

The Multiple Meanings of the Mourners' Kaddish

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Judaism has always considered the concept of the responsibility of the individual to exist as a kind of amalgam of moral and spiritual obligations that, so amalgamated, somehow far exceeds what an individual might otherwise consider to be the tasks of everyday life. Indeed, this is what the Talmud means to suggest in its famous dictum that “every Jew is the guarantor of every other one (BT *Shavuot* 39a and *Sanhedrin* 27b): that the salvation of the individual is fundamentally intertwined with the salvation of the Jewish people and, as a result, of humanity as a whole. Bonds of mutual responsibility are thereby created, such that the salvation for the one depends upon that of the others. That which is more surprising is that these chains of communal responsibility form a network which extends, step by step, horizontally and vertically, time and space simultaneously, beyond the limits of the real world and reaching the “metaphysical” domain. Our purpose will be to show that the prayer *Mourners' Kaddish*, as it was conceived and developed in rabbinical sources, represents one of the most vibrant examples of this phenomenon.

Contrary to popular belief, the *Kaddish*, in the shape and form that we recognize today, is a relatively late construct. Neither the notion nor the function of the *Kaddish* is mentioned in the Talmud. Thus, the *Mishna* (*Megila* 4:3; 23b) does not include the *Kaddish* amongst the rites requiring a *minyan* (a quorum of ten persons). It is not until a later (6th century) treatise (*Sofrim* 10:7), that the notion of the prayer “*Kaddish*”, an Aramaic term signifying “sanctification”(of the name of God), appears and that the requirement for the presence of a *minyan* becomes associated with it. Furthermore, the first complete formulation is not found until the *Seder Rav Amram* (10th century)¹, where it appears only as a prayer recited by the reader. Its function as *Kaddish Yatom* (Mourners' *Kaddish* or orphan's prayer) and its position as a liturgical obligation, is not mentioned until the 11th century in the Ashkenazic countries of France and Germany, even though such a custom may already have been practiced during the Gaonic period (from the 8th to 11th centuries). And still later, when Isaac of Vienna (13th century) speaks of it in his *Or Zarua* (*Hil. Shabbat*, §50), it, for him, is nothing more than a simple custom. He specifies that, in France, young people recite it, even though they may not be orphans themselves. The *Kaddish*, we must remember, has always been chanted, using different variants, as a sort of leitmotif to punctuate the different stopping or pausing points during the course of prayer or study and, therefore, is not specifically related to mourning. Even its recitation as a prayer “of orphans” seems, initially, to have been placed as an appendix at the end of the service, as a sort of supplement designed for orphaned young people who, since not yet adults, were not authorized to lead prayers, or to recite the various forms of *Kaddish* and the other parts of the service assigned to the reader². Undoubtedly, the most striking fact is that in none of the medieval codes, even as late as the *Shulchan Aruch*, are the rules for the recitation of the *Kaddish*, which a mourner must follow, specified in the sense that we know today³.

¹ The phrase *Va'yatzmach purkanei* (and may He accomplish His deliverance) appears for the first time in the *sidur* of Sa'adia Gaon and later, in Maimonides, thereafter being incorporated into the Spanish and Sefardic traditions.

² cf. Simcha de Vitry (12th century), *Machzor Vitry*, § 101.

³ For an excellent discussion of sources concerning the origin of the *Kaddish*, cf. Shmuel Glick, *The Light of the Mourner* (*Or le'avel*, in Hebrew), Keren ori, Jerusalem, 1991, pp. 147-158.

One might ask, under such circumstances, how did a prayer that initially was not designed to render homage to the deceased and, even less, to constitute the principal commemorative obligation of orphans, become charged with so much emotion, and progressively assume such importance. The question especially merits consideration, since anyone who has reflected, even briefly, on the significance of the words enunciated in the *Kaddish*⁴ will have realized that this prayer is in no way an invocation for the repose of the soul of the departed, as is the case with the *El malei rachamim*, of the Ashkenazim, or the *Hashkava* of the Sefaradim. Instead, it deals with the solemn glorification of God, with a strong eschatologic connotation: the confident and pressing expectation of the advent of the reign of God on earth. One notes in this regard, the obvious relationship with the famous Christian *credo* expressed in the *Pater noster*, inspired by *Matthew* 6:9-10: “Our father who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven”.

It is precisely beginning with this ancient context, of which the Christian source is a reflection, that one might attempt to restore the spiritual meaning within the train of thought of the *Kaddish*, which then will lead one, progressively, to the form that we recognize today. It seems, in effect, that the *Kaddish* prayer, elaborated during the Gaonic period, was constructed as an expansion around one key phrase, which constitutes its nucleus, and which is always recited in unison by the entire congregation: “*Yehei shemei rabba mevarach le’olam u’lealmei almaya*; May His glorious Name be praised forever and ever (lit.: forever from world to world)⁵. On the basis of compelling evidence, several scholars⁶ have advanced the hypothesis that this verse constitutes a paraphrasing of the sacred formula pronounced by the people when, in the Temple, they heard the priests enunciate fully the ineffable name of God during the course of the benedictions and prayers which accompanied the sacrificial ritual: “*Baruch shem kevod malchuto le’olam va’ed* ; Blessed be the glorious Name of His kingdom forever and ever”.⁷ The purpose of invoking the divine name was to invite the Divine Presence into the Sanctuary and to receive God’s blessing: “in all places where I shall record my name I will come unto thee, and I will bless thee” (*Ex* 20:21b). This invocation called forth a particular response, rendered to God, by the faithful assembled in the Temple:

From where do we know that one did not respond “Amen” (to benedictions) in the Temple? From the verse: “Stand up and bless the Lord your God forever and ever!” And they blessed: “Blessed be thy glorious name, which is exalted above all blessing and praise” (*Nehemia* 9:5). [...] And the people answered: “May the Name of His glorious reign be blessed forever” (*Ta’anit* 16b).

A variant of this formula would have been proclaimed, in the Temple, in response to the divine benediction enunciated by the priests, for the sake of the people, during which the ineffable Name of God was also pronounced. Later, the Sages of the Talmud, accorded a prominent place to the recitation of this formula of praise, used most often at the conclusion of prayers or at the end of a period of study, doubtlessly in order to perpetuate a memory of the divine presence and of the ritual celebrated in

⁴ See the translation of the *Kaddish* in the appendix (the original text is largely in Aramaic).

⁵ A very similar formulation (in Aramaic) may also be found in the book of Daniel: “Blessed be the name of God forever and ever, *le’hevei shmei di’eloha mevorach min’alma ve’ad alma*” (*Dn* 2:20).

⁶ Cf. Glick, *op. cit.*, p. 150.

⁷ Cf. *Mishna, Yoma* 6:2; Maimonides, *Hil. Ta’anot* 4:15.

the Temple, since destroyed, and thus to express the burning desire for its future reconstruction. But more than simply recalling a memory, indeed it would seem that the purpose was to revive the divine presence itself, or at the very least, despite the hiatus forced by exile, to maintain a certain contact with it. All is constructed as if, in the absence of the explicit invocation of the ineffable divine Name, its evocation alone should produce an effect, if not of the same intensity, at least of the same genre. In summary, it was an attempt to recall the effect that was induced by the recitation of this formula of praise in response to the divine benediction:

Rabbi Yosi ben Chalafta (2nd century) teaches: “From where do we know that to those who proclaim ‘May his holy Name be blessed’, one replies ‘forever and ever (lit.: forever, from world to world)’? From the verse: ‘Because I will publish the name of the Lord: ascribe ye greatness unto our God’ (*Dt.* 32:3)” (*Sifrei Dt.*, §306).

Rabbi Yehoshua (3rd century) teaches: “Any person who replies with all his might: ‘Amen, may His holy Name, source of all blessings, be praised’, for him, all celestial decrees weighing against him are destroyed” (*Shabat* 119b).

Raba (4th century) teaches: “By what merit does the world survive? [...] By virtue of the proclamation ‘May His holy Name be blessed’ recited after religious study” (*Sota* 49a).

Expressing such a formula calls forth anticipation of, and even initiates, the sanctification of the Name, as it was foretold by Ezechiel, who spoke of his desires for the rebuilding of the Temple, through which the divine benediction would be fully restored, and which would result in the diffusion of monotheism to the rest of humanity, as is indicated in the verse which would help to inspire the future formulation of the *Kaddish*⁸:

“*Hitgadilti ve’hitkadishiti*...: I will magnify myself and sanctify myself; and I will be known in the eyes of many nations, and they shall know that I am the Lord” (*Ez* 38:23, see also *Ez* 37:27 and *Ps* 72:17).

As Elbogen⁹ has suggested, the comforting parable of the reviving of the dried bones, mentioned by Ezechiel (chap. 37), without doubt would have contributed to a thematic liaison between the sanctification (of the name of God) and the consolation of mourners, as one sees it in the later function of the *Kaddish*. The idea being that orphans extend, in the name of the departed, the work of public sanctification of the name of God, in order that the grandeur of the divine Name finally be revealed in spectacular fashion at the time of the resurrection of the dead. In short, it is a matter of establishing a chain of solidarity, within successive generations, which, one after another, combine to bring about this event. If the expression of this *credo* seems to achieve preeminence, over and above the other diverse ritual obligations, at the death of a parent and in the process of mourning for him¹⁰, it is most certainly because it is a decisive moment for transmitting the values and the calling of Judaism, at the same time that it is a pivotal point, between life and death, that returns one to the fundamental affirmation of monotheism.

⁸ Cf. Tur, Orach Chaim 56. Other verses were equally influential: *Ne* 9:5 (cited above), *Ps* 72:19, and *passim*.

⁹ Ismar Elbogen, *The Historical Development of Jewish Prayer*, ed. Hebrew (ed. Original in German, Leipzig, 1913), Tel Aviv, 1972, pp 72-75.

¹⁰ As the name *Kaddish Yatom* (Mourners’ *Kaddish*) indicates, it seems that this practice of recitation was initially instituted for the death of a father, then a mother, and then was extended, within certain communities, to include all deaths within the immediate family.

In effect, the function of the *Kaddish Yatom* is to restore continuity, where there is a risk of an interruption in fidelity. At the theological level, it is a matter of establishing that which the *Mishna* requires: “Man has the duty to bless (God) for the evil that befalls him to the same extent that he blesses (Him) for the good (*Berachot* 9:5). In agreeing to recite the *Kaddish*, when a loved one has just died¹¹, the mourner professes his monotheistic faith; evil does not result from the act of an unyielding power opposed to God. Evil is the counterpart of good, and, even more, it is the leavening. It is not a matter of negating the sorrow or the pain, but of bringing them into balance, by considering the painful experience of evil and death as a temporary stage or a temporary state, which will finally be resolved with the advent of the divine kingdom. By making evil subservient to good and by proclaiming the final triumph of life over death, the mourner heroically transcends his grief, at the same time that he conceptually surpasses the limits which reality has cruelly imposed upon him.

Under such circumstances, one understands better how reciting the *Kaddish* for a departed parent expresses filial attachment by means of transmitting certain responsibilities; it is as if the life and the works of the departed had been, thereby, prolonged. Ancient texts attest to this principle having been applied in other circumstances or in other situations:

When a father dies, it is as if he were not dead, for he has left behind him a being similar to himself. In his life, he has seen and rejoiced and, in death, he has not been saddened. Against his enemies, he has left an avenger and, for those who love him, a being who will repay good deeds (*Siracides* 30:4-6)¹².

R. Shimon bar Yochai teaches: “He who has a son who applies himself to the study of Tora, does not die, so to say” (*Gn rabba* 49:4).

The sages teach: “The son honors the father during his life and honors him still during death [...]. How can he do this in death? When he (the son) cites a tradition in his (the father’s) name, he must not say simply, ‘Thus said my father’, but ‘Thus said my father, my teacher, may I be an atonement for the repose (of his soul)’” (*Kidushin* 31b).

This last citation indicates that works accomplished in the name of the deceased not only have an effect upon the living, but also affects the salvation of the soul of the departed. This principal is referred to frequently in rabbinic literature, even though not always with unanimity¹³. In particular, it is appropriate to relate here a famous medieval legend, which applies this principle to the recitation of the *Kaddish*¹⁴. We

¹¹ See also the celebrated verse of *Job* (1:21): “the Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.”

¹² Even though the sages did not include the *Siracides* within the biblical canon, it is frequently cited in the Talmud as a book of wisdom.

¹³ It seems that Hillel, as opposed to Shamai, was of the opinion that there was no punishment after death, and as a result, the dead had no need of atonement. (Cf. *Sifrei, Ha’azinu*, §339; *Midrash Tehilim* 46:1; Glick, *op. cit.*, pp.127-133).

¹⁴ This tale, which exists in no less than seventeen medieval versions, is an adaptation of an ancient story in which the hero was R. Yochanan ben Zakai. In its original form, the meritorious and expiatory evocation of the holy Name, by a son for a deceased father, did not include the recitation of the *Kaddish*. The introduction, in the Middle Ages, of this element into the legend reflects the new place that the *Kaddish* had acquired during this period. It is true that Isaac of Vienna says that “his teacher, Eleazer of Worms, had found in the *Midrash Tanna de-bei Eliyahu rabba* that a son reciting the *Yitgadal (Kaddish)* saved his deceased father from hell” (*ibid*). However, I have found no trace of such a text in this *Midrash*, which is in any case of a later period (gaonic). See David Golinkin, “Responsum on the recitation of *Kaddish* by women” (in Hebrew), in: *Responsa of the Masorti Rabbinical Assembly of Israel*, 1998, p. 78, note 1.

present a translation of the version given in *Or zarua* by R. Yitschak of Vienna (*Hil. Shabbat*, §50):

It happened that Rabbi Akiva met a naked man, blackened as if by coal. He carried on his head a load so heavy that it seemed as if he carried ten (loads) and he pressed on so doggedly that one would have said that he was a workhorse. Rabbi Akiva called upon him to stop and asked him, "Why do you work like a mad man? If you are a slave and if it is your master that imposes such a load upon you, I am going to free you from such a yoke. And if it is because you are too poor, I am willing to get you set up again." The man replied to him, "I beg of you, do not delay me, lest those who command me become angry." Rabbi Akiva responded, "But what is going on and what has happened to you?" The man replied, "He to whom you are speaking is no longer of this world... Yes, I am damned; everyday I am sent to cut wood with which, afterwards, I am burnt." Rabbi Akiva, greatly dismayed, said to him, "My son, but what crime can you have committed in this world, as a result of which you have been forced to accept such a fate?" The man from beyond the grave then admitted the following to Rabbi Akiva, "I was a tax collector and I was one of the bureaucrats in charge of the welfare of the people. Well, I granted favors to the rich, while oppressing the poor." Rabbi Akiva then asked him, "Did you not receive some words of instruction from your masters as to how you might make amends?"

The man was once again seized by fear and repeated, "I beg of you, do not delay me so long, for the anger of my tormentors will be aroused all the more. Well, in truth, there is absolutely no salvation for the man in front of you, for the remedy, of which I have heard them speak, is completely impossible. It would require that the poor man (who I am) have a son and that this son be able to stand up in the midst of a congregation and proclaim 'Bless He who is the source of all benediction', and that, afterwards, the congregation reply, 'May the Lord, who is the source of all benediction, be blessed forever'; or that this son say (the *Kaddish*), 'May His name be magnified (*Yitgadal*)' and that the congregation then respond, 'May His glorious name be blessed'. Then, and only then, would I be able to be liberated from the torments of hell. But, the man who stands before you did not have a son. When his wife was pregnant, he shamefully abandoned her. So that he never knew if she had given birth to a boy, and then, even if that had been the case, if only this man could have known about it, but, despicable man that I am, I have never had any friends..."

Rabbi Akiva then resolved to find out if such a child existed, in the hope of initiating him into Judaism, so as to permit him to stand before a congregation. He, therefore, asked the man from beyond the tomb, "What is your name?" The man replied, "Akiva." "And what is the name of your wife?" "Shushniva." "And the name of your town?" "Ludkia."

Having heard all of this, Rabbi Akiva was deeply moved. He set out at once to resolve this affair for the good. When he reached the indicated place, he questioned everyone he found about Akiva. They all responded, "May the bones of that wicked man be broken." Rabbi Akiva questioned them about his wife. They replied, "May her memory be erased from this world." He asked them about the child. They answered that the child (a boy) had remained uncircumcised, for even the commandment of circumcision had not been fulfilled. Rabbi Akiva decided to take charge of this child. He had him circumcised and made him sit to be taught, but he could not manage to have him accept the Tora. Rabbi Akiva then fasted on behalf of the child for forty days, until a heavenly voice was heard to say, "Rabbi Akiva, go and teach him." He taught the child the Tora, the reading of the *Shema*, the *Amida* of eighteen blessings, as well as the rules for grace after meals, until the day came when he was able to place the child before the congregation and the boy proclaimed, "Blessed be He who is the source of all benediction," to which the congregation responded, "May the Lord who is the source of all benediction be blessed forever." And then he exclaimed, "May his name be magnified (*Yitgadal*)," and the congregation replied, "May His glorious name be blessed."

At that very moment, the man from the dead was released from his torments. He appeared to Rabbi Akiva in a dream and said to him, "May it be the Lord's will that one day your soul repose in peace in the Garden of Eden, for you have saved me from the torments of hell." A prayer at once burst forth from Rabbi Akiva's lips and he said, "May Your name, Lord, be proclaimed forever, and constantly evoked from generation to generation!"

This legend is not only full of colors and flavors, it is also extremely subtle. Let us note, to begin with, the similarity between Rabbi Akiva and the damned man. Those who know well the edifying stories in the Talmud about Rabbi Akiva will not fail to remember that he was, for the first forty years of his life, an *am ha'aretz* (ignoramus),

who belittled the sages of the Tora, before becoming one himself (cf. *Pessachim* 49b). Akiva the damned could represent that facet of earlier life that could have been redeemed by the uncultured son's return to his roots¹⁵. If this interpretation is correct, it indicates that the sincere recitation of the *Kaddish*, the evocation of the "Great Name", would also have a soteriological function for he who recites it, as the end of the story seems to indicate (the eternal repose promised to Akiva). In addition, Rabbi Akiva is a character who symbolizes the tortured being, since he died a martyr for "the sanctification of God". He professed his faith in monotheism under torture and in the face of death, affirming the continuity of the reign of God, in this world and in the next (cf. *Berachot* 61b). In reciting the *Kaddish*, the bereaved son also accomplishes the act of sanctification by the fact that he emphasizes the continuity of hope, despite the death of a parent and in spite of the "exile" of God. By demonstrating fidelity to the departed, he shows himself to be a worthy participant in this mission of testimony, and thus, in return, assures the deceased parent dignity and the expiation of sins leading to eternal repose. Finally, one notes that this tale also expresses the possibility of obtaining atonement as a result of the pious acts of a person outside the family, a sage, a spiritual father, to the extent that it is he (Rabbi Akiva) who rehabilitates the child and opens to him the path of holiness.

This reverse effect of responsibility, which flows from son to parent, from the living to the dead, from the sage to the departed, also expresses itself in an unexpected, or at the very least, an astonishing manner; it ascends as high as God Himself. Two extremely pertinent *midrashim* permit us to place all of this in perspective.

Rabbi Yishmael ben Elisha recounts: "One day, when I had entered the Holy of Holies to burn incense, I saw Akatriel YH, Leader of the armies, [a visual symbol for the divine glory] seated upon his throne, elevated and exalted. He said to me, 'Yishmael, my son, bless me!' I said to him, 'May it be Your will that Your mercy prevail over Your anger, so that it can become preeminent among Your attributes, may You treat your children according to Your virtuous kindness and, for their sake, remain below the line of strict justice!' And, with his head, he made a sign of satisfaction". From this one learns the precept that one must never disdain a blessing, even from the simplest person (*Berachot* 7a).

Rabbi Yosei ben Chalafta says, "I heard a moaning voice, which resembled the wailing of a dove, and it exclaimed, 'Woe is Me for having destroyed My house [the Temple in Jerusalem], for having burnt My Sanctuary, because of the sins of the Children of Israel, and for having exiled them amongst the nations [...]!' But when the Children of Israel enter their synagogues and their houses of study and intone, 'May his glorious name be blessed!' God nods his head and says, 'Happy is He who is praised thusly in His house [...]'. But when is he like a father who has exiled his children? And woe is Me, because of children who have been cast out from their father's table" (*Berachot* 3a).

That which is common to both these amazing texts is that they both evoke God's "nodding of the head", which expresses the salutatory effect on Him produced by human benediction. The first text deals with a blessing pronounced directly by a priest in the Holy of Holies, in the very heart of the Sanctuary. On the other hand, the second text assumes the fact that the Temple has already been destroyed, but indicates that evoking the divine Name (as will be the practice later in the *Kaddish*), in places of study and of prayer, still fulfills this beneficial function. In the first text, God specifically requests human benediction. These blessings are, for Him, a necessity, in

¹⁵ In *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* (A:6), Rabbi Akiva takes his first steps in the realm of study, in the company of his son. And in *Avot de-Rabbi Natan* (B:12), it appears that it was Lud (Lod), the city of his teacher, Rabbi Eliezer, that Rabbi Akiva awakened to the study of the Tora. In the account cited above, the town is Ludkia. As Charles Mopsik has mentioned to me, the name of the wife in the story, Shushniva, is an anagram of Shushbina, which signifies simply "companion", a generic term signifying spouse.

the sense that it allows Him to soften his relationship with Israel. Here the theurgical effect of human benediction is undeniable. In the second text, this effect is at the same time, both amplified and diminished. Amplified because, in this case, one is dealing with a response to a clear and present distress. God laments, inconsolably, the fact that He was forced, by the sins of Israel, to destroy His own place of residence upon earth. Another *Midrash* expresses the same concept in a manner still more startling:

[God says], “Because of your sins, you have made of Me a cruel being and you have altered My attributes [from merciful to cruel]” (*Midrash Tanchuma, Be’chukotai*, 2).

But the effect is also diminished, because the spirit of God is only restored for a very brief period of time. The vivifying effect of invoking the Name, which is never other than a substitute for the real benediction (of the priests in the Temple), can never fill the void left by the “children carried into exile”. The only true comfort that it brings is that serves as a vehicle for renewing memory and for renewing the hope of the restoration (of the priestly blessings) in messianic times.

This last image leads us to attempt a comparison with the legend of Rabbi Akiva recounted above. Basically, all things considered, the God who laments the exile of His sons resembles, in certain ways, the miserable man, as he is depicted in the story, damned and cursed. Of course, it is not His own fault that God is dejected. Nonetheless, He suffers the sorrowful consequences of human error, breaking laws that He Himself established when creating the world. God finds himself taken hostage, exiled from his dwelling place, inextricably imprisoned by a situation not of His making, until His wayward children return to the path of full acceptance of the Tora, which leads to redemption. God, the solitary father is, so to speak, confined to a sort of purgatory or hell, which surrounds Him in darkness, preventing Him from expressing His tenderness¹⁶. For He cannot extricate Himself, since this deliverance would have meaning only if his parental role were to be truly assured. In this case, human responsibility is fully assumed. The well-known talmudic dictum fully applies here:

A prisoner cannot escape from his prison by himself (*Berachot* 5b).

It appears, then, in the light of these texts, that the recitation of the *Kaddish* was considered a source of revitalization not only for the mourner who recites it for the deceased, but also for God Himself. Through this act of sanctification, one is able to transcend the limits of the world and attempt to reestablish an equilibrium where inner harmony has been disrupted, and to restore the flow of blessings in both directions, from God to man and from man to God, and, by so doing, each is freed from his “infernal” banishment. In this sense, the edifying acts of mourners can be included among those which Moshe Idel has termed “the mystique of participation”, such as it will be later conceptualized in the Kabbalah. In the first instance, not only its theurgic effect¹⁷, but also its expiratory effect brings to mind the purification of *Yom Kippur*.

¹⁶ One may see here the conceptual foundations and mystical extrapolations through which terms such as “orphans of the father” in *Lamentations* 5:3 came to reflect the situation of the Jews with respect to God (cf. *Zohar, Lamentations* 91a, ed. and trans. by Charles Mopsik, Lagrasse, Verdier, 2000, p.62).

¹⁷ One should note that this theurgical dimension of the *Kaddish* may have been contested. There is the case of Rabbi Meir ben Shimon (13th century) who rebelled against the idea that divine perfection had to depend upon the alleged benefit provided by human benediction. Blessing God signifies nothing more than recognizing Him as the source of all benediction. “The expression ‘May He be blessed’ indicates that God sustains an action which He, Himself, accomplishes. [...] Even when the sons of this world bless Him and praise Him, all this derives only from Him [...]”. “*Milchemet mitsva*, Ms. Parme de

In effect according to talmudic tradition, sinners or even ordinary persons, of average merit, descend into Gehenom (purgatory) for twelve months, in order to atone for their sins and be purged of all impurity (cf. *Mishna, Eduyot* 2:10, *Rosh Ha'shana* 17a). The different rites of mourning, asceticism, contrition and recitation of the *Kaddish* in memory of the deceased for eleven months¹⁸, instill within the mourner a “participative empathy” for the soul of the departed, consigned to purgatory. What does this “mirror of purgatory” signify then for the mourner? That which one generally refers to as the “work of mourning”, that process of physical and spiritual resignation in the face of the loss of a loved one, requires an effort to prolong the moral relationship between mourner and deceased, in spite of and because of the separation. Here is to be found, without doubt, one of the most astonishing and fascinating meanings for that which one discreetly calls “accompanying”.

Rivon Krygier

Appendix: Translation of the *Mourners' Kaddish*

Magnified and sanctified be His great Name (of the Lord) in the world that he has created, according to His will¹⁹. May he establish His kingdom [*Sfard and Sefaradim*: may he accomplish His deliverance and may He permit the coming of His Messiah].
The congregation responds: Amen

In your lifetime and in your days and in the lifetime of all the house of Israel, speedily and at a near time, and let us say:
The congregation responds: Amen. May His great Name be blessed forever and ever.

Blessed, praised and glorified, exalted, extolled and honored, adored and lauded be the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He.
The congregation responds: *Ashkenasim*: Blessed be He. *Sefaradim*: Amen.

Beyond all blessings and hymns, praises and songs, which are uttered in the world, and let us say: *The congregation responds*: Amen.

May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life [*Sefaradim*: satiety, deliverance, consolation, well being, health, redemption, pardon, expiation and salvation] for us and for all Israel, and let us say: *The congregation responds*: Amen
May He who causes peace to reign in His high places, cause peace to reign for us and for all Israel, and let us say: *The congregation responds*: Amen.

Rossi, 155 [2749], cited in: Charles Mopsik, *The Great Texts of the Kabala*, Lagrasse, Verdier, 1993, p. 108.

¹⁸ It was decided to recite the *Kaddish* for only eleven months, and not for a full year, in order not to excessively associate the deceased with those who were definitely considered to be sinners (Rama, *Yore dei'a, siman* 376:5).

¹⁹ According to the version of the Vilna Gaon, one should translate this phrase in reverse order: “May His great Name (of the Lord) be magnified and sanctified in the world which He has created according to his will”, thereby signifying that the world will not conform to divine will until the divine Name is fully revered.