

Kaddish: An Opportunity to Comfort

BY RABBI HERBERT A. YOSKOWITZ



Nothing will fill the hole my Dad's absence has left in my world. No prayer has provided me with the guidance or answers that he was so brilliant at giving. But what the *kaddish* gave me was sacred time to be a mourner. Not just for seven days of *shivah*; or those first few weeks when people were giving me their condolences. But every day for a year. I stood up in a room, embraced by community, and identified myself as someone in mourning, which was exactly how I felt."

These words – written by a young woman who had just completed a year of mourning – reflect the significant effect of the *kaddish*, and of the *kaddish minyan*, on her life. Indeed, many who have recited the *kaddish* for a parent, or for a

relative for whom: by Jewish law, *ackdish* is a gift to the people for whom the

Most people do about this prayer in which it is to be seen only the exact saying *kaddish* and the same honor to

In response to received on the *k* shaped a series of programs at Adat Farmington Hills and third sessions

and rational elements of the *kaddish*, as well as on its mystical elements. Sandwiched between was a session on individual stories told by members who were in their year of mourning.

Program panelists included a couple who were saying *kaddish* for their daughter, a magnificent young woman who lived only seventeen years but who has left an unusually rich legacy. In her "Make A Wish" project, she prepared and appeared in a public service announcement on how young people with can-

cer like to be treated. This "infomercial" is broadcast nationally. Two other panelists were saying *kaddish* for a husband and for a father, respectively. Though only one of the four was obliged to say *kaddish* for eleven months, they all decided to say the prayer

Jason Miller, a rabbinic intern at Congregation Agudath Israel in Caldwell, New Jersey, has used the personal stories in my volume to help people who have experienced the loss of a spouse.

Commenting on the *kaddish minyan*, another panelist referred to her new "club." "I am a member of a very precious club that I did not choose. My comrades have all been wounded. They acknowledge me with a sweet smile. They understand how fragile life is. They understand my pain as I do theirs. They comfort me as the words of the *kaddish* do. I am at peace."

A bereaved widow wrote: "When I recite the *kaddish*, I think of my husband. I feel that this is something that I can do

for him, for me and for us. Starting my day here gives me purpose."

The fourth panelist reflected on the effect of the approaching completion of saying *kaddish* for eleven months for his father. "The *kaddish* experience acted not only as a healing exercise but a strengthening bond between me, my grandfather, and those who preceded us."

In my 30 years as a congregational rabbi, I had never before experienced the emotion generated from that panel, not only from the speakers but from the audience as well. On the day after the presentation, some congregants made contributions to the synagogue in appreciation of this program. Others wrote unsolicited remembrances of their own experience of saying *kaddish* for a dear one. Even now, many months later, I continue to receive such remembrances. This

ing, coupled with my need for people to context of the *kaddish* development of *The Kaddish on Ten Lives*, a small experiences which piled and edited.

talk to me about their during the months of period for saying *kaddish* received two essays writers of the country, both theme I had not prepared. Both writers – one on one in the Midwest

kaddish in a *minyan* for the full eleven months was the first posthumous gift given to each of them by the parent for whom *kaddish* was being recited.

Telling the story of one's journey during and after saying *kaddish* for a deceased relative can also benefit one's synagogue, since fellow congregants who read about the experiences will be able to relate emotionally to the "storytellers" as they report on their travels along the road from mourning to wholeness. Our synagogues can apply this model – one member telling another his or her story – to many