

התאחדות הרבנים דארצות הברית וקנדה

CENTRAL RABBINICAL CONGRESS OF THE U.S.A. AND CANADA

85 Division Avenue • Brooklyn, NY 11211 • Tel. (718) 384-6765 • Fax: (718) 486-5574

בס"ד

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A Call for Action

For centuries Jewish cemeteries were protected virtually at all costs. There is a story (well validated) of a world-renowned Torah authority decreeing a day of fasting on a town because a single bone had been exposed in the local Jewish cemetery. How does this attitude of fear and responsibility accord with our communal inattention to Europe's Jewish cemeteries?

Should this ongoing universal threat perhaps remind us of a deficiency, a shortcoming which affects virtually every Jew?

- The government of Belarus exhumed an estimated 50,000 Jewish dead in order to build an Olympic stadium, the tons of earth and remains removed were used to repair local dirt roads. Local populations complained that human skulls were appearing after heavy spring rains.
- The city of Kalisz, Poland decided to enhance a local educational institution, and excavation began in the adjacent Jewish cemetery. A trench being dug was stopped just a few meters short of the kever of the Magen Avraham.
- A cemetery in Zurich, reportedly housing the remains of one of the Baale Tosefos, was unearthed in 2016 to permit the expansion of a cultural institution.
- In 2018, the old Jewish cemetery in Wroclau, Poland (formerly Breslau) was exhumed to enable a hotel to be built. R' Shiya Pick, the Mesoras HaShas, had been buried there!
- The Shnipishok cemetery in Vilna, Lithuania, currently housing the Chaye Odom, the Beer HaGolah, the entire family of the GR"A and countless other great people and ordinary Jews is under threat of further desecration, after two apartment buildings were erected in the cemetery in 2005 and 2007. The Lithuanian government continues to refuse to divulge where all the earth (and human remains) removed from the cemetery was dumped.

The list goes on. Desecration in Czechia, Greece, Spain, Ukraine... There is so much that can be done through the US State Department, but the handful of Jews trying to protect the integrity of Europe's Jewish cemeteries do not have the access to appropriate officials. Over the last two decades there have been hundreds of high-level meetings where the plight of Jewish cemeteries in Europe was not even mentioned.

The Zohar says that were it not for the prayers of the departed, the world could not exist for a half a day. In this time of so much tragedy and pain, it's crucially important that we remind ourselves of our responsibility to protect the world's Jewish cemeteries.

Yours very truly,

Rabbi Isaac Gluck
Executive Director
CRC of USA and Canada

