

The Jewish Weekly

It Once Happened...

Partnering With G-d to Avoid a Cremation

By Batya Schochet Lisker

"Rabbi Yossi, my mother is set to be cremated, her body burned and pulverized, her soul never to find peace," her voice cracked in obvious desperation, her emotions threatening to take over. "Please help me!" begged Esther.

Esther's mother, Sara, had passed away the day before, peacefully in her sleep, at the ripe old age of 99 with all her faculties intact. Her father had died at a young age during the 1967 Six-Day War and was buried in Har HaMenuchot, the largest cemetery in Jerusalem. Subsequently the family had moved to Nashville, Tenn., but not before Sara had purchased a plot for herself beside her husband to ensure that when the time came, she would be buried with him.

"I never thought my mother's passing would create so many problems. She wrote her burial plan in her will. But her plan hit a snag. When I called the funeral home that had transferred the body from the morgue to make arrangements to honor my mother's wishes, I learned it's not so simple. The director told me that my sister would have to sign a consent form, and she had refused. 'I apologize, ma'am,' he said. 'But your sister called with instructions for your mother's remains to be cremated.'

"I was shocked. My sister, Fannie, with whom I have only occasional contact, is a very determined woman who will stop at nothing! I had no idea that she had cremation in mind for my mother.

"Fannie was cold and abrupt when I called her, and wasn't interested in hearing from me. When I started talking about funeral arrangements, she responded, 'I'm not only uninterested in participating in the cost of transporting Mom's body to Israel, I want her cremated and her ashes near me. Her urn will grace my mantelpiece, and she will be next to me forever in my living room. I will never be alone.' She stated firmly.

'Although it's true that we were never religious, Mom was interested in Jewish traditions, and her final wishes were clear,' I countered to my sister. 'Why would you want to do something that would cause her soul pain and distress?'

"But it was like talking to the wall. I hung up feeling shaken and distressed. Fannie stated in no uncertain terms that she would oppose any efforts I made, and that she



An open grave ready for burial (illustration picture)

would use her vast financial resources as well as her political connections to achieve her goal.

"Rabbi Yossi, I know my mom deserves that I fight to give her body the respect it deserves and preserve its inherent holiness for her eternal rest, but my younger sister is a wealthy and savvy opponent. I am a nearly destitute, weary 80-year-old woman with no fight left in me. Please tell me what to do."

Rabbi Yossi, a young energetic and enthusiastic young man from Israel, runs a crisis intervention organization called "Help Without Borders". Hearing that there was a Jewish body lying in disgrace in a refrigerator, he did not hesitate for a second.

A Meit Mitzvah is a dead person who has no one to arrange his or her proper burial. It is incumbent on every individual to take responsibility and help with such a burial. Even the saintly High Priest who wasn't permitted to become ritually impure by attending the funerals of some of his closest relatives is commanded to step up and take part in a Meit Mitzvah. This Chessed Shel Emet, "kindness of truth," is the purest, most altruistic act, since no one is around to acknowledge the favor. There are no thanks, no accolades, no payment. But G-d sees this kindness.

Rabbi Yossi told Esther he would take care of it. He would spare no cost to ensure that her mother would have the dignity of a full Jewish interment, including ritual purification, funeral and burial in her plot on Har Hamenuchot, as well as a tombstone and the recital of the Mourner's Kaddish.

A high-powered attorney was procured. The lengthy court process consumed emotions, energy and finances, but finally, 79 days later, Rabbi Yossi received a call from the court to confirm. He was asked if he was covering all the expenditures to close the case - funeral home, storage of the body, court costs, lawyer fees, transport flight charges and burial in Israel.

He answered in the affirmative and raced to the bank to clear out his savings, but found himself coming up short. He took out a loan

for the balance and promptly wired the funds without considering the monthly payments he had obligated himself to pay. Using his established network of contacts, he cut through the bureaucracy to get clearance from the Israeli consulate and the Ministry of Health, and to finalize arrangements.

The next day - in the middle of the summer of the COVID-19 pandemic, 80 days after Esther had contacted him - Sara's body landed in Israel and was finally laid to rest.

A few weeks later, on the second day of Rosh Hashanah, Rabbi Yossi found a quiet moment to catch up with his mother. She listened in contemplative silence as he told her all that had transpired with Sara. Concerned for her son, she said, "You emptied out your savings in the middle of the coronavirus when you are on furlough and not working?! How on earth are you going to be able to pay back the loan? What were you thinking?'"

"Don't worry, Hashem will help," he responded.


Two days later, Rabbi Yossi received a call from acquaintances in Australia. They told him that they had earmarked money to participate in the mitzvah of Meit Mitzvah in response to an appeal for a particular need in their community, but relatives were found at the last minute and it was not needed. Since they had designated the money for this cause, they inquired as to whether he knew anyone so they could contribute. They were at a loss for words when Rabbi Yossi relayed Sara's saga to them. The next day, they transferred the money to his account.

Though it did not cover the total amount of his loan, it helped cover his payments for that month when he had no other way to do so.

As for the remaining loan, Rabbi Yossi isn't worried. He asserts, "When you do good things, you partner with Hashem."

Reprinted from an email of Chabad.Org Magazine.

Editor's Note: Yesterday was the 7th of Adar, a holiday for the Chevra Kadisha (Jewish "Burial Societies") worldwide (some also fast). It is the date of Moshe Rabbeinu's passing. Who buried him? Hashem Himself! No need for the Chevra Kadisha. That's how it became their annual vacation day, and the one date they need not worry about being weakened by fasting.



Shabbat Times - Parshat Terumah

	Candle Lighting	Motzei Shabbat	Motzei Shabbat ר"ת
Jerusalem	4:50	6:04	6:44
Tel Aviv	5:05	6:06	6:41
Haifa	4:55	6:04	6:42
Be'er Sheva	5:08	6:07	6:44



A door on the East

By Rabbi Chaim Mentz

Rabbi Shneur Zalman of Liadi once sent one of his Chassidim on a mission to raise a large sum of money for an important cause.

The Rebbe blessed him with a safe trip but mysteriously warned him not to enter any house that had its door on the east side. The trip went well and soon most of the money had been collected. But one day the Chassid found himself caught in a snowstorm on a lonely road winding through the forest. The wind grew steadily stronger and colder. He urged his horse on, hoping to reach some sort of an inn before he lost his way entirely in the snow; but hours passed and still nothing.

He was numb and freezing, and the snow was falling so densely that he couldn't really see where he was going. He prayed to G-d for some sort of miracle.

Suddenly through the white sea of swirling snow he saw what looked like the outline of a house just off the road. With his last ounce of strength he forced the horse in its direction, and sure enough it was a house! It even had a Mezuzah on the door. A Jewish house, no less! He thanked G-d for his good fortune as he jumped from his wagon onto the front porch and knocked on the door.

An elderly woman opened the door and let him in to the warm house. "Come in you must be freezing," she said. "Come have a cup of tea, sit here by the stove. In just a minute my sons will return, they will put your horse in the barn, please sit down." Just as he sat and began thawing out he remembered that it was almost night and he hadn't yet prayed Minchah (afternoon prayer). So he asked the woman which direction was east (to face Jerusalem, as is customary during prayer) and prayed, thanking G-d for his good fortune.

As he finished praying, he noticed that something was wrong: the eastern wall was the one with the main entrance of the house in it!

Without hesitation he put on his coat and walked to the door saying apologetically, "I'll be right back" but the door was locked. He went to a window but it too was locked. "I forgot something in the wagon," he called to the old woman, who had slipped out of the room "Could you please open the door?" Suddenly a key turned in the door from the outside, and four brawny young men entered from the storm. As soon as they saw their visitor they immediately grabbed him, emptied his pockets, tied him up, laid him on the ground in a corner, and sat down to eat while their mother examined the booty.

"Ho ho!" She exclaimed. "Look what we have here!" As she held up the pack of money she found in his wallet. "Looks like we caught a big fish this time." One of the sons examined the money, went to the cupboard, took out a large bottle of vodka and put it on the table with a bang. "Brothers, lets celebrate! G-d has been good to us! We have enough money here to be happy for a long, long time! But first, let's take care of our guest." He pulled a large knife from somewhere under his coat while one of his brothers was pouring him a drink. He took a cup of vodka in his free hand, raised it high and said, "To long life, except for you!" as he looked at the bound Chassid.

One of the brothers, surprised by the joke, laughed so hard that the vodka came spraying out of his mouth on the others, and they all began to laugh, and then someone began a song and another toast, then another. Then the door opened again and it was their father. "Aha!" He shouted as he looked at the money on the table and the bound victim on the floor.

"Good work boys! Excellent! We'll have to kill him though ... I'm glad you left him for me. You know what? In the morning I'll take care of him. Now let's drink to our good fortune!" And before long they were all drunk as Lot and forgot completely about our unfortunate hero.

Late that night, when they were all sleeping soundly, the father woke, looked around to make sure that no one else was awake, tiptoed over to our Chassid, motioned him to be silent, cut his ropes and silently ordered him to follow. He tiptoed to the door, opened it and gave the Chassid his coat. "Here is your money back," he whispered in the Chassid's ear as he pushed the wallet into his coat pocket. Then he pressed a gold coin in the Chassid's hand. "This is for charity from an old sinner. Tell your Rebbe to please pray for me. Now go! Get out of here as fast as you can ... run for your life." The dawn was beginning to light the horizon, the storm had stopped, and our grateful hero was on the road back home.

When he entered the Rebbe's room, the Rebbe looked up at him and said: "I know what happened, you don't have to tell me. I was up all night interceding on your behalf."

The Chassid produced the golden coin and told the Rebbe of the old thief's request. The Rebbe took the coin and wedged it in a crack in the wall next to his desk and said no more.

Fifteen years passed and the Chassid, who was now married with a family, became one of the Rebbe's gabbaim (secretaries). One day he answered the door to an old beggar and told him to wait. When he entered the Rebbe's room and informed him that there was a beggar at the door, the Rebbe pulled the gold coin from the crack where it had been for the past fifteen years and told the Chassid that this was the old man who had released him years ago.

It seems that when his wife and sons awoke and realized what he had done, they beat him and drove him from the house just some hours before the police made a surprise raid and took the mother and sons off to prison. The old man began a life of wandering and atonement, waiting for a sign that his repentance had been accepted in Heaven.

Reprinted from an email of "Chabad of Bel Air".

It's the most extraordinary custom I've ever heard of. I'm referring to a comment by Rabbeinu Bachaye, the great 13th century commentator, who mentions a practice of the Chassidim of Medieval France. When someone in their family sadly passed away, they would take wood from the person's dining room table and with it, they would make the coffin. The idea here is that the merit of everything that we do around our tables accompanies us into the world to come.

The Shulchan

Rabbeinu Bachaye mentions that this is all based on a passage in Parshat Terumah. There the Torah introduces us to the Shulchan, the holy table which was used in the Sanctuary and later on, in the Temple, and it was upon that table that the לחם פנים, the showbread, would be brought as an offering before Hashem. That table was made of 'עצי שטים', acacia wood, and Rabbeinu Bachaye quotes a midrash explaining that the four letters of the word 'שטים' stand for the attributes of that table. The shin (ש) stands for שלום meaning peace, the tet (ט) for טובה, goodness, the yud (י) for ישועה, salvation and the mem (מ) for מחילה, forgiveness.

Our Tables

Indeed, this is exactly what we find with regard to our tables today. First of all, the table is a place for family togetherness. There, we have 'שלום – peace' – 'שלום בית' – serenity – our tables bond us together as families and give us many memorable experiences.

There, we have טובה – so much goodness happens around the table thanks to the הכנסת אורחים, hospitality, and bringing needy people to have their meals with us.

All of this then contributes towards the ישועה, the salvation of our people.

Finally, מחילה, forgiveness: it was through the שולחן, the Table, in the Sanctuary and later the Temple, that Hashem gave מחילה, forgiveness, to our people, and so too it is thanks to the precepts we perform, the blessings we recite before and after we eat, the special mitzvot relating to food which we have at the table and the קדושה, sacred nature, of our meals, all of this will hopefully prompt Hashem to forgive us for our sins. And all of these precepts accompany us well into the afterlife. Therefore, while we readily recognize that we cannot take any of our worldly possessions with us when we go into the World to Come, one thing we can ensure – all of our good deeds around our table and wherever we are will never depart from us.

So let's do the good deed of asking Hashem to keep our soldiers, police and medical professionals safe, especially through these trying times by adding a special prayer for the healing of all those injured, for the safe return of those taken as hostages, as well as Divine Protection for our brave IDF soldiers, police officers, medical professionals, firefighters, ZAKA members, security personnel and all those citizens protecting us in Israel as well as around the world, and for those who need healing, shidduchim, children or parnassah and may we be blessed to have the most awesome, gorgeous, beautiful, peaceful, healthy, amazing, relaxed, spiritual, safe, quiet and sweet Shabbat.

The Jewish Weekly's PARSHA FACTS

NUMBER OF MITZVOT: 3
MITZVOT ASEH: 2
MITZVOT LO TAASEH: 1
NUMBER OF PESUKIM: 96
NUMBER OF WORDS: 1145
NUMBER OF LETTERS: 4692

HAFTORA:
Melachim I 5:26-6:13

תרומה
פרשת

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