

Temple Ner Tamid Cemetery for Interfaith Families Questions & Answers

Why do we need a cemetery for Temple Ner Tamid interfaith families?

Temple Ner Tamid has a robust and growing interfaith population that has been inquiring about burial options that are tied to TNT. TNT has made strides to address this demand, by pursuing the option of purchasing a group of dedicated gravesites in the East Ridgelawn Cemetery in Clifton that would accommodate interfaith families. In general, Jewish cemeteries are restricted to people of the Jewish faith. Almost all Jewish cemeteries (including Menorah Cemetery where our current holdings are located) adhere to Orthodox practices, and it is rare that a Jewish cemetery will allow the burial of non-Jewish members of a Jewish family. Given our diverse community, the leadership of TNT wanted to provide burial options for all of its members.

Where is the East Ridgelawn Cemetery, and where will our section be located?

East Ridgelawn Cemetery is a non-sectarian cemetery located off of Route 3 in Clifton, NJ across the street from Menorah Cemetery where TNT's section is located. East Ridgelawn owns and manages Menorah Cemetery. While not yet finalized, the cemetery superintendent has shown TNT an area near the cemetery entrance that is relatively isolated from other graves.

Who will be able to be buried in this cemetery?

Eligibility will be identical to the eligibility rules of our portion of Menorah Cemetery, i.e. synagogue members, their children up to the age of 26, siblings and parents.

How many graves will be available?

We have initially purchased a group of sixteen graves, but we will have an option to purchase another sixteen if demand warrants. Quantity will be dependent on the interest and commitment of our members.

How much will the graves cost?

The cost for the first 16 graves purchased is \$2,250 with the ability to pay over a three year period (i.e. \$750 per year). The price is lowered to \$2,100 if paid in full at the time of purchase. (Please note that individual gravesites purchased at East Ridgelawn and at Menorah, as well as at most Jewish cemeteries in the area, range from \$3,000 to \$4,000 per grave so this fee is quite competitive.)

What if a grave is purchased, and the congregant moves away or resigns from TNT?

The policy is that the purchaser will retain the rights to the grave(s) purchased, regardless of their location or affiliation with TNT. If they no longer wish to retain the grave(s), they can be transferred to other members of the TNT community (who would also have the rights to graves). Sale to outsiders would be permitted with the approval of the Cemetery Committee and would incur a fee of \$400. Alternatively, if one donates the grave rights to TNT, TNT will issue a letter designating that as a charitable donation.

What burial policies will we be following?

Temple Ner Tamid will consider the interfaith cemetery as a Jewish cemetery. As such, TNT will follow those practices outlined by the Reform Movement in the United States. A description of those practices can be found at:

https://18doors.org/jewish_burial_and_mourning_practice_for_non-jewish_relatives/

A summary of those policies and practices that are envisioned is shown below:

- In the same way that TNT is flexible at Menorah about certain departures from traditional Orthodox practice, TNT will be flexible here. This includes use of flowers, cremation, burial of suicide victims, etc.
- A person can be buried who has a Christian or other faith-focused funeral that takes place offsite from the cemetery, including a wake. The only limitation is that no specific religious rites of other faiths can be performed at the cemetery while a burial is taking place.
- People can opt to not have any Jewish rites at the cemetery, provided the burial remains secular in nature. Clergy of any faith may participate.
- Gravestones (low granite or bronze on granite headstones) must be either Jewish or secular in focus, and cannot have iconography of other faiths visible (ex. crosses).
- If the non-Jewish family member desires a Jewish funeral and burial, the TNT clergy will do everything possible to accommodate. This means doing full Jewish rituals and prayers regardless of conversion status.

In conclusion, TNT believes this subject is summarized nicely from this quote taken from the above-mentioned website:

“In Jewish tradition, burial of the dead is sometimes referred to as Hesed shel emet, which is a Hebrew expression that roughly translates to “an act of true loving-kindness.” This term expresses the idea that what we do for the dead is the most sincere and selfless act of caring we can perform, since the dead cannot repay us. Burying relatives who were not Jewish in our midst and expressing our grief through Jewish mourning practice is no less an effort of true loving-kindness. The act of Hesed shel emet stands as a memorial to relationships in life which bespoke love, devotion and caring. Further, our openness promotes peace among the living. If we want our beloved deceased to rest in peace, we, their survivors, must find wholeness and completeness in their death through sharing our tradition.”

What to do if interested in moving forward with purchasing graves?

Contact Lanny Katz, Temple Ner Tamid’s Cemetery Committee Chair (contact information below) who can collect details like the number of desired graves, outline details of an installment payment plan, and answer any additional questions.

Any further questions, please contact TNT’s Cemetery Committee Chair, Lanny Katz at 973-479-0208 or lannykatz2@gmail.com