

This guide was created as a resource for the Death and Bereavement Outreach Initiative at Temple De Hirsch Sinai. Additional information on the Mourner's Kaddish may be found in the following publications or by consulting your rabbi.

A Treasury of Comfort

Rabbi Sidney Greenberg

Saying Kaddish: How to Comfort the Dying, Bury the Dead & Mourn as a Jew

Anita Diamant

The Bond of Life: A Book for Mourners

edited by Rabbi Jules Harlow

Grief in Our Seasons: A Mourner's Kaddish Companion

Rabbi Kerry M. Olitzky

Mourner's Kaddish

קדיש יתום



History and Legend

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Sacred Journeys
a caregiving, mourning and
bereavement initiative

Introduction

Kaddish - קדיש - is the Aramaic word for "holy".

The Mourner's Kaddish, קדיש יתום, calls out to God from the depths of human tragedy. Jews recite this exaltation at the very moment when faith itself is shaken - upon the irreparable loss of one closest to the heart. We maintain the connection between the bereaved and the Holy One even while wrestling and struggling, and in doing so we link ourselves firmly to Jewish tradition.

In a vigorous declaration of faith, Job cried out "Though He slay me, yet I will trust in Him (13:15)." With Job we say: "God has given, and God has taken away; blessed be the name of God (1:21)," and with Daniel we affirm the words so closely reminiscent of Kaddish: "Let the name of God be blessed forever and ever (2:20)." The long yet inadequate list of attributes in the קדיש doxology serves as a powerful reminder of the experience of being human and the fragility of life.

Recited in Aramaic, a cognate language of Hebrew, the Mourner's Kaddish is more than the sum of its words. History, legend, and practice combine to create an important Jewish custom further described within.

Mourner's Kaddish

Yitgadal v'yitkadash sh'mei raba.

B'alma di v'ra chirutei,

v'yamlich malchutei, b'chayeichon

uv'yomeichon uv'chayei d'chol

beit Yisrael, ba'agala

u'vizman kariv. V'imru: Amen.

Y'hei sh'mei raba m'varach

l'alam ul'al'mei almay.

Yitbarach v'yishtabach v'yitpa'ar

v'yitromam v'yitnasei v'yit'hadar

v'yitaleh v'yit'halal sh'mei

d'kud'sha B'rich Hu,

l'eila min kol birchata

v'shir'ata, tush'b'chata

v'nechemata, da'amiran

b'alma. V'imru: Amen.

Y'hei sh'lama raba min

sh'maya, v'chayim aleinu v'al

kol Yisrael. V'imru: Amen.

Oseh shalom bimromav, Hu

ya'aseh shalom aleinu, v'al

kol Yisrael. V'imru: Amen.

יִתְגַּדַּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא.

בְּעֵלְמָא דִּי בְּרָא כְרַעוּתָהּ,

וְיַמְלִיךְ מַלְכוּתָהּ, בְּחַיֵּינוּ

וּבְיוֹמֵינוּ וּבְחַיֵּי דְכָל

בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל, בְּעֵגְלָא

וּבְזִמָּן קָרִיב. וְאָמְרוּ: אָמֵן.

יְהִי שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא מְבָרַךְ

לְעָלָם וּלְעָלְמֵי עָלְמַיָּא.

יִתְבָּרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח, וְיִתְפָּאֵר

וְיִתְרֹמֵם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא, וְיִתְהַדָּר

וְיִתְעַלֶּה וְיִתְהַלָּל שְׁמֵהּ

דְּקֻדְשָׁא בְּרִיךְ הוּא,

לְעֵלָא מִן כָּל בִּרְכָתָא

וְשִׁירָתָא, תְּשֻׁבָתָא

וְנַחֲמָתָא, דְּאָמִירָן

בְּעֵלְמָא. וְאָמְרוּ: אָמֵן.

יְהִי שְׁלָמָא רַבָּא מִן

שְׁמַיָּא, וְחַיִּים עָלֵינוּ, וְעַל

כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל. וְאָמְרוּ: אָמֵן.

עֹשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם בְּמִרְוֵמוֹ הוּא

יַעֲשֶׂה שְׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ וְעַל

כָּל יִשְׂרָאֵל. וְאָמְרוּ: אָמֵן.



Practice

Q: Who recites the Mourner's Kaddish?

A: קדיש יתום is recited by those who have lost a loved one - traditionally a close relative: parent, sibling, child, or a spouse.

Q: When is קדיש יתום recited?

A: Kaddish is recited immediately following interment and subsequently during, and at the conclusion of, each daily service. Many families attend Shabbat services together, morning and evening, to recite these hallowed words.

Q: For how long do we recite the Kaddish?

A: The Mourner's Kaddish is recited daily during the periods of intensive mourning, *Shiva* (7 days) and *Sheloshim* (30 days). Custom is to recite Kaddish for 11 months with one's parents in mind and to commemorate their *Yartzeit* (anniversary of their passing).

Q: Are there synagogue customs associated with this prayer?

A: קדיש יתום is recited whenever there is a minyan present. It is customary for mourners to rise while saying this prayer that their grief might be recognized, and in Reform communities for the congregation to rise in support of those who mourn.

The Kaddish's language of origin, Aramaic, holds the key to unlocking this prayer's transformation from praise to memorial.

Scholars have concluded Kaddish to be the *nechemta*, the final uplifting message following scholarly discourse in the *beit midrash*, at a time when Aramaic was a spoken language. This closing message was considered even more "holy" than the learning that just occurred, giving the Kaddish its name.

Later, in *Maseket Soferim*, an early-medieval Palestinian work, we are told that Kaddish was recited upon the death of a significant scholar of Torah. As each member of the Jewish people are to study Torah, passing it through the generations as if they themselves had written a Torah scroll, it soon became custom to share words of קדיש יתום in memorial of all the Jewish departed.

The earliest readily-identifiable text of Kaddish appears in the *siddur* of Rav Amram Gaon (c. 860). Rashi (11th century) and Maimonides (12th century) knew slightly different versions of this prayer, whose obligatory recitation was not set in *halacha* until the *Shulchan Aruch* (16th century).

History



Legend of R. Akiva

Rabbi Akiva once saw a man who was nude and black as coal. He was carrying ten loads on his head and galloping like a horse. Akiva ordered him to stop.

"Why do you perform such hard labor?" he asked.

"Don't detain me," pleaded the man, "lest my masters became enraged."

"What is your occupation?" asked Akiva.

"This man," he replied, "is dead, and every day he is sent forth to chop wood with which he is then burned."

"My son," Akiva inquired, "what was your occupation in the world from which you came?"

"I was a tax collector and of high rank. I used to favor the right and smite the poor."

"Have you, perhaps, heard from your superiors if there is anything that may save you?"

"Yes," came the reply. "I heard them say that if that unfortunate man had had a son who went to synagogue, led the congregation in prayer, and then said Kaddish to which they responded 'Yehei sh'mei raba...', that man would have been released immediately."

-Multiple folk sources (c. 12th century)

One variant of the Kaddish was reserved for recitation by those experiencing a period of mourning by the middle ages. The Mourner's Kaddish was well known to Rabbi Menachem ben Solomon Meiri (c. 1275, France), though he ruled that it should not be recited on Shabbat, for the Sabbath was so holy that punishments were suspended. Rabbi Moshe Isserles in Poland, writing a short time later, decreed that the Mourner's Kaddish should be recited at all services; a custom observed to this day.

While part of folk legend, rabbis quickly discouraged mourners from attributing magical powers to the Mourner's Kaddish. Better that we should embody the values our loved ones modeled with their lives than rely upon the redemptive powers of Kaddish. Indeed, many recite the Mourner's Kaddish today in honor of their deceased rather than for their salvation.

Mourners are invited to rise and recite קדיש יתום at the end of every service in progressive Judaism, as well as during *Yizkor* memorial services on the *Shelosh Regalim* (*Pesach*, *Shavu'ot*, and *Sukkot*) and on *Yom Kippur*. It is also custom, in both Sephardic and Ashkenazic communities, to commemorate the *Yarzeit* or anniversary of the death of a loved one.

Evolution