



International Committee
FOR THE PRESERVATION OF
HAR HAZEITIM
הוועד הבינלאומי להגנת הר הזיתים

International Committee For The Preservation of Har Hazeisim

UPDATE

Spring 2017

The International Historic Cemetery of the Jewish People



MENACHEM LUBINSKY, MEETING CHIEF INSPECTOR CHAIM SHMUELI AND OTHER POLICE OFFICIALS ON SECURITY ISSUES ON HAR HAZEISIM.

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ICPHH Leadership Meets Key Knesset Members: Urges Continued Vigilance on Security

A delegation of the ICPHH leadership from the US and Israel conducted a series of meetings with key Knesset members during a whirlwind visit at the end of February and early March. Amongst the Knesset members the delegation met with were MK's Bezalel Smotrich (Bayit Yehudi), Sharren Haskel (Likud), Yoav ben Tzur (head of Shas), and Moshe Gafni and Uri Maklev (UTJ). The ICPHH delegation included Menachem Lubinsky, co-chairs of the ICPHH, Harvey Schwartz and Jeff Daube, co-chair of the Israel chapter of the ICPHH.



MK BEZALEL SMOTRICH (BAYIT YEHUDI) WITH MENACHEM LUBINSKY.

Amongst the issues raised at the meetings were maintaining the funding level for security on Har Hazeisim, the restoration of 23,000 graves, the devastating condition of some areas of the cemetery, and the ongoing development in the perimeter of the hallowed mountain. Earlier in February, Mr. Lubinsky met in New York with MK Yoel Hasson (Zionist Union) who pledged to work for multi-partisan support in the Knesset to ensure the security of Har Hazeisim.



Thousands Return to Har Hazeisim as Security is Improved

A steady flow of chasidim came to Har Hazeisim last month to mark the 40th yahrzeit of the saintly Beis Yisrael (Rabbi Yisrael Alter) of Gur. This was the first time in many years that chasidim were permitted to visit the gravesite of the Gerer Rebbe. The yahrzeit was part of the renewed sense of security by people from all over the world. One family who had not been to the gravesite of their grandparents in nearly 20 years was amongst the people now regularly visiting the cemetery. According to security officials,

attendance has increased nearly ten-fold. There is unprecedented activity on Har Hazeisim. Rabbi Hillel Horowitz of the Council of Cemeteries has organized many events and tours of

Har Hazeisim. The ICPHH representative on Har Hazeisim, Joshua Wander, has also reported a sharp increase in the number of visitors requesting tours of the historic mountain.



Visitors have commented on the noticeable security improvements, including the fence, surveillance cameras, police station, and border police platoon. The Municipality of Jerusalem continues to make progress to further improve the infrastructure of the

cemetery as well as access to Har Hazeisim. Plans include the extension of the light rail, a new cable car, a promenade in the vicinity of Har Hazeisim, and improved parking. Mayor Nir Barkat has been at the forefront of these development plans.

Fence Near Completion; Police See Major Improvement in Security

The much-anticipated fence around the Eastern sector of Har Hazeisim is nearing completion. The iron fence that is mounted on the low concrete wall now surrounds such chelkas as Gur, Afghanistan, Polin, Taiman and Agudas Achim, areas that were in years



past the target of vandalism and rock attacks against visitors and mourners. The fence is particularly noticeable on the outer perimeter of the cemetery facing the road below (Derech Bet Lechem) and the Arab neighborhoods across the way.

In a tour of the areas covered by the new fence, Chief Inspector Chaim Shmueli and other police officials briefed ICPHH officials on the enhanced security, a direct result



of the construction of the fence. He noted that several cameras in the area have been upgraded and emphasized that he believes "the cameras have been a huge deterrent and are contributing to the improved security situation on Har Hazeisim."

The fence was built with a NIS 2.5 million grant from the

national government and the municipality of Jerusalem. The concept of building a fence was first raised by the ICPHH in 2012 and gained steady support in the ensuing years. In addition to the support of many in the Knesset, Moshe Gafni (UTJ), chairman of the Knesset Finance Committee, and Jerusalem's First Deputy Mayor Yosef Deutsch played a major role in securing the financing of the new fence.

ICPHH: "Border Police Must Stay Under Improved Conditions"

Talk of a possible withdrawal of a Border Police unit stationed on Har Hazeisim is being sharply rebuked by the leadership of the ICPHH. The unit is widely credited with the improvement of security on Har Hazeisim. The talk of a possible withdrawal comes as the long-awaited security fence nears completion. "The physical presence of this unit is the biggest deterrence against the resumption of violence," said Abe Lubinsky, Chairman of the ICPHH. "It would be a tragic mistake if this unit were to fold its tent in such a crucial



area of the cemetery.”

The Magavnikim, as the Border Policemen are known in Israel, are stationed adjacent to the Afghan chelka and within earshot of the neighboring Silwan. Mr. Lubinsky has been a strong advocate for improving conditions for the Magavnikim. They are currently shielded by a new tent that provides shade from the hot sun and the cold nights of the mountainous terrain. The ICPHH is advocating that a permanent building and watchtower be built for them.



ABE LUBINSKY, CHAIRMAN OF THE ICPHH, WITH BORDER PATROL

The Border Police unit is in addition to coverage by the Israeli Police who operate out of the police station atop of Har Hazeisim. Mr. Lubinsky pointed out that while the police presence is

erratic, the Border Police are a permanent presence.

ICPHH Urges Shuls to Help Restore 23,000 Graves on Har Hazeisim

“Every shul should adopt a few of the 23,000 graves that have still not been restored since they were destroyed during the Jordanian occupation (1948-1967),” said Abe Lubinsky, chairman of the ICPHH. In an emotional appeal, he wondered “how can we be complacent when Jewish remains are strewn about without a headstone?” Why are we looking for graves to restore in Europe when this shameful negligence is in front of us in Jerusalem?”

The ICPHH has decided to make this a priority in the coming months, working with such well-





known chevra kadishas as Agudas Achim Anshei America, where there are graves of American rabbis and others that need to be restored. Although each area has different requirements, including access, Lubinsky estimated the cost of a restoration to be \$1800, but he noted that any contribution would help with this program.

Perpetrators of Vandalized Jewish Gravesites in Philadelphia and Missouri Share Same Motive as Perpetrators on Har Hazeisim in Yerushalayim, ICPHH Leader Charges

"Those who vandalized and destroyed hundreds of Jewish headstones at the Mount Carmel Cemetery in Philadelphia and at the Jewish cemetery in suburban St. Louis had the same motive as those who demolished 45,000 Jewish graves on Har Hazeisim in Yerushalayim," said Menachem Lubinsky, co-chairman of the International Committee for the Preservation of Har Hazeisim (ICPHH). Standing in front of thousands of destroyed graves on Har Hazeisim, the same week that some of the US vandalism occurred, Mr. Lubinsky said: "The hoodlums and vandals know very well that amongst the fundamental values of the Jewish people is the sanctity of life and respect for the dead." He added: "They know that when they destroy and topple graves they are plunging a dagger in the heart of every Jew."

Lubinsky noted that as many as 23,000 graves remain to be restored on the 3000-year-old Har Hazeisim. In recent years, the security on Har Hazeisim has greatly improved thanks to the ICPHH. This was accomplished through the installation of a network of surveillance cameras, a police station, a garrison of Border Police, and most recently the construction of a new wall/fence on the Eastern section of the cemetery.



Despite signing an Armistice Agreement to allow Jews access to Har Hazeisim, the Jordanians not only banned Jewish burials and access but proceeded to build roads, housing, hotels and even latrines from tombstones they destroyed (1948-1967). "We know that if we do not protect our past, our future is also in doubt," the ICPHH leader said. "It is unfathomable that these gravesites remain in such a state and after 50 years these holy neshamos still do not have headstones." Mr. Lubinsky said ominously that perhaps "Missouri and Philadelphia were a reminder of our sacred obligation to honor our dead."

Celebrations of Jerusalem 50 to Include Har Hazeisim

More than 1,000 people are scheduled to take part in a program sponsored by the World Mizrahi Movement marking the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Jerusalem. According to Harvey Schwartz, the co-chairman of ICPHH Israel, the closing ceremony will take place on Har Hazeisim. He also said that the ICPHH would be represented at events at the Binyanei Hauma Convention Center.

An ICPHH delegation met with Miri Regev, the Minister for Sport and Culture, who said that the ICPHH would be included in official government celebrations of the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the cemetery by the IDF in 1967. It was then that it was discovered that the Jordanians had destroyed



as many as 45,000 graves in what is considered the largest destruction of Jewish graves ever recorded in history. While the Israeli government restored 20,000 graves and the Chevra Kadishas another 5,000, approximately 23,000 remain to be restored, a major



focus of the ICPHH.

Last Chol Hamoed Pesach, the ICPHH together with the Ministry, sponsored a large concert on Har Hazeisim. One of the featured speakers was Rabbi Pesach Lerner, a member of the ICPHH Executive Committee. Due to logistical reasons, the event this year will not take place on Pesach and will be rescheduled at a later date.

Some Improvements at Kever of Bartenura but Far from Sufficient

For the first time in years, a small municipal van has been cleaning some of the garbage from the top of the tomb of the saintly 15th Century tzaddik Rav Ovadia of Bartenura.



ICPHH officials on recent visits to the kever found it to be drenched in urine, under mountains of garbage. Rav Ovadiah ben Abraham of Bartenura (1445 -1515) came to Jerusalem from Italy and is best known for his popular commentary on the Mishnah, commonly known as "The Bartenura". In his later years, he revived the Jewish community of Jerusalem and became recognized as the spiritual leader of the Jews of his generation. In addition to being a great tzaddik and gaon, the Bartenura built the first yeshiva in 1000 years and many institutions for the elderly and poor, including a hospital. He also persuaded the Muslim authorities to eliminate a tax on the Jews.

A VEHICLE OF THE MUNICIPALITY OF JERUSALEM BEGINS CLEANING UP THE AREA NEAR THE GRAVE SITE OF THE SAINTLY BARTENURA

In a meeting with MK Rabbi Yoav ben Zur, head of the Shas party, the ICPHH raised their concerns for the urgent need to protect the hallowed gravesite of the saint. Thousands of Jews visit the kever every year despite the deplorable conditions.

New Bus Stop for Har Hazeisim

The Egged Bus Company has restored bus service to Har Hazeisim and to the nearby Maale Hazeitim community. A new bus stop was recently installed opposite the Visitor's Booth operated by Elad (Ir David). Two bus lines will stop at Har Hazeisim, the 83 and 51. The ICPHH has long advocated for the resumption of the transportation as it would restore visitor confidence in the beefed-up security.

"We believe that the improvement in public transportation will greatly increase the number of visits to the holy cemetery," said Abe Lubinsky of the ICPHH. "We know that City Hall is working on plans to further improve accessibility to Har Hazeisim and we are enormously grateful to the Mayor and the City Council."



ICPHH Meets YATAR Auxiliary Police as Possible Additions to Har Hazeisim Security

In February the ICPHH leadership met with the heads of YATAR, a division of the Israel Police Force, established to work hand-in-hand with the various Special Commando Forces to combat terrorism.

YATAR's volunteers come from all walks of life and are specially trained by the Israel Police Force. Additionally, YATAR counts amongst its ranks a number of individuals who were trained and served in elite units of the police force and army.

In the discussions, the ICPHH raised the possibility of having YATAR patrol the Har Hazeisim area, particularly during the night when the police force is depleted. The YATAR representatives showed great enthusiasm about the possibility of playing a role in securing the 3000-year old cemetery. YATAR and the ICPHH will continue discussions to bolster the security force on Har Hazeisim.



MENACHEM LUBINSKY AND JEFF DAUBE MEET WITH A REPRESENTATIVE OF THE YATAR AUXILIARY POLICE

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