

Gamliel Institute of Kavod v’Nichum

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# Chevra Kadisha: International Perspectives

**Overview**: Course 6: Chevra Kadisha: International Perspectives is the Gamliel Institute’s capstone course for students who have successfully completed the first five Gamliel Institute courses. The core component of Course 6 is the international study mission which provides a hands-on opportunity for students to examine important, influential cultural and historical aspects of the Chevra Kadisha movement in North America, Europe and Israel. Students will have an opportunity to be part of joint learning and teaching in order to expand Chevra Kadisha practices. Students who experience this mission and master the course work will be positioned to evaluate any community’s unique challenges and work with those communities and their chevra kaddisha groups to find solutions that are the best for them.

**Background:** The [Gamliel Institute](http://www.jewish-funerals.org/gamliel-institute) is a center for intensive, in-depth study, training, and advocacy concerning Jewish end‐of‐life practices. The Institute is a project of [Kavod V'Nichum](http://www.jewish-funerals.org), a North American non-profit organization which provides assistance, training, and resources about Jewish death and bereavement practice for Chevra Kadisha groups and bereavement committees in synagogues and communities throughout the U.S. and Canada.

In Spring 2015, the Gamliel Institute will offer its capstone Course 6: Chevra Kadisha: International Perspectives. In this course, students will explore the resources, history, politics, culture and practice along the continuum of care, from serious illness through death and mourning, in New York City, Prague, and Israel, with exposure to a variety of customs and traditions. This unique course combines in-person lectures and text study with hands on in‐depth Tahara training, museum and archeological tours, and extensive networking.

To be eligible to take Course 6, students must have successfully completed Gamliel Institute Chevra Kadisha core courses 1 through 5 (Origins and Evolution; Tahara and Shmira; Education, Organizing, and Training; Nechama; and Ritual Practice). These first five courses are taught using distance learning to keep costs low and accommodate students from all across the U.S. and Canada. All classes are recorded for review and future use. Students are grouped into Chevruta (pairs) for off-line study. Students post journal entries to a class forum and teachers consult with students between classes. Gamliel students meet face to face and learn together at the annual Chevra Kadisha conference in a concentrated 12 hour block.

Of the 85 students who have taken at least one Gamliel Institute course, 25 will be eligible for Course 6, with expected participation by 20 in 2015. Course 6 will be offered again in 2017. The entire cost of Course 6 is $170,000 including air and ground transportation, hotel and food, instructors and guides. Students have been challenged to raise $5,000 each, $100,000 total, either through a tuition payment or by raising funds. This includes $1,700 for air fares, $2,500 for accommodations, and $800 for meals. In addition to assisting the students with their fundraising efforts, the Gamliel Institute will raise an additional $70,000 to cover planning, local coordinators, honoraria for eminent scholars to provide lectures and demonstrations, and facilitators’ fees.

All contributions are tax deductible and should be made out to the Gamliel Institute of Kavod v’Nichum.

**Study Mission Detail**

In New York, students will learn with scholars and historians, rabbinical seminary faculty and students, synagogue clergy, chaplains, Jewish funeral home and cemetery staff, art collectors and museum curators, archeologists and genealogists, and Chevra Kadisha members across all streams of Judaism.

In Prague, students will learn about the home of the first Chevra Kadisha for which we have detailed records. They will study Spanish and Italian Chevra Kadisha groups and their formative influence on Prague; explore the development and organization of the Prague Chevra Kadisha; and examine the Prague influence on hundreds of Chevra Kadisha groups that formed across Europe through the next four centuries. They will visit the Prague cemetery and the Jewish Museum with the historic Chevra Kadisha murals.

In Israel, students will work with the many Chevra Kadisha groups in Jerusalem and other communities participating in providing taharot - to learn from them, to assist them, and to facilitate networking with each other. Evenings will be devoted to study of rabbinic and modern texts and to discussions of the emotional impact of our work. The study tour will travel to Tzefat (Safed), where students will study the kabbalistic influences on the Chevra Kadisha, and to Beit Shearim, the archeological site of a Jewish town and a large number of ancient rock-cut Jewish tombs, where students will explore and learn about the origins and customs of the early Rabbinic period. Students will study Rabbinic texts with scholars who will guide them through explanations of burial and cemetery customs.

Gatherings of those involved in Chevra Kadisha work in New York and Israel will provide significant opportunities for Gamliel Institute students both to learn from others, and to apply the teaching skills and knowledge they have acquired in previous Gamliel Institute courses. Especially in Israel, this should help raise the profile and importance of both the non-Orthodox and Orthodox Chevra Kadisha groups.

Students will work with selected newspaper editorial boards, magazine editors, and blog writers to encourage publication of articles about Chevra Kadisha work. Both before and after the on-site portion of the course, meetings with regulators and politicians will be included on the agenda, with the goal of having students learn to work with them to raise awareness and explore issues related to funeral home and cemetery regulation, death certificates, autopsy, and organ and tissue donation.

Pre-trip on-line class sessions during early spring will provide students with background information and relevant study material. This preparatory learning will be followed by 16 days of intensive on-site experience—seven days in New York City, two in Prague, and seven in Israel—in April 2015. Two follow-up class sessions, after return, will focus on de‐briefing and applying the lessons learned.

**Student Body**

Gamliel students are rabbis, rabbinic students, cantors and lay people. They are spread out across the U.S. and Canada from Vancouver; Portland, OR;, Sana Rosa, CA;, Berkeley, CA;, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Chico, CA; Santa Fe, NM, Chicago; Oklahoma City, Annapolis, MD; Leesburg, FL; Richmond; Philadelphia, Winnipeg; New York, and Portland, ME.

**Budget**

Course development, instructors, trip logistics and trip costs - $200,000

Covered by:

Covenant grant - $30,000

Student’s provided - $30,000

Scholarships raised so far - $10,000

What we still need to raise - $130,000