

# HISTORY OF THE CEMETERY

Because of their traditions and religious customs, Jews have a deep respect for the places where the remains of their ancestors are buried. In Hebrew, a cemetery is called a beit kevarot (house or grave site), a beit chayim (house of life), or a beit olam (house of eternity). The Old Jewish Cemetery is one of the best preserved Jewish cemeteries in Europe. It holds 12,000 tombstones, called macevot. The oldest legible tombstone dates back to the 15th century and belongs to the rabbi and poet Avigdor Karo.

Although the cemetery was expanded several times, its land was insufficient for the needs of the Jewish community, so burials began to be done in layers. Religious laws, however, forbid the destruction of old graves, so additional layers of soil in which the deceased could be buried were added to the cemetery. Some tombstones were lifted up into the new layer, while others remained buried. That is why tombstones from different periods of history stand side by side today.

The tombstones are made of Slivenec marble or sandstone. The stonemasons carved the names and dates of death of the deceased in Hebrew script. Their good deeds and qualities or their function in the Jewish community are also mentioned. For rabbis and scholars, the names of their works are usually given. A traditional quotation concludes the entire inscription: "May his soul be accepted into the union of the living." This is known as the Tanzeva. Interestingly, flowers are not brought to Jewish cemeteries. Instead, small stones are placed on tombstones, perhaps following the ancient custom of placing a stone on the grave of the deceased in the desert.

Among the greatest personalities buried in the Prague cemetery is Yehuda Liva ben Bezael (also known as Rabbi Löw or Maharal). Jews from all over the world come to pray at the grave of this scholar.

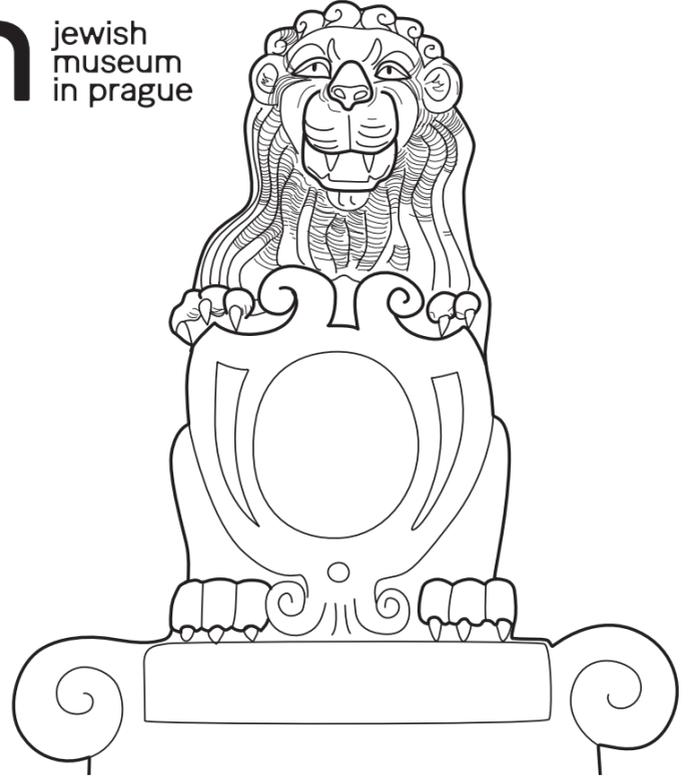
A large tombstone, known as a tumba, can also be found there for the merchant and court Jew of Emperor Rudolf II. Mordechai Maisel, who was involved in the construction of the Jewish Town Hall, the High Synagogue, the hospital and the almshouse in Prague, helped expand the cemetery and completed the construction of the Maisel Synagogue in 1592. The Old Jewish Cemetery was used for burials until 1787, when Joseph II forbade the use of cemeteries in inhabited quarters. Today, the Jewish community uses the New Jewish Cemetery in Prague's Olšany district as its main burial ground.

# THE OLD JEWISH CEMETERY

3-16 yrs

worksheet for children

m jewish museum in prague



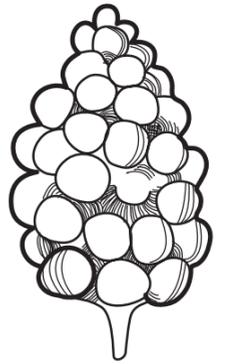
🗺️ Can you find a tombstone with a lion statue in the cemetery? Mark the spot on the map.

fold

## THE SECRETS OF THE SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

As you walk through the cemetery, you may notice how the decoration of the tombstones has changed over time. The oldest ones are simple. Then during the Renaissance, more and more decorations were added and different symbols began to appear on tombstones. These may be just decorations, but they usually refer to the Jewish religion or to the name or occupation of the deceased.

Here are some of the symbols:

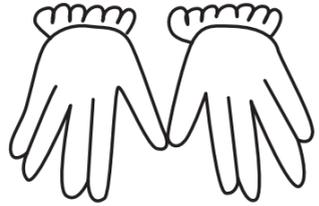


**Grapes** – a symbol of fertility, wealth and the tribes of Israel

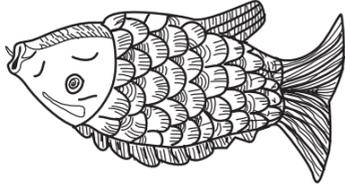


**Kettle** – marks the tombstones of the assistant temple priests (Levites)

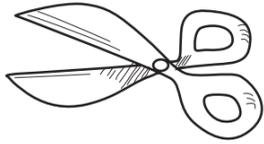
**Blessing hands** – mark the tombstones of the biblical family of temple priests (Kohen)



**Fish** – the names Ephraim, Fischel, Karp, Karpes.



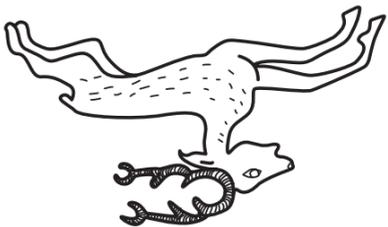
**Scissors** – the symbol of a tailor



**Wolf** – the names Wolf, Zeev, Benjamin.



**Deer** – names Natfali, Cevi, Hirsch.



**Lion** – names Yehuda, Arteh, Leib.

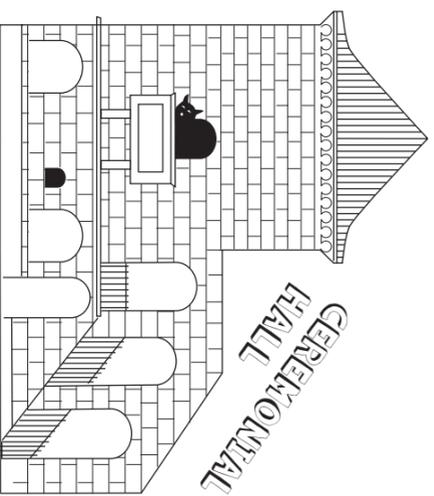


What motif would you choose for your family? Draw the animal that describes you the best:

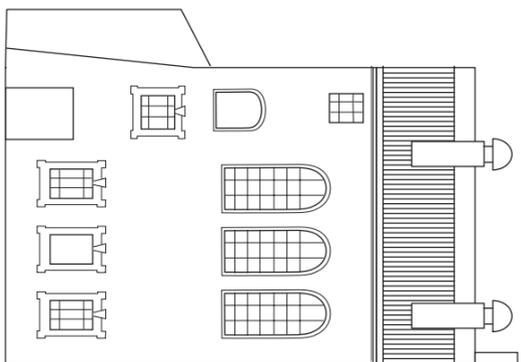
Can you find some of these symbols while walking through the cemetery? There's a map of the tombstones on the back that will tell you where to look for them. Can you find all these reliefs as you walk through the cemetery?

# OLD JEWISH CEMETERY

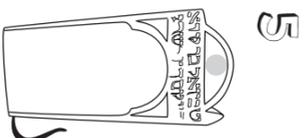
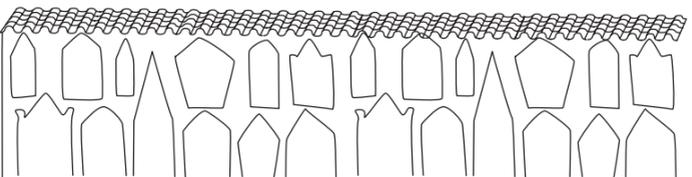
Walk through the cemetery and **find all the symbols**.  
See if you can match them to the right tombstones.  
Colour in the map using your imagination.



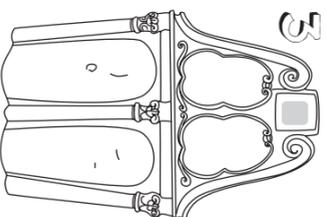
GEREMONTAL HALL



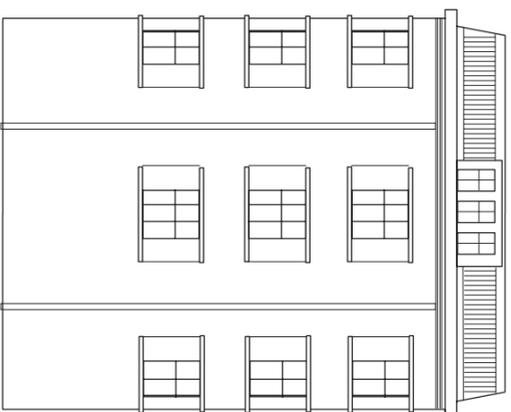
KLAUSEN SYNAGOGUE



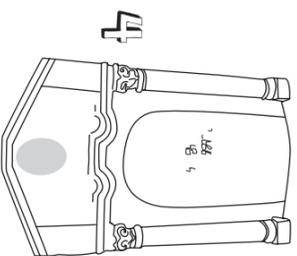
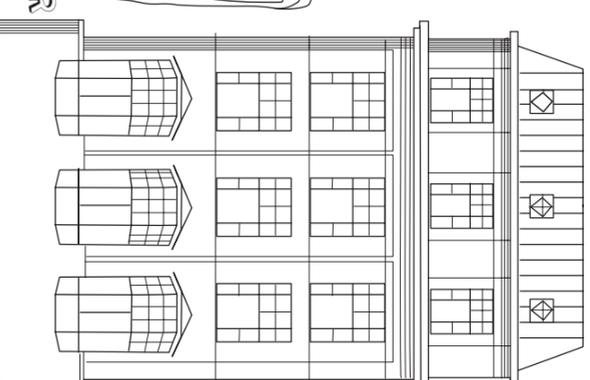
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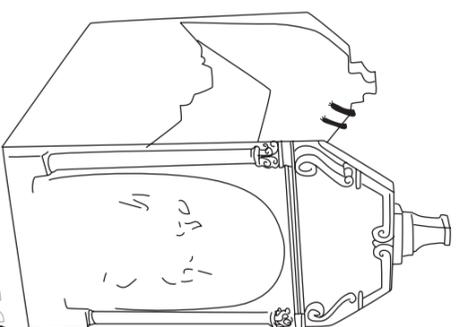
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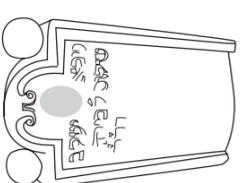
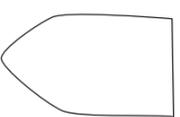
AVOIGDOR KARA



4



MORDECHAI KATSEL



2

Which symbols belong to these tombstones?

1 \_\_\_\_\_ 5 \_\_\_\_\_

2 \_\_\_\_\_ 6 \_\_\_\_\_

3 \_\_\_\_\_ 7 \_\_\_\_\_

4 \_\_\_\_\_ 8 \_\_\_\_\_

The cat's mother lost her kittens. Can you find all 5? Circle the missing kittens.



1

There's a family of cats living in the cemetery. Quietly observe your surroundings and be alert, otherwise the cats will hide from you!

