

**Rabbi Shmuel Jacob Feffer**  
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הרב שמואל יעקב פעפער  
הרב הראשי דליטא  
ואב"ד דק"ק ווילנא יצ"ו

## **On the Old Vilna Jewish Cemetery:**

**4 Shvath 5777 / 31 January 2017**

For the sake of the Almighty's loved ones who are buried in the Old Vilna Jewish Cemetery (Piramont; Shnipishok; Šnipiškės):

I am a rabbi who has been living in Vilnius for the past twenty-five years, and I am intimately familiar with its problems and issues and I fear for its Jewish future and for the memory of its glorious past. Now I see it as a momentous duty to speak publicly and remove any veil of ambiguity on this important issue and to publicize the truth of the situation that it be clear as the sun at noon; to stand in the breach and not to allow destroyers to come and destroy the old cemetery, Heaven forbid; and, to the contrary to stand firm with more strength and sacred courage on the sacred watch, for the sake of the Almighty and his Torah and pure honest faith.

Therefore, let these words serve as a great outcry that needs to be heard, from one end of the world to the other, to halt the horrific decree that hovers upon us, and is now on the agenda: the plan of certain property developers in cooperation with the government of Lithuania and the Vilnius municipality to eradicate the old Vilna cemetery via seizure (so called "purchase") and conversion to be desecrated in a despicable manner.

It is taken as self-evident by every believing Jew, and indeed, all humankind globally, that the old cemetery served the Jewish people in Vilna for over five hundred years and in it are buried great saintly souls and priceless souls as well as other Jews, may they all rest in peace. The holiness of the cemetery is eternal and it is forbidden to utilize it or the structures built upon it, for personal use, for enjoyment, or any other use, or to act on this holy ground with levity. Who would think of daring to come and desecrate it and to build upon it buildings as the two buildings that were built on top of sacred graves over a decade ago? Godfearing Jews who protested were silenced by powerful institutions and parties with vested interests of personal profit.

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And now again they have brazenly come to steal the peace from the dead who rest in the ground and to steal the place that these Jews had bought for their burial, to deprive them of their uncontested ownership – the guarantee of all Jews who believe in burial and in the preservation of the soul to purchase burial ground in freehold perpetuity, and the revival of the dead as per the holy Torah which does not change with the times.

The malicious desire to desecrate the old cemetery and to convert it to a place of licentious concerts, conventions and assemblies, which will cause people to trample and disturb the resting place of the holy souls buried there and to obliterate this holy place, must be stopped!

Is it not enough that the memory of the Jews in Lithuania was almost entirely destroyed, during the Second World War, by the Nazis and part of the locals in collaboration? Now another brazen act is being attempted by those who dare to come upon the souls of the dead, the holy ones who are buried there, to steal their rest and to desecrate and destroy this holy place. This would be a horrible and unforgivable crime.

It is also public knowledge that there are local interests and organizations and Jewish committee abroad, that came to visit and make agreements and compromises as if it were a business, and they publicly agreed in a conspiracy of treachery, saying, in effect: "Let us come and destroy the memory of the old cemetery of Vilna, its holiness and its borders and transfer stewardship to those who desire to do with it as they maliciously please."

Therefore let this clear declaration go forth: Jewish brethren across the globe and all nations of culture everywhere, please hear our plea. Come and save the old cemetery of Vilna from this terrible desecration and do not allow anyone to give any rights to it, nor any foothold in it, to any one, in any way. Leave in peace the resting place of those who are buried there and their souls.

And to all who are involved in this, the destroyers and their partners, it shall be said firmly: Take your destructive hands off the old cemetery of Vilna. No nation has any rights to the sanctified Jewish cemeteries, and no organization or committee has any standing to deal, sell or buy cemeteries, or allow for their desecration in any way, shape, or form.

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This is an outrage not only for Jews. Such is not done by any civilized nation. It is imperative to stand in the breach to protect the Old Jewish Cemetery of Vilna, to fence in its borders, and to restore the religious Orthodox Jewish ownership as in the times of the Chevra Kadisha of Vilna who originally bought this property, on behalf of every single person who was buried there legally and acquired his or her resting place, paying fully for the land, as per Jewish law and traditions over all the generations.

I have set my signature for you in pain, O You Jerusalem of Lithuania, in holy trepidation "And the language of truth shall be sustained forever."



P.S. The "Sports Palace" built in the times of the Soviet Union and the two buildings built in the times of modern democratic Lithuania, are built on the Old Vilna Jewish Cemetery on a base of and surrounded by the bones and remains of those who were buried there. (The cement used in the construction of the building was mixed with bones of Jews buried in the old cemetery) It is strictly forbidden, Heaven forbid, to derive any use or benefit from this land. It must remain empty until we shall merit the coming to life of the dead and the coming of the righteous redeemer speedily in our days. Amen