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By the Grace of G-d
3rd of Shevat, 5719
Brooklyn, N. Y.

Mr. Herschel Auerbach
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Greeting and Blessing:

I received your letter of January 2nd, in which you ask my opinion on several points concerning conditions on a cemetery, such as the kind of memorials, flowers on the grave, etc. You ask if these points are in violation of Jewish law.

Generally speaking, the points you describe in your letter do not violate Jewish law in the strict sense of the word. However, it is possible that you did not mention all the facts and particulars which might affect the law on these points. I suggest that before you make any final decision, you consult with a local Orthodox Rabbi, who perhaps knows the property in question, or can ascertain all the necessary and pertinent details.

What I meant by saying that the points enumerated in your letter do not, general speaking, violate the letter of the Jewish law, is that it is necessary in ~~such~~ cases to consider also the spirit of the law, which is no less important in this case, and perhaps even more important. This is to say that the general view of our Jewish religion in regard to monuments for the dead is that the true and essential monument is to give to their souls true spiritual gratification by extra deeds connected with our Torah and Mitzvoth. For, inasmuch as we all believe in the eternity of the soul, and its passing from this world which is called "the world of illusion," to a higher world which is called "the world of truth," every good deed, in accordance with the Torah and Mitzvoth, which is done in connection with their memory and with the intention of affording them spiritual pleasure, is the best way through which those who are left behind can commemorate the souls of their near and dear ones.

In view of the above, it is clear that although it is a good thing to have a tombstone or similar monument on a grave, and also to keep the grave in good condition, etc., one must bear in mind that, ~~these~~ ^{as a commemoration} these are, after all, superficial symbols, the real significance of which comes to fruition only through profound and inner expressions of attachment, as mentioned above. In other words, physical monuments can only be secondary to spiritual monuments. Therefore, if there was a question of choice as to spending the money on physical monu-

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ments of bronze or stone, or applying these extra funds towards sacred causes of Torah and Mitzvoh, and the like, there can be no question as to where the priority belongs. Hence, even if beautifying the grave with flowers, and the like, is not necessarily a violation of the strict letter of the Jewish law, it would be in conflict with the deeper Jewish outlook of the soul, which prefers spiritual deeds rather than flowers.

By way of contrast, it is well to mention here what the non-Jewish outlook is, as expressed in the gigantic pyramids and similar monuments of the ancient Egyptian and other non-Jewish kings. Although these monuments have survived for thousands of year, they can only bring to us a message of inhumanity, in that hundreds of thousands of lives and inestimable material were spent on what is really useless. Compare it with the way the passing of the great King Hezekiah has been commemorated, as our Sages relate, when a Yeshiva was founded in his memory. It is surely unnecessary to elaborate further.

Needless to say, you do not impose on me when asking me such questions

I hope to hear good news from you, especially about your fruitful activities in all matters of Torah and Mitzvoh, which I hope will grow and expand, as growth is the sign of life.

With blessing

m. Schneerson