

RAA/Igud Harabonim Calls Upon Rabbis to Educate the American Jewish Community to Support In-Earth Burials and to Oppose Cremations

Edited by: JV Staff

On Monday, July 24, 2017, the Igud Harabonim/Rabbinical Alliance of America (RAA/IGUD) convened at the Ahi Ezer Yeshiva Congregation, in Brooklyn, New York for its monthly Rosh Chodesh (Av) conference & dinner where its Presidium Member, Rabbi Hanania Elbaz is the Rabbi. Rabbi Yaakov Klass, presidium member and Torah editor of the Jewish Press served as the Conference Chairman.

The evening was dedicated in memory of HaGaon HaChacham Shalom Ben HaGaon HaChacham Chayim Elbaz, Zt'l father of Rabbi Hanania Elbaz and father of Rabbi Eliyahu Elbaz, Rabbi of the Sephardic Lebanese Congregation of Brooklyn.

Rabbi Elchonon Zohn, the Chevra Kadisha Director of the Vaad Harabonim of Queens (VHQ), and the President and Founder of National Association of Chevra Kadisha (NASCK), spoke at the Rosh Chodesh Conference on the issue of cremation in the Jewish Community. Tragically, cremation within the Jewish community is estimated to be as high as 40% within the USA. In the New York area, it is estimated to be at 20%.

Rabbi Yehoshua S. Hecht, chairman of the presidium of

the RAA/IGUD introduced Rabbi Zohn by declaring in the name of the 70 Rabbis present at the monthly meeting of the RAA/IGUD that the RAA extends its full support of Rabbi Zohn in his holy work in correcting this sad trend.



Left to Right - Rabbi Moish Schmerler, coordinator, Rabbinical Alliance of America; Rabbi Yaakov Klass, presidium member, Rabbinical Alliance of America, Torah Editor Jewish Press; Rabbi Hanania Elbaz, presidium member, Rabbinical Alliance of America, Ahi Ezer Yeshiva Congregation; Rabbi Elchonon Zohn, Chevra Kadisha Director of the Vaad Harabonim of Queens, president and founder of National Association of Chevra Kadisha; Rabbi Yehoshua Hecht, presidium member, Rabbinical Alliance of America; Rabbi Mendy Mirocznik, executive vice-president, Rabbinical Alliance of America; Rabbi Aharon Zeev, Aur Torah Sephardic Congregation of Staten Island

Rabbi Hecht quoted the Sages who compare the remains of the body to that of a sacred Torah Scroll that has been rendered unusable. Rabbi Hecht noted that when a Sefer Torah

becomes unfit for its ritual purpose we are obligated to bury it in a dignified manner, "the physical body is the domicile for the soul and when a Jew departs this world we are obligated to bury the physical remains in the dignified & prescribed method as

outlined in the Code of Jewish Law. As Rabbis, we must teach and inform all --that cremation is not a Jewish option at all."

Rabbi Zohn stated that a lot has changed since 1971 when as

a Rabbinical student he began his tenure at the Vaad Harabonim in Queens. Rabbi Zohn stated, "in those days nearly every Jew received a proper Jewish burial. Cremation was unheard of, the challenge in those days was arranging for a Tahara, the



Rabbi Zohn stated, "in those days nearly every Jew received a proper Jewish burial. Cremation was unheard of, the challenge in those days was arranging for a Tahara, the ritual purification of the deceased...Sadly times are different today. Our big challenge today is cremation."

ritual purification of the deceased...Sadly times are different today. Our big challenge today is cremation."

Rabbi Zohn stated that cremation by and large is not due to economics as the highest percentage of cremation is happening in Manhattan and Great Neck, NY.

Rabbi Zohn noted that in Florida, economics often is a

factor due to the reality that many retirees in Florida live off fixed pensions. To combat that reality and in a move to encourage proper Jewish burial, NASCK has purchased in South Florida 15 acres of land to be used as a cemetery for in-

To encourage proper Jewish burial, NASCK has purchased in South Florida 15 acres of land to be used as a cemetery for in-ground burial to accommodate the needs of any Jew who due to financial limitations may feel that a proper Jewish funeral may be out of their reach.

program for an annual TEAM Shabbat to be held on Shabbat Vayechi. Team stands for, Traditional, End of Life, Awareness, Movement.

The designation for Shabbat -Vayechi is because Yaakov at the end of his life directs his son Yosef on how to attend to his burial. NASCK will provide to every participating Synagogue the materials necessary -- free of charge so that they may conduct a meaningful program for TEAM Shabbat.

Rabbi Mendy Mirocznik, Executive Vice-President of the RAA/IGUD concluded the evening by presenting a resolution that was unanimously adopted by all the attendees, to advocate for TEAM Shabbat as well as to support the valiant efforts of Rabbi Zohn in educating the Jewish community on the necessity of in-ground internment, a tradition upheld by the Jewish people for millennia.