

TMF Board Statements and Current Projects

A Brief History of The Matzevah Foundation, Inc.

Since 2005, a group of Baptist Christians has been working with the Jewish Community of Poland in restoring Jewish cemeteries, which are known in Hebrew as *Beit Chaim* – "the house of the living" and are considered to holy places by the Jewish community. The Matzevah Foundation, Inc. (TMF) grew out of this relationship, advancing it today as a non-profit, public charity, which primarily serves the Jewish community of Poland and cooperates with the global Jewish Community to care for and restore Jewish Cemeteries in Poland.

TMF Values: The Importance of Caring (Mercy)

Why is caring for the Jewish cemeteries of Poland important to The Matzevah Foundation?

As Christians, caring for Jewish cemeteries is not obligatory. Nevertheless, we realize the importance of this mitzvah and are driven by *gemilut chasadim*, "the giving of loving-kindness" as our motivation to care for abandoned and desolate Jewish cemeteries in Poland.

We also realize that caring for the Jewish cemeteries in Poland is important to the Jew, first, due to the *Halakhah*, as the Torah teaches and as the rabbis teach us in the Talmud. We know that caring for the dead is one of the highest expressions of *chesed*, loving-kindness, as the dead cannot repay us or anyone for the loving-kindness shown to them.

From first-hand experience, we know that caring for these cemeteries is an overwhelming task for the Polish Jewish community but doing so is a mitzvah. Nonetheless it is an opportunity for TMF to break the cycle of evil and thereby open a path that leads to forgiveness, dialogue and possibly reconciliation.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel wrote in *The Reasons for My Involvement in the Peace Movement*:

"There is immense silent agony in the world, and *the task of man is to be a voice for the plundered poor*, to prevent the desecration of the soul and the violation of our dream of honesty. The more deeply immersed I became in the thinking of the prophets, the more powerfully it became clear to me what *the lives of the Prophets sought to convey: that morally speaking, there is no limit to the concern one must feel for the suffering of human beings*, that *indifference to evil is worse than evil itself, that in a free society, some are guilty, but all are responsible*."

The Prophets speak to us about mercy; remember that Jesus admonished religious people by saying: "Go and learn what this means, 'I desire mercy, and not sacrifice.' For I came not to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matthew 9:13). Jesus quoted in part the Prophet Hosea (Hosea 6:6), who echoes God's desire for us – he wants us to know him more than performing religious acts. As such, we act out of mercy or concern for others and I believe, that we are collectively responsible to speak for those who no longer have a voice, those, who suffered and died at the hand of their oppressors during the Shoah. We celebrate their memory and act to honor it.

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Statement of Vision

The Matzevah Foundation seeks to remember and honor the Jewish heritage of Poland by restoring Jewish cemeteries and reconciling Jews and Christians through participating in a common mitzvah. Stated simply we remember, restore and reconcile.

Statement of Mission

The mission of the Matzevah Foundation is twofold. Firstly, it will mobilize human and financial resources to care for and preserve the Jewish heritage of Poland by restoring Jewish cemeteries in Poland. Secondly, it will educate the public regarding the history of Polish Jews during and following the Shoah (Holocaust) in Poland.

Objectives

1. As TMF, we will serve Jews and join with them in the mitzvah of caring for and restoring Jewish Cemeteries in Poland.
2. The Matzevah Foundation will partner with Jewish and Christian organizations to carry out its mission.
3. As Christians, TMF makes the loving-kindness (*chesed*) of God known by keeping the two Great Commandments: loving God and neighbor (others).
4. The Matzevah Foundation will serve as a bridge between Followers of Christ and Jews allowing them to serve together in the mitzvah “of caring for the dead” in Poland.
5. The Matzevah Foundation will seek financial contributions for specific Jewish Cemetery Restoration Projects in Poland as well as for the general work and operations of TMF itself.
6. The Matzevah Foundation will recruit Jewish and Christian volunteers for Jewish Cemetery Restoration Projects in Poland as a means to care for and restore Jewish cemeteries according to the wishes of the Jewish community of Poland.
7. The Matzevah Foundation will function as a servant and a mediator, who facilitates this mitzvah between Jews and Gentiles.

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Code of Ethics for The Matzevah Foundation

1. Loyalty and Commitment

Officers and Agents of TMF will support the mission of the organization by promoting the activities of TMF and by participating in Jewish cemetery restoration projects, at least once every two years. Secondly, Officers and Agents of TMF will avoid conflict of interest in personal and business matters and will not seek to benefit financially in any way at the expense of the organization. Most importantly, Officers and Agents of TMF are public servants entrusted with the leadership of the organization; as such, they will not act selfishly to advance their own interests but will act selflessly for the good of the Jewish community, whom they serve, advancing what is best for all and in so doing placing the needs of the Jewish community, as well as those of others, above their own interests.

2. Stewardship

Officers and Agents of TMF will be good stewards of the resources entrusted to them, respecting the wishes of those who financially support the operation of the organization or those who contribute funds to TMF Jewish cemetery restoration projects, ensuring that funds and resources are used as designated. Secondly, Officers and Agents of TMF will not abuse organizational resources or seek personal gain from contributions, nor will they misappropriate funds and will ensure that they act in such a way to protect the property and resources entrusted to them.

3. Integrity

Officers and Agents of The Matzevah Foundation will be people of their word. Therefore, Officers and Agents of TMF will honor any commitment that they make, ensuring that they follow through on any promises or agreements made; they will faithfully execute their duties and obligations established in any cooperative effort or partnership, whether these actions are legally compelled or not. Examples of these agreements follow later in this document.

4. Honesty and Transparency

The Matzevah Foundation will be honest and transparent in all of its actions as it carries out its mission to educate the public about the Holocaust, or the Shoah, as well as to facilitate Jewish cemetery restoration projects in Poland. Officers and Agents of TMF will disclose all costs, fees, and expenses associated with operating the organization or associated with any Jewish cemetery restoration project in Poland. Officers and Agents of TMF will refrain from all deceptive acts and lying and will instead be honest and open in TMF's dealing with authorities or stakeholders (donors or recipients) regarding its mission and operation. Additionally, Officers and Agents of TMF will keep accurate financial records and disclose financial information as required ensuring privacy and confidentiality when possible.

5. Dignity in Outside Relationships

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As a public charity established by a group of Christians to serve the global Jewish community, The Matzevah Foundation must be mindful of the Holocaust, or the Shoah, and its impact on Jews and particularly on Jews of Polish descent. Therefore, the Officers and Agents of TMF will not, nor will they seek to, proselytize Jews. Instead, as Christians, we seek to open a dialogue with the Jewish community towards reconciliation. We honor the Jews as the root of everything that we know about God, and for this reason, the motivation for our work is that of loving-kindness and love for neighbor.

6. Justice

The Matzevah Foundation and its Officers and Agents will act justly, being fair and non-discriminatory in its dealings with people and organizations.

7. Responsible Citizenship

As a tax-exempt non-profit organization, The Matzevah Foundation will not make contributions to any political party or to any candidate for political office, nor will it be involved in government or politics. Officers and Agents of TMF will instead strive to be good citizens of their communities and will respect local laws no matter where they are in this world. TMF wishes to advance the common good of the community through education about the Holocaust and through Jewish cemetery restoration projects.

8. Cooperation and Openness in Dialogue

Officers and Agents of The Matzevah Foundation will work to keep an open dialogue with the public about its work and will engage in dialogue any party who has a concern about the purpose or operation of TMF. Additionally, TMF and its Officers and Agents will work cooperatively with government officials in carrying out its Jewish cemetery projects in Poland.

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Polish Jewish Cemetery Restoration Projects

Zambrów Jewish Cemetery Restoration Project (August 2011 to Present)

The Matzevah Foundation is partnering with the Foundation for the Preservation of Jewish Heritage in Poland (FODZ) and with the Rabbinical Council for Matters of Jewish Cemeteries in Poland to care for and restore the Jewish cemetery in Zambrów, Poland. Over a two-year period, volunteers from Poland and the US have cleaned and cleared the cemetery of debris, shrubs and small trees, as well as, inventoried the genealogical data preserving it for descendants. The Matzevah Foundation placed a memorial matzevah in 2012 and plans to build a wall in order to restore and preserve sanctity.

Oświęcim Jewish Cemetery Restoration Project (September 2011 to Present)

TMF is partnering with the Auschwitz Jewish Center (AJC) to restore the Jewish cemetery in Oświęcim, Poland. Oświęcim is the location of the infamous Nazi death camp, Auschwitz. The AJC is affiliated with the Museum of Jewish Heritage in New York City. In the summer of 2013, volunteers from the US, Poland, Germany and Israel cleared and cleaned the cemetery removing small shrubs and small trees along with painting ohels. In August 2014, volunteers cleared the cemetery, gathered matzevah fragments and repaired cracks in the exterior wall. In 2015, we will clear the cemetery and build a memorial wall with matzevah fragments.

Blonie Jewish Cemetery: Gates to Another World (June 2014 to Present)

Alek Schwarz has invited TMF to care for the small Jewish cemetery in Błonie northeast of Warsaw. Short-term goals are twofold: mow and clear grass along with constructing and hanging two gates on surviving pillars of the cemetery. Tentatively plans call for mowing the overgrown grass along with building and hanging memorial gates. These gates will symbolize the dialogue and steps taken toward reconciliation between TMF and the Jewish community of Poland.

Krzepice Jewish Cemetery Restoration Project (July 2013 to Present)

The Matzevah Foundation is partnering with the Jewish community of Katowice, Poland, Rabbi Yehoshua Ellis and the Brama Cukerman Foundation to restore the Jewish cemetery in Krzepice, Poland. The team is planning this summer (2014) for volunteers from the US and Poland (local high school students) to clear and clean the cemetery of debris, small shrubs and trees. The priority is to clear a line of sight around the perimeter in order for surveyors to establish property lines for the building of a wall.