



Ask The Rabbi

Researched at Ohr Somayach, Jerusalem

This Issue Contains:

1. Grave Issue
2. Yiddle Riddle



Edward Karan from BA/FAS New York
<ekarannn@colybrand.com> wrote:

Dear Rabbi,

I was reading an article in a magazine on archaeology commenting how the "fanatic" group, ATRA KADDISHA, hampers excavations when graves are unearthed in Israel. I'm interested why we can't relocate graves. The article quoted a Talmudic source that in the times of the Mishna, cities that were expanding were allowed to relocate a grave site.

Another thing: I imagine that graves are considered 'holy' places, but at the same time they are "impure." I am looking for a good explanation on how something can be both holy and impure at the same time? Shalom,

Dear Eddie,

Speaking of archeology, did you hear that they discovered a three thousand year old city in Israel with evidence that everyone in the city had cellular phones? That's right. They searched the entire city and didn't find a single telephone wire!

But back to your question. In general, it's forbidden to move a body, even bones, from one grave to another. Besides the disrespect to the deceased, the departed soul experiences pain when his body is dug up.

In certain situations, however, moving graves is permitted. For example, when the move is for the good of the departed, such as moving him to his

family plot. And as you wrote, one may move graves located in an area needed by the public — provided no alternate site exists.

However, the remains must be treated with respect and reburied in an assigned plot. Not just thrown away or put on display.

Based on photos and eye-witness accounts of construction sites and archeological digs in Israel, bones are tossed around, piled into bags, and discarded in a most irreverent way. The members of the *Atra Kaddisha* are simply trying to safeguard the sanctity of their ancestors' graves. (*Atra Kaddisha* means 'the holy place'.)

You asked, "how can graves be holy yet impure?" Man is made of two aspects: Body and soul. While the dead body is impure, the soul, which is still related to the body, is holy.

Sources:

- Shulchan Aruch - Yoreh Deah 363:1
- Gesher Hachaim vol. I chapters 26 & 27 and vol. II chapters 20-21
- See Talmud Yerushalmi Moed Katan 2:4, Ramban, Torat Ha-adam, Ohr Zaruah 419, Tshuvat HaRashba I:369, Rabbeinu Yerucham I:229-230, Rambam Hilchot Aivel 14:12-26

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Ask The Rabbi is written by Rabbi Moshe Lazerus, Rabbi Reuven Subar, Rabbi Avrohom Lefkowitz and other Rabbis at Ohr Somayach Institutions / Tanenbaum College, Jerusalem, Israel.

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Yiddle Riddle

Which Tractate's name is the antonym of the name of the Order (*sefer*) of which it is part?

Answer next week

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