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THE MITZVAH GRAM

The Monthly Publication of The Chicago Mitzvah Campaign
1-866-MY-RABBI

www.chicagomitzvahcampaign.com

A Call for a Rabbi from Suburban Bloomingdale

CMC Chaplaincy and Senior Services Division

- Hospital visitations
- Weekly "Shabbos packages" delivered to hospital patients
- "Senior Friendship" (home outreach for isolated seniors)
- Monthly Jewish discussion at dozens of retirement and nursing facilities
- Subsidized emergency response systems
- Free kosher guest meals in hospitals
- Free medicar transportation for the elderly and infirm
- Delivering shabbos and holiday meals to patients
- Holiday awareness and celebrations at retirement and nursing homes
- Patient and family support
- Telephone reassurance program
- Promoting traditional Jewish funeral practices
- Mitzvah commute

Many months ago, the CMC received a request for a patient visit from the chaplain's office at Alexian Brothers hospital in Elk Grove Village, IL. The request concerned an elderly patient, "MW", from Bloomingdale, Illinois, who had been discharged from the hospital and was being cared for at home by her devoted son, "SW".

Although she had not been particularly observant during her lifetime, SW still wanted to know the Jewish perspective on how to best honor his mother at this solemn time.

Although SW was very well-read in general, he knew next to nothing about Judaism, and practiced his religion even less. Nevertheless, when Rabbi Jaworowski responded to the call to visit his mother, he and SW really connected. After a long talk, the rabbi helped SW to wrap the tefillin and pray, something that SW had not done in many decades. SW felt so uplifted by the experience of this mitzvah that he declared that he would like to have his own pair of tefillin! The CMC procured a pair of tefillin for SW and trained him in their proper use.

After a short period of regularly using the tefillin, SW contacted Rabbi Jaworowski and stated that he was now ready and thirsty for another mitzvah - he wanted to attend a prayer service in a synagogue! Although it was very difficult for SW to leave his mother even for just a few hours, he made the necessary arrangements to be able to meet Rabbi Jaworowski in the synagogue on Yom Kippur. The inspiration of this communal prayer service strengthened and encouraged SW in his spiritual journey for many months, as he continued to regularly wrap the tefillin and pray on his own.

And so, when MW recently passed away, SW felt connected enough to his

religion to immediately call Rabbi Jaworowski and ask him to officiate at the funeral service. Although she had not been particularly observant during her lifetime, SW still wanted to know the Jewish perspective on how to best honor his mother at this solemn time.

The CMC rabbis explained to SW the

significance of the traditional "Taharah", the special ritual washing that is performed for the deceased prior to the funeral. In Jewish tradition, the honor of performing the Taharah and caring for the dead is reserved for the most respected community members, who can be expected to maintain the highest level of decorum and dignity throughout the process.

SW enthusiastically accepted the opportunity to have his mother honored with a traditional "Taharah". Although MW's deceased body was being kept in a distant facility without the requisite tools and equipment, the Jewish Sacred Society scrambled and went to extraordinary lengths at last-minute notice in order to ensure that all the proper preparations could be made. On the following day Rabbi Jaworowski officiated at MW's funeral, and the CMC provided transportation and ensured the presence of a minyan so that SW could say kaddish in memory of his beloved mother.

Reflecting on this unusual chain of events, it was truly impressive to witness how a call to visit a sick and elderly patient brought in its wake such a chain of mitzvot and spiritual growth.

Why is Judaism Opposed to Cremation?

The following information was culled and adapted from an article entitled, "Why Does Jewish Law Forbid Cremation", by Rabbi Naftali Silberberg. The original article may be found at www.chabad.org.

Question:

Why is Jewish law and tradition so strongly opposed to the practice of cremating the deceased?

Answer:

Jewish law clearly obligates us to bury our dead in as intact condition as possible under the ground. Tampering with the deceased body – and certainly cremating or otherwise destroying it – is strictly prohibited. But while the law itself is unequivocal in this matter, explaining the roots and deeper reasons for the Jewish perspective on this topic may be approached from a number of angles.

The Basic Perspective

In Jewish law, the human body belongs to its Creator. It is merely on loan to the person, who is the guardian of the body, but he or she has no right to deface it in any way. The body must be "returned" in its entirety, just as it was given. And since the body was created from the dust of the earth, it is to there that it must therefore be returned. This is expressed in the words that G-d tells Adam, the first man, "For dust you are, and to dust you will return."

Additionally, man was created in "G-d's image and likeness". Any violation of the human body is considered, therefore, to be a violation of G-d Himself. This general principle is the basis of many of our laws, such as those that require us to keep ourselves from danger, maintain proper hygiene, and so on. This principle also applies after death - any mutilation of the deceased is prohibited. This is also one of the reasons why Jewish law does not permit autopsies other than in the most extenuating circumstances.

Utmost respect for the sanctity of the human body is also the overriding concern that pervades the process of preparing the deceased for burial. Indeed, according to traditional Jewish sources, the merit of facilitating the proper burial of a Jewish corpse is immeasurable.

Delving Deeper

There are other belief systems that view the body and all the other physical trappings of this world, as well as the temptations they present, as no more than strategic challenges set in the soul's path, in order to overcome these challenges en route to a heavenly paradise. As such, the body has no intrinsic worth of its own, and once its function has been fully served, it retains no value whatsoever. In contrast however, Judaism sees the refinement of the body and this physical world as the paramount objective. The soul was dispatched from its heavenly abode to infuse these otherwise mundane entities with holiness and purpose.

As such, in Judaism the body is seen as sacred; it is the temple of the soul and the medium by which we do goodness in this world. By acting as the soul's vehicle for doing mitzvot, the body becomes invested with permanent value and sanctity. And in to Jewish law, an object that has facilitated the fulfillment of a mitzvah (such as a Torah scroll or holy book) cannot be wantonly destroyed, but must be disposed of (and yes, even buried) respectfully. Certainly then, the body deserves no less respect when being laid to rest.

Fundamental Tenet of Faith

Two of the most fundamental tenets of the Jewish faith are the belief in the ultimate redemption of the Jewish people - and of all of mankind -- through a righteous messiah, and the concept of the resurrection of the dead, an awaited time when all souls will return to their bodies. The Messianic Era will be characterized by world peace and harmony. The Jewish people will be gathered from all corners of the earth and will be returned to the Promised Land, where the Holy Temple will be rebuilt in Jerusalem.

This era will be the culmination of G-d's master plan for Creation. We will then be able to enjoy the fruits of our labor; and we will then see the end-product of our millennia-long labor of permeating Creation with holiness and purpose. The curtain will be ripped aside, and the flesh, our very own bodies, will perceive G-d: "And the glory of the L-rd shall be revealed, and all flesh together shall see that the mouth of the L-rd spoke."

Cremation, on the other hand, is an implied statement of rejection of the concept of resurrection. It is in effect a declaration that once the soul has departed the body, the lifeless body has served its purpose and now has no further value.



Additional Concepts and Precepts

A. The Torah commands us not to follow the practices of the non-Jews. Cremating the dead was (and still is) a ritual observed by many pagan cultures, and thus violates this biblical prohibition.

B. According to Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism), the soul does not depart the body immediately after death. Such an abrupt departure would be intensely painful for the soul. The gradual decomposition of the body allows the soul the time to slowly depart the body and acclimate itself to its new heavenly abode. The instant destruction of the body caused by cremation deprives the soul of this much-needed adjustment period.

C. Throughout our history, a traditional Jewish burial, known as *Kever Yisrael*, was always considered a highest priority. During times when many of their non-Jewish co-citizens regularly cremated their dead, the Jews were distinguishable by their commitment to bury their dead with dignity. This fact was already noted by Tacitus, the famed 1st century Roman historian. Understanding the great importance of this mitzvah, the Israeli army is known to take great risks, venturing behind enemy lines to bring back to Israel the bodies of their fallen comrades.

Pulling the Plug on Grandma: A Story

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After sustaining a severe heart attack in 1973, my grandmother sank into a deep coma and was placed on life support systems in the hospital. Her EEG was totally flat, indicating zero brain activity. She was hooked up to a pacemaker that made her lungs breathe artificially. But technically, as the doctors told me privately, she was basically as good as dead. "She'll never come out of the coma," they said, "and she's better off this way. If she did, her life would be meaningless. She'd exist in a purely vegetative state."

Even though she was in her mid-seventies and had lived a full life, I refused to believe that my beloved grandmother could simply slip away like this. She was too feisty, too vital to just disappear into a coma. My instincts told me to start talking to her and keep chatting away. I stayed at her bedside day and night, and I spoke to her all the time – about my husband and our two small children, about other relatives, about her own life. I told her all the news that was circulating in Australia at the time. I also kept urging her to keep clinging to life, not to give up. "Don't you dare leave us!" I exhorted. "I need you, Mom needs you, your grandchildren need you. They're just beginning to get to know you. It's too soon for you to go!"

It was hard for me to battle for my grandmother's life, alone as I was. During that time I was her only relative in Sydney. Her daughter (my mother) was away overseas on a trip, and my only sibling – a brother – lived in Israel. My husband was home caring for our children so that I could take my post at her bedside. I stood a solitary vigil, but the most enormously difficult thing was being asked to make decisions alone. The emotional burden was huge.

After four days with no signs of life flickering in either my grandmother's eyes or hands, and no change recorded by the EEG, the doctors advised me to authorize the papers that would turn off the life sup-

port systems. I trembled to think that I held the power of consigning my grandmother to an early grave. "She's just being kept artificially alive by the pacemaker and the respirator. Keeping her hooked up to these machines is just a waste."

"Well, listen," I said. "It's Thursday afternoon, and in the Jewish religion we bury people right away. My parents are overseas – practically two days away – and they would certainly want to be here for the funeral. But we don't do funerals on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath. The earliest we could do the funeral would be on Sunday. So let me call my parents to get ready to fly home, and I'll sign the papers on Sunday." It was all very cold and calculating, but deep inside, my heart was aching.

Meanwhile, I didn't let up. I kept talking up a storm, discussing weighty matters, babbling about the mundane. "Guess what, Grandma?" I gossiped. "You won't believe who ended up being your roommate here in the hospital! Stringfellow! Your next-door neighbor at home, Mrs. Stringfellow, was just brought in with a serious condition. Isn't that a coincidence? She lives next door to you in Sydney and now she's your roommate here in the hospital!"

On Saturday, I was at my usual post at my grandmother's bedside, getting ready to start a round of tearful goodbyes, when I thought I noticed her eyes blinking. I called a nurse and told her what I had seen. "It's just your imagination, dearie," the nurse said compassionately. "Why don't you go downstairs for some coffee, and I'll stay with her until you come back?"

But when I returned, the nurse was brimming with excitement herself. "You know," she said, "I think you may be right. I've been sitting here watching your grandmother, and I could swear I saw her

blinking too."

A few hours later, my grandmother's eyelids flew open. She stared at me and then craned her neck toward the empty bed on the other side of the room. "Hey," she yelled, "what happened to Stringfellow?"

By the time my mother arrived at the hospital the next day, my grandmother was sitting in bed, conversing cheerfully with the hospital staff, and looking perfectly normal. My mother glared at me, annoyed, sure I had exaggerated my grandmother's condition. "For *this* I had to *shlep* all the way home?" she asked.

Later, my grandmother told me that while in the "coma" she had heard every single word that was said *to* her and *about* her. She repeated all the conversations to me, and her retention was remarkable.

"I kept shouting to you," she said, "but somehow you didn't hear me. I kept on trying to tell you, 'Don't bury me yet!'"

After she was discharged from the hospital, my grandmother's quality of life remained excellent. She lived on her own as a self-sufficient, independent, and high-spirited lady and continued to live in this manner until her death, sixteen years after I almost pulled the plug.

Judy Doobov

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We wish a speedy recovery and good health to:

- Shoshana bas Sara
- Refoel ben Yehudis
- Rivka bas Leba
- Leah bas Chana
- Rivka bas Sara
- Faiga bas Tzila

- Gittel bas Kreindel
- Yehudit bas Sara
- Yehuda Dovid ben Rochel Sima
- Chava Ronya bas Chadvera
- Refoel Yakov ben Gitel

- Yitzchok ben Sara
- Mordechai ben Rachel
- Baruch Berl ben Liba Leah
- Yisrael Mazal ben Raizel Miriam
- David ben Sarah

- Devasha Golda bas Chanah
- Chana bas Yulia
- Dovid ben Eden
- Sheina bas Madeline
- Tzvia Leeba bas Hoshe

CMC OFFERS

End of Life Services

Regular visitations for the terminally ill

CMC visitations provide support, comfort and companionship for the terminally ill. At the end stage of life many patients may also derive reassurance and solace from the prayers and Jewish traditions that the CMC offers.

Family counseling and support

The CMC helps families of terminally ill patients by supporting and counseling them to understand and process the many issues that they face at this difficult time of transition and loss. We make available spiritual guidance and material support, helping to ensure that families receive the appropriate care and resources that they need.

Promoting traditional Jewish funerals

Promoting traditional Jewish funerals is an important priority to the CMC. The education and guidance that the CMC provides to patients and their families enables them to make meaningful decisions and enriches their experience of the dignified, time-honored Jewish traditions.

Assisting the indigent with burials

The CMC provides assistance and support to indigent families, thereby ensuring that they may receive and afford a dignified funeral for their loved ones.



Providing minyanim for funerals and unveiling

Reciting the kaddish at funeral and unveiling services calls for the presence of a quorum of ten. The CMC arranges for the availability and transportation of any additional number of participants that are required in order to complete the minyan.



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Kaddish, Yohrtzeit and Yizkor

For those mourners who are unable to recite the kaddish themselves, the CMC guarantees the recitation of kaddish for a full eleven-month period, as well as on the yohrtzeit date in future years. The CMC also sends out reminders to family members to alert them to upcoming yohrzeit and yizkor services in memory of the departed.

For all CMC services please call **1-866-MY-RABBI (1-866-697-2224)**
www.ChicagoMitzvahCampaign.com



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 6241 North Sacramento Avenue, Chicago, IL 60659
 1-866-MY-RABBI
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