



MYTHS ABOUT JEWISH BURIAL

1

NO BURIAL WITH TATOOS

While Judaism forbids getting a tattoo, Halacha (Orthodox Jewish law) allows Jews with tattoos to be buried in a Jewish cemetery.

2

NO AUTOPSIES

While there is a religious prohibition about wantonly destroying and desecrating a corpse, Halacha allows for an autopsy if there is a good chance that the information gleaned will save someone's life.

3

MUST BE BURIED WHOLE

Being buried whole (like keeping kosher and observing Shabbat) is an important value in Judaism, but Halacha mandates that all of these commandments must be violated in order to save a life.

4

RESURRECTION OF THE DEAD REQUIRES ORGANS

You don't have your organs for resurrection of the dead. They decay. In addition, no one has ever suggested that Holocaust victims who were cremated will not be resurrected.

5

ORGAN DONATION IS FORBIDDEN

Most Orthodox rabbis support organ donation. The issue is that most organs are taken once the brain has died and some rabbis require the heart to be dead as well. See next Myth.

6

BRAIN DEATH IS NOT DEATH

Some rabbis believe that the irreversible cessation of brain function ('brain death') is the death of the person according to Halacha, regardless of the fact that the heart is still alive and beating. In other words, the organism is dead while some organs are alive. Therefore, they approve of donating organs at this point. Some rabbis don't agree and view a beating heart as a sign of human life.

7

MUST BE BURIED IN GROUND

The Torah states "you came from dust you shall return to dust." Some people understand this to mean that Jews must be buried whole in the ground. Yet this verse has never been understood by any rabbi to be a commandment to be buried whole or even to be buried in the ground. For more than 2,000 years Jewish bodies were left in caves to decay and were not buried in the ground.