

The Power of Kaddish: What Are We Saying and Why is It So Important?

Source Sheet by Rabbi Federgrun

Vancouver Torah Learning Centre

1. Siddur Ashkenaz, Kaddish, Kaddish

Yatom

Glorified and sanctified be God's great name.

Throughout the world which He has created according to His will. May He establish His kingdom in your lifetime and during your days, and within the life of the entire House of Israel, speedily and soon; and say, Amen.

May His great name be blessed forever and to all eternity.

Blessed and praised, glorified and exalted, extolled and honored, adored and lauded be the name of the Holy One, blessed be He.

Beyond all the blessings and hymns, praises and consolations that are ever spoken in the world; and say, Amen.

May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life, for us and for all Israel; and say, Amen.

He who creates peace in His celestial heights, may He create peace for us and for all Israel; and say, Amen.

2. Ezekiel 38:18-23

סידור אשכנז, קדיש, קדיש יתום

יִתְגַּדַּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא.

בְּעֵלְמָא דִּי בְרָא כְרַעוּתָהּ וְיִמְלִיךָ מְלְכוּתָהּ
בְּחַיִּיכוּן וּבְיוֹמֵיכוּן וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל
בְּעֵגְלָא וּבְזִמְן קָרִיב, וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן:

יְהֵא שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ לְעַלְמֵי
עֵלְמַיָּא:

יְתַבְרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח וְיִתְפָּאֵר וְיִתְרוֹמֵם
וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא וְיִתְהַדָּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלָּל שְׁמֵהּ
דְקֻדְשָׁא. בְּרִיךְ הוּא.

לְעֵלְא מִן כָּל בְּרַכְתָּא וְשִׁירְתָּא וְהַשְׁבָּחָתָא
וְנַחֲמָתָא דְאָמִירוֹן בְּעֵלְמָא. וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן:

יְהֵא שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן שְׁמַיָּא וְחַיִּים עָלֵינוּ
וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל. וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן:

עוֹשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמְרוֹמָיו הוּא יַעֲשֵׂה שְׁלוֹם
עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאָמְרוּ אָמֵן:

יחזקאל ל"ח:י"ח-כ"ג

(18) On that day, when Gog sets foot on the soil of Israel—declares the Lord GOD—My raging anger shall flare up. (19) For I have decreed in My indignation and in My blazing wrath: On that day, a terrible earthquake shall befall the land of Israel. (20) The fish of the sea, the birds of the sky, the beasts of the field, all creeping things that move on the ground, and every human being on earth shall quake before Me. Mountains shall be overthrown, cliffs shall topple, and every wall shall crumble to the ground. (21) I will then summon the sword against him throughout My mountains—declares the Lord GOD—and every man's sword shall be turned against his brother. (22) I will punish him with pestilence and with bloodshed; and I will pour torrential rain, hailstones, and sulfurous fire upon him and his hordes and the many peoples with him. (23) Thus will I manifest My greatness and My holiness, and make Myself known in the sight of many nations. And they shall know that I am the LORD.

(יח) וְהָיָה | בְּיוֹם הַהוּא בְּיוֹם כְּוֹא גּוֹג
עַל-אַדְמַת יִשְׂרָאֵל נְאֻם אֱדוֹשֵׁם ה' תַּעֲלֶה
חֲמָתִי בְּאַפִּי: (יט) וּבְקִנְאַתִּי בְּאִשׁ-עֵבְרֹתַי
דְּבַרְתִּי אִם-לֹא | בְּיוֹם הַהוּא יִהְיֶה רַעַשׁ
גְּדוֹל עַל אֲדָמַת יִשְׂרָאֵל: (כ) וְרַעַשׂוּ מִפְּנֵי
דְגֵי הַיָּם וְעוֹף הַשָּׁמַיִם וְתִתַּת הַשָּׁדָה
וְכָל-הַרְמֵשׁ הָרֹמֵשׁ עַל-הָאָדָמָה וְכָל-הָאָדָם
אֲשֶׁר עַל-פְּנֵי הָאָדָמָה וְנִהְרְסוּ הַהָרִים
וְנִפְּלוּ הַמְּדַרְגּוֹת וְכָל-חֹמֶה לְאַרְצָה תִּפּוֹל:
(כא) וְקִרְאתִי עָלָיו לְכָל-הָרִי הַרְבֵּ נְאֻם
אֱדוֹשֵׁם ה' תִּרְבֵּ אִישׁ בְּאַתִּיו תִּהְיֶה: (כב)
וְנִשְׁפָּטִי אִתּוֹ בְּדָבָר וּבְדָם וּגְשָׁם שׁוֹטֵף
וְאֲבִי אֶלְגָּבִישׁ אֵשׁ וּגְפָרִית אֲמַטִּיר עָלָיו
וְעַל-אֲגָפָיו וְעַל-עַמִּים רַבִּים אֲשֶׁר אִתּוֹ:
(כג) וְהִתְגַּדַּלְתִּי וְהִתְקַדַּשְׁתִּי וְנִודַעְתִּי לְעֵינֵי
גּוֹיִם רַבִּים וְיָדְעוּ כִּי-אֲנִי ה' (ס)

3. The Loss of Godliness in the World .ג

4. **Moed Katan 25a** ד
As it is taught in a *baraita*: Rabbi Shimon ben Elazar says: One who stands over the deceased at the time of the soul's departure is obligated to rend his clothes. To what may this be likened? To a Torah scroll that is burned, for which anyone present is obligated to rend his clothes.

מועד קטן כ"ה א
 דתניא רבי שמעון בן אלעזר אומר
 העומד על המת בשעת יציאת נשמה חייב
 לקרוע למה זה דומה לספר תורה
 שנשרף שחייב לקרוע

5. The Last Kaddish by Dr. Simon Yisrael Feuerman ה
 This last sad chapter, the winter of her death, led me to other thoughts as well: *God doesn't care about her or me, I'd think, and I don't give a whit about him either.* How could one feel otherwise? I watched her life ebb away quickly under the brutal strain of cancer. I have tried to forget, but I can never forget....

Anger at God and at the ways of the world might have at least energized me while I said Kaddish, but worse, far worse than that were periods of seemingly no feeling at all. The Kaddish often seemed its own punishment, superimposed and out of place. Obsequious and coerced praises to the Creator of death and life – Heaven forbid – a catechism to numb the mind and the soul. The mourners' drone.

Thankfully, these periods of “deadness” did not at all characterize my very “good” mourning year. In fact, it was powerful forces set in motion long ago that led me again and again to the prayer stand – to say the Kaddish and to do it well, with feeling.

Looking back on the past 11 months, I can see that there were incidental “pleasures” or satisfactions in saying Kaddish. It made me face, at 49, my own foray into old age – getting to be an old man, with irreparable losses and gray whiskers, someone who might be called on in shul to utter something wise on occasion even though he is no rabbi.

Through those months, through the disbelief and the anger and the numbness, I said Kaddish with one goal in mind: Say a beautiful prayer in the name of a beautiful woman – my mother. Mostly, I succeeded; and multitudes stood behind me responding in unison to my Kaddish: *Yehei shmeh rabba mevarakh lealam ulalmey almaya*. May his great name be blessed forever, and to all eternity...

In a sense, the Kaddish prayer was meant for my mother: a mixture of right-ness, righteousness, and piety – the spiritual equivalent of the “stiff upper lip.” There is a God despite it all. Though we may not see him – we *want* to see him – this is how he is seen. There is an old saying from the Rebbe of Kotzk: “Where is God?” a man asks. “Wherever you let Him in,” the rebbe answered. My mother surely would have agreed with the Hasidic master.

6. Accepting Hashem's Judgement .1

7. **Berakhot 3a** **ברכות ג' א** .2
- When Israel enters synagogues and study halls and answers in the *kaddish* prayer, **May His great name be blessed, the Holy One, Blessed be He, shakes His head and says: Happy is the king who is thus praised in his house.** When the Temple stood, this praise was recited there, but now: **How great is the pain of the father who exiled his children, and woe to the children who were exiled from their father's table,** as their pain only adds to that of their father.
- בשעה שישראל נכנסין לבתי כנסיות ולבתי מדרשות ועונין יהא שמיה הגדול מבורך הקדוש ברוך הוא מנענע ראשו ואומר אשרי המלך שמקלסין אותו בביתו כך מה לו לאב שהגלה את בניו ואוי להם לבנים שגלו מעל שולחן אביהם:

8. Kaddish for My Father by Rabbi Yehuda Weinberg .3

Our Sages devised such a wise way to mourn and find comfort. King Solomon wrote that there is a time for everything, including a time to be happy and a time for sadness. Why do we need a time for sadness? During this period, I've learned to appreciate this teaching.

Being sad presents an opportunity to grow and gain a deeper understanding about the meaning of life and the correct way to handle a crisis.

During the first stage, from the minute that my father passed away, it was impossible for me to even talk. The pain and the sadness were so intense. The ceremony and the funeral afterward felt like a non-ending darkness. I felt like I was going down without any hope that the pain would subside. At the funeral, there were so many people who came to give their last respects to my great father, but I was someplace else, even though I was right next to him.

Then came that moment where I was forced to speak. Fortunately, these were the first words that I needed to say: "*Yisgadal V' Yiskadash Shemay Raba...*" – reciting the Kaddish. Suddenly I felt I'm not alone. I remembered that I have the Almighty to rely on, forever and ever. I felt not only the pain of the loss of my father, but also the opportunity to remember him and everything he taught me through this special way of sanctifying and praising God's name. From that moment, I felt that I was starting to climb upwards and had hope that happier days were to come.

Everyday when I have the opportunity to say the Kaddish prayer, I reconnect to this emotional healing feeling. So today when I need to stop saying Kaddish, it's an especially sad day.

9. The Spirit Is Mightier Than the Grave .ט

10. **Kiddushin 31b** **קידושין ל"א ב**
- The Sages taught: One honors his father in his life and honors him in his death. How does he honor him in his death? If he says a matter he heard from his father's mouth, he should not say: So said Father. Rather, he should say: So said Father, my teacher, may I be an atonement for his resting soul. And this *halakha* applies within twelve months of his death. From this time onward he says: May his memory be for a blessing, for the life of the World-to-Come.**
- .ס
ת"ר מכבדו בחייו ומכבדו במותו במותו
כיצד היה אומר דבר שמועה מפיו לא
יאמר כך אמר אבא אלא כך אמר אבא
מרי הריני כפרת משכבו והני מילי תוך
שנים עשר חדש מכאן ואילך אומר
זכרונו לברכה לחיי העולם הבא

11. **My 11 Months of Kaddish by Dr. Harlan Weisman** .א"י
- I knew little about saying Kaddish or its significance, but I read everything I could on the subject, and had many questions. How could this strange Aramaic chant, which mentions neither death nor mourning, be important in increasing the merit of one's father? And what does this "increasing the merit" actually mean?
- With these questions, I was determined to go to shul at least once a day for the next 11 months, to say Kaddish, even though my Hebrew was poor and I could not *daven* (pray) proficiently.

On a daily basis, I needed to find a minyan close to where I work at Johnson & Johnson headquarters in New Brunswick, New Jersey. I soon found Congregation Poile Zedek, a historic synagogue two blocks away from my office. The members were almost all Russian and Ukrainian immigrants.

That took care of the morning, and for the afternoon Michah/Ma'ariv, I discovered the Yavneh House of Princeton. Soon I was getting to know the regulars in each of these places, and the 2-to-4 others also saying Kaddish.

My life began to revolve around Kaddish. I had to arrange my work schedule, travel schedule, and social schedule around getting to at least one minyan per day. Gradually I was getting the hang of each of the three daily services, but no sooner would I get confident, than I would be thrown a loop by going to a shul with a different style of prayer: Askanaz, Sephard, Ha-Arizal, *Mizrach* and Temani.

Given my struggles in mastering the variety of services and the time commitment, I wasn't sure why I was determined to keep going, but it seemed important. I knew I was on a mission to increase the merit for my father – though I still wasn't sure what that meant, or whether I believed my daily Kaddish had any effect on it. But somehow it seemed right. I was doing something special for my father, the man who had given me so much. I was thanking him and appreciating him and giving him something that I was never quite able to do when he was alive. I felt a connection, a bonding, a closeness that seemed that both our souls needed....

On my last day of saying Kaddish, the 26th of Tammuz, I said Kaddish during Maariv at *Yavneh* house in Princeton, Shacharit at *Poile Zadek* in New Brunswick, and Minchah at the *Garment Center Synagogue* in Manhattan, a few blocks away from where I was to give a keynote speech at a dinner event. There I was standing in the synagogue about to say the last Kaddish during my 11 months of mourning.

Aleynu, at the end of the service, was almost over. I remained standing. It was time.

Yisgadal v'yiskadash Sh'mei rabba...

I began to tremble.

B'allma dee v'rah chir'usei, v'yamlich malchusei...

I wasn't sure I could make it through. My legs were weak. I felt like I was going to cry uncontrollably.

May God's great name be praised to all eternity.

I stumbled through the next few verses of Aramaic:

Hallowed, and honored, extolled and exalted, adored and acclaimed be the Name of the blessed Holy One... May God grant abundant peace and life, to us and to all Israel. And let us say, Amein

I took three steps back on my trembling legs. Trying to keep my balance, I bowed left, *Oseh Shalom bim'ro'Mav*.

Bowed right, *hu ya'aseh shalom, aleinu*.

Bowed forward, *v'a' kol yisroel, v'imru Amain*.

Three final steps forward. It was over.

I didn't anticipate the sudden sense of loss, of emptiness, of deep sadness.

I sat down for a few moments, and then davened Ma'ariv. It was a blur. I don't remember saying the Shema or Amidah.

Before I knew it, everyone was standing for Aleynu.

After Aleynu, the mourners remained standing for Kaddish. But for the first time in 11 months, I sat down, silent. Numb.

I spoke to the rabbi afterwards. He said what I felt was normal. The sadness will gradually dull over the next week or so, and life will go on.

My mission was over. It has not only been part of my life, it's been my life. My mission, my deep, soulful connection to my father was gone. He's gone. Nothing filled the hole that was growing inside me.

I walked slowly to the hotel in a daze. *How can I possibly talk to anyone? How can I banter small talk during the cocktail hour before my speech.*

I walked into the room. The organizers greeted me. Something surprising happened. A switch had flipped. The energy was restored. I was on again – talking, connecting, flowing. My father was back inside of me. It felt good to be in front of the audience. The tension was gone. I was relaxed, the words came out easily.

In the car ride home, I prayed. I thanked God. And I thanked my father.

Next day, I went to shul, even though I didn't have the obligation to say Kaddish anymore. But I needed the warmth and the continuity. And the minyan needed me, the tenth man. I'm repaying all those who took care of me for those 11 months. I'm helping those who continue their period of saying Kaddish, and I watch the new ones joining us, some just as unsure of what they're doing as I was 11 months ago, as they stumble through their first Kaddish.

I go because it feels good to join the generations of Jews before me who were blessed with the same traditions. I go because it makes the light inside me shine more brightly.

In the weeks following my last Kaddish, the hole inside of me opened and closed in unpredictable cycles. The sadness continued, coming and going, but gradually became less intense. And the hole gradually filled and stopped opening, just like the rabbi said. The sadness was pushed away by the knowledge that my father was *not* gone. He is with me today, with me every day. His values, his kindness, compassion, courage, endurance, fortitude, determination and tenacity to do what's right, his commitment to justice and fairness, but most of all his love, is with me today, tomorrow and always. And I am passing these gifts onto my children, as they will to theirs, through the generations.

