

## OCTOBER

### *Kaddish*

#### **Rabbi Chava Koster**

##### *Introduction*

The past few weeks we have talked about the Kaddish, based on a congregant's parent's surprise at discovering that this prayer of mourning does not mention death at all. Where did this Kaddish prayer really come from and how did it get to what we have today? Most scholars agree that the Kaddish began as a prayer said after a study session, better known as the Siyyum Kaddish or Rabbis' Kaddish. Most of it is written in Aramaic, which was the lingua franca of the Jewish people. Its opening words are inspired by Ezekiel 38:23, which expresses a vision of God becoming great in the eyes of all nations. The Kaddish according to Talmudic sources first appeared in a prayer services as a conclusion to the Torah reading. Over time it began appearing in abbreviated form (full or half Kaddish) at the end of sections within the prayer service. In addition to being recited at a funeral following the Tziduk ha din prayer, it transitioned over time into a mourners' prayer. Masechet Soferim tells of the chazzan in Jerusalem who after the prayer services on Shabbat would bless the mourners and recite a slightly abbreviated Kaddish to console them. A Midrashic source from the Heichalot literature, states that when sinners in (Hell or) Gehenom respond Amen to the Kaddish that they are allowed entry into Gan Eden. This idea found its way into medieval literature explaining when a child recites Barchu or Kaddish for his parents.

#### **Ann Temkin**

*Chief Curator of Painting and Sculpture, The Museum of Modern Art*

*October 25, 2013*

I am glad that Rabbi Koster happens to have invited me to speak about the Mourner's Kaddish, as it's the one and only prayer I've ever read a book about. It's one that many of you have read, I imagine -- titled *Kaddish*, it was written by Leon Wieseltier and published in 1998. I somehow had the inspiration to go out and buy that book on Yom Kippur in 2001, which fell two weeks after 9/11. I found its close to 600 pages an invaluable accompaniment to those next few months in New York City. So, in a way my contribution tonight becomes a book recommendation. It's a slog, and Wieseltier intended it to be a slog, just as saying Kaddish three times a day for the eleven months after his father died was a slog. But it's like James Joyce said when he heard complaints that *Ulysses* was so long and difficult to read -- "well, it was long and difficult to write." Why should the task be any easier on the reader than on the writer?

And of course, if a book can even begin to be slightly as life-enhancing for the reader as well as the writer, that is something incredible. I read it a bit again this month, wondering if my involvement with and admiration for it depended mainly on the important moment at which it came for me. The words of the prayer itself, the magnifieds and sanctifieds, course through the pages of the book as he investigates the centuries of commentary upon it, of which during those eleven months he became an obsessive compulsive consumer. Intellectual study became an

emotional solution: on the third page or so, he writes: " I don't know what to do. No, I know what to do. I will open a book..." And the book is a combination of a journal filled with private reflections about his own life, and a work of profound learning. There are passages that I could not read to you, as the emotion is so brutally raw, and also passages that are marvelously funny, one of which I can read:

*The evening prayer. It is almost sundown. I step up to the task. "Is it time?" I ask the young man in charge of the proceedings. He looks at his watch. "Another forty seconds," he replies. I have an antinomian fantasy. I will cause them all to sin! I will start in thirty seconds, and dupe my pious, hairsplitting comrades into praying a full ten seconds before the appointed hour! I resist the temptation, of course. I am here fore them and they are here for me.*

That kind of adventure is far different from the one that simply happens every Friday night, and for which there is little time to really reflect. I love best the poem by Merrit Molloy that I discovered only as a congregant at services here at the Village Temple: "when all that is left of me is love, just give me away." Sometimes one can use the time of the Mourner's Kaddish just as a way to take a moment to remember someone fondly and to affirm appreciation. But sometimes, as may be true for many of you, I find that when it is time for the Mourner's Kaddish I have to decide to *not* think about the person I would be mourning. I know that I would be likely to lose my composure entirely, because in fact there is always at any moment a potential flood of feeling that is held back by a very fragile dam.

And I will conclude my comments with a poem that also has meant an enormous amount to me. This was written by Schmucl HaNagid, published in 1996 in an English translation by Peter Cole. The poet, HaNagid, was a tenth century army general and prime minister of Granada in Moslem Spain. The poem does not address mourning per se, but marvels at the human ability to withstand sorrow and hardship.

The multiple troubles of man,  
my brother, like slander and pain,  
amaze you? Consider the heart  
which holds them all  
in strangeness, and does not break.

### **Paul Hamilton**

*Actor*

*October 25, 2013*

*"I DON'T THINK GOD MEANT FOR PEOPLE TO NOT HAVE A FAMILY"*

Cecil Gaines

The Butler

For as long as I can remember, I have loved to watch movies.

While other kids were honing there personal skill sets, I would be watching

*SATURDAY AFTERNOON AT THE MOVIES* with Bill Kennedy.

It was there, at the age of 9-10, I first encountered *THE KADDISH*, watching the 1952 (the year of my birth!) remake of *THE JAZZ SINGER*, were Jerry Golding (Danny Thomas) has just told his cantor father, David Golding, over the phone, that he is going to pursue his love, this business called show, and not follow in his footsteps as the next generation of Cantor.

Upon returning home, he cannot find his father, but hears a haunting familiar melody, coming from the temple next to their family home.

Upon entering the temple he realizes it is his father, singing the Kaddish, and he is singing it for HIM.

Now, maybe all that movie saturation rubbed off on me, or

Maybe I was encountering the first of my many spirits living in this universe.

But I believe that I was struck by the power and devastating and *NEED* we all have for *FAMILY*, and how we seek its approval.

FROM the family we are born into

TO the family we acquire as we grow up

TO the family we build from school , work, and play

TO the family of strangers that make up the rest of the world, and by extension, our entire universe.

In considering what prayer, and THE KADDISH in particular conjures up in me,

It is thru the PHLOSOLOGY OF FAMILY and my daily experience of it, that I feel best equipped to respond.

I am an actor.

And, although my skill sets vary in their acumen, I believe that voodoo that I do so well, is tell stories to others, in the hopes of giving them some relief from their daily grind, or some pause in the way they see and breath in the world.

A, for lack of a better definition, PRAYER GUIDE, a singer of songs and their words, in order to illuminate the possibility of conversing not only with ourselves, but with the universe.

So, if you will indulge me, here are a few “words” or “prayers” that come to mind:

1. TWO PRAYERS FOR THE LIVING - *A /B*

2. A PRAYER FOR ALL MY LOVES *C*

3. TWO PRAYERS FOR MY FELLOW ACTOR COLLEAGUES *D/E*

4. A PRAYER FROM ME TO ALL I HAVE KNOWN, KNOW, AND WILL KNOW *F*

5. A PRAYER FOR THE UNIVERSE *G*

**(A)**

CHEKOV, ANTON

From THE SEAGULL

Translated By Paul Schmidt

Act II

Sorin

You're a fine one to talk! You've lived an interesting life. Me? I've worked for twenty-eight years in a government office, and I haven't had a life, I haven't *experienced* it or anything. And I *want* to – you understand what I mean? You've been everywhere, done everything: it's easy for you to be philosophical: you don't care anymore. But I want to live! Which is why I drink sherry after dinner and smoke cigars. And everything. That's why.

**(B)**

From the New Yorker August 30, 2004

***IF THERE IS NO GOD***

If there is no God,  
Not everything is permitted to man,  
He is still his brother's keeper  
And he is not permitted to sadden his brother,  
By saying that there is no God.

Czeslaw Milosz

(Translated from the Polish by Czeslaw Milosz and Robert Hass)

**(C)**

WILLIAM BUTLER YEATS

From THE ROSE

WHEN YOU ARE OLD

When you are old and gray and full of sleep,  
And nodding by the fire, take down this book,  
And slowly read, and dream of the soft look  
Your eyes had once, and of their shadows deep;  
How many loved your moments of glad grace,  
And loved your beauty with love false or true,  
But one man loved the pilgrim soul in you,  
And loved the sorrows of your changing face;  
And bending down beside the glowing bars,  
Murmur, a little sadly, how Love has fled  
And paced upon the mountains overhead  
And hid his face amid a crowd of stars.

1892

*Michael McDermott (1995)*

Legendary

We were just a day away from failure,  
Confronting what we feared  
But I stole the keys from the jailer  
And we walked right out of here  
When we were a minute from our capture  
I covered you in doubt  
I'm sorry if I let you down  
I swear, I'll figure this whole thing out  
You can pray to the Father, you can pray to Mary  
But I already know, we're gonna be legendary  
They try to convince us, that we're ordinary,  
But I already know we're gonna be legendary  
Yeah, I already know we're gonna be legendary  
I don't blame you for leavin'  
In fact, I don't blame you at all  
Nobody wants to be around  
When a man is about to fall

You spoke to me... words of honor  
You spoke to me... words so true  
I don't know if your prayers, count for much around  
here  
But even if they do  
You can pray to the Father, you can pray to Mary  
But I already know, we're gonna be legendary  
They try to convince us, that we're ordinary,  
But I already know we're gonna be legendary  
Yeah, I already know we're gonna be legendary  
It doesn't matter who you are  
You're never who you want to be  
I'm sure on some given days  
You curse the day that you met me  
You play your games of indifference  
But your eyes reveal the pain  
You say that time may heal the wounds  
But the scars, they will remain  
You can pray to the Father, you can pray to Mary  
But I already know, we're gonna be legendary  
They try to convince us, that we're ordinary,  
But I already know we're gonna be legendary  
Yeah, I already know we're gonna be legendary  
*Michael McDermott (1995)*

1. Bells
2. My Own Little World
3. Forever
4. Forgotten
5. Say Hey Charlie Boy
6. Suzie's Got A Brand  
New Hat
7. Summer Days
8. Deirdre Dances
9. Legendary
10. Wounded
11. Come Around Mary
12. It's Killing Me

Bells  
It's been a long time girl, since I  
slipped inside your world  
It's almost like I've never even been  
there  
Though the battle's just begun I feel  
the damage has been done  
And I know there's nothing left that  
we could repair

Sermons were sung and seven psalms  
were hung  
On the walls of my dyin' faith  
I'm just waitin' for them bells to ring  
There's a statesman in the yard,  
preachin' like some bandit bard  
But me, I move along most unaffected  
I never noticed the decay or when  
things didn't go my way  
Life's everything I ever expected  
With my warrior mask and ignoble  
task  
Listen to the hunter, whispering  
He's just waitin' for, just waitin' for  
them bells to ring  
Singin' hey hey la, hey la hey, hey  
hey la, hey la hey  
Just waitin' for them bells to ring  
If I gave you my heard, could you  
heal it  
If I gave you my song, would you sing  
it  
Lets sing it all night long  
Though the lines have been drawn, in  
the breaking of the dawn  
I will cross this bridge prepared to  
fight  
And though my blood may soon be  
shed, I feel that peace lies up ahead  
Near the belfry's healing light  
And ring if it does, like Picasso's  
peaceful dove  
I will fly free, far away.  
I'm just waitin' for, waitin' for them  
bells to ring  
Singin' hey hey la, hey la hey, hey  
hey la, hey la hey  
Just waitin' for them bells to ring  
Ringin' out from the mountains  
Ringin' out from the valleys  
Ringin' out for my homeland  
And the blood in the alley  
Ringin' out for the drunk ones  
Ringin' out for the sober  
Ringin' out for the lover, who knows  
that its over

Ringin' out for the hungry  
Ringin' out for the homeless  
Ringin' out for the righteous  
Ringin' out for the hopeless  
Ringin' out in the blackness  
Ringin' out for the soldier  
Ringin' out for the future, waitin' over  
your shoulder  
Ringin' out for the sinner  
Singin' out for the accuser  
Ringin' out for the winner  
Ringin' out for the loser  
Ringin' out for the orphan  
And the disbeliever  
Ringin' out for the honest  
And the deceiver  
Ringin' out for me  
Ringin' out for you  
And all the things that we've been  
through  
Hey hey la, hey la hey, hey hey la,  
hey la hey  
Just waitin' for them bells to ring  
(F)  
Shadows are fallin' and I'm runnin' out of breath  
Keep me in your heart for a while  
If I leave you it doesn't mean I love you any less  
Keep me in your heart for a while  
When you get up in the mornin' and you see that crazy sun  
Keep me in your heart for a while  
There's a train leavin' nightly called "When All is Said and Done"  
Keep me in your heart for a while  
Sha-lalala-lala-li-lalala-lo  
Keep me in your heart for a while  
Sha-lalala-lala-li-lalala-lo  
Keep me in your heart for a while  
Sometimes when you're doin' simple things around the house  
Maybe you'll think of me and smile  
You know I'm tied to you like the buttons on your blouse  
Keep me in your heart for a while  
Hold me in your thoughts  
Take me to your dreams  
Touch me as I fall into view  
When the winter comes  
Keep the fires lit  
And I will be right next to you

Engine driver's headed north up to Pleasant Stream  
Keep me in your heart for a while  
These wheels keep turnin' but they're runnin' out of steam  
Keep me in your heart for a while  
Sha-lalala-lala-li-lalala-lo  
Keep me in your heart for a while  
Sha-lalala-lala-li-lalala-lo  
Keep me in your heart for a while  
Keep me in your heart for a while  
Read more: [Warren Zevon - Keep Me In Your Heart Lyrics | MetroLyrics](#)  
(G)

From Dancing At Lugnasa  
Brian Friel

...There is one memory that visits me most often and what fascinates me about that memory is that it owes nothing to fact.  
In that memory, atmosphere is more real than incident and everything is simultaneously actual and illusory...  
In that memory the air is nostalgic with music. It drifts in from somewhere far away – a mirage of sound –  
A dream music that is both heard and imagined.  
That seems both itself and its own echo  
A sound so alluring and so mesmeric that (the air) is bewitched, maybe haunted by it...  
When I remember it, I think of it as dancing.  
Dancing with eyes half closed because to open them would break the spell.  
Dancing as if language had surrendered to movement – as if this ritual, this wordless ceremony was now the way to speak, to whisper private and sacred things, to be in touch with some otherness.  
Dancing as if the very heart of life and all its hopes might be found in those assuaging notes and those hushed rhythms and in those silent and hypnotic movements.  
Dancing as if language no longer existed because words were no longer necessary...

**The Poem written by my late great friend Randy Knolle that I forgot**  
EULOGY

(To my parents Henry and Genevieve)  
In deep teeth tight winter  
cold goes to the heart,  
cracks it and air.  
Under snow and the stone  
with the frozen hummingbirds  
lay living ashes.  
Remembering lies buried in the soul.  
Let Odin puff his dead ice-laden cheeks  
and howl with the worship of  
the vengeful Jehova



the circles of Buddha  
the love of Athena  
the fire of Allah  
the blood of Jesus  
For the moment we need no gods.  
For you gave us warmth and movement and light.  
The soul lies buried in remembering.  
Your warm breath  
the breath of your children.  
Florida 1996