
CREMATION VS BURIAL

Things to consider when
making this major decision.

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Why have Jews always insisted on burial rather than cremation?

- A** Monotheistic religions have always buried the dead. In the Tanach we see many examples of our forefathers and mothers being buried. Cremation was the way of pagan societies in ancient times. Abraham came along to oppose that way of life.
- B** The word for human is Adam. It comes from the word Adama - meaning earth. The human is made of matter and spirit. Once the soul leaves, the body must return to the earth. (Dust to dust, ashes to ashes is NOT a Jewish phrase. It was first used in the year 1662 in the Christian book of common prayer).
- C** The way of nature is decomposition. Animals dying in the forests and deserts decompose and return to the earth. It is a gradual process in flow with the cycle of nature. Cremation is incredibly violent and unnatural. During the intense two hour process, body fluids bubble and sizzle, muscles expand and contract, eyes, brain and inner organs bulge and explode.
- D** The soul leaves the body gradually so cremation causes immense pain and anguish to the soul.
- E** The body isn't yours. Hashem lent it to you for a certain amount of time to contain your soul in this world. Cremation is destroying Hashem's property.

- F** The body is going to be resurrected from the luz bone which survives decomposition. Modern Cremation destroys this bone, meaning there will be resurrection issues.
- G** Jews for 4000 years always buried dead bodies. The idea of cremating Jews throughout the ages was an anti-semitic policy intended as a form of punishment, insult, embarrassment and ridicule. Most recently we see that Nazis used this method to dispose of millions of Jews. As a proud cultural Jew with a strong Jewish identity it is absurd to choose to do to yourself what your ancestors feared most and had forced upon them as punishment and humiliation.
- H** After 4000 years of burial, some modern Jews decided that the belief in resurrection of the dead was outdated, so they decided to cremate bodies as a protest against this belief. Firstly, making a statement is rarely a powerful reason for doing drastic things, especially throwing away your ancient ancestral tradition. Secondly, they didn't bear in mind all the other considerations as to why not to cremate.

Other important things to bear in mind with cremation

The 'ashes' certainly are not the person and don't even represent them. Forensic scientists can not tell the difference in DNA between ashes. They could easily be swapped and mixed and no-one would know. In the cremation contract they even say that the likelihood is that the dust will be mixed with previous remains.

What do you do with the ashes? If you scatter the 'ashes' they are absorbed and lost, meaning no permanent resting place. If you keep them in the urn - after a generation or two they'll be a creepy thing that ends up stuffed away in someone's attic. Rather have photos and memorabilia to remember your loved one.

After two hours of incineration, what is left is not ashes, it's a pile of burned and dehydrated bones that are removed by a simple worker, possibly with little reverence, who places the remains in a machine which grinds the leftovers up into a dust (a process known as pulverisation).

In the UK, burial costs are covered by yearly fees.

The stench of burning flesh is sickening and if they didn't use extractor fans and perfumes the funeral hall would smell like Auschwitz.

If you regret burial you can always cremate later. Many people regret cremating their loved ones - but there's no turning back.

SPIRITUAL

If Jewish beliefs are true then spiritually speaking, cremation is a terrible, irreversible mistake.

LOGICAL

Even if there's just a small chance that Jewish beliefs are true, it's just not worth taking the risk. Consider this application of Pascal's Wager; If Jewish beliefs are true, burial is spiritually beneficial and cremation is spiritually catastrophic. If Jewish beliefs aren't true, there is no particular benefit or loss either way. Therefore, logically speaking, burial makes much more sense.

Another way to look at it is: If you don't believe in life after death, then what does it matter to you what is done with your body? If you do believe in life after death you admit that you are primarily a spiritual being not a physical one, so what does it matter to you what is done with your body?

CULTURAL

Even if you don't believe in the spiritual aspect, and logic doesn't appeal to you, culturally it is absurd for a proud Jew to choose the custom of the Nazis and other anti-semites throughout the ages, over the ancient tradition of their ancestors.

For more discussion

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If after reading this you decide to be buried rather than cremated, we will organise for Kaddish to be said for you for a whole year and on your yahrzeit.