Finally, each soul which broke forth from the body in love for God shared in the light of Mashiah ben Yosef, the light which would grow into the light of redemption:

This multitude of murders of tens of thousands of Israel, of those who were slain and fell before the evil kingdom, [fulfilled the] destiny of holy worship (Avodat Kodesh). Surely, each and every one of these accepted the yoke of the kingdom of heaven in the final moments [of life] and sacrificed himself in love for God. All were of the root of the soul of Mashiah ben Yosef. 30

Concluding statement

For Harlap, the Holocaust belonged to an ongoing unfolding of redemption. The catastrophe made manifest the inevitable catharsis of evil, in the form of the Sitra ahra’s assault on the sanctified nation of Israel. The assault was self-destructive, for Israel’s holiness coincided with reality itself. Ultimately, the antagonism would erupt into a redemptive realm, of Torah and sacred life. History, which excluded Israel and became consumed by the Sitra ahra, would be left behind, destroyed. Using the terminology of Ha’gra, Harlap spoke of the resolution to the tension of the Mashiah ben Yosef era with the emergence of the messianic light and the end to shadow — identifiable with Mashiah ben David. The Neshamot mi’i lam hatohu were the existential counterpart. In life, this meant a transcendental approach to Mitzvot and the consequent spiritual collapse of the seeker. In death, this meant the separation from the body as the living soul reached towards God and redemption. Harlap assured his followers that the time of redemption’s consolation would arrive. And then: “We will see with our own eyes that all the difficult and bitter suffering was worth it. For it brings us to the lofty grace and sublime holiness which belongs to the consolation [of redemption].” 31

30 MM VI, p. 213.
31 ‘Vehine amar, ‘Nahamu, nahamu ami.’

WE ARE WHERE WE ARE NOT:
THE CEMETERY IN JEWISH CULTURE

Avriel Bar-Levav

Car nous sommes ou nous ne sommes pas
Pierre-Jean Jouve, Lyrique
(For we are where we are not)

Between Centrality and Marginality

The cemetery is the final institutionalized resting place where the dead, or at least their graves, can be visited. It is a meeting place between the dead and the living, the already dead and the not yet dead. As Samuel Uceda notes in his commentary to tractate Avot, ‘Every hour and every

* I wish to thank my teachers and friends for their generous assistance and pertinent comments: Michael Brocke, Rainer Berzan, Hanan Eshel, Zeev Gries, Shmuel Herr, Moshe Idol, Ora Limor, Dena Ordan, Rami Reiner, Iris Shagrir, Ephraim Shoham-Steiner and Haim Weiss. The responsibility for any remaining flaws is entirely mine.

The greater part of this paper originated in a lecture delivered at the Ludwig Steinheim Institute of the University of Duisburg, Germany, in December 2000. I am grateful to the institute director Prof. Michael Brocke for his invitation and hospitality. For an invitation to another lecture, held at the Witten-Herdeke University in Germany in June 2001, in the framework of the ‘art in dialog’ project, I wish to thank Karen and Jörg van den Berg; parts of this paper are based on that lecture as well. I have also benefited from presenting the topic at the departmental history seminar at Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Be’er Sheva, for which I thank Yosef Salmon, and at the Twentieth Interuniversity Conference on the Study of Folklore held there in 2001, for which I thank Tamar Alexander and Yuval Harari.

moment one is going to his eternal home and is nearing death ... from the day of birth one comes nearer to death and goes toward it." In other words, in a somewhat grim paraphrase of a saying by Rabbi Nahman of Bratslav, in which he notes that he is always on his way to the Land of Israel but halts on the way, similarly, all of us are in the course of a journey to the cemetery. Yet the cemetery is a meeting place not only between the dead and the living but also of ideas — of spiritual, emotional, and aesthetic trends and conceptions. The outcome of this gathering is a whirlpool, the result of the combination of utterly different ideas stemming from diverse sources, yet influencing and shaping the visitor's world, who in each tour of the cemetery takes a trip to his or her future.

The aim of this paper is to present in a preliminary fashion some Jewish perceptions of the cemetery as an institution, and the different roles and functions of the medieval, early modern, and modern cemetery, based on out-cemetery or nonepigraphic sources culled from Jewish halakhic, ethical, and mystical literary works. No attempt is made, however, at a comprehensive survey of the innumerable sources relevant to the topic, scattered piecemeal in all fields of Jewish literature. To date, scholarly attention has been devoted mainly to individual cemeteries, tombstones, and grave visiting. In contrast, this paper concentrates on the cemetery as a whole. Since this is an exploratory study, I take a phenomenological, nonhistorical approach, utilizing different source types and genres in conjunction. To the best of my knowledge, no study has yet thus addressed the Jewish cemetery, and the eight phenomenological models isolated here represent an initial attempt to fill this lacuna.

In Jewish culture there is a tension between two trends, one for which the cemetery is marginal, and another for which it is central. In broad terms the marginality of the cemetery primarily represents an elitist trend, whereas its centrality is largely related to popular concepts. Yet, the borders between elitist-popular and marginality-centrality are not strictly parallel. There are elitist writers for whom the cemetery is central, and popular trends for which it is marginal. Nevertheless, proceeding cautiously, we may still link the marginalizing approach mainly to elitist elements, and vice versa. The attitude reflected by Judah Halevi's Kuzari, according to which the cemetery is a place where gentle


6 For a typology of the tombstones of the Jewish cemetery in Istanbul, see Minna Rozen, Hasköy Cemetery: Typology of Stones, Tel-Aviv 1994; on the tombstone inscriptions see Marcin Wodziński, 'The Poetics of Hebrew Tombstone Inscriptions in Poland and East-Central Europe', Literatura Ludowa (2001), 2, p. 17-33 (Polish). I wish to thank Dr. Wodziński for supplying me with an English version of this paper. For a new approach to cemetery epigraphy, see Rachel L. Greenblatt, 'The Shapes of Memory: Evidence in Stone from the Old Jewish Cemetery in Prague', Leo Baeck Institute Year Book 47 (2002), pp. 43-67.


8 For an example of a different historical-phenomenological approach to another institution in a specific time and place, see the typology of the medieval English market by James Masschele, 'The Public Space of the Marketplace in Medieval England', Speculum 77 (2002), pp. 383-421.
and sensitive souls become confused, whereas the crude ones experience no confusion, is fairly representative of writers of his ilk.

Stories about the graves of the patriarchs have a distinct place in the book of Genesis. However, the fact that the burial place of Moses, the master prophet, should remain unknown (Deut. 34:6), can be seen as reflecting tension between a sense in which the burial place lacks significance and the power that the biblical avoidance of specifying the site lends to its potential centrality. Concealment of the place and its marginalization represents an attempt to overcome its centrality. Moreover, although Moses' grave is unknown, there were later important traditions about the graves of other prophets. Nonetheless, Jewish cemeteries are marginal in space — intended to be on the outskirts of the Jewish residence — even if, as a result of urban development, they later become centrally located. They are also marginal in principle because Judaism considers the dead impure, and impurity leads to physical distancing.

9 {Kuzari}, 260.
10 For another example of an elitist attitude rejecting the place of death in Judaism, found in the writings of Rabbi Joseph Dov Halevi Soloveitchik, see Yehezkel Lichtenstein, *The Dead: From Impurity to Sanctification*, Ph.D. diss., Bar-Ilan University, 1977, pp. 227-228 (Hebrew). The rich collection of sources in Lichtenstein's work is offset by an almost total absence of general secondary literature.
13 There are many examples, one of which is the old cemetery of Tel-Aviv, meant to be on the outskirts of Jaffa, but which found itself in the center of the first Hebrew town. On this cemetery, see Barbara Mann, 'Modernism and Zionist Uncanny: Reading the Old Cemetery in Tel-Aviv'. *Representations* 69 (2000), pp. 63-95 (a Hebrew version appeared in *Mikan: Journal for Hebrew Literary Studies* 2 (2001), pp. 5-32). In my opinion, Mann's article takes a somewhat artificial post-colonialist approach, and unfortunately its strengths concerning the thought of Homi K. Bhabha are not paralleled by knowledge of Jewish sources.
14 This of course is quite contrary to the centrality of the Christian cemetery and its proximity to the church. See Chateauvriand's note on this: 'It is by way of death that we arrive at the presence of God', quoted in John McManners, *Death and the Enlightenment: Changing Attitudes to Death among Christian and Unbelievers in

The well-developed Jewish mourning rituals specify the time and quality of legitimate grief. By so doing they not only limit that grief but also the connection between the living and the dead, as per the talmudic dictum: 'He who mourns too much over his dead is actually weeping for someone else' (*BT Mo'ed Katan* 27b). There is a designated time for mourning, which should not be exceeded. The same attitude applies to the cemetery: it has its rightful place, but nothing further.

The cemetery is a postbiblical institution and, in its present form, a medieval one. During the rabbinic era there were several burial systems, including secondary burial. With the exception of some specific cases, the sages usually devoted little attention to the individual grave. Although, because of the laws of purity, they were indeed interested in knowing a cemetery's location, they cared less about marking the personal grave. On the contrary, not marking the grave of a sage was seen as a sign of respect: 'Monuments are not erected on the graves of the righteous: their sayings are their memorial' (*PT Shekalim* 2:1, 47a).

Nevertheless, grave visiting on fixed days of the year became a recurrent Jewish phenomenon, a fact of (popular) life. The following Maimonidean text evinces strong scholarly opposition to this practice. Maimonides mandated: 'One should not visit the cemetery' (*Code, Laws of Mourning*, 4:4). Both this dictum and the Jewish popular custom it

17 For example, when there was a special sign connected to a grave, such as smoke coming up from the grave of Elisha ben Avuya, *ahor*, the prototype of the heretic. See BT *Hagiga* 15b.
Attempts to stop can be viewed against the background of the Muslim veneration of saints and their graves. Nevertheless, the context is of course Jewish. That this comment aroused the following counter-reaction by the sixteenth-century rabbi David ibn Abi Zimra is not surprising:

Visit the graves [in Maimonides’ saying] means to open the grave and examine the corpse, and this is forbidden because these are the ways of the Amorites [the paradigm for forbidden magic in Jewish culture]. Yet there is no problem with just visiting the graves, and this is the custom among all of the people of Israel to visit their dead and prostrate themselves on their graves. (David ibn Abi Zimra, commentary to Maimonides, Code, ad loc.)

Albeit unsuccessful, by its very existence Maimonides’ attempt to eradicate the custom of grave visiting attests to the above-mentioned elitist-popular tension. He would prefer that the masses not visit graves; nevertheless, this was clearly not the general practice. Abi Zimra’s scholarly commentary, quoted above, which actually abrogates Maimonides’ intention, exemplifies that not all scholars opposed cemetery visits.

Another, earlier example of elitist-popular tension comes from the midrashic work Avot de-Rabbi Natan (The Fathers according to Rabbi Nathan). According to this work, one of the four types of behavior to be avoided by persons seeking to gain acceptance to the elite group of sages, to be designated a haver, is to avoid visiting cemeteries (because the sages meticulously observe purity regulations, and the cemetery is impure).19

Yet sages are few and cemetery goers are many. Moreover, even here the distinction is not so clear-cut, as some of the sages were themselves in the habit of visiting graves.

The trend toward marginalizing the cemetery should be viewed against the background of the marginality of death in Jewish culture in general,20 especially as compared to Christianity, in which the resurrection of Jesus after his death is a central dogma. From the Early Christian period the cult of saints and the veneration of their graves was a widespread phenomenon.21 It may well be that the Jewish objection to the veneration of graves can be grasped as a reaction to such Christian concepts.22 Even the state of the literature about the Jewish cemetery provides further evidence of this marginality. There is no halakhic monograph on the cemetery, nor has any other treatise been devoted solely to this topic in traditional Jewish literature. Only a brief chapter (chap. 13) in the minor rabbinic tractate Semahot treats the cemetery.23 Although an important source for death rituals and attitudes, in the larger context of rabbinic literature, this source is quite marginal.24 Yet this apparent marginality in no way detracts from the importance of this institution.


21 See the profound formulation of Ora Limor, Holy Land Travels: Christian Pilgrims in Late Antiquity, Jerusalem 1998, p. 10 (Hebrew); ‘with its construction, the Church of the Sepulchre ... became the Temple of the “New Jerusalem”’.


For this study of the institution of the Jewish cemetery, I suggest a typology of eight models which can be used to understand various functions of the medieval to modern Jewish cemetery: (1) neighborhood; (2) gate or portal; (3) communication center (4) stage; (5) setting or backdrop (6) refuge, (7) trap, and (8) center of identity. What follows is structured according to these models; thus, the discussion is phenomenological rather than historical. Note that these models are not contradictory and may coexist; their relative centrality, however, fluctuates in diverse settings and periods.

**Neighborhood**

The concept of the cemetery as a neighborhood is perhaps echoed by the sources themselves, in the Mishnaic term *shekhunat ha-kevarot*, which means either ‘the neighborhood of the graves’, or just scattered graves. In Mishnaic literature this term simply denotes an agglutination of several graves. However, the later Jewish cemetery functions as a neighborhood, more specifically a poor standard or a fringe neighborhood, on several planes. For one, it is located on the outskirts of the town. As Midrash Tehillim states: ‘If you see the cemetery ahead of you, it means you are nearing the city’ (Buber ed., Ps. 20). Moreover, this fringe neighborhood is inhabited by fringe entities: not only the dead but also the insane and demons. Indeed, sleeping in the cemetery is part of the rabbinic criterion for defining insanity and foolishness: a fool (shoteh) is one who sleeps in a graveyard (Tosefta Terumat 1:3). The demonic link to the cemetery comes via its impurity, making it as much their neighborhood as the neighborhood of the dead.

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27 See Rashi on BT Sanhedrin 65b: ‘the demon of the cemetery will love him and assist him in his magic’. Ritual washing of hands upon leaving the cemetery is explained as means of purification after encountering cemetery demons; see Maharil, s 23. On the connection between the demons and the cemetery, see Tamar Alexander, ‘The

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**THE CEMETERY IN JEWISH CULTURE**

Another aspect of the cemetery as a neighborhood belongs to its inner organization. Similar to the rise of rationality in town planning, it is from the late eighteenth century that we find the dead buried in neat rows. Nevertheless, their place in the cemetery should reflect their status in the religious world of the living: thus, the righteous should be buried together, as should the wicked. Neglect of this rule greatly inconveniences the helpless dead. The prohibition against burying the wicked near the righteous appears in BT Sanhedrin 47a, and several stories from *Sefer Hasidim* illustrate this point. That the cemetery is not a place for social intermingling, is seen from the following examples:

A wicked person was buried among the martyrs who were killed sanctifying the holy name. [One of them] came to a prominent living person in a dream, requesting that they remove [the body of the wicked person], because it was very difficult for them. (*Sefer Hasidim*, Wistinetzki-Freimann ed., no. 265, p. 86)


28 For an example of the scattered layout of a medieval cemetery, see J.M. Lilley et al., *The Jewish Burial Ground at Jewbury*, York 1994, pp. 329-336. (When first investigated this York cemetery was not known to be Jewish, thus this study contains valuable archeological data rare for a Jewish cemetery.) For an example of an analysis of the layout of a graves in a specific modern cemetery, see Michael Brocke, *Der jüdische Friedhof in Solingen*, Solingen 1996, pp. 20-21; idem, *Der alte jüdische Friedhof zu Frankfurt am Main*, Frankfurt am Main 1996, p. 61. For Jewish sources on the placing of the Dead, see Daniel Sperber, *Minhagei Yisrael*, V1, Jerusalem 1998, pp. 110-115 (Hebrew).

29 See the legend about the burial of Jacob Emden in proximity to his lifelong enemy Jonathan Eibeschuetz, which was possible because it was believed that they made peace with each other when Emden died, noted by Sid Z. Leiman, ‘Mrs. Jonathan Eibeschuetz’s Epitaph: A Grave Matter Indeed’, in *Scholars and Scholarship: The Interaction Between Judaism and Other Cultures*, ed. Leo Landman, New York 1990, p. 143.

30 See also no. 266. *Sefer Hasidim* is an important and influential source (also) for matters regarding death. For its influence in another similar context see Admiel Kosman, ‘Kissing the Dead — Transformation of a Custom’, *Tarbiz* 65 (1996), pp. 483-503 (Hebrew); cf. Elliot Horowitz, ‘On Kissing the Dead in the Mediterranean World’, *Tarbiz* 67 (1998), pp. 131-134 (Hebrew).
This can work in reverse as well:

There was a story about a righteous sage who was buried near someone who was indecent. This righteous [sage] came to all the people of the town in a dream, and said: You have wronged me by burying me near the toilet, which smells bad; and the smoke also bothers me. Therefore, they inserted a barrier of stones between the grave of the righteous man and the grave of the wicked one, and from then on he no longer appeared to them in a dream. (Ibid., no. 266)

Sefer Hasidim also provides a theoretical explanation for the neighborhood-like arrangement of the cemetery:

Jacob said ‘bury me in their burial-place’ (Gen. 47:30), because it is a burden for the angel to bring distant souls together. Therefore he wanted to lie with them. If the dead know nothing, why should Jacob be buried with his fathers? That he be buried somewhere in the Land of Israel should be sufficient. From this we learn that the spirits talk to each other, and that the righteous ones are happy that no wicked person lies among them. (Ibid., no. 305, p. 95)

It is clear from this passage that the soul-body association does not cease with death. The soul retains its connection to the corpse; therefore the neighborhood of the dead bodies, which is the cemetery, is also the neighborhood of their souls. This is one of the reasons that the dead like to be visited in the cemetery.\(^{31}\) Sefer Hasidim elaborates on the custom of visiting graves in times of drought, mentioned in BT Talmud 16a:\(^{32}\)

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32 See below, in the section on the communication center, and Horowitz, ‘Speaking to the Dead’, p. 308. See note 7 above.

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[ 24* ]

The Cemetery in Jewish Culture

Barzillay the Gil’adite said: ‘Let me die in my own town’ (2 Sam. 19:38), because it gives the dead pleasure when those that loved them come to their graves and ask for betterment for the dead person’s soul. In that world [the other world] the dead benefit from this. In turn, when asked to, they pray for the living as well. (Sefer Hasidim, no. 270, p. 86)

Thus, in some sense, even in death mutual interaction is maintained with the living, to the benefit of both parties, and the world of the dead continues to reflect the social forms of the living neighborhood. The neighborhood of the dead is here perceived as an integral part of the neighborhood of the living.\(^{33}\)

Gate

We have seen the need for interaction, for an ongoing visiting relationship between the living and the dead. Yet the suburb of the dead is also a dangerous place. It is considered extremely dangerous to leave a grave empty, and for this reason, graves are not prepared in advance, but dug only for the specific occasion. If for some reason the actual burial is postponed, a temporary substitute is placed in the open grave: either a chicken, or a living person, usually some pauper paid to sleep there. This custom reflects the perception of the grave as a gate or a portal, through which the dead might pull the living into their world. Not only is the cemetery the realm of the dead, but also an entrance to their world. It is in the interest of the living to keep the gate closed and thus prevent the dead from drawing them into their realm. The idea of the cemetery as a dangerous portal perhaps underlies the custom prohibiting pregnant

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[ 25* ]
women to visit graves. The function of the cemetery as a gate is connected to the notion of liminality developed by Victor Turner in the context of the classical work of Arnold van Gennep on rites of passage. Because of its character as a gate, it is of vital importance that everything in the cemetery be closed, that nothing be reminiscent of or symbolize openness. For example, the corpse’s mouth must be completely shut. If even partially open, because the shrouds get into the dead person’s mouth, for instance, people in the city might die. Similarly, if the corpse’s hands are clenched rather than extended, this too is considered a dangerous opening. These signs are so important that if there is an outbreak of plague in a town, Sefer Hasidim permits recent graves to be opened and checked (no. 1542). Not only is an open grave dangerous, but also an open space in the cemetery: it is forbidden to leave an unfilled space between graves, again because this opening might cause death, as Sefer Hasidim relates:

A person commanded that he be buried in the cemetery somewhat apart from the rest of the dead, so that he would be buried alone. Shortly thereafter, they buried his offspring around him, because they died one after another. (Ibid., no. 1538, p. 377)

This gate is also the one through which the souls of the dead can leave their world and enter ours, as occurs on Hoshana Rabbah night. It is their feast because this date also marks the conclusion of the penitential period that begins with the New Year and ends on the seventh day of Sukkot. On Hoshana Rabbah night the dead leave their graves and pray in the cemetery for mercy for the Jews. Thus the gate is bidirectional: it is a means of separation as well as a means of connection and communication. Furthermore: when there is a gate there is need for a lock, and indeed we know of a custom among Jews of East Europe to bury a lock with the dead in time of plague, maybe as an attempt to close the open gate of the cemetery.

Communication Center

In the Babylonian Talmud there is a dispute regarding the reason for visiting graves after prayers on fast days declared due to the of lack of rain. In Rabbi Levi’s opinion visiting the graves reflects the people’s status before God, which is as of the dead; in Rabbi Hanina’s view this practice stems from a desire to have the dead ask God for mercy (BT Ta’anit 16a). The first opinion echoes the model of the cemetery as a setting, whereas the second one alludes to its role as a communication center, a place to acquire information from the world beyond, as well as a conduit for conveying requests to heaven. This concept partially explains the rationale for the well-developed Jewish customs of grave visiting.

The communicative qualities of the cemetery are stressed in a Zoharic story.

When the world requires mercy, the living go and inform the spirits of the righteous and weep over their graves, in order that soul may cleave to soul ... Rabbi Hyya said: I would be surprised if there were any who knew how to communicate with the dead apart from us. Rabbi Abba said: Sorrow communicates with them. The Torah communicates with them. For if they cannot find someone who is knowledgeable about this, they take a sefer torah [scroll] to the graves, and [the dead] then bestir themselves out of concern for the

34 On the sources for this custom, see Jacob Weiss, Responsa Minhah Yitzhak, 10:42.
37 According to Sefer Hasidim, this was witnessed by two people who hid themselves in the graveyard that night; see no. 1543, p. 378.
Torah, [wondering] why it has been exiled to such a place. Then 
Dumah\textsuperscript{39} communicates with them.\textsuperscript{40}

In the talmudic story about a pious man who escapes from his wife to 
the cemetery, he gains crucial agricultural information about the future 
by overhearing two souls talking:

It is related that a certain pious man gave a denar to a poor man on 
the eve of New Year in a year of drought, and his wife scolded him 
and he went and passed the night in the cemetery, and he heard two 
spirits conversing with one another. Said one to her companion:
My dear, come and let us wander about the world and let us hear 
from behind the curtain what suffering is coming on the world. 
Said her companion to her: I am not able, because I am buried in a 
matting of reeds. But do you go, and whatever you hear tell me. So 
the other went and wandered about and returned. Said her 
companion to her: My dear, what have you heard from behind the 
curtain? She replied: I have heard that whoever sows after the first 
rainfall will have his crop smitten by hail. So the man went and did 
not sow till after the second rainfall, with the result that everyone 
else’s crop was smitten and his was not smitten. The next year he 
again went and passed the night in the cemetery, and heard the two 
spirits conversing with one another. Said one to her companion:
Come and let us wander about the world and hear from behind the 
curtain what punishment is coming upon the world. Said the other 
to her: My dear, did I not tell you that I am not able because I am 
buried in a matting of reeds? But do you go, and whatever you hear, 
come and tell me. So the other one went and wandered about the 
world and returned. She said to her: My dear, what have you heard 
from behind the curtain? She replied: I heard that whoever sows

\textsuperscript{39} Dumah is the angel who receives the dead. On the development of his character, see 

\textsuperscript{40} Zohar III, 70b-71a. Part of this section is quoted by Tishby, Wisdom (note 51 
below), II, p. 860, where the English translation emphasizes the notion of 
communication.

after the later rain will have his crop smitten with blight. So the 
man went and sowed after the first rain with the result that 
everyone else’s crop was blighted and his was not blighted. Said his 
wife to him: How is it that last year everyone else’s crop was smitten 
and yours was not smitten, and this year everyone else’s crop is 
blighted and yours is not blighted? So he related to her all his 
experiences. The story goes that shortly thereafter a quarrel broke 
out between the wife of that pious man and the mother of the child, 
and the former said to the latter, come and I will show you your 
daughter buried in a matting of reeds. The next year the man again 
going and spent the night in the cemetery and heard those [souls] 
conversing together. One said: My dear, come and let us wander 
about the world and hear from behind the curtain what suffering is 
coming upon the world. Said the other: My dear, leave me alone; 
our conversation has already been heard among the living. (BT 
Berakhot 18b)\textsuperscript{41}

This dialogue in the cemetery is depicted as a private one, belonging 
only to the sphere of the dead souls. Once it becomes known to the souls 
that they have been overheard, they stop communicating. However, the 
problem here was not that the man in question acted on the overheard 
information. It was the interference of the dialogue between the living, 
the disclosure of information acquired from the dialogue between the 
dead, that brought this interaction to a standstill. It appears that 
although entitled to its own dialogue, the dialogue of each entity must 
nevertheless remain separate.

On the other hand, people also come to the cemetery in order to 
communicate what troubles them, as well as to ask the dead for 
assistance. The basic book of graveyard liturgy, 
Ma’ane Lashon 
(Prague, pre-1615),\textsuperscript{42} contains prayers of this nature, in which the dead

\textsuperscript{41} See Ophrah Meir, ‘The Story of the Hasid and the Spirits in the Cemetery’, 
Jerusalem Studies in Jewish Folklore XIII-XIV, pp. 81-97; Aryeh Cohen, ‘Do the 
Dead Know?’ pp. 64-66; Simcha Paul Raphael, Jewish Views of the Afterlife, 

\textsuperscript{42} On Ma’ane Lashon in the framework of the Jewish books for the sick and the dying, 
see Zeev Gries, Conduct Literature (Regimen Vitae): Its History and Place in the
are informed about various situations, and asked for their protection and assistance, either directly, or indirectly, as messengers to the divine world. We find prayers to be recited at the graveyard for bearing children, or for good health, or for the petitioner’s children’s health. Most of these prayers specifically state that the petitioner is coming to convey information, to a father in the following example: ‘I have come to inform you of my pain and my sorrow, because now I am now descending lower and lower ... I have come here to your grave to inform you of your son’s distress.” 43 Another aspect of the cemetery as a communication center is the written information that appears on the tombs, and other texts found in cemeteries, such as buried Hebrew texts (geniza) or damaged Torah scrolls.

Communication in the cemetery also takes place between the living. This is the purpose of the eulogy, of the epitaph, and of tombstone decorations. 44 Those who deliver the eulogy and prepare the gravestone impart information to the living: the dead person’s status, lifespan, and sometimes additional information as well. But apart from that, the cemetery can also evoke a special kind of dialogue between the living — a dialogue of passion and lust, as reflected in the story of the merry widow discussed below.

When the living come to the cemetery with Ma’aneh Lashon in their hand, they express their belief that it is possible to communicate there with the dead, to relate their troubles and ask the dead for assistance. Although the dialogue between the living and the dead takes place mainly in the cemetery, the dead have more options at their disposal to appear before the living and converse with them. This is a reversal of the spatial relationship between the living and the dead. In order to communicate with the dead, a living person should go to their place. On the other hand, the dead are quite free to approach living beings wherever they are. One of the common ways this happens, according to Sefer Hasidim, is in dreams. 45 The following story reflects how the dead feel when visited in the cemetery:

A certain Jewish community wanted to relocate in a new place. A dead member of the community came to one person in a dream and said: “Do not leave us, for we derive pleasure from your visits to the cemetery. If you leave us, know that you will all be killed.” They paid no heed [and left that place] and all were killed. (Sefer Hasidim, no. 269, p. 86)

In this story the dead come to the living and communicate with them, in order to ensure that the living will continue to communicate with the dead. Because of the power of the dead, when the living ignore the request, the outcome can be tragic. 46

Stage

Being the place where the funeral takes place, the cemetery also sets the stage for exclusive ritual acts. One such activity is the eulogy, which, according to BT Megillah 29a, is delivered in the graveyard, and a second is the prayer acknowledging divine justice, תではありません, which, according to the twelfth-century Mahzor Vitry (no. 276), is also to be recited in the cemetery.

According to some eastern European customs, in times of great trouble, such as plague, a marriage between two orphans is arranged and held in the cemetery. The charitable act of wedding the orphans is not sufficient; in order to be effective, and to evoke heavenly mercy, it must

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43 Ma’aneh Lashon, Vilna 1870, chap. 8.
44 On medieval Christian tombs and their cultural meaning, see Elizabeth Valdez del Almo with Carol Stamatí Pendaragan (eds.), Memory and the Medieval Tomb, Cambridge 2000.
46 For the relationship between the living and the dead in medieval Christian Europe, see Patrick J. Geary, Living with the Dead in the Middle Ages, Ithaca 1994, esp. pp. 77–92.
be performed publicly on the cemetery's 'stage'. The lines formed by the condolers after the funeral for the mourners to pass through, and the custom of circling the body, found in some communities, also belong to the feature of the cemetery as a stage. Because it differs greatly from the medieval dance of death, I do not define this act of circling as a danse macabre. Nevertheless, it is an example of a structured and ritualistic activity, which is performed in the cemetery and belongs to its function as a stage. Another ritual belonging to this function is the blowing of horns noted by Rashi. An interesting ritual is that of bringing the Torah scrolls, and also the bimah [podium] of the synagogue — which in Hebrew also means stage — to the cemetery. Such a custom is mentioned in the Zohar and opposed by the sixteenth-century rabbi Joseph Karo in his Beit Yosef (Orah Hayyim, 579:3), especially in cases where the bimah is taken to a non-Jewish cemetery.

The women's ritual of measuring the circumference of the cemetery with candlewick during the High Holiday period, masterfully analyzed by Chava Weissler, can be seen in the symbolic framework of the cemetery as a gate, and also as linked to its apperception as a stage. On the one hand, by measuring the cemetery the women create a closed circle, which correlates to the idea of opening — their action symbolizes closure, as if to seal the cemetery and stop death. On the other hand, their cemetery visit exhibits features of a religious procession, and the act of measuring it with what will later become candlewick, is a religious performance that uses the cemetery as its stage. Other communal visits to the cemetery, for instance on the Ninth of Av and on other occasions, also reflect its aspect as a stage.

Setting or Backdrop

The aspect of the cemetery as a setting or backdrop to the stage is related to the previous model of the stage. Let me begin the discussion by quoting a poem by the eleventh-century Spanish poet Moses ibn Ezra:

I had the thought to pass the lodging where
My parents and all my dearest friends abide.
I greeted them, but no one spoke, 'Have father
And mother both forgotten me?' I cried.
They heard. Without a word they summoned me,
And pointed out my own place by their side.

Visiting these graves causes the poet to meditate on his own death, reinforcing the realization that he too is on his way to the cemetery. Remembering death is a value in traditional Jewish culture, because this memory carries moral implications for the behavior of the person engaged in remembering. Although Jews, Christians, and Muslims share this concept, the method of remembering differs for each. In Christian culture, objects of art function as memento mori, as reminders

50 Rashi to BT Ta'anit 16a, lemma הַמָּשָּׁל מַעְרָשׁ.
52 This is also connected to the implications of the debate in BT Ta'anit 16a.
54 See note 7 above.
56 See Bar-Levav, Concept of Death, pp. 103, 144-146, 152.
of death.\textsuperscript{57} In Jewish culture such objects are relatively uncommon,\textsuperscript{58} but there are other nonmaterial means of remembrance, including cemetery visits. The cemetery thus functions as a setting supposed to inspire the necessary atmosphere and shape the visitor's mood.

The cemetery setting is not necessarily beautiful and aesthetic, but rather moral. The tombs might be aesthetic, both in their form and the content of their epitaphs, but it is only in the modern period that some artistic effort was devoted to the Jewish cemetery as a whole.\textsuperscript{59} The atmosphere of neglect found in some Jewish cemeteries also reflects the marginality of death and the cemetery in the larger framework of Jewish culture.\textsuperscript{60} It is the place one goes to in order to achieve a sense of hishtavut, equanimity, in which one accepts praise and condemnation with the same spiritual calm, as a place not only of memento mori but of mors itself. This spirit is reflected in an anecdote found in the important anonymous medieval ethical work, \textit{Sefer ha-Yashar} (Book of the Honest):

When one is old one should pray every night and say supplications, and refrain from sex, and consume only a little meat and wine, and look after the needs of the poor and the sick, and accompany the dead to their graves. He should attend to the graves of the dead each week, and stand there alone, reminding himself of this [coming] scene. Thus did an utterly wicked and licentious person. People reported this man's atrocities to the king. One person said, 'My lord, you should know that he is now even worse than ever. I testify before you that, because my house is in the wall [surrounding the city], I heard him go to steal the shrouds of the dead in the middle of the night.' The king ordered two of his loyal men to investigate. They followed him at night until they saw him enter a grave, take out a metal collar, and fasten it around his neck. He pulled it mightily, and said, 'Woe to you, wretched body, poor carcass, arid spirit, lonesome soul, obtuse mind, mortal human being, man made of mud.' (chap. 13)

Any connection with the cemetery is suspicious. Other than a pauper hired to sleep in an empty grave, a person who goes there at night — keeping in mind the talmudic definition of a fool as someone who stays in a cemetery at night — is probably stealing shrouds, a ghastly crime. Yet it turns out that, by going there, this man sought to develop and strengthen his moral and ethical fiber. Here the cemetery serves as a setting for evoking the appropriate spiritual mood. In a sense, this can be viewed as another aspect of the cemetery as a gate, this time as a gate to personal and spiritual development. This anecdote can be also analyzed as reflecting the interplay between the models of neighborhood and setting. The accusation emerges because the man is found visiting an unfit neighborhood at night.

Let us consider another story about the cemetery as a moral setting from a different source, \textit{Reshit Hokhma} (Beginning of Wisdom), an ethical work by the sixteenth-century rabbi Elijah di Vidas from Safed. He quotes Rabbi Isaac of Acre, an important thirteenth-century kabbalist, who came to the Land of Israel from Spain. The story tells of a princess seen coming out of the bath by a crude and vulgar man, who said with a deep sigh: 'I wish this woman were in my possession, so I could have my way with her.' The princess, who overheard him, replied,
‘Not here, in the cemetery.’ Overjoyed upon hearing this, he understood her words as an invitation to meet in the cemetery, rather than as meaning that the cemetery is the great equalizer. This man proceeded to the cemetery, kept his mind fixed on the princess, and expected her each day. Because of his concentration, seclusion, and his great desire, his soul reached a high level of communion with God. He became a man of God, and people started to visit the cemetery in order to receive his blessing.

Moshe Idel has noted the Muslim Sufi origins of this story, and explained that the cemetery setting hints at a situation of equality between opposites. This is an example of adoption of Muslim mystical ideas by a Jewish mystic, together with the Muslim understanding of the cemetery’s role. Not only were Muslim practices of admiration of saints adopted by Jews, but theoretical and ethical ideas as well were borrowed. The foreign origins of the idea of the cemetery as a setting are not surprising, because, as opposed to the Jewish cemetery’s other meanings, there is nothing particularistic about this function. Obviously an approach that calls for hishtavut, for attaining personal and spiritual equanimity, would be indifferent to the cemetery’s denomination altogether. The emotional qualities of the cemetery are not dependent on its denomination. They depend also on its function as a setting, a background inspiring personal and emotional processes.

Nonetheless, a cemetery does not necessarily provoke spiritual or noble emotions; on the contrary, it might also invoke a passion for life, together with a sense of nihilism, as reflected in the international folkloristic motif of the merry widow, or the widow of Ephesus (no. 1510 in the Aarne-Thompson list of motifs), which appears in pagan, Jewish, and Christian sources. The following example of this motif comes from the Tosafot:

It once happened that a woman used to cry and mourn over her husband’s grave. There was a man in the cemetery who had been appointed by the king to guard a body left hanging on the gallows. He seduced this woman and she acceded. When he returned to the cemetery the body was gone. He was very sorry for his action and greatly fearful of the king’s reaction. The woman said to him: ‘Do not fear. Take my husband’s body from his grave and hang him on the scaffold instead.’ (Tosafot, Kiddushin 80b)

This international motif seems to capture the paradoxical fact that the place of the dead evokes emotions of passion and life. The presence of death in the cemetery has the ability either to make one philosophical or conversely, quite worldly. The cemetery is both a place where higher spiritual status can be attained, by means of the inner dialogue it evokes, and a place capable of releasing fundamental lusts.

Refuge

A further function of the cemetery belongs neither to its role as a setting for moral improvement or physical pleasure but to its function as a refuge. The cemetery is known as a picturesque place of refuge for first-born animals, mostly bulls. According to biblical law first-born animals belong to the priests, but because priests are obligated to avoid the impurity of death, the cemetery is a good hiding-place for such an animal.

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66 Rashi to BT Pesahim 97a.
It is also a refuge for people. In the famous story from BT Berakhot 18b cited above, a pious man escapes and sleeps in the cemetery after his wife rebukes him for spending too much on charity. Because the cemetery is not only a place of refuge but also a communication center, he acquires useful information in the process. Nonetheless, his original impetus for going to the cemetery (like that of the pious man from the story in BT Berakhot) was its function as a refuge.

The graveyard can be a place of safety not only for people and animals but also for property. There are many anecdotes about people burying their belongings in the cemetery. One medieval story relates an encounter between a rich man and a pauper. The wealthy man, in a despondent mood, had decided to give charity only to someone who has despaired of prospering in this world, yet the reaction of the rag-clothed pauper to whom this rich man tried to give a large sum of money surprised him. The latter inquired, ‘Why did you give me all this money and not divide it among all the poor?’ The rich man explained that he wanted to give it only to someone bereft of hope in profiting in this world. ‘Take your money back, you crazy fool’, he said. ‘I am not forlorn. I put my confidence in God, who can save me and make me rich in a moment. Leave off this stupidity.’ The rich man was surprised: ‘I had pity for you and wanted to help you’, he said, ‘and you curse me in response?’ ‘You thought you were doing me a favour’, said the pauper, ‘but on the contrary, you could have killed me. Don’t you know that only the dead are bereft of hope in this world?’ So the rich man took his money and buried it in the cemetery. Some time later, having lost his fortune, he went to the cemetery to dig up the money hidden there. The guards caught him digging and brought him before the governor. By a twist of fate this was the same poor man he had once encountered. When brought before him on the accusation of stealing shrouds, the governor made himself known to the formerly wealthy man, ordered his money returned, and granted him a daily meal for the rest of his life.67 This


69 A distortion of the idea of the cemetery as a refuge can be seen in its role as the alleged meeting-place of the elders of Zion, in the forged protocols. According to the protocols, the elders of Zion gathered “once each century around the tomb of the Grand Master Caleb”. See Norman Cohn, Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish World-Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion, New York 1966, pp. 34, 269.

entering the cemetery during a funeral: ‘The snare is broken, and we are escaped’ (Psalms 124:7).

Center of Identity

Interestingly, the internet is a paradise for cemeteries. For our purposes, one of the more fascinating internet sites belongs to the Egyptian Jewish cemetery in Bassatine, once a suburb and now a poor neighborhood of Cairo, which actually has its own electronic journal, appropriately entitled the Bassatine News. Obviously, this journal is not published by the denizens of the cemetery but rather by the living, one Carmen Weinstein, a leading member of the small local Jewish community. The e-journal is her way of communicating mainly with former Egyptian Jews worldwide, and was an important tool in her successful campaign to keep squatters out of the Jewish cemetery in Bassatine. Because of Cairo’s high population density, and the lack of housing, both the living and the dead now share many of Cairo’s cemeteries. Weinstein sought to ward off this fate for the Jewish cemetery. Her goal was achieved with the aid of former Egyptian and other Jews, who financed the necessary means for keeping intruders out, like fences and guards. I quote from the first issue of the journal, of April 1994, which described the cemetery:

After 1967, most of the marble slabs covering the individual graves were stolen. Most of the vaults...were squatted on by the migrants from upper Egypt as well as by destitute Cairenes.... In 1978, Carmen Weinstein took upon herself responsibility for the task of

This quote exemplifies two distinct attitudes toward the cemetery. For Weinstein, it is an important and central place, whereas for the heads of the Cairo Jewish community at that time (until Weinstein took over), it was a place of no importance. Both these polarities are reflected in Jewish sources.

One result of her efforts was that Weinstein, who runs a printing and stationery business in Cairo, was elected president of the Jewish community. She succeeded in building a wall around the cemetery and protecting most of it from squatters. It is not by chance that Ms. Weinstein has been able to collect the sums necessary to protect the cemetery. The memory of this inactive local cemetery is important to Jews who left Egypt, as well as for other Jews. However, this devotion to the cemetery is a projection of memory, not of actual existence; namely, cemeteries may acquire more importance after they are abandoned than when still being used for burial. When the community

74 Cf. a similar attitude of the Jewish community in Istanbul toward the destruction of the ancient Jewish cemetery of Kuzguncuk, in Rozen, Hasköy Cemetery (above, note 6), p. 3. This attitude reflects the marginality of the cemetery for the communal establishment, and its centrality for individuals (as in the Cairo example) and for historians (as in Istanbul). There are other cases in which attempts to preserve cemeteries are sponsored by people who no longer live in the community, such as the projects of Lesley Keller in Hungary.

75 For historical reasons also, there is a new sense of urgency that accompanies the documentation of work on cemeteries of defunct communities. See Minna Rozen, ‘A Survey of Jewish Cemeteries in Western Turkey’, The Jewish Quarterly Review
was active, and people lived normal lives, the institutional hierarchy was entirely different. Jewish cemeteries throughout the ages were generally neglected places, because the protection or the beautification of the cemetery was almost never a high priority. There are of course some exceptions. In rich communities, some wealth was diverted to the cemetery, mainly for individual tombstones or family monuments, much less so for its public facilities. Such is the case in the famous Ouderkerk cemetery belonging to the once affluent Portuguese Jewish community in Amsterdam. In the twentieth century the Warsaw Jewish cemetery in Genesa Street was considered a place of beauty and tranquility.

In general, however, most Jewish cemeteries were less important than other communal institutions, and their limited funding reflects this hierarchy. It is important for a community to have a cemetery, but once in place, it is usually, though not always, marginal. Even when Jewish burial societies became influential, as was the case in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, their strength found expression in the synagogue rather than in the cemetery. Rabbi Naftali ha-Kohen Katz, chief rabbi of Posen and then of Frankfurt on the Main in the early eighteenth century, who acted as the rabbi of the local burial society as well (a dual function quite common in that period, which signifies the burial society’s

83 (1992), pp. 71-125, and idem, Haskoy Cemetery. A different matter is the usage of fake, forged or distorted data about cemeteries in order to invent tradition or establish identity. Such is the case of the Karaites Abraham Firkovich, as discussed in a series of forthcoming articles by Dan Shapira; or the case of some haredi activities in Israel; see A Grave Crisis in Israel: Pictures and Documents, published by the Chicago Help for Israel’s Cemeteries and Graves Organization, Chicago 1998.


77 See Avner Holtzman, An Image Before My Eyes, Tel-Aviv 2002, pp. 119, 255 (Hebrew).

78 See for example H. H. Ben-Sasson, On Jewish History in the Middle Ages, Tel Aviv 1962, p. 137 (Hebrew); Rainer Baran, Friedhelm Burgard, and Rosmarie Kosch, 'The Hierarchy of Medieval Jewish Settlements Seen through Jewish and Non-Jewish Sources', Jewish Studies 40 (2000), pp. 57*-67*. For an example of the centrality of the local cemeteries for a town see Chone Shmeruk, The Call For A Prophet, Jerusalem 1999, p. 21 (Hebrew).


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were not even located near the cemetery, but became part of the communal offices and infrastructure.

Conclusion

Returning to the issue of the tension between the marginality and centrality of the Jewish cemetery, I have chosen to illustrate this point by telling two cemetery stories. Stories remind us that analytical models reflect only a partial picture, and not always the important part.

The first story comes from the classic collection of Jewish jokes compiled by Alter Druyanov. It tells of the elderly aunt who, for her entire life, visited the cemetery during the month of Elul. Now that she had migrated from her East European shtetl to New York, she still wished to keep her custom. But who could give up a day's work to take her to Brooklyn? One evening family members returned home and saw that her face was shining. They asked her, 'Auntie, why are you glowing?' The old woman replied, 'Ah, just one hour in the pure place, die teyere ort, is enough to make you feel as if your burden were a hundred times lighter.' Everyone was puzzled, 'Have you been to Brooklyn?' they asked. She replied, 'How could I get to Brooklyn by myself? I went nearby, next to the train station.' The family members could not help laughing. 'Auntie', they said, 'that is not a Jewish cemetery'. 'So what', she replied, 'aren't the gentile dead called dead?'

This story strikingly illustrates the function of the cemetery as a place of communication and inner dialogue, which is evoked in a certain setting — the presence of graves, any graves. The identity of the cemetery per se is stronger here than its specifically Jewish identity. This attitude, ascribed in the joke to the elderly displaced aunt, is used as the punch line of the joke, in order to induce the laughter or at least the smile that jokes should. However, such an attitude can be found in the writings of no less a figure than Rabbi Moses Isserles, in his famous glosses to Karo's Shulhan Arukh, which made this Sephardic code applicable to the Ashkenazi world. The laws of public fast days (Shulhan Arukh: Orah Hayyim, 579:3) state that after prayers everyone proceeds to the cemetery and weeps and pleads there, implying that they are as good as dead if they do not repent. To this Isserles comments: 'accordingly, if there are no Jewish graves then we go near gentile ones'.

This is a reasonable conclusion from Rabbi Levi's viewpoint as presented in his dispute with Rabbi Hanina in the Talmud (BT Ta'anit 16a), mentioned in the section on the communication center. The idea that seemed funny, or almost subversive as implemented in the joke, was acceptable to the talmudic sages as well as to the halakhist Isserles. Perhaps this inner problematic — that the graves themselves are more important then the denomination of those buried there — is inherent to the idea of the setting, which carries with it something external, and in that sense, almost universal.

The second story is about a rabbi whose community refused to hand over the sums necessary to erect a fence around the local cemetery. One Sabbath he told them about his trip back home from the neighboring town, while returning from a wedding. It was a dark and stormy winter night, and the horses lost their way in the mud. Unknowingly they entered the cemetery and trotted over the graves. Suddenly they went over the grave of the late Rabbi Fischl, who, when alive, had tried in vain to raise funds to erect a fence around the cemetery. Upset by having a horse and carriage drive over his grave, Fischl tried to strangle the poor rabbi in revenge. The rabbi cried for mercy, but to no avail. Only when he promised that he would do his best to have a fence erected around the cemetery, did the late Fischl let go. He then rode over the grave of Reb Zanwil, who had strongly opposed such a fence. Now it was Zanwil who forcefully strangled our poor rabbi, almost to death, and agreed to cease only when the rabbi promised him that no fence would be erected, that the graveyard would remain as it was. Next he rode over the grave of the late Reb Berl, known for his extreme honesty. He too started to strangle

84 There were also non-Jewish cemeteries in which there was a Jewish corner, for example, in France.
85 This is of course limited to some aspects and rituals related to the cemetery, whereas for others the denomination of the dead is crucial.
the rabbi, claiming that he heard him promising both to build a fence and
not to build a fence. Surely the rabbi was lying, and had to be punished.
'Don't worry', the rabbi told him. 'I did not deceive either. I will do my
best to erect the fence, but as I am sure that the heads of the community
will not allot the money, nothing will happen.'

This story can be read symbolically, as depicting the attitude of rabbis
and their flock to the cemetery. The rabbi wants to fence off and
marginalize the cemetery from the rest of society. The fence surrounding
the cemetery also serves as a symbolic barrier, which limits the
connection between the cemetery and the rest of the world. The
townspeople, for their part, want the cemetery to be part of their lives.
They need the cemetery around them, just as the old woman from the
first story needs to visit the cemetery, any cemetery, in order to fulfill her
spiritual needs. The rabbi wants to isolate the cemetery, thus keeping it a
distinctively 'other' place.

Cemeteries evoke varied emotions, and they perhaps engage some
people. The people who study cemeteries, whose steadfast efforts create
the fascinating shift from stone to paper, prove paper stronger and
more everlasting than stone. Cemeteries serve as a focal point of identity,
both for those who sleep there in the dust, and for us. This link is
subsumed in one of the Hebrew terms for cemetery — beth ha-hayyim,
'the dwelling of life' — a name that reflects the vital connection between
the living and the dead. My proposed phenomenological treatment
represents a provisional attempt to identify and analyze various
functions of the Jewish cemetery. Future synchronic and diachronic
study of cemetery-related developments and thought will undoubtedly
sharpen and expand our understanding of the 'place where we are not',
of our place, and of ourselves.

86 The story is found in an unpublished manuscript of the late Yiddish journalist,
Moshe Bunem Yustnian (B. Yeushzon), which contains material for new parts of
his book, From Our Old Treasure. I wish to thank his son, Joshua Yustman, who
kindly showed it to me.