

Cemetery Privileges: A Benefit of Membership

By Jerry Enis

Chairman, Cemetery Committee

One of the most important benefits of membership in Congregation Sons of Israel, albeit an “uncomfortable” subject to discuss, is cemetery privileges including free grave sites for members. Passed down through the generations from the founders of our Shul are the great traditions of respect, dignity and sensitivity with which we, as Jews, deal with death and comforting the bereaved family.

Until Bloomfield-Cooper opened in Manalapan, Sons of Israel maintained its own Chevra Kaddisha, performing T'hara (ritual washing), Tachrim (dressing in shroud) and providing Shomrim (accompaniment until burial), as well as managing the Congregation cemetery in Englishtown. Today, the Chevra still manages the cemetery and is often called upon to provide information and assistance to the family.

The Congregation also provides a Nechama Committee, chaired by Harlean Enis, that works closely with Rabbi Pilavin to assist in preparing the shiva house, if requested, and to either set up a Shiva Meal for the immediate family upon their return from the cemetery, or, if the family prefers, dedicate a siddur in the name of the deceased family member. Members of the Committee include Diane Cohen, Dorothy Jablonka, Stacey Katz and Miriam Mishan, David Rozen, Bonnie Leff and Anita Raboi. Anyone wishing to join the Nechama Committee or seeking further information may contact Harlean at 732-851-4910.

The Congregation provides twice-daily minyanim at the Shul. Mincha and Maariv minyanim may be arranged for the shiva house when possible, as coordinated by the Rabbi and the Ritual Committee.

Maintaining these traditions is an important aspect of the Sons of Israel history and sense of community. Few congregations today provide these services at this crucial time of need. It comes from an understanding that we are all one family and are responsible for one another. The kashrut of the cemetery is consistent from generation to generation. It is our obligation to maintain the tradition. Anyone wishing to join the Cemetery Committee or seeking further information may contact Chair Jerry Enis at 732-446-5400.

Following is an important review of Congregation Sons of Israel By-Laws pertaining to burial in the Congregation's cemetery, including a list of fees payable through the funeral home to Congregation Sons of Israel.

IN ALL CASES:

The deceased must be a Jew as defined by the Orthodox tradition.

Burials must be coordinated and approved through the Congregation office and/or the Congregation Cemetery Committee.

Burial services require the supervision of the Rabbi of Congregation Sons of Israel or his designee. Co-officiating is at his discretion alone.

Ritual preparation of the deceased must be in accordance with Orthodox Halacha including T'hara (ritual washing), Tachrichim (deceased dressed only in shrouds), and interment in a Kosher coffin.

A certificate attesting to the kosher performance of these Halachic requirements must be approved by the Rabbi of Congregation Sons of Israel, particularly in those cases where such preparation was performed out of the local geographic area.

FEES:

The following fees are separate from honoraria the funeral chapel may collect for services of the Rabbi; grave opening fees; and, of course, funeral home management fees.

A Congregation Sons of Israel Burial Fee of \$900 shall be collected for any non-member who, according to Congregational By-Laws, may be buried in the cemetery. Questions of eligibility can only be answered by the congregation rabbi or chair of the cemetery committee.

Burial fees are waived and a free grave site is provided for members as a privilege of Membership in Good Standing of Congregation Sons of Israel. A gravesite will be selected by the Cemetery Committee unless the deceased has reserved a site or has been assigned a grave site by the holder or assignee of a deeded plot.

A headstone reservation fee of \$450 will be collected for, and held in escrow by, the Congregation. The fee shall be returned to the family's designee upon erection of a headstone (within one year).

A spouse may reserve a gravesite adjacent to the deceased for a fee of \$450.

CURRENT FEES (Collected by memorial home on behalf of Congregation).

- \$500 to gravedigger
- Member Gravesite : No charge
- Non-Member Gravesite: \$900

- Gravesite Reservation: \$450 (Next to spouse/family member)
- Headstone Guarantee: \$450 fee held in escrow by Congregation and returned upon dedication.
- Rabbi Honorarium: Member (suggested)

Many decades ago, the Congregation permitted reservation of Family Plots and issued deeds to that effect. The Cemetery Committee has been attempting to obtain copies of those deeds for its records. If your family has a deed, please send us a copy. We are often faced with the necessity to make right of burial decisions for relatives of individuals who were never members but who were promised gravesites in a plot reserved by a long-deceased former member.

In the Jewish tradition, these situations are dealt with by the Rabbi and the Chevra in the most sensitive and caring way. Procrastination is not possible. Decision-making is guided by our By-Laws, always mindful of the intent of our founders some 90-plus years ago and our awesome responsibility to those buried in our cemetery whose only voice is through the living.

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