

# 8

## FROM THE RHINE VALLEY TO JEZREEL VALLEY

### Innovative Versions of the Mourners' Kaddish in the Kibbutz Movement

DALIA MARX

Someone of our generation who loses a parent or a close friend—suffers from two kinds of orphanhood, one through the loss of a dear one, and the second . . . because he has lost the forms of speech, the cherished expression and the spiritual heritage, through which his forebears used to convey their mourning . . . one orphanhood is the loss of a person, the second, the loss of tradition.

Uriel Tal, “Kaddish Yatom”

One can hardly imagine a prayer that evokes stronger emotional responses among Jews than the Mourners' Kaddish. Some draw consolation from its theology, many more are compelled and soothed by its familiarity and repetitiveness, still others are alienated by its theological message. Yet few remain indifferent to the Kaddish, and even the fiercest atheists among my acquaintances tremble at the sound of the words “Yitgadal ve-yitkadash shemeh raba.” One reaction to the Kaddish is that of the German Jewish poet Heinrich Heine, who converted to Christianity. When he reflected on his own impending death, he wrote in his poem “Gedächtnisfeier” (commemoration): “Keinen Kadosch wird man sagen, / Nichts gesagt und nichts gesungen / Wird an meinen Sterbetagen” (No Kaddish will be recited / Nothing will be said or sung / on my dying days).<sup>1</sup> Indeed, the Kaddish represents much more than its

literal meaning; it has come to be a powerful symbol, regardless of its original function and regardless of the wording or theology the prayer manifests.

After a brief description of the existential context that transformed an ancient prayer into a ritualized theological response to catastrophe that became the mourners' prayer, I will turn to contemporary Israeli literary liturgical responses to this traditional prayer. I believe that the journey between two valleys, from the medieval Rhine to the contemporary Jezreel valley, may serve as a useful test case for liturgical innovations and may reveal a complex multifaceted Jewish religiosity.

The Kaddish prayer is mentioned by name for the first time in Geonic sources,<sup>2</sup> but it is probably much older. Some scholars, such as Ismar Elbogen, date it to the Second Temple period.<sup>3</sup> Originally, the Kaddish had no connection to death or grief. Joseph Heinemann has argued that it originated in the *Bet ha-midrash* (House of Study), not the synagogue and that its original historical and cultural context was as the concluding prayer after a sermon or Torah study.<sup>4</sup> Unlike most other Jewish prayers, there are at least five different versions of it, and it serves different liturgical functions.<sup>5</sup> Yet the best known of all the Kaddish versions was the last to develop—*Kaddish yatom* (the Orphans' Kaddish, or, as it is better known in English, the Mourners' Kaddish).

The Kaddish as a mourners' prayer should be considered contextually within the variety of mourning and memorial liturgical and ritual innovations that followed the Crusader persecutions, beginning in 1096 in Ashkenaz. The devastation resulting from these cruel pogroms, brought upon the established and learned communities of the Rhineland, resulted in tremendous religious creativity.<sup>6</sup> Among the innovations that served as responses to the persecutions were the *Yizkor* (communal service for the dead),<sup>7</sup> the *Yahrzeit* (a commemoration of the death anniversary), lighting candles for the deceased, a variety of lamentation hymns and the prayer *Av ha-rahamim*, a general requiem for martyrs.<sup>8</sup>

The first known explicit connection between the Kaddish and mourning was made in the minor tractate *Sofrim*, dating to the eighth century.<sup>9</sup> However, at this stage, it was recited by the cantor and not the mourners, and there is no reason to assume that there was a specific version of the Kaddish designated for the mourners. There is a reference to the requirement for a boy to recite the Kaddish in the literature of the school of Rashi, dated from the eleventh to the mid-thirtieth centuries,<sup>10</sup> but the explicit requirement for a mourner to say the Kaddish on behalf of his dead father

did not appear until the thirteenth century in *Or zaru'a*, a legal compendium composed by Rabbi Yitshak ben Moshe of Vienna, who wrote: "It is our custom here, in the land of Canaan [Bohemia], as well as it is the custom of the inhabitants of Rhineland, for an orphan to rise and recite the Kaddish after worshippers have finished reciting *En Keloheinu*. In France, however, I observed that they did not insist that the one who recites the Kaddish would be an orphan child or a child who has a father and mother. Our custom seems more reasonable, on account of the story of Rabbi Akiva" (*Shabbat*, 50). Following this, Rabbi Yitzhak cites an aggadic story of Rabbi Akiva, whose training of an orphan boy to recite the Kaddish was instrumental in saving his father from the sufferings of hell. This story appears in many versions, some of them older than the one in *Or Zaru'a*, although this is the first time the Kaddish is specifically mentioned as a means for a child to rescue his dead father from the torments of the *gehinom* world of the dead.<sup>11</sup> The popular theological notion that a son's actions can benefit his deceased father appears already in Amoraic literature, but it was largely ignored.<sup>12</sup> Israel Ta-Shema argued that the concept gained popularity in the Geonic period, but even then it was not unanimously accepted.<sup>13</sup> And as mentioned in *Or Zaru'a*, there was a parallel custom to let a child recite the Kaddish, regardless of whether he was an orphan or has parents, in order to accustom him to lead the congregation.<sup>14</sup>

As an outcome of the Crusades, including the existence of many children who were orphans, it became the task of the survivors to recite a special version of the Kaddish—the Mourners' Kaddish. The belief that a son can benefit his deceased father merged with the custom of allowing a child to recite the Kaddish. Consequently, the child symbolically took the place of his father in the congregation.

The Kaddish seemed suitable for this purpose since it deals with the sanctification of the name of God and establishing God's kingdom on earth. In a catastrophic time, when the situation is uncertain and unstable, the desire for just rule and for the presence of God's hand in the world may be felt as especially necessary. And there is more to the Kaddish than a response to the situation of the persecuted Ashkenazic communities. Death, in and of itself, is a highly traumatic experience for the survivors of the deceased, and probably every culture creates coping devices and means to deal with it. In our case, the unnatural death of so many Jews, including mass suicides and the killing of children by their own parents in order to avoid forced conversions,<sup>15</sup> required a special religious response. And indeed their deaths were considered

*Kiddush hashem* (martyrdom, and literally, [death for] the sanctification of the Name). According to this view, God's presence in the world increases through the martyrs. This was a way of finding consolation and giving meaning to the unprecedented martyrdom,<sup>16</sup> as the Kaddish reiterates the desire for the magnification of the Divine name in the wounded world:

|   |  |
|---|--|
| Magnified and sanctified be His Great Name          | תְּגַדֵּל וְיִתְקַדֵּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא |
| in the world that He created according to His will. | בְּעֵלְמָא דִּי בְרָא כְרַעוּתֵיהּ     |
| And may He Establish His Kingdom . . .              | וְיַמְלִיךְ מַלְכוּתֵהּ . . .          |

As mentioned, the traumatic events in medieval Ashkenaz gave rise to the creation of the Mourners' Kaddish, the obligation of which was not only on orphans, but also on other immediate relatives: parents, spouses, and siblings. Consequently, far from its denotative meaning and from its original use, the Kaddish became fixed in the Jewish consciousness as the prayer of mourners.

### The Mourners' Kaddish in Israel

The historian and thinker Uriel Tal (1926–84) notes a connection between the alienation of the members of the nation as a nation and the status of the individual mourner in isolation. Tal begins his article on the Mourners' Kaddish with the heart-wrenching words quoted in the epigraph for this article. People “of our generation” experience alienation and loneliness not only as a result of the loss of someone beloved, but they are also separated from their heritage and cannot turn to it for support when facing a personal tragedy. “Our silence” (as a result of the lack of a vocabulary of grief), Tal writes, “is deafening.”<sup>17</sup>

This situation in Israel can partly be explained by the polarization with regard to religion between the “religious” (namely Orthodox and ultra-Orthodox) and the so-called “secular,”<sup>18</sup> with a minority of non-Orthodox religious communities in between. This polarization makes the mere entrance into a synagogue (any synagogue) a political act. Many Israelis shy away from any expression of Jewish religiosity, since they connect it with rejection of modernity, disrespect for democratic values, and religious coercion and corruption.<sup>19</sup> This being said, it seems that Israelis do turn to religious ceremonies when it comes to lifecycle events (and to a lesser extent, annual holy day observances), especially when facing death. Unlike other life ceremonies that can

be planned, death, in most cases, requires a quick response. Death generally finds the grieving family unprepared, no matter how predictable the death may have been. The chaotic nature of death causes many people to seek the security of structure and prescribed protocol.

It is interesting that the very need that created the Mourners' Kaddish in the first place in medieval Germany is by and large operative in an entirely different context in modern Israel. Secular Israelis turn to traditional funeral forms and especially to the recitation of the Kaddish. Among other responsible factors might be the fact that funerals are dominated by an Orthodox religious institution, since religious life in Israel is regulated through the Orthodox Chief Rabbinate. A ceremony that is meant to be a meaningful rite of passage turns out to be awkward and exclusive, and in many cases funerals feel alien and alienating. Private funerals in private cemeteries are possible but very expensive, and most Israelis are insufficiently informed about them.

There is a discrepancy between the dependence upon the Kaddish and the fact that people do not understand its theology or even its simple meaning and pronunciation. The journalist Benny Ziffer wrote about the embarrassing situation in which a son,<sup>20</sup> who had just lost a parent, received a laminated card with the words of the Kaddish on it from the burial society person and was helpless in dealing with it:

[The son looks] like someone who must decipher for the first time in his life a hieroglyphic inscription. He begins to mumble the words and to stumble over every possible Aramaic obstacle, . . . every word on the cardboard looks like a train of meaningless letters, whose cars piercingly bump into each other. Only toward the end, when the Kaddish comes closer to Hebrew, the ashamed man, who failed the reading of the fundamental test, finds consolation with the sentence: "May the One who makes peace in His lofty heavens . . ." <sup>21</sup> which every Israeli, even the most secular, remembers from the song Yigal Bashan sang at the first Chassidic Song Festival in 1969.<sup>22</sup>

Ziffer, "a completely secular person," as he refers to himself, understands the Kaddish as a "great poetic text that everyone should know" and calls upon Israelis to learn the Kaddish in order to understand it and to be able to recite it properly when needed.<sup>23</sup>

The vast majority of the Jewish prayers are in Hebrew, the Israeli vernacular (albeit formulated in an older and loftier linguistic register). Israelis can read them without the need for translation. The Kaddish, however, is composed in Aramaic, a foreign language. Linguistically, Aramaic is indeed the closest language to Hebrew, but the words of the Kaddish sound foreign to the Israeli ear, so that the natural sense of alienation (caused by death itself) increases due to the alienation from the text.<sup>24</sup> There was some experimentation with reciting the Kaddish in Hebrew but, as far as I know, it never worked in the long run. People longed for the mantra-like rhythm of the undecipherable words, treating them as a chant. When it comes to language and religiosity, the Kaddish puts Israelis in the same place as their siblings in the Diaspora.<sup>25</sup>

The Kaddish is chanted, along with the memorial prayer *El male rahamim*, at every official memorial ceremony for the Holocaust or Israeli Fallen Soldiers and Victims of Terrorism on Remembrance Days. It is usually a moving moment at these ceremonies, but unlike other elements, these two prayers are a fixed part of the service, recited by a military cantor, not by those in attendance.

As an example of liturgical reactions to the Kaddish, I will turn to a discussion of the ways in which this prayer has been dealt with in the Kibbutz Movement. I will confine myself to texts that were composed for actual liturgical use, and will not deal with poems or other means of expression. It is my contention that by composing and using new versions of the Kaddish, with a drastically changed theology, the kibbutz members took ownership of their religiosity and control of their mourning.

## The Kaddish Prayer in the Kibbutz Movement

One of the main arenas in which Israeli ritual creativity has taken place is the Kibbutz Movement, which used to be the vanguard of the socialist, secular State of Israel in its early years. Some of the more creative expressions of Israeli spirituality nested within the gates of the kibbutzim. The kibbutzim took charge of the social and cultural life of their members. To this day, some of the most interesting and groundbreaking Israeli ritual innovations have strong roots in the kibbutzim. Treatment of mourning and grief is no exception to this rule.<sup>26</sup>

I will outline now three somewhat blended yet distinct stages of the uses of the Kaddish in kibbutz funerals and memorial events in general: spontaneity and silence; creative adaptations of the prayer; and retreat to tradition.

### Spontaneity and Silence

The early kibbutz funerals were not marked by formal structure. Most of the members were young, and were not generally related to one another by family. The kibbutz project began, for the most part, with a total rejection of religious ritual and religious symbols,<sup>27</sup> yet members were soon engaged in spontaneous experimentation with rituals of grief. Nehama Zitser tells of the death of Yitshak Turner, a young man of the Ha-shomer movement in 1915. She describes the despair and helplessness of his young friends. At a certain moment one member got up and began to hum the *Hora* to himself. Gradually he raised his voice and eventually got up on his feet and began dancing. Little by little, all the members joined him, singing and dancing. He encouraged them, saying: “Hey, hey, friends, Turner didn’t want tears, he wanted life and growth.” They ceased dancing at dawn, when they had to go to work.<sup>28</sup>

Still, many funerals were marked by silence, no prayers or eulogies being delivered.<sup>29</sup> The following poem by Shalom Yosef Shapira (1904–90) may illustrate the “Temple of Silence” that the kibbutz members created:

#### When a person dies

When a person<sup>30</sup> dies in the Jezreel Valley  
The sheaves will be silent.  
The Jezreel Valley is Holy of Holies  
And no one weeps in the Holy of Holies.

When night descends upon the Jezreel Valley  
The stars will shimmer;  
They are the memorial lights in the Jezreel Valley  
for those for whom there is no “Kaddish.”<sup>31</sup>

#### אדם כי ימות... ש. שפירא

אדם כי ימות בעמק-יזרעאל  
תדמנה שבליים.  
קדוש קדושים הוא עמק-יזרעאל  
ואין בו כים בקדוש הקדושים.  
וברדת הלילה על עמק-יזרעאל  
ידעו ענו כוכבים;  
גרות-נשמה הם בעמק-יזרעאל  
לאילה שאין להם “קדיש” .

This fierce poem proposes an alternative religiosity—instead of Jerusalem and its (lost) Temple, the Jezreel valley is portrayed as the Holy of Holies, which requires restraint and self-discipline. No one is allowed to cry in the presence of the Sanctum Sanctorum. But the heavens and the stars in the sky lend themselves to serving as memorial candles for those for whom the Kaddish is not recited.

The composer Yehudah Sharet (1901–79) of Kibbutz Yagur, in a letter from the 1920s, recalled the funeral of a young man called Shuster who

was killed in a work accident. He wrote: “No sob, no moan, no scream—a bleak orphanage, this is what our funerals will look like. The stillness of the mother and the lack of motherly crying, and nothing more. . . . It was as if the silence were a testimony to our uprootedness.”<sup>32</sup> But the silence was also a deliberate choice. Aharon David Gordon (1856–1922), a spiritual leader of the pioneer Zionist movement, left the following will: “This is what I would do, and this is how I wish others would treat me [when I die]: those who wish to honor me shall honor me with silence. For at least one year, no one shall talk about me nor write a single word about me.”<sup>33</sup> Silence was perceived as the proper response to the cruelty of death. But there were other nonverbal responses. The anthropologist Nissan Rubin notes two separate stages: the 1910s, which were marked with song and dance, and the 1920s–50s, “a period of silence.”<sup>34</sup>

One may suggest that the lack of words of prayer in the kibbutz funerals was not a mere result of the so-called “secular” nature of the socialist settlements but also due to the fact that the young members felt that they could not allow themselves to sink into paralyzing grief in the face of the death of many young people (due to disease, conflict with Arabs, accidents, and suicide).<sup>35</sup> In a way, this was a renunciation of the self for the sake of self-discipline. The pioneers could not allow themselves to cease from their demanding daily routine and to be engulfed by sorrow.

### Literary Creativity

The issue of death and mourning became more central in the 1960s when the founders of the kibbutzim began to pass away.<sup>36</sup> Gradually, the silence at the funerals became unbearable. In the early sixties, Yitshak Tabenkin (1888–1971), one of the founders of the Kibbutz Movement, said in a private conversation that the poets and thinkers of the Kibbutz Movement should be approached in order to find poetic expression of “our love of life” in a new version of the Kaddish.<sup>37</sup> Soon enough, some new versions of the Kaddish were composed. I will present here four examples that represent diverse literary styles.

Shortly after Tabenkin’s call, Zvi She’er (1904–87), an educator who also worked in Kibbutz Yagur’s plants, composed the first known alternative version of the Kaddish.<sup>38</sup> According to some testimonies, he did so as a response to the unbearable silence at the graveside. Yagur’s Kaddish, as it is usually referred to, is still read in funerals at Yagur and in some other kibbutzim.<sup>39</sup>



Magnified be the person who holds on to his hopes  
from the morning of his life until his very last  
day.

Whose heart is not tainted and whose ways are  
upright,

And who never despairs in his quest for  
redemption.

In whose heart is both the world's suffering and  
its joys,  
who is its radiance both manifest and hidden.

Hope will not end with him  
And the way of the upright will not perish.

May the glory of humankind be forever blessed.

Magnified, indeed, be the Hebrew person on his  
land

And sanctified be the one who lives with the  
memory of the life that has been taken away.

Life has ended, sealed in the soil of Yagur, in its  
toil, in the hearts of its members.

May his memory abide with us as a blessing.

יִתְגַּדַּל הָאָדָם הַשׁוֹמֵר תּוֹחַלְתּוֹ

מִבֶּקֶר חַיָּיו עַד יוֹמוֹ הָאַחֲרוֹן.

אֲשֶׁר לְבוֹ לֹא סָג וְיִשֶׁר מַעֲשָׂהוּ,

וּמְגִאוֹלָה לֹא נוֹאֵשׁ.

אֲשֶׁר בְּלְבוֹ סִבֵּל הַעוֹלָם וְשִׁמְחָתוֹ,

שֶׁהוּא זִיווּ בְּגִלְיוֹנוֹ וְסִתְרוֹ.

לֹא תִתּוֹם עֲמוֹ תִקְוָה

וְדַרְךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא תֵאָבֵד.

בְּוַכּוֹן יִקַּר הָאָדָם לְעַד.

יִתְגַּדַּל הָאָדָם הַעֲבָרִי עַל אֲדָמָתוֹ

וְיִתְקַדֵּשׁ הַחַי בְּזִכְרוֹן הַחַיִּים

שֶׁנִּפְקְדוּ.

תִּמּוֹ חַיִּים חֲתוּמִים בְּאֲדָמַת יָגוּר,

בְּעֵמְקֶיהָ, בְּלֵב חֲבָרְיָהּ.

יְהִי זִכְרוֹ לְבִרְכָה בְּתוֹכֵנוּ.

She'er quotes the well-known opening words of the traditional Kaddish but changed its original meaning dramatically. Instead of praising God and God's future kingdom, it praises the individual in the specific context of his "kingdom," the kibbutz. The phrase ziv ha'olam (the world's radiance), which is one of the attributes of God, is applied here to the deceased. It is important to note that the phrase Yitgadal ve'yitkadesh shem ha'adam ("May the name of person be magnified and sanctified") was coined half a century earlier by the writer Yosef Haim Brenner (1881–1921), who used it to end an article he wrote in 1905, in the aftermath of the Russian Revolution.<sup>40</sup>

This text exalts the individual within the fabric of the communal life, an action that is entirely missing from the traditional Kaddish, which does not refer to the deceased at all. The glory and the sanctification of God, the center

of the traditional text, are completely missing from this one, which eliminates any reference to the Divine.

There are some similarities among the different versions of the Kaddish used by the kibbutzim: all of them begin with the traditional word *yitgadal*; all of them are dedicated to the memory of the individual in the framework of the kibbutz; all of them wish for the memory to be for a blessing; and all of them are formulated in the male singular voice but are modified when the deceased is a female. But each emphasizes different elements.

The following text was composed by the poet Eli Alon (born in 1935) from Kibbutz Ein Shemer.

### Kaddish for the People of Ein Shemer

Magnified and sanctified be the person in his life  
and in his death  
In his happiness, in his suffering and in his toil.  
Blessed and praised be our kibbutz through those  
who love it  
And gave it their strength without restraint  
And their reward—meaning to their lives and  
their labor.  
And when a life well lived should end—the  
memory of their deeds will not be lost.  
For the way of the upright will never perish  
because the aspirations of their deeds may  
remain forever.  
May the seed that they sowed sprout forth,  
the tree bear fruit, and the home flourish, bus-  
tling with life  
and multiplying generations.  
The soil of Ein Shemer gathers you in today with  
sadness and love to its breast.  
Let the clods of earth be sweet to you.  
May your life and your deeds be bound up in the  
bond of our lives  
For consolation and for hope.

### קדיש לאנשי עין-שמר

יִתְגַּדֵּל וְיִתְקַדֵּשׁ הָאָדָם בְּחַיָּיו וּבְמוֹתוֹ  
בְּשִׂמְחָתוֹ, בְּסִבְלֹו וּבְעִמְלֹו  
יִתְבָּרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח קְבוּצָנוּ בְּאוֹהֲבָיו  
אֲשֶׁר נָתַנוּ מִחֵילָם לְלֵא חֶסֶךְ  
וּגְמוּלָם - טַעַם חַיֵּיהֶם וְעִמְלָם.  
וְאִם תָּמוּ חַיֵּים שֶׁל טַעַם - לֹא  
יִפְקַד זְכָר פְּעֻלָּם.  
כִּי דֶרֶךְ יִשְׂרָאֵל לֹא תֵאבֵד  
וְתוֹחֶלֶת מַעֲשֵׂיהֶם תִּעְמַד לְעַד.  
יִנְבֹּט הַזֶּרַע אֲשֶׁר זָרְעוּ,  
הָעֵץ יַעֲשֶׂה פְרִי, הַבַּיִת יִשְׁגֹּשֶׁג,  
יִהְיֶה חַיֵּים וְיִרְבֶּה דֹרוֹת.  
אֲדַמַּת עֵין-שֶׁמֶר אוֹסֶפֶת אוֹתָךְ  
הַיּוֹם בְּעֶצֶב וּבְאַהֲבָה אֶל חֵיקָה.  
יִמְתְּקוּ לְךָ רִגְבֵי עֲפָרָה.  
יִהְיוּ חַיֵּיךָ וּמַעֲשֵׂיךָ צְרוּרִים בְּצִרּוֹר  
חַיֵּינוּ לְנַחֲמָה וּלְתִקְוָה.

In this version, even more than in Yagur's Kaddish, there is an emphasis on the kibbutz communal life and on the meaningful choices that the deceased made as a kibbutz member. Whereas the Kaddish of Yagur emphasizes the living, this version places the deceased at the center, saying that the fruits of his deeds will last long and that he and his deeds will not be forgotten. Alon cites

not only the Kaddish, but also the mourning prayer *El male rahamim*, giving it a completely new meaning. Instead of asking God that the soul of the deceased may be “bound up in the bonds of life,” referring to the life in the World to Come, it promises that the deeds of the deceased will be “bound up in the bonds of our lives,” that is, they will continue to be present and to impact the community long after he is gone. Similarly, the sentence “For the way of the upright will never perish” is an adaptation of a biblical verse (Hosea 14:10), which speaks about the upright walking in the ways of God, in which the righteous are allowed to step.

The following text was composed by Shalom Smid, a member of Kibbutz Negba, which belongs to Hakibbutz Ha-Artzi, a left-wing group and the most antireligious of the Kibbutz Movement:

### The Kaddish of the Kibbutzim

Magnified be the name of the person,  
Extolled be the labors of his life  
and blessed through our memory  
for the sum of his deeds  
through his days in the world  
And for the actions which he did not  
manage to complete.  
For dreams that were spun and were then  
no more  
And for precious virtues and even human  
weaknesses that have faded away  
through the foggy mists of time.  
May the person's memory be radiant and  
the reflections of his life be like the  
brilliance of the firmament in our hearts—  
Let his name endure as long as the sun  
shines (Ps. 72:17).<sup>41</sup>  
What remains of the person<sup>42</sup> is the memory  
beyond the limits of time.  
His name shall not be covered by darkness.  
The imperative of life's continuity will  
bring relief to our inmost pain.<sup>43</sup>  
The march of time will be compassionate.  
And we shall cherish the fruits of his life  
for many a day.  
Magnified and sanctified.

### קדיש הקיבוצים

יִתְגַּדֵּל שֵׁם הָאָדָם, יִתְעַלֶּה פּוֹעֵל-חַיָּיו,  
וְיִתְבָּרַךְ בְּזָכוֹרֹנּוֹ עַל צְרוּר מַעֲלָלָיו  
בַּיָּמִי חֲלָדוֹ וְעַל הַמַּעֲשֵׂ שֶׁלֹּא הִסְפִּיק  
לְהַשְׁלִימוֹ  
עַל הַחֲלוּמוֹת שֶׁנִּסְוּ וְנִמְנוּגוֹ  
וְעַל יְסוּדוֹת יָקָר וְאֶף חוֹלְשוֹת-אֲנוּשׁ  
שֶׁנִּגְזְרוּ,  
מִבְּעַד הַדּוֹק הָעֶרְפְּלִי שֶׁל הַזְּמַן.  
יִזְהִיר זֵכֶר הָאָדָם וְהַד חַיָּיו בְּזֵהָרָה  
הַרְקִיעַ בְּלִבְנוֹ—  
“וְנִשְׁמָו לְפָנַי שֶׁמֶשׁ יוֹנִן” (תהלים עב, יז),  
כִּי מִתֵּר הָאָדָם הוּא הַזְּכוֹרֹן  
מֵעֵבֶר לְמַחְצוֹת הַזְּמַן.  
לֹא בַחֲשֶׁךְ שָׁמוֹ יִכְסֶה.  
צוֹ הַמֶּשֶׁךְ הַחַיִּים יִצְמִיחַ פֶּרֶקֶן לְכָאֲבָנוּ  
הַמִּשְׁקָע.  
הַזְּמַן בְּמַהֲלָכוֹ יִרְחַם.  
וְנִצְוֹר אֶת כָּל פְּרֻחֵי חַיָּיו לְיָמִים רַבִּים.  
יִתְגַּדֵּל וְיִתְקַדֵּשׁ.

This text emphasizes the pain and loss in the face of death. Its first half speaks of the human fate to leave this world without accomplishing our aspirations and realizing our dreams, the second part is dedicated to consolation of the mourners and hopes for the future. Unlike She'er's text, here the Zionist aspect and the kibbutz ideology are not stressed. In fact, they are referred to only indirectly. Instead, it reflects doleful reflection on the finite nature of human life; it stresses the memory and the consolation of the mourners.

Another version, composed by Oved Sadeh (literally: the worker of the field, 1925–2008) from Kibbutz Beir Keshet, follows more closely the structure of the traditional Kaddish. However, it employs a completely different set of images:

*Magnified and sanctified*

be the clod that crushed  
as the plow split  
the hard soil

*Glorified and extolled—be the leaf  
that sprouted and greened, reddened—and  
fell.*

*Acclaimed and lauded*

be the one who carries the burden  
and when his path collapsed<sup>44</sup>  
my path too collapsed.

*Blessed and praised*

be the voice of the singular one<sup>45</sup>  
along with the voice of the many.

*Magnified and sanctified*

Be the individual in his uniqueness.

יִתְגַּדֵּל וְיִתְקַדֵּשׁ

הַרְגֵב שְׁקָרָס

בְּפִלֵחַ מַחְרֵשָׁה

הָאֲדָמָה הַקְּשָׁה

יִתְהַדָּר וְיִתְעַלֶּה - הָעֵלֶה

שֶׁלִבְבֵךְ, וְהוֹרִיק הָאֲדָיִם-וְנִשֵּׁר.

יִתְרוֹמֵם וְיִתְנַשֵּׂא

הַנוֹשֵׂא בְּמִשָּׂא

וּבְכָרַע דְרָכּוֹ

גַּם דְרָכֵי נְרַמְסָה.

יִתְבָּרַךְ וְיִשְׁתַּבַּח

קוֹל הַיְחִיד

עִם קוֹל הַרְבִּיּוֹת.

יִתְגַּדֵּל וְיִתְקַדֵּשׁ

הַיְחִיד בְּיִחּוּדוֹ.<sup>46</sup>

Sadeh's version is a carefully crafted text: it rhymes and has a meter. The imagery is clearly based on the farming cycle. Unlike the other kibbutz versions, here it is the clod of earth that is "magnified and sanctified," and indeed, this text is deeply grounded in the agricultural kibbutz experience. And yet it stresses the individual. Only toward the end does it mention the community, and even then it is done in order to stress individual uniqueness.

All the above-cited texts make use of the traditional Kaddish, especially of its opening words, which profoundly resonate the expression of mourning, regardless of their denotation. Yet it drastically changes the content, not only in that it shifts the focus from the heavenly kingdom to the earth (in the most tangible sense of the word), from the Divine to the human, and from the metaphysical to the concrete and visceral. God is completely taken out of the picture. Although each composer has his literary, ideological, and cultural agenda, it seems that they cite one another, having created a sub-genre of liturgical expression in which one can identify slightly different emphases.

The writers of these texts (and of similar ones) made a conscious choice in keeping the connotative expression of the Kaddish while supplying ideologically appropriate content. In their texts, these writers made bold statements; they showed that they own the spiritual property, as it were, of the Jewish tradition, yet they choose to use it in an informed way that is adequate to their faith and way of life.

In order to compare the data from the studies of Kalekin-Fishman and Klingman, Rubin, and Shua from the eighties with the situation today, I wrote to those in charge of the cultural life or of mourning committees on the kibbutzim. I inquired about the recitation of the Kaddish prayer and about changing trends in burial rituals within their communities. I have received responses from about forty kibbutzim, and they reveal a very diverse picture. Generally speaking, the number of kibbutzim in which the traditional Kaddish is recited is more or less the same as those in which a special kibbutz Kaddish is in use. In many kibbutzim both are recited. Typically, the traditional text is read by a family member and the kibbutz Kaddish by a "reader" from the community. Some of the people I have spoken with stressed that both men and women recite the Kaddish. About half of the kibbutzim that recite only the traditional Kaddish invite a rabbi or a religious person from a neighboring town or settlement to conduct the funeral, a situation that was almost never seen in the kibbutzim in the past. In many cases, the Orthodox burial leader acts as *mara d'atra*, the local authority, and dictates the nature of the ceremony. In some kibbutzim, especially those affiliated with the Ha-Kibbutz Ha-Artzi movement, no Kaddish is recited. In general, however, the number of kibbutzim in which Kaddish is recited, or at least in which its recitation is a legitimate option, is much larger than in the 1980s, and needless to say, it is much more frequent than in the past. Many kibbutzim stress the autonomy of family to

make the choices regarding the nature of the burial ceremony; a committee member visits the family and shares possible texts and practices, and the family makes the actual decisions. Central kibbutz protocol regarding funerals and mourning gives way to choices made by each family.

### Retreat to Traditionalism

Nissan Rubin writes: “As long as the ideological fervor was strong, secular formulations of ritual could be preserved. With the waning of ideological fervor, some of the secular elements of mourning customs disappeared and more traditional content was reinstated.”<sup>47</sup> This trend—along with absorption into the kibbutzim of people uncommitted to kibbutz values and clusters of non-members, economic as well as cultural privatization, and the centrality of the nuclear family—all these brought about the retreat (or “withdrawal,” as some kibbutz members refer to it) to traditionalism.

This process does not mean, for the most part, that the kibbutzim are becoming more traditional or embracing Orthodoxy. It is rather an indication of the weakening of the ownership the kibbutzim took of their cultural life and of the secular religiosity they created. Authoritative figures, “those who know how,” mostly from outside the community, manage significant parts of the cultural life.

In some kibbutzim there have been functioning traditional synagogues for many decades. Most were rather marginal and intended to address the needs of members’ parents. In the last decade, many kibbutzim have built new synagogues. Some of these institutions are models of inventiveness and creativity,<sup>48</sup> while others are adopting Orthodox formulae, often under the guidance (or supervision) of Orthodox rabbis. Lately, in some secular kibbutzim separate dancing takes place during Simhat Torah, and needless to say, the women, placed behind the mehitsah (separation wall), are not allowed to dance with the Torah scroll.<sup>49</sup> The existence of more and more Orthodox synagogues in the secular kibbutzim is a symptom of a broader phenomenon: a decrease of self-confidence in the social and communal way, the ebbing of mutual social and economic care, and the privatization of most of the kibbutzim have caused a decline in the quality of cultural life. Religious formulae that present themselves as confident and efficacious find their way into the feeble fabric of kibbutz life.<sup>50</sup>

The treatment of the Kaddish is no exception to the rule. While the “Kibbutz Kaddishim” are still recited at funerals in many kibbutzim, some choose

to add the traditional Kaddish and sometimes also the burial prayer, *El male rahamin*. In some cases these traditional prayers have even replaced the Kibbutz Kaddishim entirely. The submission to forms of traditionalism and its authoritative agents often occurs without dealing with it or even understanding it. Paradoxically, one can say that the retreat to tradition reflects a diminished commitment to vibrant Jewish activity.

We may, in conclusion, point to three, albeit somewhat blurred, stages in the treatment of mourning prayers in the kibbutzim. In the first years, spontaneous reactions but mostly utter silence were deemed a proper response to death. Later, new versions of mourning readings, based on the traditional Kaddish but reflecting the kibbutz's ideological worldview, were created. In the third phase we are witnessing a return to tradition, not necessarily as an informed religious choice but rather as an adaptation of ready-made formulae, which are deemed "authentic."<sup>51</sup>

This was a journey from the Rhine Valley, where the Mourners' Kaddish became a device for coping with trauma, to the Jezreel Valley, almost a thousand years later, where Israeli Jews struggle with it, recite it, and even innovate within it in order to cope with human finitude and with their beliefs and fears.<sup>52</sup> It seems that even when Jews walk through the Valley of Death, they may draw consolation and strength from the sources, and that is true for religious as well as secular, and even devotedly atheist Jews.

## Notes

1. Heinrich Heine, *Sämtliche Schriften* (Munich, 1975), 1:113. See also David Telsner, *The Kaddish: Its History and Significance* (Jerusalem 1995); Leon Wieseltier, *Kaddish* (New York, 1998), 271–72. All translations are mine.
2. Tractate Sofrim specifies this prayer among other parts of the service that cannot be fulfilled without a quorum of ten worshipers (Sofrim 10:6). It also says: "After the Mussaf (the Additional service) it is customary for the cantor to go behind the synagogue's door, or to the corner of the synagogue, where he joins the mourners and their relatives to offer a blessing. He then recites Kaddish" (Sofrim 19:9). The first text of the Kaddish appears in Seder Rav Amram Gaon (ninth century in Babylon). Regarding the Kaddish prayer in general, see the following: Ismar Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy: A Comprehensive History*, trans. R. P. Scheindlin (Philadelphia, 1993), 80–84; Lawrence A. Hoffman, ed., *Minhag Ami/My People's Prayer Book: Traditional Prayers, Modern Commentaries*, vol. 6 (Woodstock, Vt., 2002); Stefan C. Reif, *Judaism and Hebrew Prayer: New Perspectives on Jewish Liturgical History* (Cambridge, 1993), 207–10, 219–20; David de Sola Pool, *The Old Jewish-Aramaic Prayer, the Kaddish* (New York, 1964); Telsner, *The Kaddish*; Wieseltier, *Kaddish*.

3. Elbogen, *Jewish Liturgy*, 81–83. Some scholars have indicated the similarities between the Lord's Prayer (Matthew, 6:9–13) and the Kaddish. See Baruch Graubard, "The Kaddish Prayer," *The Lord's Prayer and Jewish Liturgy*, ed. J. Petuchowski and M. Brocke, 59–72 (New York, 1978).
4. Joseph Heinemann, *Prayer in the Talmud: Forms and Patterns*, trans. R. Sarason (Berlin, 1977), 251–75.
5. The different formulations are the Scholar's Kaddish, recited after studying the Torah; the Full Kaddish, recited at the end of the service; the so-called "Half Kaddish," which divides different rubrics of the service; the Mourners' Kaddish; and the Burial Kaddish, recited at funerals and at the end of the study of a Talmud tractate. Significantly, only this last form of the Kaddish mentions the resurrection of the dead.
6. "The Crusades provoked the first major attempt to exterminate an entire Jewry in Europe. It failed but it left many, many mourners in its wake" (Wieseltier, Kaddish, 81). For reference, see: Ivan Marcus, *The Jewish Life Cycle: Rites of Passage* (Seattle, 2004), 227–44.
7. Solomon Freehof, "Hazkarat neshamot," *Hebrew Union College Annual* 36 (1965): 179–89.
8. Marcus, *Life Cycle*, 228–31. One should add to this list a multitude of local memorial customs, many of which are not observed today. See, for example, Gabriel Sivan, "The Hymns of the Isles," *Judaism* 39 (1990): 326–37.
9. See Heinemann, *Prayer in the Talmud*, 251–75.
10. There are numerous mentions of the Kaddish in Mahzor Vitry (composed by Rabbi Simha ben Emanuel of Vitry, a disciple of Rashi), the prototype of the Franco-German religious practice. In most places, it says that the cantor recites the Kaddish, but in others it specifies that a child (na'ar) does it. See, for example, paragraphs 157, 193, 312, and 356.
11. For an exploration of the versions of the tale, see Myron Bialik Lerner, "The Tale of the Tanna and The Dead Man: Its Literary and Halakhic Versions" [in Hebrew], *Asupot* 2 (1988): 29–70; Telsner, *The Kaddish*, 68–76; Wieseltier, *Kaddish*, 126–31.
12. "A son can bring merit מצד to his father, a father cannot bring merit to his son" (*bSan* 104a).
13. Israel Ta-Shema: "Some Notes on the Origins of the Kaddish" [in Hebrew], *Tarbiz* 53 (1984): 559–68.
14. Siddur Rashi, 216. See Ta-Shema, "Some Notes."
15. See for example: Shlomo Eidelberg, trans. and ed., *The Jews and the Crusaders: The Hebrew Chronicles of the First and Second Crusades* (Madison, Wisc., 1987); Robert Chazan, *God, Humanity, and History: The Hebrew First-Crusade Narratives* (Berkeley, Calif., 2000); Jeremy Cohen, *Sanctifying the Name of God: Jewish Martyrs and Jewish Memories of the First Crusade* (Philadelphia, 2004).
16. The idea of God's sanctification through Israel, appears in Ezek. 20:41: **וְהִתְקַדְּשׁוּ בְּיַעַרְיָ וְהִתְקַדְּשׁוּ בְּיַעַרְיָ** ("and I shall be sanctified through you in the sight of the nations") and **וְהִתְקַדְּשׁוּ בְּיַעַרְיָ** ("Through them that are nigh unto Me I will be sanctified," Lev. 10:3). See the commentary to these verses.
17. Uriel Tal, Kaddish, 35.



18. This is a problematic term because it refers to a social affiliation more than to a theological conviction. I am using it here because this is the accepted term in the Israeli public sphere.
19. See Haim Cohn, "Religious Freedom and Religious Coercion in the State of Israel," *Israel among the Nations: International and Comparative Law Perspectives on Israel's 50th Anniversary*, ed. A. E. Kellermann, K. Siehr, T. Einhorn, 79–110 (The Hague, 1998). It should be noted that "Secular" Israelis do seek spirituality, and many turn to Eastern practices or to forms of noninstitutionalized religiosity; see below.
20. Ziffer uses a male reference since he refers to "normal" funerals, namely, Orthodox, where only males are allowed to recite the Kaddish.
21. Only the concluding sentence (and probably the last to be added) of the Kaddish is in Hebrew.
22. Benny Ziffer, "Learn the Kaddish!," in *Siddur ishi*, ed. H. Yovel [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv, 2009), 73.
23. *Ibid.*, 74.
24. Dan Meller, an atheist activist of Humanistic Judaism, wrote a fierce accusation against the use of the Aramaic language for the Kaddish, calling it deceptive and manipulative of people experiencing personal tragedies. See Dan Meller, "Kadish," on Hofesh: Freedom from Religion website [in Hebrew], [www.hofesh.org.il/articles/kadish.html](http://www.hofesh.org.il/articles/kadish.html) (accessed March 2, 2014).
25. Dalia Marx, "When *L'shon HaKodesh* Is Also the Vernacular: The Development of Israeli Reform Liturgy," *CCAR Journal* 56, no. 4 (2009): 31–62.
26. For general information regarding mourning in the non-Orthodox kibbutzim, see Devorah Kalekin-Fishman, "Bereavement and Mourning in Non-religious Kibbutzim," *Death Studies: Education, Counseling, Care, Law, Ethics* 12, no. 3 (1988): 253–70; Nissan Rubin, *New Rituals, Old Societies: Invented Rituals in Contemporary Israel* (Boston, 2009), 92–109; Rubin, *Death Customs in a Non-Religious Kibbutz*, Israeli Judaism, ed. S. Deshen, C. S. Liebman, and M. Shokeid, 323–34 (New Jersey, 1995).
27. Avraham Azili, *The Attitude of Ha-shomer Ha-tsa'ir to Religion and Tradition (1920–1948)* [in Hebrew] (Givat Havivah, 1984), 10–17.
28. Muki Tzur, Ta'ir Zvulun, and Hanina Porat, eds., *The Beginning of the Kibbutz* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv, 1981), 124. For more examples, see Rubin, "Death Customs," 327–29.
29. Rubin, "Death Customs," 330.
30. The Hebrew word *adam*, which is grammatically male, refers to the human being in general.
31. Printed in *Yalkut avlut*, ed. Zvi Shua and Arye Ben-Gurion [in Hebrew] (Beit Hashita, 1990), 144. The poem was set to music by Moshe Rapaport.
32. Shua and Ben-Gurion, *Yalkut*, 128.
33. Sippura shel Degania [in Hebrew] (Tel-Aviv, 1962), 123.
34. Rubin, "Death Customs," 330. It seems, though, that there is no clear division between these periods and, to some extent, they coincided.
35. Muki Tzur, *Lelo ktonet pasim* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv, 1976), 33.
36. Rubin, "Death Customs," 325.
37. Shua and Ben-Gurion, *Yalkut*, 145.

38. A testimony to the legendary status of this Kaddish is the variety of stories about the circumstances of its creation. According to one, it was already composed in 1948 as a response to the death of Yehoshua Globberman, a commander in the Haganah organization and the first soldier to be killed in the 1948 war (Shua and Ben-Gurion, *Yalkut*, 147). But according to the Yagur archives, it was composed in the sixties. (I thank Rabbi Gadi Raviv of Yagur for the information).
39. The Yagur Kaddish is recited by the reader while the traditional Kaddish is recited at Yagur, if the family chooses it, by the family itself.
40. Yosef Haim Brenner, "Letters to Russia" [in Hebrew], *Ktavim* 3 (1985): 103.
41. The phrase *shemesh yinon* (Ps. 72:17, which I translated as "endure as long as the sun shines") was understood by the rabbis as referring to the Messiah (bPes 54a; bSan 98b).
42. The phrase *motar ha-adam* refers in Ecclesiastes (3:19) to the question whether the human being is preferable to the beast.
43. The phrase *yatsm'iah purkan* is a paraphrase of a sentence included in the Sephardic version of the Kaddish: *Yatsmah purkane vi-karev meshihe* (May he bring salvation and draw the Messiah near).
44. *Bikhro'a* literally means "when knelt down."
45. Or "the singular voice" or "the voice of the individual" or "the voice of the one."
46. Shua and Ben-Gurion, *Yalkut*, 149.
47. Rubin, "Death Customs," 323.
48. For example, the synagogue instituted and led by Buja (Binyamin) Yogev in Kibbutz Beit Ha'emek. And see Naamah Azulay, "'A House of Prayer for All Nations': Unorthodox Prayer Houses for Nonreligious Israeli Jews," in *Between Tradition and Modernity*, ed. L. Remennick and A. Prashizky, 22–41 (Bar Ilan, 2008); Rachel Werczberger, "The Jewish Renewal Movement in Israeli Secular Society," *Contemporary Jewry* 31, no. 2 (2011): 107–28.
49. For example, in Kibbutz Mazuva the woman cantor, who served the local congregation for many years, was not allowed to officiate during the High Holidays of 5972 (1986).
50. I thank the sociologist Dr. Nir Resisi, who shared this analysis with me. When an Orthodox synagogue was established in Degania, "the mother of the kevuot," I wrote its members an open letter, which was published in the press. I concluded with the plea: "You, the sons and daughters of the Kibbutz movement, breathed new life into Judaism by adding content and richness to our holidays, and you even created new ones. When you reach out to Judaism, don't approach it submissively and with feelings of inadequacy. Approach it securely, with engagement and ownership. Approach it with the happiness that comes with the performance of a commandment" (*Ynet*, June 8, 2008).
51. In order to fully appreciate the role and status of the Kaddish in Israel, one should examine theological treatment of this prayer. See David and Verete, *The Kaddish Prayer*. For musical innovation, see Hanan Yovel, *A Personal Siddur* [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv, 2009), 70–75. For graphic artistic depictions of this prayer, see especially the series of silk screens by the Moshe Gershuny, each of which depicts a word from the Kaddish and creative commentaries. And, finally, for poems citing the Kaddish, see David and Verete, *The Kaddish Prayer*; Eli Alon,

“On the Secular Kaddish,” *Hazrimah hadu-sitrit shel ha-ivrit*, ed. Z. Luz, 144–54 [in Hebrew] (Tel Aviv, 2011).

52. In the future, I hope to deal with special Kaddish versions written for the remembrance of the Holocaust.