

Rather, you shall surely bury him on that day. (21:23)

The prohibition against keeping a body unburied overnight applies even to one who has died of natural causes. The *Talmud Yerushalmi Moed Kattan* (2:4) states that one is not permitted to disinter the bones of a corpse unless it is for the purpose of reinterring them in a family plot. This prohibition is applicable, even if it means moving the bones to a cemetery that is more dignified than the original place where the body had been buried. Also, a person/*neshamah* would rather be buried in close proximity to family (*Meshech Chochmah*). The *Meshech Chochmah* seems to say that same-day burial is requisite even if one is only moving bones, since he cites the above *pasuk* (concerning same-day burial) in connection with the *Yerushalmi. Tikbirenu bayom ha'hu*, "Bury him on that day" has been a mandate of *Chevra Kaddisha*, Jewish Burial Society, from earliest times. One who is involved in dealing with *meisim*, the dead, is cognizant of -- and sensitive to -- this demand. The earthly container must be returned to its earthly source soon after the *neshamah* takes leave of it. The following story cited by *Horav Yitzchak Zilberstein, Shlita*, was related to him by *Rav David Shmidel*, the director of *Asra Kaddisha*, an organization in *Eretz Yisrael* committed to preserving ancient gravesites.

The gentiles destroyed the Jewish cemetery in the city of Grodno, Russia. All of the bones remaining from the decomposed bodies were collected in a container. Apparently, they were not prepared to bury the remains of the Jews. *Rav Shmidel* did not wait; he immediately phoned Russia, and, after being pushed from one bureaucrat to another, was finally able to obtain a release of the bones to have them removed for burial in the Jewish cemetery. He asked one of his trusted aides to fly to Russia immediately, retrieve the bones, and, on that very same day, have them buried in the Jewish cemetery, in order to fulfill the *mitzvah* of *ki kevor tikbirenu ba'yom ha'hu*.

Rav Shmidel's agent flew to Russia, and, upon landing, hired a car and driver to take him to the executive in charge of cemeteries. As is common in Russia, no one was "available"; the earliest time the executive was to be expected was in two weeks! The agent was no fool: "I will wait right here for two weeks. I brought enough food to sustain me for two weeks." The Russians realized that this man was no pushover. They immediately made some "calls," and the director appeared! The agent asked the gentile driver to help bury the bones. "I will pay you double if you will help," the man pleaded. "Have you lost your mind? Do you realize how large of a hole we will have to dig in order to bury all of these bones? And you expect to finish by sunset? Impossible! Perhaps if you had fifty men, it might be feasible. Otherwise, you are dreaming!"

The agent from *Eretz Yisrael* looked at the truckload of bones and realized that, indeed, it would take fifty men working all day to complete the burial before *shkiah*, sunset. The agent was a deeply religious man. He looked up at the sky and cried out, "Hashem, I have done all that I can do. I resolutely did everything within my power to see to it that these bones should be gathered and made available for immediate burial in *kever Yisrael*, Jewish grave. I am only a human being, however, one person. It is impossible for me alone to do the work of fifty able-bodied men.

Therefore, Hashem, I say that I have done mine. It is now, Hashem, for You to do the rest.”

No sooner had he finished his short, sincere prayer than a Jew approached him looking for a certain Jewish grave. *Rav Shmindel's* agent asked, “Who are you and from where are you?” “My name is Chaim K., and I am with a group of *Chassidim* who have come to pray at a certain grave.” “How many are you?” asked the agent. “I have fifty *bachurim*, young *yeshivah* students, on the bus.” When the agent heard this, he knew that Hashem had answered his prayers. He walked over to the bus, alighted the stairs, and said to the *bachurim*, “My friends, let me tell you a story.”

When the *bachurim* heard the story, they immediately removed their jackets, rolled up their sleeves, and began to dig. By sundown that night, they had succeeded in burying all of the bones that had been waiting to reach *kever Yisrael*. The agent returned to *Eretz Yisrael* filled with emotion and awe. His sincere devotion to a *mitzvah*, together with his emotional plea to Hashem from the inner recesses of his heart, brought about the fulfillment of the *mitzvah* of *kevor tikbienu ba'yom ha'hu*. His joy, however, was still incomplete, as he walked through the door of his apartment and noticed his oldest daughter, who, at the age of thirty-one, was past her prime for marriage: “*Ribbono shel Olam*, You were so good to me when I needed to have the bones of those Jews buried that day. Yet, my joy is incomplete as long as I see my daughter's sad face. She (we) has (have) gone through so much. Please put an end to our waiting and allow her to find her designated match.” Two months later, his joy was complete when his daughter became engaged.

Was it a miracle, or, as a Torah scholar observed: “When one performs *chesed* with the dead, Hashem rewards him with the merit to establish a *bayis*, house, family”?