judge, who apparently didn't quite understand the great furor, suggested what seemed to him a most logical arrangement. "The corpse shall be cremated," he ruled. Still, in an attempt to satisfy the Jewish brother, he informed him that the ashes would be divided equally between the two brothers. Half would be given to the non-Jew, and the other half to Yitzchak, who would be free to bury it in a Jewish cemetery.

In any other situation, Yitzchak would have burst into uncontrollable laughter, remembering the famous verdict of King Solomon. But in this case, the subject was his father, whose body was about to be terribly violated. He could not permit himself to lose this battle.

Yitzchak summoned his brother and tried to convince him in other ways. "You know that my portion of the inheritance is twenty-five million dollars," Yitzchak began in a soft voice. "Take ten million of those dollars for yourself and give me the body in exchange," he offered.

The brother looked at him with flashing eyes and spit out angrily, "Aren't you ashamed? Here I made such efforts to locate you, and then you are shaming me like this, suing me in court, and embarrassing me in public! I don't want to talk to you at all!" he concluded vehemently.

Yitzchak wouldn't give up. In a flash of inspiration, he decided to make a much improved offer. "I will give you my entire share of the inheritance, all twenty-five million dollars, as long as you give me Father's body," he told his brother, his voice shaky but sure. The brother thought a moment, and then immediately wrapped up the deal. What was a dead body worth to a non-Jew, compared to twenty-five million dollars?

And don't think that Yitzchak is a wealthy person. Not at all. Yitzchak is just a Jew who always managed to make as much money as he needed to get by, and who managed to marry off his children honorably. Nothing more than that.

The deal was closed on the spot. The non-Jewish brother received the entire inheritance, while Yitzchak flew back to Israel together with the most precious treasure possible: his father's unviolated body. Not only did Yitzchak lose his inheritance, he also had to pay fifty thousand dollars in legal funds.

Back in Israel, the entire family assembled to pay their final respects to their forgotten grandfather. Yitzchak said *Kaddish* in a crushed voice, and began a year of mourning.

Facing the open grave, Yitzchak began to think about the strange series of events that he had endured over the past few days. He had found his father, discovered a non-Jewish brother, lost twenty-five million dollars, and succeeded in according his father a Jewish burial. His family members were also immersed in thought. Who had a greater merit? The father who had miraculously made his way to burial in Israel, or the son who had conceded such tremendous wealth for that purpose?

As the family stood, still immersed in thought, the undertakers steadily continued their work. Not one of them imagined that this body, which they were slowly lowering into the ground, had "cost" the family twenty-five million dollars.



Yitzchak, the hero of the story, is a modest man. He never intended to publicize the story, and had no plans of gaining any glory from his act.

What happened was, the story reached the ears of the Gaon HaRav Chaim Yerachmiel Kleinman, *shlita*, mashgiach of Yeshivas Ateres Yisrael, who is personally acquainted with several of the people involved in the story. In a conversation with Mishpacha, HaRav Kleinman verified all the details of the story, and even mentioned that he had presented the story to *gedolim*, who had displayed great amazement upon hearing the tale. One of those *gedolim* was HaGaon HaRav Yitzchak Zilberstein, *shlita*, rabbi of the Ramat Elchanan neighborhood, who later retold the story to the audience at one of his lectures.

“It is unbelievable,” says HaRav Kleinman excitedly. “It is a story that is totally atypical of our times. It is nothing less than a ‘Ber-ditchever tale.’ ” HaRav Kleinman has retold the story many times, but each time he is moved anew.

Mishpacha attempted, in any case, to establish contact with the hero of the story, but the latter’s lawyer relayed that he was not interested in being interviewed.

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*Cremation is like you're trying to cover up a crime -
Burn the body, scatter the ashes around. As far as
anyone's concerned, this whole thing never happened.*

*I don't want to be cremated I want the straight-up
funeral thing. Everyone's going to be there that I know;
I want to be there too - right up at the front!*

— Jerry Seinfeld

CONCLUSION



Don't take Olam Hazeh so seriously.

– Rabbi Yaakov Yisrael Kanievsky, known as The Steipler ztz"l



*One day we are going to die.
But all the other days we won't.*

– Peanuts



The soul continues to have a relationship with the body after death, a relationship that becomes more distant during the first year of mourning until, ultimately, the two are reunited in the End of Days. The body has been the partner of the soul throughout life in mitzvah observance. Kabbalah likens the relationship to a bride and groom as partners in life and whose fate is intertwined after death.

If the body is destroyed, rather than decomposed, there's no home for the soul to return to when the time comes for resurrection of the dead. And that's very painful for the soul for all eternity.

"A cemetery is called a "Beit HaChaim," says Rabbi Elchonon Zohn, "the home of the living, because we firmly believe in the eternal life of the souls that rest there. When one believes in a Creator of heaven and earth Who clearly commanded us to be buried, believes in an eternal world of truth, reward and punishment, and the ultimate resurrection (three of the thirteen principles of Jewish faith defined by Maimonides), then societal trends and economic considerations do not sway one's commitment."

The Torah, which is very brief in places, spends many *parshas* detailing the death and burial of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs and the care taken to ensure their speedy and dignified burial. Humans are made in the image of God and the honor accorded to him after death is an expression of this. Moreover, burial is part of the purification process that we undergo before being admitted into eternal life. This of course doesn't apply to martyrs who died *Al Kiddush Hashem* (sanctifying the name of God) and whose bodies were violated against their will. Their very death was purification enough.

Cremation is the antithesis of a Jewish funeral. "While a funeral respects both the body and soul of the deceased and honors that connection, cremation is a violent act with the body burned at 1600 degrees Fahrenheit for several hours and then what hasn't burned away, mostly bone fragments, is pulverized," explains Rabbi Jay Lyons of NASCK's Florida branch. So it isn't ashes that are left over as much as bone dust. A Kohen (who is prohibited from coming into contact or proximity to a dead body) may even carry the ashes because they have no significance. That's part of the tragedy of cremation.

NASCK (The National Association of *Chevra Kaddishas*) is trying to even out the playing field by creating a financially friendly burial option in accordance with *Halacha* while educating the public that this is what God wants and ultimately, what their bodies and souls need in order to pass smoothly into The Next World. Their cemetery is a fifteen acre property in Lake Worth, Palm Beach County which will allow upright monuments (not found in Florida) for a flat fee of \$3,600, which includes the grave opening and closing cost.

Burial is consistent with Jewish values of respect, Jewish identity, family unity and continuity. It provides more closure and a place to visit and maintain a connection. It is also best for the environment.

Jewish law ensures the utmost respect is given to the deceased with the members of the *Chevra Kaddisha* begging their forgiveness, if they have acted insensitively towards them. And according to Jewish law, the deceased is not allowed to be left alone from the

moment the soul departs the body until the body has been covered with earth, with prayers being continually said for the soul of the departed.

The soul is aware of everything that happens to it from the time it leaves the body as it begins its tentative journey to The Next World. We have ample proof of this from testimonies of near-death experiences. While decomposing in the ground may not be fun, cremation is certainly a horrible way to sever the connection of the body from the soul forever. That's probably why Jews have been burned so often in history by their cruel anti-Semitic enemies. It seems an ironic thing to choose. And even if someone is uncertain of the existence of life after death, why take the chance?

May we all find peace in this world and the next. May *Mashiach* come soon so that we all reconnect, body and soul, and with each other.

Part of this conclusion appeared in an article in The Jewish Press

NASCK can be reached in New York at:

Phone: 718-847-6280

Cellphone: 718-734-8436

rabbizohn@nasck.org

rabbizions@nasck.org

www.nasck.org

They welcome donations and inquiries about their new cemetery.

Rabbi Lyons can be reached in Florida at:

561-376-9972

www.fljewishcemetery.org

NASCK emphasizes the need to have a living will or a card (similar to an organ donor card) which states one's wishes in the event of a sudden death so that they are not mistakenly cremated. NASCK also works to prevent autopsies and other post-mortem violation of the body the EMES Card is available at nasck.org.

AFTERWORD

*Twenty years from now
you will be more disappointed
by the things that you didn't do
than by the ones you did do.*

– Mark Twain



few weeks ago, I received an email from a lovely lady whose husband had just passed away. And although many days and events have elapsed since its arrival in my inbox, her question, hasn't left my mind.

It wasn't the complexity of her question that left me baffled. It wasn't even the intensity of emotion with which it was asked, that left me pondering. Rather, it was "her question behind her question," as my dear mentor, Rabbi Steinsaltz, would call it. For within her question, lies the cry of the Jewish soul. It is a cry that we all share, and that each of us must respond to, every single day.

So, with all humility, allow me to share parts of this exchange with you.

Dear Rabbi,

Just before my husband passed away yesterday, he asked to have a Jewish burial and be buried in a Jewish cemetery. I was taken aback by his request, as my husband never practiced Judaism, in any shape or form. Moreover, he married me, a non-Jew, and I would have preferred to bury him in a non-Jewish cemetery, next to a plot that was purchased for me many years

ago. I also heard that Jewish law may not allow him to be buried in a Jewish cemetery, since he had a tattoo and he also “married out” of his faith. But I also want to be respectful of his wish, and do the right thing. So, Rabbi, what should I do?

Thank you,

J.



Dear J.,

Your poignant question moves me. I read it again and again, for somewhere, beyond your words, I heard the cry of the deceased's soul.

You are right: you ought to be respectful of his wish, in spite of your concerns. Many Jewish legal authorities rule that every Jew, including Jews who have tattoos and Jews who “marry out”, ought to be buried among their people in a Jewish cemetery. (Even one who commits suicide – a crime of the highest order in Torah and Halacha – may be buried inside a Jewish cemetery as we assume that he was not in a normal state of mind at that moment).

But your question, J., struck a profound chord deep within, for it told the super-rational story of the Jewish soul:

As you described, here lived a Jew, who “married out”, and “never practiced Judaism in any shape or form.” But as the end of his life looms, this assimilated Jew seems to have but one request: “Bury me as a Jew.” It defies logic, doesn't it? Here's a man who had no apparent commitment to Judaism, and to his Jewish roots, yet when faced with death, his sole desire is to die as a Jew!

This, J., is the story of the inextinguishable Jewish soul. It never ceases to yearn for self-fulfillment. It never stops calling upon us to actualize our Divine purpose in life. And it always attempts to come forth and challenge our commitment to our Torah, to our faith, and to our people, even when it hides in the strangest of places.

Lastly, J., allow me to thank you sincerely for your question. Its reverberating echoes will forever remain with me. For just imagine, J., the feats we could achieve if we would listen to our soul's cry, not just during the tough times, but more importantly, at every moment we breathe. Imagine how this could bring meaning into our lives and improve the world around us.

Indeed, to die as a Jew is important. But to live as a Jew is vital. Thank you J. for your question, and for this eternal reminder.

With my deepest wishes,

Rabbi Pinchas Allouche

FOR FURTHER READING

- *Cremation or Burial; A Jewish View*
by Doron Kornbluth
- *The Jewish Way in Death and Mourning*
By Rabbi Maurice Lamm
- *Small Miracles from Beyond: Dreams, Visions and Signs that Link Us to the Other Side*
By Yitta Halberstam & Judith Leventhal

There are many relevant articles on the following websites:

- www.Aish.com
- www.Chabad.org
- www.peacefulreturn.com

GLOSSARY

ABBA: Father

ADAR: The sixth month of the Jewish calendar. Purim is celebrated in this month.

A"H: Alav/Aleiha Hashalom May he/she rest in peace

ALIYAH: Immigration to Israel (lit. ascent)

BAIS YAAKOV: A Chareidi girls' school

BARUCH DAYAN HAEMET: The blessing said when hearing of a death (Lit. Blessed is the True Judge)

BARAK: Lightning, also a boy's name

BARUCH HASHEM: Thank God

BAT: Daughter (of)

BERDICHEVER: Name of a rabbi after the town of Berdichev

BRACHA: Blessing

BRESLOV: A type of Chassidism

CHAG: Holiday (pl. *chaggim*)

CHASSID: Righteous person or follower of a Chassidic Rabbi

CHATAN: Groom

CHESED: Acts of kindness

CHEVRAH LOMDEI MISHNAH: A group who study Mishnah in the merit of the deceased

CHEVRA KADDISHA: Jewish Burial Society

DAVEN: Pray

(K)EL MALEH RACHAMIM: A prayer said for the deceased expressing God's compassion

ESHET CHAYIL: A virtuous woman. The name of a prayer said Erev Shabbat in honor of the Jewish woman

EREV: Eve (as in Erev Shabbat)

FRUM: Religiously observant

GAN EDEN: The Garden of Eden, Paradise, Heaven

GAON: Brilliant

GEDOLIM: Great Rabbis

HAFRASHAT CHALLAH: Separating the *Challah* when baking. One of three special mitzvot given to women along with lighting Shabbat candles and going to the *mikveh*

HALACHA: Jewish Law

HASHEM: God (lit. the Name)

HASHGACHA PRATIT: Divine Providence

HESPED: Eulogy. (pl. *Hespedim*)

KIPPA: Round head covering worn by religious Jews

KADDISH: A prayer praising God. Mourner's *Kaddish* is recited for eleven months in honor of the deceased

KALLAH: Bride

KEDUSHAH: Holiness

KEVER: Grave

KIRUV: Drawing people closer to Judaism

KRIAH: Rending a mourner's garment

KVOD HAMEIT: Honor for the deceased

ILLUI NESHAMA: Elevation of the soul

LEVI: A member of the tribe of Levi

L'HITRAOT: See you

MA'ASSER: Tithe

MASHGIACH: Spiritual dean of a yeshiva

MASHIACH: The Messiah

MATZEVA: Tombstone

MELITZ YOSHER: Someone who puts in a good word in Heaven for those on earth

MIDDA: Character trait (pl. *Middot*)

MIKVEH: Pool for ritual immersion

MINHAG: Custom

MINYAN: A quorum of ten men. A *minyan* must be present for some prayers like *Kaddish* to be recited

MISHNAH: Part of the Oral Torah

MISHNAYOT: Chapters of Mishnah

MOTEK: Sweetheart

NAHAFOCHU: The tables turned

NESHAMA: Soul. (The Soul is divided into five parts. The *Neshama* is the third part)

NISSAN: The first month in the biblical calendar and the seventh month from Rosh Hashanah. Passover is celebrated in Nissan

OLAM HABAH: The Next World

OLAM HAZE: This World

PARSHA: Weekly Torah portion

PESACH: Passover

RABBANIT: The wife of a rabbi, a learned woman, a teacher

RAV: Rabbi

REFUAH SHLEIMA: A complete recovery

ROSH CHODESH: The new month

ROSH YESHIVA: Dean of a yeshiva

SANDAK: Godfather at a *Brit*

SEDER: Festive meal during Passover when the Passover story is recounted and ritual foods are eaten

SEFER: Book or scroll

SHABBAT: The Sabbath

SHADDAI: One of God's names

SHADDCHAN/SHADDCHANIT: Matchmaker

SHALOM ZACHOR: A ceremony to welcome a new baby boy on the Friday night before his Brit

SHEMA YISRAEL: The quintessential Jewish prayer declaring the Oneness of God. Said several times a day and on one's deathbed

SHIDDUCH: Match (made by a matchmaker)

SHIN: The 20th letter of the Hebrew alphabet

SHIVA: Seven days of mourning, the first part of mourning

SHLITA: Hebrew acronym for "May he merit long life" usually added to the name of a rabbi

SHLOSHIM: Thirty days of mourning. The second part of mourning

SHOMER: Guard

SHOMER SHABBAT: A Sabbath observant Jew

SHUL: Synagogue

SHULCHAN ARUCH: The code of Jewish Law

SHUSHAN PURIM: The day after Purim which is celebrated as Purim in Jerusalem and some other cities in Israel

SUCCAH: A temporary booth covered in leaves where Jews eat and sleep during the holiday of Sukkoth

SUCCOTH: The Feast of Tabernacles commemorating the Jews' sojourn in the desert

TAHARA: The ritual purifying and preparing a body for burial

TALLIT: Prayer Shawl

TANTE: Aunt (Yiddish)

TECHIYAT HAMEITIM: The Resurrection of the dead

TEHILLIM: The book of Psalms

TEVET: Fourth month in the Jewish calendar

TISHA B'AV: The 9th of the month of Av, the 11th month of the Jewish calendar. Saddest day of the year, commemorating the destruction of both Temples in Jerusalem

TORAH: Five books of law given by God to Moses and the People of Israel at Mount Sinai in both written and oral form

TZADDIK: A righteous person

TZEDAKA: Charity

TZITZIT: Fringed garment representing the commandments

YAAKOV AVINU: The Patriarch Jacob

Yahrzeit: Anniversary of death

Yeshiva: Elementary or higher school of learning where Torah and Talmud are the main subjects

YIMACH SHMAM: May their names be blotted out

YITRO: Moses' father and a Priest of Midian who converted to Judaism

YIZKOR: Prayer said in memory of the deceased during the holidays and on the person's *yahrzeit*

YOSEF: Joseph

ZICHRONO/ZICHRONA LIVRACHA: May his/her memory be [for] a blessing

ZTZ"l: Zecher Tzaddik Livracha. May the Tzaddik be remembered for a blessing

FOR AN ILLUI NESHAMA

An *illui Neshama* means an elevation of a person's soul. Once in The Next World, a person can no longer perform mitzvot but the departed is still able to benefit from the mitzvot done in his or her memory, thereby earning an elevation of their soul.

The following can be done in memory of a departed loved one and earns them an *illui neshama*:

1. Writing a *sefer Torah* in their memory
2. Giving charity or a bequest, or starting a fund in their memory
3. Naming a child after them
4. Doing a mitzvah you learned from them
5. Saying the *Yizkor* prayer on the high holidays and major festivals in the synagogue
6. Lighting a candle on their *yahrzeit*
7. Visiting and praying at their grave on the anniversary of their death or on other significant dates
8. Saying a Torah thought in their name
9. Using something of theirs to do a mitzvah
10. Finishing an incomplete obligation for them (such as paying a debt or learning Torah with their children)
11. Saying *alav HaShalom, aleiha HaShalom*, May he/she rest in peace or *zichrono/zichrona livracha* when speaking about them.

MY BURIAL WISHES

7" x 11"

In recognition of the fact that there may come a time, after my death, when decisions will need to be made with regard to the care and disposition of my body, it is my desire and I, _____,

(Deceased Name) (Rabbi's Hebrew Name)

do hereby direct that

A. I object to any autopsy of my body except when permitted by Jewish law

B. My funeral should be conducted with the dignity and respect accorded by Jewish law and tradition as described in the pamphlet entitled: "Dignity For The Body / Peace For The Soul."

Designation of Rabbi or Alternate: Promptly, upon my death, in addition to or in the absence of my family, please notify:

Rabbi: _____

Address: _____

Tel. Day: _____ Eve: _____

I request that any questions that may arise at the time of my death regarding dissection or autopsy of my body, donation of body organs, or the preparation for and the time of my burial, be made in consultation with the Rabbi.

If the Rabbi listed is unavailable, please contact: Rabbi/Cong./Ins./Org./Chavra Kadisha

Name: _____

Address: _____

Tel. Day: _____ Eve: _____

Location of Documents and Grave Information:

My Last Will and Testament is located at: _____

The deed or permit for my grave is located at: _____

Name of cemetery: _____

Grave location: Sec. _____ Block no. _____ Row _____ Grave _____

To receive grave information please call:

Name: _____

Address: _____

Tel. Day: _____ Eve: _____

Funeral Arrangements: The funeral home where I

☐ have already made pre-arrangements is:

☐ would like to have my funeral arranged is:

Name: _____

Phone: _____ Ask for: _____

Signature _____ Date _____

(If you are not physically capable of signing, another person may sign your name on your behalf).

DECLARATION OF WITNESS

I declare that the person who signed (or asked another to sign) this document is personally known to me and appears to be of sound mind and acting willingly and free from duress. This document was signed in my presence.

Witness: _____

Residing at: _____

(It is recommended that copies of this form be given to the Rabbi and the alternate designated therein, to the funeral director and to your doctor, lawyer, family members, friends or social workers who are likely to be contacted in the event of your death).



A division of NASCK

The National Association of Chevra Kadisha (NASCK) is a non-profit organization dedicated to sharing information about the importance and beauty of burial. People deserve honesty when making their very personal 'final decision.' Don't be misled by the illusion and deceptive myths of a billion-dollar cremation industry.

NASCK provides:

Resources and Educational materials including
articles, brochures and videos in English and Russian

Online Training Webinars and Live Seminars

Consultancy and Guidance for Burial Services

Access to Burial Societies

Shiva Materials



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