

D'var Torah presented by President Jonathan Epstein at the January 9, 2026
Service Honoring the KI Cemetery Association

Shabbat shalom.

I'm standing before you as the president of our KI Cemetery Association and certainly wouldn't be here without the three decades of service from our past president, Ken Kirshner. While I've only been on the cemetery Association board for a fraction of that time, I've always respected the quiet work of our Association.

There is a concept in Jewish tradition that captures the essence of the work that our Association board does *chesed shel emet* — true lovingkindness. It refers to acts of care done for those who can never repay us. Our sages teach that this is the purest form of *chesed*, precisely because it carries no expectation of thanks or recognition.

For example, when we install fresh flags beside the headstones of veterans for Memorial Day, shovel dirt on a casket, or maintain our cemetery grounds, create guidelines for headstones or keep up with our tax filing – these are acts that can never be reciprocated.

Caring for a cemetery is *chesed shel emet* in its clearest form.

The people we serve likely never know our names, nor will they thank us for our efforts – not that that's the reason why we do what we do. Jewish tradition tells us that this work is not only important — it is *sacred*.

Judaism has always understood that not all meaningful work is visible. In a world that often rewards attention and recognition, likes, hits, views and notifications, please let tonight remind you that some of the holiest responsibilities are carried out quietly, simply because they must be done.

A cemetery is where memory meets responsibility. It is where permanence confronts time. By maintaining sacred ground, we affirm that dignity does not end with life, and that remembrance is not passive—it requires constant care, structure, and foresight. For that reason, I am extremely grateful for the work that our Association has done over the years – and will continue to do into the future.

We speak often of *kavod ha-met*, honoring the dead. But that honor is active. It requires planning for generations we will never meet. In that sense, cemetery

stewardship is not about the past alone — it is about continuity. And that only comes with work and planning.

Perhaps you didn't know that our Association is nearly 100 years old, and that among our permanent residents include a veteran of the Spanish American War back in the late 1890s.

Reform Judaism places great emphasis on ethical action and communal responsibility. It teaches that holiness is not limited to prayer or ritual, but expressed through how we govern, how we plan, and how we care for our institutions. From that perspective, board service—often administrative and rarely glamorous—is itself a form of Jewish practice.

Budgets, maintenance decisions, and long-term planning may not feel spiritual in the moment. But when undertaken with intention, they become *avodah* — sacred work. They ensure that this community remains rooted and responsible long after any one of us is gone.

Tonight, as we honor the work of the board, we are not celebrating recognition. We are affirming enduring Jewish values: responsibility, continuity, and love expressed through action rather than words.

Thank you again to our Association board members who make the work we do feel special and sacred. I value your time and expertise and treasure your willingness to devote your services to us and to those who cannot express their gratitude.

May we continue this work with care and steadiness, and I hope that you will join us on that journey. And may it always reflect the quiet holiness of *chesed shel emet*.

Shabbat shalom.