

# Religious Services Ministry makes burial fees transparent

• By JEREMY SHARON

The Religious Services Ministry has issued new regulations requiring burial societies to make publicly available the price of burial in non-standard cemetery plots, a move designed to increase transparency in what has long been a murky field.

Burial in Israel for Israeli citizens is free, but due to the shortage of available land in the country, most free burial is in multi-story burial complexes of one sort or another, and 90% of cemeteries are reserved for this form of burial.

The other 10% is given over to so-called non-standard burial, usually burial in the ground, what is called field burial, in choice plots in the cemetery, where the burial society can charge whatever they wish, often amounting to many thousands of shekels.

Burial societies use the revenue from these choice plots in order to fund their construction of the multi-story burial complexes where the

majority of people are now interred.

The burial societies were not, however, required to state specifically the price of such plots, leading to confusion and frustration by family members when seeking such burial, and frequent concerns and complaints that they were being taken advantage of by the burial society.

The latest issue of the director's regulations issued by the Religious Services Ministry last month and just now made public requires all burial societies to have a website and publish the prices of their non-standard burial plots.

In addition, the new director's regulations also publish the price of burial plots that are purchased not at the time of the death of a loved one, but by an individual for themselves and for their loved ones while they are still alive.

Such purchases are usually for field burial or what is known as "double burial," using one plot where one individual is buried atop the other separated by a shallow layer of earth.

These are not provided for free, since

the state is trying to encourage the use of multi-story burial complexes to prevent larger tracts of land being given over to cemeteries. These prices are set by the ministry and have now been published in the director's regulations for major towns and cities across the country.

In June 2018, the religious services advisory organization ITIM helped draft legislation, submitted to the Knesset by then-MK Aliza Lavi, to require the burial societies to publish their prices.

The bill was not advanced, but the new regulations requiring them to publish their prices has now redressed the issue.

"We are pleased that the Religious Services Ministry has made this improvement, which will financially benefit the average citizen and remove a burden at an emotionally-charged time in life," said ITIM director Rabbi Seth Farber. "We commend the ministry for this important step forward in government transparency. For far too long people were afraid they were getting taken advantage of."