



Office of The  
CHIEF RABBI

# Women Mourners: A Guide to Kaddish and Mourning



United Synagogue  
Women

## **Kaddish guidelines and mourning frameworks for female mourners**

The chances are, if you are reading this, you are recently bereaved, have yahrzeit, or feel that you might be bereaved in the near future. You may be in a difficult place or feeling somewhat lost and alone.

Jewish law and tradition provides a framework for mourning with a number of different ways to memorialise a loved one who has passed away, some of which we set out below. Saying Kaddish, which is optional rather than obligatory for women, is one of these ways. It is important to emphasise that there is no single way to do this in the halachic structure and that Kaddish therefore is not the only way.

Some suggestions include:

- a. Learning Torah in the name of your loved one;
- b. Helping others;
- c. Praying (including saying Tehillim/Psalms);
- d. Giving a Devar Torah (short explanation of a Jewish idea or text) in shul, at home or amongst friends;
- e. Giving Tzedaka (charity) in the name of your loved one;

These are not just alternatives to saying Kaddish. They are equally meaningful in their own right from a spiritual and halachic perspective.

None of these are mutually exclusive during the mourning period or on a yahrzeit. You can also perform them outside of these times.

For many people, saying Kaddish helps them during a very difficult time in their lives. However it does not work for everyone. Do not feel pressured into saying Kaddish but if you do wish to, then we hope these notes below will help you to do so.

Your United Synagogue community is here for you at this time. Your Rabbi, Rebbetzen, friends and community leaders are here to help. This publication is not designed to be a comprehensive treatment.

Please consult your Rabbi if you have any further questions, or the Office of the Chief Rabbi if you do not have a Rabbi.

### **Why do we say Kaddish and what is it?**

At this difficult time, we look for ways to honour the memory of a deceased relative. Saying Kaddish is one way to do so. The sanctification of God's Name by saying Kaddish is of significant religious value. It might thereby provide some comfort and reciting it might also help those who are bereaved to feel more part of the community.

It is a prayer which mourners recite at a funeral, during the shiva, daily during the period of mourning (see below for more details) and on the anniversary of the death of a loved one. Your Rabbi or the US Burial Society will be able to advise how long to say Kaddish for.

Should you choose to say Kaddish, there are some guidelines below. We hope that you will find them helpful.

### **How many kinds of Kaddish do mourners say?**

Mourner's Kaddish, which is recited after various fixed points of the service, and Rabbis' Kaddish which, as well as having a place in the service, is often recited after a Devar Torah after a service or after a shiur (study session). Mourner's Kaddish is on page 36 (transliteration on page 926) and Rabbis' Kaddish is on page 34 (transliteration on page 925) respectively in the green siddur. To watch a short JOG video on 'How to say Kaddish' visit [www.theus.org.uk/jog](http://www.theus.org.uk/jog)

### **Who is a mourner for the purposes of saying Kaddish?**

Somebody who sadly loses a parent, spouse, sibling or child is a mourner who could say Kaddish.

## **How long is Kaddish said for?**

Kaddish for a parent is recited for 11 months and for at least 30 days for other relatives (generally starting in both cases from the day of burial, following the Hebrew calendar).

## **When may I say Kaddish?**

Mourner's Kaddish is said during davening (prayers) in the Shiva week and at specific points in every shul service. Rabbis' Kaddish is said as indicated above and after parts of the service containing Rabbinic study passages. Examples are shortly after the start of Shacharit (morning) prayers, towards the end of the service on Friday night and at the end of Shabbat or Yom Tov 'Musaf' prayers in some communities.

At a funeral, either Mourner's Kaddish or a distinct 'Burial' Kaddish can be recited. Ask your Rabbi for guidance as to which one to recite.

## **Is Kaddish always said in a minyan (10 Jewish men over the age of 13)?**

Yes, Kaddish is a 'communal' prayer of public sanctity and as such requires a minyan, as a group obligated to pray, to be present whenever it is recited.

## **Because Kaddish is said in a minyan, does this mean that only men say Kaddish?**

No. Kaddish is a prayer which can be recited by any mourners who wish to, be they men, women or children.

## **If I feel I want to say Kaddish, as a woman, how do I get help?**

At a funeral or stone setting: a woman can say Kaddish if she wishes to. The normative situation is that a man does as well. Others present can provide gentle help if required. Speak with your Rabbi before the funeral to tell him that you would like to say Kaddish and, if it would be helpful, ask if he can recommend another lady to say it quietly with you. They will give you guidance and support,

help you in pointing out which Kaddish to say when and enable the necessary support from the others who are saying Kaddish, to help you all say it together at the same pace. This will also help to encourage others present to respond at the appropriate places during Kaddish.

In shul: let the Rabbi and/or Rebbetzen or gabbai (warden) know that you wish to say Kaddish. If possible, do so in advance so that they can make sure that those leading and managing the service and shul environment are aware, and look after you and can ask another lady to provide help if you would like.

### **What can I do if I miss a service or am away from a minyan?**

As noted above, there is an age-old practice to recite Psalms or learn Torah regularly in memory of a loved one, regardless of whether you are saying Kaddish or not. If you have missed a service, read one of the Psalms in the siddur after Shabbat mincha (Psalms 120-134 on pages 508-518 in the green siddur) or a mishna from Pirkei Avot (the Ethics of the Fathers) on pages 524-572 in the green siddur. These are appropriate substitutes for saying Kaddish since they show that you are doing some Jewish learning, a significant tribute to a loved one in spiritual terms.

Do not feel that if you miss one service you are no longer able to say Kaddish. If you decide to say Kaddish, you can do so at any service that you attend.

### **What if there is no mechitza when I get to shul?**

Alert the Rabbi or gabbai (shul warden) who should be able to provide one easily for you. In some shuls, especially those with limited space and where the attendance is usually just men, try to contact the shul in advance if you can to let them know you plan to attend so that they can set up the mechitza before you arrive and provide any other support you need.

### **Should both men and women respond to me when I am saying Kaddish?**

Yes. Both men and women should respond to anyone, woman or man, who is saying Kaddish.

### **If there is no man saying Kaddish in shul, is it still OK for me (as a woman) to say it? How can it be done?**

You need to say Kaddish with a man, following the Chief Rabbi's guidelines for the United Synagogue. To make sure this happens, please let the Rabbi and gabbai know you are saying Kaddish and they will arrange for a man to say Kaddish with you, if no man who is in mourning or commemorating a yahrzeit is already present.

### **Do I have to be observant in order to recite Kaddish?**

Kaddish is something that every Jewish person can say in US communities, if sadly they need to. Whether or not you say Kaddish, taking on extra mitzvot, however small, is a powerful way to honour the memory of a deceased loved one. Observing more mitzvot requires a patient, gradual approach – as with development in so many areas of life – so feel free to consult your Rabbi or Rebbetzen for advice if you wish, or contact the Office of the Chief Rabbi if you do not have a Rabbi or Rebbetzen.

**May we all meet  
at 'simchas'  
(happy occasions).**

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