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A Shabbat Message from Rabbi Arthur Weiner

Friday November 18, 2022 ~ Parsha: Chayei Sarah

Dear JCCP/CBT family,

Where Will You Be Buried?

Rabbi, what do I do? I've been asked this question many times in my career but in no area of life as frequently as when a loved one passes away.

Now, in most situations, especially when the death is not the result of a tragic accident, the mechanics and the process are not particularly difficult. Painful, sad, to be sure – but not difficult. Generally, a phone call to the funeral director and a phone call to me and you're good to go. Unless, of course, you're not sure which funeral director to use in which case you call me first and then a funeral director. And then see step number 1 above.

But what really throws a wrench into things, and not in a good way, is when one important detail has not been considered in advance: where will the burial take place? For generations, the week before this week's Torah reading of *Chayei Sara* is the time when Rabbis and many of you get fundraising letters and appeals from Hebrew Free Burial associations, *Chevra Kadishas* (*burial societies*), and similar organizations. Why now? Because for the first time, we are dealing with a funeral in the Bible. We've had death, destruction, floods, war, and all types of serious things. But we've not had a situation where someone needs to arrange for the burial of a member of the family. And Abraham has a problem: he doesn't own land, and thus has no place to bury Sarah.

Now if this were a different type of Shabbat message, I would now make a statement about the importance of Abraham's purchase of the Cave of *Machpaleh*. How the purchase demonstrated that the Hittites recognized him as true member of the community, a citizen as opposed to a resident alien, and in a real legal sense, an equal.

I might talk about the significance of this being the first land purchase in the Land of Israel.

But this Shabbat, I simply want to reflect on the importance of preparing for burial well in advance of the need to actually do so. Since Abraham had not addressed this earlier, the clear understanding from the Torah as well as the commentary is that he paid too much.

And that will happen to you if and when you find yourself in a similar position.

Rabbi, what do I do? Every one of you has heard of Gutterman and Musicant, Robert Schoem's, Louis Suburban, and the other wonderful Jewish funeral directors who serve Northern New Jersey. And all of you already know to call me or the synagogue in case of loss. Yet, despite all the help we can offer and guidance that we can provide, only the family can decide where the actual burial will take place. This is Abraham's problem, and a lesson to us all. Start thinking about these issues now.

You should know that the best place to buy a grave (as well as the least expensive) is from this synagogue. If you do not currently own burial plots for yourself and your family, I urge you to consider contacting the office and learning more about our cemetery now.

Many of us own burial plots, or are connected to family plots which you anticipate for your future. May it be God's will that we don't need to use them for many, many years. But there are people who are reading this message who have put off this decision, or "can't deal with this situation", or simply have not considered how important it is. On this Shabbat, I hope that I have made the case that it is. Planning now is the only way to make sure your wishes and values will be upheld, and the financial burden and decision making will not become the responsibility of your children. And the longer you delay, the more expensive it gets.

And as this week's Torah reading teaches us, it's a lot more important than we realize.