

Volume 7, Number 2
Nisan 5771

April 2011

Olam Tikvahinu

A place to share Torah



Shacharit on Masada, by Lisa Gross

What is Sacred Space?

Olam Tikvateinu

Volume 7, Number 2

Nisan 5771

April 2011

Editor Lisa Friedman

Editorial Advisor Rabbi David Kalender

Table of Contents

Olam Tikvateinu	4
Under the Talit	5
<i>By Brittanie Werbel</i>	
L'Dor Va Dor	6
<i>By Clare Bachner</i>	
My Sacred Space	6
<i>By Bruce Waxman</i>	
The Annual Retelling	7
<i>By Gail Wolf</i>	
Sacred Space	8
<i>By Margo N. Tamburrino</i>	
Hands	10
<i>By Susan Coren</i>	
Meaningful Moon Bounce	11
<i>By Howard Kaye</i>	
Sacred Space	12
<i>By Richard Silbergitt</i>	
Shabbat	12
<i>By Rob Yunich</i>	
Memorials	14
<i>By Sharyn Stahl</i>	
Sitting in the Hospital with Harry	16
<i>By Debbie Weber</i>	
The Final Sacred Space	19
<i>By Anonymous</i>	
The Mourner's Kaddish	21
<i>By Henry Wulf</i>	
Recently I Took a Walk	24
<i>By Larry Nisenoff</i>	
Israel Spaces	Cover, 27
<i>By Lisa Gross</i>	

Olam Tikvateinu

ה' חִפָּץ לְמַעַן צְדָקוֹ יִגְדִיל תּוֹרָה וַיִּאֲדִיר

*For the sake of God's righteousness,
God desires that Torah grow and be glorified.—Isaiah 42:21*

An inspiring and empowering element of our tradition is the recognition that we may discover the sacred in a multitude of spaces—physical, communal, spiritual, or some combination of these or other aspects.

This volume of *Olam Tikvateinu* is an exploration of the sacred as experienced through the hearts, minds and senses of your friends in the Olam Tikvah community. May we continue together as community that uncovers the sacred every day of our lives.

Rabbi David Kalender

*This edition is brought to you through the generosity
of Mark & Debbie Weber,
In memory of Mark's father, Harry.*

It is also sponsored by the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund
and the Rabbi Itzhaq M. Klirs Memorial Adult Education Fund.

Olam Tikvateinu is funded solely through contributions.
If you enjoyed reading this edition, please consider making a contribution
to the Rabbi's Discretionary Fund.
To discuss sponsorship of an entire edition, please contact Rabbi Kalender.
Thank you for your support.

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, 171 Second Street, Suite 300, San Francisco, California, 94105, USA.

Under the Talit

By

Brittanie Werbel

On a recent Sukkot morning, Dan was unable to join the boys and me for services. But on our way out the door I grabbed his talit bag. I had seen other Olam Tikvah parents wrap their children in a talit during the priestly blessings, and I wanted to do the same with Jonah and Brandon. I don't have a talit, so Dan's is the only one in our house. It belonged to my father-in-law, and it is particularly special as a usable reminder of Jerry and his lifelong commitment to family and to Judaism. At the appropriate time in the service I gathered the boys, who were around three and five years old at the time. Since I don't usually wear one, the blessing recited before donning the talit is unfamiliar to me. I stumbled through it, and then coaxed the boys to let me wrap their father's and grandfather's talit around them.

As I stood there, sheltering my children in the warm, woolen garment, I listened to the vaguely haunting, slightly muffled chant of the priestly blessing. I concentrated on adding my own blessing to those being recited by the Kohanim. My blessing—informal and in English—came down to three words, repeated over and over, the only three things I truly wish for my children: “Healthy, Happy, Jewish.”

From the time Jonah and Brandon were born, my job has been to love and to teach them. I consciously strive to teach them a love for Judaism. They are learning to enjoy the holidays, recite the prayers and respect the customs and traditions. They'll be able to walk into a synagogue anywhere in the world and recognize the words of the *Amidah* and *Aleinu*. But I also want them to feel that they belong in that other synagogue, as much as they belong at Olam Tikvah, and to feel a part of something much greater than themselves. I've grown to love the sound of the prayers in Hebrew. Sometimes I understand the words, sometimes I don't. But I love the feeling of being connected with past generations who sang the same melodies or the same words. Even when they encounter a prayer or a tune or a custom with which they are unfamiliar—just as donning a talit and wrapping them in it was certainly unfamiliar to me—my children will belong to the Jewish community, and it will belong to them.

I also want my children to feel a connection with their ancestors, from the grandparent and great-grandparents for whom they are named to those whose names have been lost to us. They should know that key components of our religion—including the Sifrei Torah, the Ark, the talit, the words of

Brittanie Zelkind Werbel has been a member of Olam Tikvah since she and Dan were married in 1999. Like their sons, Jonah and Brandon, Brittanie and Dan consider OT their home away from home.

prayers and accompanying tunes—remain with us through the efforts of all those who fought to keep, preserve and teach Judaism over the ages. I want my children to know this tradition that takes us back thousands of years. It is a history full of tragedy and sadness, but equally full of joy and beauty. Not only do I want them to know these things, I also want them to love these things.

Did Jonah and Brandon feel a sense of belonging, a sense of being part of something old and special and *theirs*, as they stood that day, wrapped in their father's and grandfather's talit for the priestly blessing? Perhaps they only felt warm and cozy and safe, snuggling with me and each other as the Kohanim chanted. But I think that part of the special sense of that shared moment came from an awareness of connection. Under the talit, the boys and I felt connected to each other and to Judaism, to our OT community and to the larger Jewish community, to our past and to the future.

L'Dor Va Dor

By

Clare Bachner



Gazing at my daughter, Rebecca, when she was seven months pregnant, I realized that a sacred space resided within her. Sacred space is the place where an infant is nourished and provided for until it is ready to join the rest of humanity.

The baby, born November 9, 2010, is named after two of his great grandfathers.

Clare Bachner and her husband, Herb, joined Olam Tikvah in 1982. Their children were part of the OT experience from their preschool days to their respective weddings. Clare is now the Social Action Chair.

My Sacred Space

By

Bruce Waxman

Standing in the garden

I observe the first ripe tomato.

It is small, red and pear shaped.

I pluck it from the stalk and put it in my mouth.

Shebecheyanu.

Bruce Waxman has been an OT member since 1988. Sometimes his Jewish path goes through the garden.

The Annual Retelling

By
Gail Wolf

The annual retelling of the story
Was ever so much more than the words
Surrounded by the rituals of years.
The cleaning
The waxing
The polishing and shining
Shopping and sorting
Separated the year from the eight special days.
Passover filled the house
And the kitchen
Alive with long-remembered scents.
Amidst it all
Mama—
Creating the feasts and memories
Peeling
Grating
Paring
Chopping
Blending
Simmering and roasting
The horseradish, eggs, soups and meats
That flavored the week.
An exodus thousands of years ago
Brought God into a kitchen in Queens.

Sacred Space

By

Margo N. Tamburrino

Congregation Olam Tikvah

World of Hope

Adding justice to the world

One day at a time, one person at a time

Special place, special time

Sacred Space

The people

The places

The things

Where we would be without this world of hope?

Sacred space for family and friends

Torah, T'filah, Tzedakah

The meaning of life

Sanctuary, Jewish life

A world away from all strife

All the stages of life, the life cycle

Birth, B'nai Mitzvah

Weddings, baby naming, the final hour

Participate in mitzvot

Participate in life.

Add your presence to the sacred space

Add to the goal of justice in the world

Your thoughts fill the sacred space

Strive for your best

In this most sacred of spaces

Margo Tamburrino and her family have been part of Olam Tikvah since 1983. Margo is especially proud to have been part of one of the first adult b'nai mitzvah classes.

This essay appears only in the printed edition.

Hands

By
Susan Coren



A larger, color version of this photo hangs outside the Social Hall.

It was an honor to be asked to help hang a Mezuzah as a Sisterhood representative during the May 23, 2010 Dedication ceremony for the new wing at Olam Tikvah. I stood beside the two women with whom I had served with as Co-President, Joanne Stryer and Rochelle Goldberg, and with Andrea Fabian, who has served for many years on the Sisterhood Executive Committee. I decided to hold back and take a picture as Rochelle, Joanne and Andrea started to hang the Mezuzah. Watching their hands in that moment, I thought of all the women who came before us, creating our Sisterhood, leading it, helping it to grow and become strong. I thought of all of the volunteers who give of themselves so that the money that Sisterhood raises can be donated to help our shul continue to thrive. And I thought of Rochelle's daughter, Molly, and all the other young Olam Tikvah girls, who get to watch their moms be an integral part of our community and will always know that they, too, have a place waiting for them in our Sisterhood. Our Sisterhood is a wonderful, multigenerational group of strong and amazing women, and I am proud to be a part of it. I am thankful for being able to share in this sacred moment in this sacred space that is so important to me.

Susan Coren and her family have been members of Olam Tikvah since 1999. As co-President of Sisterhood, she particularly enjoyed giving the d'var Torah on Sisterhood Shabbat.

Meaningful Moon Bounce

By

Howard Kaye



A larger, color version of this photo hangs outside the Social Hall.

I intended to make an image of “Sacred Space” when my family attended the May 23, 2010 Dedication of the new wing. I did not know what the space would bring to my lens. I had thoughts of a religious ritual or an architectural detail as possible subjects. Moon Bounce was unexpected.

When I saw the Moon Bounce, which was set up inside due to the rain, I knew I wanted to show it: children enjoying themselves fully in a religious setting, a dedication of holy space, even though the children themselves were not performing any religious ritual. I experimented with blur as the children played. I wanted enough blur to show their joyous romping inside, combined with enough detail to show the setting of the synagogue.

The construction of the new wing is represented by the art work on the donor wall in the background. The colors worked, with the children’s tie-dye, yellow shirts, and moon bounce colors repeated by the art on the wall. As the colors unite the parts of the image, there is also a spatial divide for the generations. Adults are outside, in the new space with the new art, celebrating the Dedication. Children are confined within the Moon Bounce, their own space, with their own celebration. Generation to generation, we are all in our own space, thanking God that we have this place.

Howard M. Kaye was raised in Northern Virginia, where he and his wife, Julie, are now raising their children. They have been OT members since 1995. A photographer for his entire adult life, Howard continues to “make positives out of negatives.”

Meaningful Moon Bounce | 1

Sacred Space

By

Richard Silbergitt

Where and when does sacredness endow
On sanctuary, or a humble place,
Its chosen timeless blessing, here and now
Transforming it into a sacred space?

What confluence of time and space becomes
A pallet for eternal reckoning,
A place in which the heart and soul succumb,
For humankind a higher beckoning?

How and why, transcending human frailty
Does spirit sense and reach a higher sphere?
Within this place a new reality,
A feeling deeply held that God is near.

You find it not within a building plan,
For sacred space is in the heart of man.

Rich Silbergitt is a physicist whose best SAT was English Composition and who has loved poetry since grammar school.

Shabbat

My 25 Hours of Sacred Space

By

Rob Yunich

I've never seen a city come to a complete stop the way Jerusalem does on Shabbat. The transition begins on Friday afternoon: stores and restaurants close, people leave work, and suddenly, the streets become nearly devoid of pedestrians and cars. Then, a few hours later, you start to see people walking to shul dressed to usher in Shabbat.

I first had the opportunity to watch the capital of the Jewish State halt for 25 hours just a few days after arriving, on my only trip there, after

Rob Yunich, chair of OT's Adult Education Committee, has been part of the congregation since 2003. He loves cooking and writing, except on Shabbat of course.

graduating from the Charles E. Smith Jewish Day School. It was at that moment that I decided I needed a way to bring that feeling back to the United States.

Instead of being part of the minority of Jews who observe Shabbat in the United States, I was part of an Israeli majority that takes a weekly day off. I could embrace a sense of community that jumps out across the entire country, but especially in Jerusalem.

In his book, *To Be a Jew*, Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin describes Shabbat as “an island in time.”

“To describe the feeling that overcomes one on the Sabbath is like trying to describe a beautiful sunset to a blind man, Donin writes. “It is what is needed most in the competitive, tension-packed, hurried, frenzied life of this society” (62).

Over the subsequent years, I have devoted much effort to ensuring that I’ll get my weekly 25-hour break from life. I don’t profess to be a strict observer of every Shabbat law. But abstaining from work, avoiding use of my computer and cell phone and generally escaping from all the pressures of daily life has created an “island” in the land-anchored town of Fairfax.

Nearly every Shabbat, I can be found in my “corner” of Olam Tikvah during the Saturday morning service. And that’s by design. It allows me to tune out the rest of the world for a couple of hours and enjoy the peacefulness of the moment. I can concentrate on praying, studying Torah, reflecting on life and, following services, catching up with my OT friends. The remainder of Shabbat is comprised mostly of relaxation—a continuation of that “island” feel. When Havdalah concludes, I’m ready for another hectic week.

“[Shabbat] serves as a glorious release from weekday concerns, routine pressures, and even secular recreation,” Donin writes. “It is a day of peaceful tranquility, inner joy and spiritual uplift, accompanied by song and cheer” (62).

Now I have no qualms about turning down an invitation that conflicts with my Shabbat observance. Go to somebody’s house for a Shabbat meal? No problem. Attend a Friday night sporting event (even if it’s game seven of the Stanley Cup finals)? No way.

Shabbat has become my sacred space.

Reference:

Rabbi Hayim Halevy Donin, *To Be a Jew: A Guide to Jewish Observance in Contemporary Life* (Basic Books Inc., 1972)

Memorials

By

Sharyn Stahl

On a 2009 Jewish study tour in Poland, our group stopped between Warsaw and Lublin, at a cemetery containing a memorial created by area residents out of broken gravestones left after Nazi destruction. While every cemetery is a sacred memorial, this cemetery seemed even more so to us, because of our emotions after visiting several concentration camps. Prior to our arrival, visitors had placed small stones on the ledges of the remnants, as is customary when Jews visit a cemetery.

At the concentration camps, we had just witnessed concrete evidence of the attempted Nazi destruction of the Jewish people. Here, we saw both evidence of that destruction and the attempt by local residents to save the memorials. Many of the pieces had been placed either upside down or sideways: obviously, the residents did not read Hebrew. Yet they persevered in their efforts to honor the Jewish tradition and the Jewish dead.

I was fascinated by the intentional zigzag opening between the front and back of the memorial. It reminded me of a lightning bolt. I wandered around to the dark, wooded area behind the memorial, where intact gravestones sat with mold growing on them. I stood in the darkness. The light at the front of the memorial shone through the lightning-bolt opening. I noticed a large, vibrant tree, stretching its branches toward the light. To me, this illumination and the living tree were signs of hope that those who had perished in the Holocaust had not been forgotten; that we and our children would do all we could to make sure that such destruction would never happen again.

Sharyn Stahl and her husband have been members of Olam Tikvah since 1977. They are the proud parents of Ronit, Danielle and Jonathan Stahl.



Larger, color versions of these and other photos of this site hang in the hallway behind the sanctuary.

Sitting in the Hospital with Harry

By

Debbie Weber

Until recently, I never would have thought that a hospital room would be a sacred space. That all changed in June 2010, when my father-in-law, Harry, was hospitalized, yet again, with congestive heart failure. In his hospital room, I had one of the most powerful experiences of my life. I have often wondered what it would be like to die, or almost die. On that day, a transformation occurred, taking me from just sitting in a hospital room to sharing Harry's struggle between life and death. For me, this experience was sacred.

It was Erev Shabbat. The family was gathered by Harry's side. He was in a deep sleep, and for the second time that week, we thought the end was near. The Rabbi came. He recited prayers of comfort and healing, while Harry slept. I had planned our usual Shabbat routine. As the day wore on, however, my sister-in-law, Andi, my niece Hilary and I decided to spend the night at the hospital. So the three of us made our beds with all the chairs in the room and prepared for our vigil. We did not want Harry to be alone.

As sunset approached, Harry started to come out of his sleep. He was talking a little, but not making a lot of sense. He did not stop talking the whole night. At that point I wasn't really sure what was happening, but I felt a little relief, knowing that he was starting to wake up. For me, it was particularly significant that he was starting to stir just before Shabbat.

Harry started waving and pointing at the ceiling. Hilary asked what he was doing, and at first he said he was "Making Indian signs." Later he said, "I'm playing checkers. It's a checkerboard." Even later, he commented that the ceiling pattern was interesting, that it must have been cut with four tiles at a time to make it so even. Finally, Harry told us there was a light "up there," composed of "all the colors." He kept looking at the board with the nurses' names on it, reading them over and over and saying there was a red flashing light.

I thought, why is Harry looking up to the ceiling, and why is he focusing on light? I wondered whether he was on a journey. I sensed that he was struggling to stay alive, and that he felt God's presence. I began to feel an important connection between Shabbat, light and looking up to God

In *Beresbit*, God separated light from darkness on the first day, and God said light is good. On the seventh day (Shabbat), God ceased from work and rested. We usher in Shabbat by lighting candles, thereby creating light. Shabbat candles draw us closer to God, and they help to create a spiritual feeling. Shabbat is the day of light, and it gives us purpose. We fear darkness at

Debbie Weber and her husband, Mark, have been OT members since 1996. Since their first trip to Israel in 2003, the Olam Tikvah community has become an integral part of their lives.

times—when it’s dark, we don’t see as well; when we sleep, we may wonder whether we’ll wake up.

Throughout the Bible, God appears to the Israelites in various forms of light. In our prayers and rituals, we frequently refer to it. God first spoke to Moses through the burning bush—fire, of course, emits light. When we, as Jews, were on our journey from Egypt through the desert to the “Promised Land,” we followed God’s light during the night, so that we wouldn’t be afraid because of darkness. The concentration on light and Shabbat strengthened and deepened my experience. Perhaps Harry, too, was feeling the power of Shabbat.

While we did not light Shabbat candles that night, it made sense to me that Harry wanted all the lights on in the room. He did not want to fall asleep, and he wanted all of us to help him stay awake. In fact, at one point, while the others were talking to Harry, I fell asleep for a minute. Harry looked over and snapped his fingers in my face to wake me up. He laughed when I woke up: “Debbie, you were sleeping.” Harry was really focused on the multicolored light he saw. In my mind, God was up there, helping Harry sort through his life and aiding him in his struggle to stay alive. I felt God’s presence, in the room with all of us.

Harry started talking about whether it was time to go. He was trying to tie together loose ends. He wanted to see his family, and he wanted us to make sure we took care of Claire, or Mom, as he called her. “Is it time to go?” “I don’t know if it’s time to go.” “I guess if it’s time to go, then it’s time.” “I don’t know how long I’m going to be here.” “How long am I going to be here?” “How long do I have?” “Who’s coming?” “When is everyone coming?” “I hope I’ll be here when they come.” He kept looking at the clock and telling us what time it was. He said, “You have to take care of Mom.” He said he didn’t take care of her as well as he should have, and that he was sorry. And that he tried to treat everybody the same. He said he tried to be a good person. This was a tough conversation for us.

The night passed quickly. All night, I was in my space, holding Harry’s hand, and I was in his space, sharing his fight. Astonishingly, as Shabbat morning approached, Harry got stronger and stronger. We didn’t know whether his renewed strength was just to be able to see everyone again, or if he was really going to stay with us for a period of time. But as the light came up outside, he became more and more himself. He ate a good breakfast for the first time in a week, even feeding himself, and he became feisty again. We watched him come alive.

Surrounded by his family, Harry told us his story. He seemed to have been in two places at once. He was in the present with Andi, Hilary and me, and he was on his personal journey with God and his struggle to stay alive:

I remember red lights flashing behind signs. At one point my mind was “blank”; I didn’t remember anything or that I was aware of thoughts. My eyes were closing—I was afraid of doing so—I would be “finished.” I kept feeling that this is the end. I woke up—I saw signs in the hospital room, not feeling lost as before. I kept thinking about the last thing I would see of the outside world. It was a strange feeling. I was lost, waiting for the end, and for someone to take me “away.” It was a horrible feeling—last rites being said [maybe this was related to when the Rabbi was actually saying prayers]. I thought about the last thing I was going to do. I thought about how good people were to me.

That same morning, he told the nurse’s assistant that the “Man upstairs was calling me, but I decided to stay downstairs.”

Conclusion

I believe that sacred space is a place for comfort and healing. It is also a place where a powerful moment is likely to happen. Harry’s hospital room became sacred that night, as we watched his struggle with God and with death. We felt his strength, and in a way, we shared his fight. We were so deeply involved and focused on him, that it didn’t seem like it took place all night.

This experience brought me closer to God and the power of Shabbat. I really felt God’s presence and power in Harry’s hospital room, through the colorful light he described. During the night, I couldn’t imagine what his thoughts were when he wasn’t talking. To have him actually describe the room he was in and how it worked, i.e., moving up toward heaven, brought sense to my whole experience. His outer struggle was clear to me, but to be able to hear about his inner thoughts, validated what I had thought was happening. The *ame* I felt during this 24-hour period with Harry was the most sacred experience that I may ever have. Through Harry, I learned that God is with us in our struggles to stay alive. It is comforting to know that God really was there to help him and to help me

In August, we were able to celebrate Harry’s 95th birthday—a celebration where he was totally in command and enjoying every minute. He passed away at the end of October. I will never forget that June day I spent, sitting in Harry’s hospital room, feeling him struggle with God, life and death and rejoicing as he rallied one final time.

The Final Sacred Space

By
Anonymous

Late one spring evening, about 10 years ago, three women dressed in long skirts, wearing kerchiefs and carrying buckets and wooden boards quietly arrived at the door of the funeral home where I had served as a shomer(et): a person who watches over the deceased between the time of death and burial]. An eerie aura surrounded them, but instead of being afraid, I felt a calm emanating from them. They were there to perform tahara, the ritual cleansing of the body. I never forgot that feeling of being in the presence of their serenity and purposefulness.

After my mother died several years later, I realized the time had come for me to try and understand why these women and their task fascinated me so much. I am generally squeamish: I do not like to see blood or gore, and I turn my head away from violent TV programs and movies. Somehow, I knew this would not be that kind of situation. It is my belief that lifecycle events should be acknowledged by the community with ritual. Tahara is one of the last ways that a community can acknowledge and show its respect for someone. I was ready to watch my first tahara.

Five of us entered the chilly room, which was equipped with white metal cabinets filled with towels, rubber gloves and aprons, a variety of personal care items, pulleys, a sink and a gurney with the body. The other four women prepared the coffin by placing straw inside, making a mound for her head. They placed a sheet catty corner into the coffin. This sheet, I learned, is the final covering for the meit, the term I learned for the body. Next they placed a Star of David on the lid of the coffin, carefully making sure it was lined up correctly.

After confirming that this person was the right one, we donned aprons and rubber gloves. The other four women began to meticulously clean the nails of the deceased, while I read some prayers and instructions. At first I could not understand why they took so much pain with this task, or why they had so carefully placed the Jewish star on the coffin—after all, who would know? But it quickly became obvious that these women were intent on their task of making sure that everything was done in a proper ritual manner. This was their way of showing that even in death, every individual deserves respect.

It seemed that the women were struggling with the meit, and I volunteered to help them physically, rather than just read the prayers. First we washed the right side of the meit, then the left; then we poured cleansing water over her, again right side then left. We put boards under her so we

A longtime OT member, **Anonymous** serves on the Chevra Kaddisha.

could completely dry her. We rolled her from side to side so we could reach all parts when we dried her. Very little conversation took place. We only said what was needed to perform the tasks: “Be careful of her head.” “There seems to be an open sore here.” “Let’s put a band aid on it.” “Her privacy towels are slipping.” “I’ll fix it.” “One, two, three, roll her to our side so we can dry her.” “One, two, three, now we will roll her to your side.”

Putting on the shrouds presented other problems. The pants were easy. Putting a bonnet on her head and covering her face was also easy, but the two jackets presented challenges. Again we rolled her from side to side, not unlike swaddling a baby, to make sure the jacket was smooth. Even in death, we were concerned about the comfort of the meit. The next challenge was to encircle the meit with a white cloth ribbon and tie off the knot in three loops to resemble the letter shin, a symbol for God. It took several tries to get the knot to stay in the shape of a shin, but we were determined to do it correctly.

The pulleys helped get the body into the already prepared coffin. With all of us working together, we completed our task. Finally, we put pottery shards on the eyes and mouth and sprinkled dirt from Israel into the coffin. We covered the meit with the sheet, but this time we started on the left side. We put the cover on the coffin, making sure to line up the peg holes accurately, so the coffin would close tightly.

We shared a moment of silence and asked for m’chila (forgiveness) from the meit and the community if we had prepared anything incorrectly. Our final act was to place the coffin facing the door, so her feet would lead. We checked to make sure the shomer was there, quietly left the building, ceremonially washed our hands and recited the hand-washing blessing. No small talk was exchanged. No “See you tomorrow!” “Are you going to the OT dinner tomorrow night?” We wished each other a safe journey home and headed to our cars, hoping that we would not be called upon too soon to perform the mitzvah of tahara.

I still about think about why I was so attracted to these three women, the task they voluntarily perform and why I felt a need to join them. There is no public thank you per se, and no one really knows whether you performed the absolutions correctly, but I feel everyone of us deserves respect and caring during our last moments on earth. As a Jewish community, it has always been our duty to ensure that each meit is ritually prepared for the last event in her life cycle. As part of the Jewish community, I have accepted the obligation of preparing each meit, to the best of my ability, for *her final sacred space*.

If you are interested in learning more about the Chevra Kaddisha, please contact one of the rabbis.

The Mourner's Kaddish

Its Paradoxes and Power

By

Henry Wulf

“It sounds like comfort and feels like a transcendent embrace, and yet, the prayer that is synonymous with Jewish mourning does not mention death or consolation.”

Anita Diamant, *Saying Kaddish*, 13

What are we to make of the *Mourner's Kaddish*, one of Judaism's best known prayers, which seems replete with contradictions? Jewish mourners start saying this prayer at the funeral of family members and continue at specified times for the rest of their lives. But the prayer is a doxology—a hymn in praise of God—not one designed specifically to summon comforting thoughts of a loved one, as we find in parts of the Yizkor service. The Rabbis intended it to be accessible to all Jews, so why do we modern Jews continue to recite it in Aramaic—once the *lingua franca* of Jews, but now an ancient language in disuse—and not Hebrew? While it is a commandment to say it, Halacha (Jewish law) requires only saying the words, not belief in or understanding of those words. And while one might think mourners could say the *Kaddish* in private, remembrances about the loss of a loved one being personal and intimate, the Rabbis specified that they must recite it only in the presence of a minyan. Despite all these incongruities, however, there is general agreement that the *Mourner's Kaddish* has a gripping power, both for those who say it and for those who hear it.

The *Mourner's Kaddish* is one of five different *Kaddish* prayers, all variations of one another. They are:

- The Half-Kaddish (Hatzi Kaddish), which links different sections of communal services;
- The *Mourner's Kaddish* (Kaddish Yatom¹), which is said during a mourning period, on the anniversary of a death (yahrzeit), or during a Yizkor service;
- The Full-Kaddish (Kaddish Shalem), which is recited after the communal prayers of the *Amidah* (Shemoneh Esrei);
- The Rabbi's Kaddish (Kaddish D'Rabbanan), which follows study of the Oral Torah (e.g., the Talmud); and
- The Burial Kaddish (Kaddish ahar Hakk'vura), used traditionally at a funeral, but often replaced by the *Mourner's Kaddish*.

During services, the Hatzi and Full Kaddish prayers serve the same

Henry Wulf helps direct the activities of OT's Chevra Kaddisha. He hopes the mitzvot performed by the Chevra and those who help maintain our daily minyan provide a measure of solace to the bereaved in our community.

purpose as punctuation in a written document. That is, they are notations or place markers, indicating that we are shifting from one part of a service to another. At Olam Tikvah, it is personal choice whether to sit or stand during a recitation of these *Kaddish* prayers.

When the *Mourner's Kaddish* is recited, however, mourners stand, while the congregation remains seated². In that instant, the service attains a palpably different sense than when we recite the other *Kaddish* prayers. By this physical differentiation, the community understands that those standing and reciting, “Yitgadal v’yitkadash shmai raba,” are in a particular emotional place, and in need of the community’s embrace.

The recitation of the *Mourner's Kaddish* captures both horizontal and vertical dimensions of time. The vertical dimension reaches back to our ancestors, providing a “spiritual handclasp between the generations, one that connects two lifetimes,” as Rabbi Maurice Lamm states (158). The requirement to say the Mourner’s *Kaddish* only in the presence of a minyan creates the horizontal dimension. Mourners are forced into their community, to grieve in public; the community’s minyan gathered for prayer receives and supports them. Each, in turn, gathers strength from the new and powerful bonds produced by this union.

What creates the power of the *Mourner's Kaddish*? It is the intersection of core human impulses and declarations of faith in God. The core impulses resound in the measured, rhythmic, metronomic pace of the words and the collective congregational responses, developing a music-like harmony, almost a synchronous heartbeat, between the mourners and the community. The Aramaic text is like a cry from the mourner, followed by an affirmation of support from the community. Consider, for example, how all these elements combine by speaking aloud the following segment of the Aramaic text [the congregational response is in brackets]:

<i>Yit-ba-rach v'yish-ta-bach</i>	<i>Blessed, praised,</i>
<i>V'yit-pa-ar v'yit-ro-mam v'yit-na-sei</i>	<i>glorified, exalted, extolled,</i>
<i>V'yit-ha-dar v'yit-a-leh v'yit-ha-lal</i>	<i>honored, magnified, and lauded</i>
<i>Sh'mei d'ku-sba [b'rich hu].</i>	<i>be the name of the Holy One, [blessed be He].</i>

The Aramaic words emphasize a tension that exists between the intellectual content and the emotional effect of the prayer. At one level, maintaining the sense of rhythm seems more important than a complete and current understanding of the words. On the other hand, the words and their meaning have a profound significance. Judaism, an action-centered religion, starts with the notion that just reciting the words of the *Mourner's Kaddish* is a mitzvah. The words in this doxology emphasize a Jew’s faith in God as a way to measure the importance of life in the face of death. The conclusion, incorporating words from the Book of Job, encapsulates the prayer’s powerful sense of comfort, consolation, hope and faith:

Oseh shalom bimromav
Hu ya'aseh shalom
Aleinu v'al kol yisroel
V'imru, **[Amen]**.

He who makes peace in the heavens,
May He make peace;
For us and for all Israel;
And let us say, **[Amen]**.

The key word in this section might be the verb *ya'aseh* (make). Here mourners are imploring God to take an active role in bringing us peace. The death of a loved one has torn the fabric of our life and we are not at peace. The *Kaddish* maintains that God can repair the hole in our soul, and not just for us mourners, but for the entire world. Thus, at the end, both mourners and the community find faith in this expression of God's investment in all creation, now and forever. Rabbi Joseph Caro expressed this idea beautifully and concisely in the *Shulchan Aruch*, his sixteenth century compilation of Jewish law, calling *Kaddish*, "a prayer that renews the world."

References:

Anita Diamant, *Saying Kaddish* (Shocken Books, 1998)
Ari Goldman, *Living a Year of Kaddish* (Shocken Books, 2003)
Samuel C. Heilman, *When a Jew Dies* (University of California Press, 2001)
Maurice Lamm, *The Jewish Way of Death and Mourning* (Jonathan David Publishers, 1969)

(Endnotes)

¹ The literal translation of its formal name (Kiddush Yatom) is "Orphan's Kaddish," but it is most commonly called the "Mourner's Kaddish." (Kiddush Avelim).

² When present after study of the Oral Torah, mourners should also rise and lead the Kaddish D'Rabbanan.

Recently I Took a Walk

By

Larry Nisenoff

Recently, I took a walk on a Sunday morning.

It was not an impressive outing by any means—it wasn't a long or a challenging walk, like up a steep hill. It wasn't too cold or too hot outside. It was just me—I didn't even take the dog. I lifted myself up and walked, one step after the other, around the cul-de-sac, full circle.

Psalm 121. A Song of Ascents

After my father died, on 3/7/10 (figures he'd leave us on a day that is numerically balanced) I observed the Shiva period, driving between my Mom's house and my house each day, taking in the sun and the moon, in turn—back to the house of my youth. I had a busy week, enveloped in the details of getting to minyan and saying *Kaddish*.

I lift my eyes to the mountains—from where will my help come?

Dad was 82; he had Alzheimer's and lung cancer—the latter a product of 60+ years of pipe-smoking. Mom had provided his care for several years, and the relentless nature of the tasks took a toll. She and I had recently decided that he needed to be in a facility where he could receive more comprehensive care on a daily basis. The real inflection point had come when Dad started to “wander”—he would just all-of-a-sudden start on a task, most often attempting to go somewhere. The most critical, and the saddest for us, occurred on a weekday morning at about 4:00am, when Mom was awakened by Dad knocking on the front door. The ensuing conversation was something like:

[*Mom opens the front door*]

Mom: Norman, what are you doing outside at this hour?

Dad: I was trying to catch the bus to go to work.

Mom: Norman, it is 4:00 in the morning, and you've been retired for years.

Dad: [*Long pause*] Well, anyway, it didn't come, and I seem to have forgotten my keys... .

The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.

Dad hadn't worked full-time in years, and he was clearly at risk. Who knows how far he walked or where he really went, but the case was hard to argue any other way. Clearly he was in decline, both mentally and physically,

Larry Nisenoff lost his father in March, 2010; he has two daughters, Karen and Elisheva.

and a facility was the safest place for him. It would give Mom, my brother and me some peace of mind.

He was only there about a month, and we visited him there several times. The best stories are of him interacting with my daughters—like telling Karen how much he enjoyed her wedding and asking about where her kids were going to go to college. Karen is 15: She was ready for Dad’s “altered universe,” however, and came home smiling and laughing about it. My daughter Elisheva and my wife read to Dad and had lunch with him just two days before he died. The time passed quickly. The call came at 1:20am. During the following week, through family interactions, support from the OT family, the funeral and the days and nights of Shiva, I felt God’s presence close by.

Guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps.

That Saturday night, the last service during our Shiva period, the shul provided a minyan at the house, to which my daughter and I added several of our closest friends. We had about 40 people in the house and, as is the custom, food everywhere. We joined together for the Ma’ariv service and then continued on with Havdalah. Havdalah marks the start of the new week; for us, this time, it marked a new phase in our family’s story. Dad had always said that a man feels immortal until his father dies. Now I truly had an idea of what he had meant so many years ago.

The process of saying *Kaddish* isn’t emotional on the surface; it is a prayer we say in varying formats several times each day—at Shacharit, Mincha and Ma’ariv—sunrise, afternoon and evening. We set aside this particular rendition for a few specific reasons, the most important of which is to guide us as individuals through the mourning process. Each of thinks he or she can do it alone, but none of us can; the real power of the community comes to bear at these moments. As the sun rises and sets, and the moon follows, so go our lives. There’s wisdom in our 5771 years.

The Lord is your protective shade at your right hand.

The service went as it always does—consistent, reliable crutch that it is. Interestingly, as we began I realized I was standing in my own kitchen without a siddur: there I was, the community convened in my home so I could say *Kaddish* for my Dad, and no prayerbook. Go figure. Suddenly I remembered that I had special siddur in the kitchen. It was given to me by my maternal grandfather, Pop Jake, for my bar mitzvah, 35 years prior. It was old and dirty, and the cover had come off years ago, so it stayed on top of the fridge for Havdalah and Chanukah candles and Kiddush. What a perfect way to tie the generations and the family together. I fumbled, but quickly found my place in the service, just in time to recite the *Mourners’ Kaddish*.

The Lord will guard you from all evil; He will guard your soul.

After *Kaddish*, I asked that we add *Psalm 121*. My elder daughter and three of her closest friends led the responsive reading. This Psalm speaks to me where I think I am in my life just now—divorce pending, recently having lost a parent, missing my younger daughter (who lives with her Mom)—I have strength as one person, and resilience (some might say “stubbornness”) to never, ever, give up on my daughters, or myself or life or Hashem. I have my place in the history of the Jewish people...lately feeling more like Job than I'd like, but I started on the path many years ago and will stay on the path. *Ahlf zu lochis* [“spitefully” or “just to spite me”], as my parents would say.

The Lord is your guardian.

My walk the next morning was slow and steady, more symbolic than anything else. I had, of course, been out of the house each day. But the steady, solitary, solemn pace around the cul-de-sac was awesome in its simplicity, while being truly severe in its finality. The sun was bright and warm, in contrast to the dull, dim feelings inside me.

This shiva was unique to me for one additional reason—with the Rav's help, I had organized a second graveside service for my brother and sister-in-law, who live overseas while she serves in the USAF. I have been to funerals before; I was a pallbearer for Pop Jake when I was 14. My strongest memory from burying Pop Jake was the hollow thud of the earth as it was tossed on the lowered casket from the upside-down shovel—a sound that is ingrained in my mind and was eerily familiar at Dad's funeral. The second minyan provided an additional persistent memory: in approaching the site after the grave is completely filled with dirt, there is nothing unique about the plot itself. There I buried my father, my Dad, my daughters' grandfather, and there, as simple as the earth can be, is a rectangle of brown dirt mixed with orange clay, in an ever-expanding field of green grass. Nothing else. Infinitely humbling.

Between Dad's passing and Pesach, I felt somewhat saddened. As I led the Seder, I could see and hear him—waiting for the sun to set to begin telling the story in the first person, as we're commanded, following along with his finger in the large-print *Haggadah*, negotiating over the return of the Afikomen—as the rest of us told stories and engaged in different ways over a whole host of topics—the essence of families and relationships. Alas, the Seder will always be bittersweet going forward—not because I have to lead, and *Hallel* always brings a smile—but because Dad used to call me “Haham”—which he took directly from the story of the four sons—except I think he meant it more as “wise guy” than “wise one.”

As I approached the entrance to the house, my neighbor Tom, walked from the shade of his front porch and reached out with one of his ever-

present, heartfelt greetings, which I returned the best I could, just a little delayed with the weight of my thoughts and a little scratchy with my voice. I realized since I'd left the house, I hadn't spoken: lost in these thoughts.

Respectfully—for Dad, for me, for Mom and my daughters, for Judaism and for Hashem—I will do my best to say *Kaddish* each day for 11 months. Subsequently, I will say *Kaddish* each year at his *yahrzeit*. At 11 months, we will take another walk, just as solemn, to Dad's grave and provide a headstone. That will end the formal mourning process, but not our memories of Dad.

My help will come from the Lord, Maker of heaven and earth.

Israel Spaces

By

Lisa Gross

I took these photos when I was in Israel on Ramah Seminar. Wherever you go in Israel, there is always a sense of connecting to Biblical descriptions of the land that God promised our ancestors, as described in the Torah.

David's Tomb: I took this picture right outside of David's Crypt. Many people feel a strong connection between King David and Judaism, because of his writings, as well as his history of uniting the land and establishing Jerusalem as the capital



city. I think this image captures some of the contradictions of Israel—the blend of ancient and modern, the sacred next to the ordinary—the ancient stones, the star, and even the torn chicken wire, which hints at conflict, relating to both modern and ancient times.

Shacharit on Masada (Cover): Even though Masada is more historical than holy, my friend, with his t'filin and talit, preparing to daven Shacharit as the sun rose behind him, looked like he was in a sacred time and place.

Larger, color versions of Lisa's photos hang in the hallway behind the sanctuary.

Lifelong OT member **Lisa Gross** studies art at the University of Michigan.

Olam Tikvatienu

Congregation Olam Tikvah
3800 Glenbrook Road
Fairfax, Virginia 22031-3199

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. Postage Paid
Permit #72
Merrifield, VA 22116