Missakim is a relatively new organization that assists people at the time of bereavement. It is now very common in Brooklyn to see chairs, children and other religious objects needed in a shivuos house with the Misaskim name on them. However, Misaskim does much more than this. A friend of mine who is involved with Misaskim told me the following story:

He is a Misaskim volunteer and is on call one night a week. This means that when a person passes away in Maimonides Hospital in Boro Park and it seems likely that this person will not have a Jewish burial, he is called. The goal is to convince the relatives of the deceased to allow the niftar to have a proper Jewish funeral and burial.

Not long ago my friend, Reb A., got a call. He and another Misaskim volunteer went to the hospital. The woman who had passed away was an old Russian woman. The relatives there were also Russians. “They knew nothing about Yiddishkeit,” Reb A. told me. “When we mentioned to them the idea of giving the woman a Jewish burial, they said that they were planning to have her cremated. They would then bring her ashes to Cleveland, where a son lived, for burial.”

Reb A. and the other Misaskim volunteer took aside two of the relatives who seemed to be the spokespersons. Each spoke to one of them about the importance of not cremating the deceased and making sure that she had a proper Jewish funeral and burial. Finally, after half an hour, they were told, “Okay, do what you have to do.”

Immediately, they called a funeral home, and told them to come over right away. They explained what was going on. “You’d better get here as soon as possible. These people might change their minds!”

“The funeral home’s vehicle was there within fifteen minutes.” Reb A. told me. “The body was taken to the funeral home and everything was done according to halacha.”

Reb A. and the other volunteer decided that they should attend the levayah the next day. “Who knows what the relatives would think when they saw a plain box wheeled out instead of an ornate casket,” Reb A. told me. When they got there, there was almost no one present. Reb A. and the other Misaskim volunteer, as well as some of the funeral home workers, were needed to complete a minyan.

Shortly after they got there, the son of the niftar said that he wanted to say a few words. He got up and said, “Mother, you were born a Jew in Stalin’s Russia. You were not able to live as a Jew there. However, today you are going to be buried as a Jew. Everything is being done according to Jewish law.”

Reb A. told me that this was the second time he was involved in such a situation. One can only imagine how many other times Misaskim volunteers have been able to insure that a person has a Jewish burial. This is truly a marvelous chosen organization.

Donations can be sent to Misaskim at 5005 16th Avenue, Brooklyn, NY 11214.

Professor Yitzchok Levine, Dept. of Mathematical Sciences, Stevens Institute of Technology, Hoboken, NJ

Counrttop Conundrum

After reading the letter in the Reader’s Forum on November 26, I was reminded of my own story when I ordered granite countertops for my new kitchen. After choosing the granite, I asked him to send me in matching the cabinets and tiles, and so on. After it was delivered for installation, I saw that it was not what I had ordered.

Luckily, I had my sample, which clearly showed that they had delivered and cut out the wrong countertop. They offered to let me keep the countertop at no charge (since now it had no value to them). Even my husband, who would normally try to convince me to accept such a great offer, could not deny that it was unacceptable, since it did not match and was very unattractive.

Let everyone be forewarned. Take a sample or take clear pictures when ordering expensive granite.

Name Withheld

At the Heavenly Throne

The following letter was written by Rivka, Good Shabbos to you Rivka.

Dear Rivka,

It’s Erev Shabbos and you are already in your Shabbos clothes, my eyes red with crying. I’ll be putting on my Shabbos Kodesh, and puffy.

First, according to halachah, one may not share a plea with the public. Rather, as mentioned in last week’s Readers’ Forum, everyone must consult with his or her own Rav when a situation comes up, since all situations are distinct.

Second, the original shadchan did not indicate that she gave me grandparents. Rivka, dearest, pray for our consolation, for we who don’t know, don’t yet see, don’t yet hear, but the faint echoes. Rivka, can they hear you up there, our screams both loud and silent?

We, the daughters of daughters…

Rivka, Good Shabbos to you and a minyan. A day of unsheled tears before the final psak din.

Kosi Halboese.

Rivka, as you hear the songs of the malachim, Forgive those who did not do quite right by you.

Rivka, as you remain behind you in this winter, that is much colder now.

May our good tidings reach the shore of their travels this year! Amen.

Anonymous

Countertop Conundrum

After reading the letter in the Reader’s Forum on November 26, I was reminded of my own story when I ordered granite countertops for my new kitchen. After choosing the granite, I asked him to send me in matching the cabinets and tiles, and so on. After it was delivered for installation, I saw that it was not what I had ordered. Luckily, I had my sample, which clearly showed that they had delivered and cut out the wrong countertop. They offered to let me keep the countertop at no charge (since now it had no value to them). Even my husband, who would normally try to convince me to accept such a great offer, could not deny that it was unacceptable, since it did not match and was very unattractive.

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