

Women and Kaddish

Source Sheet by Aviva Kaufmann

SOURCE 1:

**Havot Yair 222, Rabbi Yair Chaim
Barcharach, Germany (1638-1702)**

(1) Question: A strange thing was done in Amsterdam and became public there.

(2) Someone passed away with no sons, and willed before passing that each day for twelve months, ten shall be paid to study in his house, and after the studies the daughter will recite Kaddish (see Responsa Maharashdam, Orah Hayim 6). The sages of the community and the aldermen did not protest.

(3) Although there is no evidence to defeat this thing, for a woman too is commanded to sanctify God's name, and furthermore, with the presence of a quorum of Jewish males, it is called "the people of Israel." So even though the story of Rabbi Akiva, which is the source for the recitation of Kaddish by orphans, is about a male child, nevertheless, even for a daughter it stands to reason that there is a purpose and it brings satisfaction to the soul [of the deceased], for she is his offspring.

(4) Nevertheless, there is concern that this will weaken the power of Jewish customs, which are also Torah, and everyone will build a private altar based on his own reasoning. The words of the rabbis will seem preposterous, and they will make light of them.

חוות יאיר רכ"ב

(א) שאלה: דבר זר נעשה באמשטרדם ומפורסם שם.
(ב) שאחד נעדר בלי בן וצוה לפני פטירתו שילמדו עשרה כל יום תוך י"ב חודש בביתו בשכרם ואחר הלימוד תאמר הבת קדיש [עי' שו"ת ר"ש מדינא חלק א"ח סי' ו'] ולא מיחו בידה חכמי הקהילה והפרנסים.
(ג) ואף כי אין ראיה לסתור הדבר כי גם אשה מצווה על קידוש השם, גם יש מנין זכרים מקרי בני ישראל ואף כי מעשה דר"ע שממנו מקור אמירת יתומים קדיש בבן זכר היה, מ"מ יש סברא דגם בבת יש תועלת ונחת רוח לנפש כי זרעו היא.
(ד) מ"מ יש לחוש שע"י כך יחלשו כח המנהגים של בני ישראל שג"כ תורה הם ויהי' כל אחד בונה במה לעצמו ע"פ סברתו ומחזי מילי דרבנן כחוכא ואטלול' ויבואו לזלזל בו.

SOURCE 2.

Aseih Lecha Rav, 5:33, Rabbi Chaim David Halevi, Israel (1924-1998)

The Rabbi "Shevut Yaakov" has not asked if a daughter could recite kaddish or not, and wrote it as the most obvious thing according to that which the rabbi who asked the question ruled. And also the rabbi who asked the question ruled simply to permit the daughter to say kaddish without any halachic discussion of the essential issue. And it is understood from this that the recitation of kaddish by a daughter was to them permissible, clearly and simply, and it appears that is how they practised in their communities. Therefore, the responsum of the Rabbi "Shevut Yaakov" is not a lone opinion against those who disagree. Rather, it is trustworthy testimony that this was the custom in those communities.

SOURCE 3:

Teshuvah Me'ahavah vol 2. Rabbi Elazar ben David Fleckeles, Prague (1754-1826)

It is true that kaddish is for honouring the father, ...and it is written [Exodus 20:11]"So that your days may be long" [if you honour your parents]. Do men need [long] life but women don't need [long] life?...

But I saw in the holy community of Prague a correct tradition of old. In the courtyard of the Kloizen synagogue, there sat old men and women... And they have the custom that one who has not left after them sons but rather young daughters, five or six years old, the daughters say kaddish there...

But in the synagogue, which is designated for prayer, I have never seen such a thing and it is not proper that any woman, young or old, should come to the men's house of prayer...

SOURCE 4:

Mateh Efrayim, Laws of Kaddish

4:8

**Rabbi Efrayim Zalman
Margoliot, Galicia 1762-
1828**

One who has no sons, just a daughter, and commanded before his death that ten men shall be paid to study in his home and, following the learning, the daughter will recite kaddish - one may not listen to his request and one should prevent this from being done. All the more so, one should not permit a woman to recite the kaddish of prayer. And even if she is single, it is prohibited, and all the more so if she is married, Heaven forbid to make her voice heard in the synagogue or a minyan [at home]. Rather, if she wishes to bring merit to her father, she should be careful to attend all times of prayer at a synagogue or minyan and listen carefully for the recitation of kaddish and respond "Amen" with proper concentration. [God] who knows all thoughts will consider it as if she fulfilled the command of her father.

מטה אפרים, דיני קדיש ד'ח'

(ח) מי שאין לו בנים רק בת
וצוה לפני פטירתו שילמדו
עשרה בביתו בשכרם ואחר
הלימוד תאמר הבת קדיש אין
לשמוע לו ויש למחות שלא
לעשות כן ומכ"ש שאין להניח
שתאמר קדיש של תפלה
ואפילו אם היא פנוי' אסורה
ומכ"ש א"א חלילה להשמיע
קולה לרבי באמירת קדיש בין
בבהכ"נ בין במנין אלא אם
תרצה לזכות את אביה תהי'
זהירה בכל עתות התפלה
בין בבהכ"נ בין במנין להטות
אזנה באמירת קדישים לענות
אמן בכוונה רצוי' ויודע
מחשבות יחשוב לה כאלו
אמרה וקיימה מצות אביו:

SOURCE 5:

Sdei Hemed Hashalem, Vol 5, ASeifat Dinim, Mourning 160
Rabbi Hayyim Hiskiyah Medini, Crimea and Israel (1832-1904)

One should prevent the daughter from saying kaddish with ten after the death of her father who had commanded her so, for it is a new and strange thing in the eyes of the rabbis...

And behold, recently, I was asked from a neighbouring town by one of the Krymchaks (Crimean Jews) who wanted the daughter to recite kaddish for her father who passed away without male children, and the questioner has stopped this from happening until my reply comes. And I responded to them that we are not permitted to change and do something innovative in the land. And even if there exists such a custom amongst the Ashkenazim, here amongst the Separdim such a thing has never been heard of anywhere and its absence is good. And this is the rule: it is preferable to refrain and not do anything. They received my response and she was prevented from saying kaddish for her father.

SOURCE 6:

Piskei Uzziel, Bishe'elot Hazeman 3
Rabbi Ben Tziyon Meir Hai Uzziel, Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, Jaffa (1880-1953)

...it is not appropriate nor befitting for daughters to recite kaddish for their parents even in the house of mourning, and how much more so in the synagogue... it is clear that all matters of kaddish are a tradition from the rabbis and as such we should not add to their words or innovate ideas from our own minds to explain the reasons of the tradition... Thus,... one should not innovate this custom of recitation of kaddish by daughters....

... A son is the physical continuation of his father's being in his deeds and words, and fills his place in the congregation.... And our prayer with the recitation of kaddish... correspond[s] to the sanctification of God's name...in the synagogues and study houses and through mitzvot performed publicly through which God's

holiness is made more manifest...

From here, our rabbis learned that sanctification occurs only in the presence of ten..

This is the secret of kaddish itself and is also the reason for its recitation by one's sons, for they continue his form and deeds and fill his place in the holy community of the holy nation.

And this thing [taking the father's place in the minyan] obviously can be fulfilled only by sons., who join the congregation of Israel, and not by daughters. Thus the daughters do not recite kaddish in public, but they are commanded to honour their fathers by continuing to do the good deeds and charity of their parents to increase their own deeds.

SOURCE 7:

From Women, Jewish Law and Modernity, Rabbi Joel Wolowelsky, 1997, p89

Tsipora Hunter Kravitz, wife of Rabbi Yosef Kravitz, recalled.. that in 1935, when she was fourteen years old, her brothers were out of town when her father, ... the Dayan of the town [Eisheshok, Lithuania], died. She said Kaddish at the graveside and continued to say Kaddish in both the new bet midrash and the shtiebl until a brother returned. She recalled that, at the same time, Gittel Gordon, then eighteen years old, said Kaddish in the shtibl. Another former inhabitant of the town recalled that when the girls said kaddish, they wore berets and stood in the men's section in the first row to the right of the amud.

SOURCE 8:

It would be difficult today to oppose a woman's recitation of kaddish based on the notion that customs of Israel should not be changed in any synagogue or community that permits mourning adult relatives of all kinds (and even paid non-relatives) to recite kaddish together, numerous times, every day of the week for only eleven months, all of which are innovations on the original practice.... so many

customs have changed with regard to the recitation of mourner's kaddish that, in the larger picture, a daughter's desire to take an active role in ensuring her parents' welfare after death is just one of many innovations.

Hilkhot Nashim, p130, edited by Rahel Berkovits

SOURCE 9:

Rabbi Yosef Eliyahu Henkin, Eastern Europe and USA (1880-1973)

Responsum Manuscript 1946 2:4, section 2 and Responsa Benei Banim 2:7

...and for this reason itself, one should also not rebuff the young girls – since saying kaddish causes closeness to Judaism – and indeed it is proper that she should stand behind a mechitzah and there she should pray and also there she should recite kaddish, and if she should push and enter in front of the mechitzah at the time of kaddish, since undoubtedly also others are saying kaddish according to the current custom [vs. only one person saying kaddish for all the mourners] that many say kaddish, it does not bother us.

SOURCE 10:

Rabbi Yehuda Henkin, USA and Israel (1945-) Responsa Benei Banim 2:7

[my grandfather] wrote “that the woman should say kaddish in front of women, and he wrote that she should recite at the time that the men are saying kaddish because she is dependent on their minyan. And the rest of the women and children in the women’s section should answer her “Amen” and “Yehei shemei Rabbah” ... even if there are not any women or children there, she can recite kaddish since the men answer “Amen” to the kaddish of the men and she is reciting it word for word with them.

SOURCE 11:

Rabbi Yehuda Henkin, USA and Israel (1945-)

...one can conclude that a female mourner in the women's section, if she regularly recites kaddish with the male mourners... and one day it happened that there are no male mourners, she can recite kaddish by herself since it is only an occasional event.

SOURCE 12:

S. Reguer, "Kaddish on the 'Wrong' Side of the Mehitzah" On Being a Jewish Feminist. p180

Then there was the time I visited Boston and was praying in an Orthodox school attended by one of the most outstanding Jewish scholars and rabbis of our day*. The sexton was nervous because I had already told him what I would be doing. He insisted on saying kaddish with me. But I saw a flurry of activity in the corner where the rabbi say, and when it came time to say it, I said the kaddish alone and all answered, as they properly should have.

*Rabbi Joseph B Soloveitchik, USA (1903-1993)

SOURCE 13:

Rahel Berkovits, Hilkhhot Nashim, p113

Raise the subject of kaddish and women will tell stories of being hushed, or of men who are not mourners starting to shout over them, or of rabbis who would not permit them to recite kaddish without a male voice but would also not ensure that there would always be a man saying kaddish with them. At a time when women are already in pain over their person loss and feel nervous and anxious about the great responsibility they hold toward their parent's soul, instead of being brought closer to the warmth and comfort of the Jewish community, they feel hurt and pushed away.

SOURCE 14:

May a woman say kaddish? It is a controversial question. It sounds to some like a feminist provocation. But ask the question differently. May a daughter say kaddish? Suddenly the controversy disappears, at least for me. If you deny the kaddish to a daughter, then you do not understand the kaddish. The kaddish is not an obligation of gender. It is an obligation of descent. This is not about men, this about sons. This is not about women, this is about daughter.

from Kaddish by Leon Wieseltier

SOURCE 15:

The *Kaddish* means to me that the survivor publicly and markedly manifests his wish and intention to assume the relation to the Jewish community which his parent had, and that so the chain of tradition remains unbroken from generation to generation, each adding its own link. You can do that for the generations of your family, I must do that for the generations of my family.

I believe that the elimination of women from such duties was never intended by our law and custom... It was never intended that, if they could perform them, their performance of them should not be considered as valuable and valid as when one of the male sex performed them. And of the *Kaddish* I feel sure this is particularly true.

...When my father died, my mother would not permit others to take her daughters' place in saying the *Kaddish*, and so I am sure I am acting in her spirit when I am moved to decline your offer.

Extract from letter from Henrietta Szold's letter to Haym Peretz who had offered to say kaddish for her mother