

A Place of Comfort: Saying Kaddish in the Morning Minyan
by Rabbi Dayle Friedman

I have just finished saying Kaddish for two dear ones in the past year and a half. First, I said Kaddish for 11 months for my Dad, Don Friedman, z'l, who died in August, 2013. It was not a given that I would end up saying Kaddish at daily minyan for my father. His connection to Judaism was vestigial and gastronomic. He would have been bemused by my taking on this practice. But, on reflection, this was the right way for me to mourn, both for my own sake, and for the sake of *ha'alat haneshamah*, elevating my Dad's soul.

More recently, I have just completed *sheloshim*, thirty days of saying Kaddish for my beloved sister, Jill Friedman Fixler, who died all too soon of cancer at 61.

I have had the blessings of saying Kaddish in the morning minyan in our home shul, GJC, and in Congregation Adath Israel in Merion Station, in addition to at least 8 other congregations I've encountered on my travels.

When I first started saying Kaddish, I was stopped by the very first words:

*Yitgadal v'yitkadash shemei rabba
B'alma divra chirutei*

**Let God's great name be magnified and sanctified
In this world created according to God's will.**

How could that be so? Did God will a world of loss? A world of ashen taste and sight? A world of primal order disturbed?

Over time, I came to notice words that follow soon after those:

Vi-yamlich malchutei b'chayeichon uviyomeichon

God's reign is made manifest through our lives, through our days.

The Divine was manifest in the life and days of the Dad I mourn, the precious sister I will miss forever.

In the life and days I make as I take in their legacies, sifting, winnowing out all that grew from their wounds and brokenness, savoring and nurturing all the brilliance and beauty that flowed from their *neshamot tehorot*, pure souls that became more and more evident as their small souls melted away throughout their long illnesses.

Later, my attention was drawn to this phrase:

L'eilah mikol birchata v'shirata

Tushbechata v'nechemata

Beyond all blessing and song, praise and comfort...

The experience of saying Kaddish in the minyan has truly been beyond all praise, beyond any consolation I could imagine.

In the minyan, I've been able to be simply a mourner--not a mother, not a rabbi, not a wife, just a bereaved daughter and sister. I had a place where nothing was demanded of me, and where I was not alone in my grief.

The minyan has been a world of immense kindness--whether it was Berel's friendly welcome or Mitchell, who kept inviting me to lead parts of the service as I tried my hardest to melt into the wall, until he finally placed his hand on my shoulder and gently said, "Tell you what. You tell me when you're ready." Such tenderness.

The minyan has been a place of wrestling--with so many words, with repetition (why 2 Ashrei's--one isn't enough?) and with the bareness of the davening--no rousing melodies, just business-like intention to say the words *and* get through in time to get to work and whatever responsibilities await us.

The minyan has been a place of learning, thanks to the beautiful, pithy Torah teachings shared each morning by Rabbis Zeff, Lewis and Sklover.

Ultimately, I have come to treasure saying Kaddish in the minyan. I have come to feel that the words of the prayers and the melodies of chanting are the soundtrack, but what has been key, for me, is the feeling of being enfolded in a warm embrace, *olam chesed*, a world of kindness.

The minyan can be intimidating--so much ritual and liturgy-- but it truly doesn't matter whether you know the liturgy, whether you are praying, meditating, or spacing out. Just by walking through the door, you become a hero, for by your very presence you are making a difference.

These words come near the end of the Kaddish:

Yehei shelama raba...aleinu v'al kol yisrael.

May great peace come upon us and upon all Israel.

I am grateful for the peace that has come to me through the long, bittersweet slog of saying Kaddish in the minyan. I am grateful to each and every person who helps constitute the quorum of ten adults so that mourners can say Kaddish; I intend to continue doing my part to help to make the minyan. And I pray that all who do this sacred *mitzvah* will be met with peace, well-being and wholeness.

You, too, can perform the mitzvah of making the minyan. GJC's morning minyan meets every Monday and Thursday at 7:15 a.m. (and ends in time to make the 8:18 train to Center City), and every Sunday at 9:00 a.m.