

14 Kislev, 5784
November 27, 2023

A Public Proclamation

Due to a profound concern for the preservation and protection of the older Jewish cemeteries in Europe – the resting places of our beloved ancestors and our distinguished rabbis - and due specifically to the ongoing deliberations regarding the fate of the Old Jewish Cemetery in Shnipishkes in Vilnius, we have undertaken to clarify what is essential for their preservation and protection.

- 1.** All Jewish communities are obligated to concern themselves with their local abandoned and desolate Jewish cemeteries and – in consultation with experts in Jewish law – do whatever is possible to preserve and protect them. In particular, descendants of the deceased are obligated to concern themselves with the upkeep of the cemeteries of their ancestors. This obligation of concern for the well-being of cemeteries applies equally to Jewish cemeteries that are presently standing and have not been damaged.
- 2.** A Jewish cemetery retains its sacred status for perpetuity, whether or not its tombstones are standing in place. The common folk, who think otherwise, err. In general, so long as the remains of the dead remain in place, the cemetery retains its sacred status, and the graves remain a place for prayer by the living. Any other use of the cemetery grounds is prohibited and desecrates its sanctity, even if no tombstones remain in place.
- 3.** A Jewish cemetery belongs to the persons buried in it, for perpetuity. Every grave is acquired by, or assigned to, a particular person on the condition that he or she will rest in peace, in that place, until the end of time. Not even a descendant of the deceased may disturb his or her

ancestor's resting place (without a special dispensation from the halakhic authorities).

4. At present, we are especially concerned with the Old Jewish Cemetery in Shnipishkes in Vilnius. The cemetery was stolen from the Jews during the Holocaust and its aftermath. It needs to be returned to its rightful owners. The Sports Palace that was constructed over the Jewish cemetery, desecrates it. It is prohibited to use the space covered by the Sports Palace for any purpose other than maintaining the graves and the grounds of the Jewish cemetery. No museum or memorial complex of any kind, and by any name, or any similar building, may be constructed on the cemetery grounds. The world-wide Jewish community is obligated to restore the Old Jewish Cemetery to its former glory, to rebuild the boundary wall that once surrounded it, and to repair whatever can be, and still needs to be, repaired.
5. Any earth mixed with human remains that has been removed from the Old Jewish Cemetery during excavation and construction in previous years, needs to be returned to the Jewish communal authorities for proper reburial in the Jewish cemetery.

Signed by:

Rav Moshe Hillel Hirsch

Rosh Yeshiva, Yeshiva Slobodka, Bnai Brak

Rav Reuven Feinstein

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Rav Osher Eliyahu Kalmanowitz

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