

June 4, 1974

Dr. Elmer Offenbacher
451 West End Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10024

Dear Elmer:

Just a note or two about the Hebra Kadisha:

1. Rabbi Wermuth told me that Mr. Dorfzaun and you had raised some questions about the coffins that we permit for burials which take place under the aegis of The Jewish Center. I would like to inform you that we do not insist upon the very cheapest pine box. As long as there are no halakhic violations, we like to give the family some area of choice. The Riverside people therefore know that there are three boxes of which we approve.

2. In the next few weeks, I will be making up the schedule for the three lectures that had been requested by the Hebra Kadisha. At the suggestion of some of the members, these will be kept restricted only to members of the Hebra. My present plans call for one lecture on *Shema*, one on *Shema Yisrael* (these two to be given to the men and women's Hebra Kadisha together), and one, to each group separately, on the practical techniques. The last lecture should be more in the form of a seminar by the older members to the newer ones. If there are any question, they should be submitted to me in advance by the individuals who will be leading the discussion.

3. I would like the Hebra Kadish to consider the following idea, which I propose tentatively. At present, our tasks seem to be exclusively related to taharah. As you yourself had indicated, we ought to broaden the scope of our activities. My thought is that if that is the case, we ought to enlarge the Hebra, and invite participation even by those who may be too squeemish to participate in a taharah. We might, for instance, set the number of 18 members for each group, knowing that

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there are at least half of each group that we can count on for taharot. The others could be assigned specific duties, such as telephoning, but much more important, would be the following two areas: men members of the Hebra, especially those who do not volunteer for taharot, would be expected to attend minyanim of families sitting shiva, so that there never be any problem of a family of The Jewish Center finding that it cannot arrange for a minyan during shiva. The women should arrange for a standard *shiva*, properly packaged, with notice that it is given with the compliments of the Jewish Center Hebra Kadisha and which should be delivered to each home by the women in charge. In that way, we can expand our activities without making it too onerous for a limited number of individuals.

4. 4. Several weeks ago, I sent out a booklet containing instructions for the taharah as formalized by a group in Chicago. I mailed it to a number of our people with a great deal of experience, and asked them to check out the Jewish Center procedure against those contained in the booklet. When (and if!) I receive these responses, it will allow us to establish and set a formal procedure, in writing for our Hebra.

5. Since writing the above four points, I received your letter of June 3. What I have already written provides an answer to your inquiry to Mr. Dorfzaun (a copy of which you sent to me) concerning coffins. I am planning three shh'urim -- and if they succeed, perhaps we can have more in the future .

6. Aside from Hebra Kadisha matters, I am grateful to you for your comments on the Shavuot experience -- and that is all to your credit. I shall consider a she'ur in the evenings, but it would have to replace the Tuesday morning lecture. Otherwise, as a physicist, you would have too invent a 48-hour day for me. As is, my schedule is incredibly packed! But I do appreciate the request and perhaps we can use both Rabbi Wermuth and Cantor Wietschner in our program.

My best regards.

Cordially,

RABBI NORMAN LAMM

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