

Review Essay

Kaddish, Women's Voices, edited by Michal Smart, conceived by Barbara Ashkenaz (Jerusalem: Urim Publications, 2013) 271 pp.

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This volume opens new chapters in two century-old discussions regarding the Mourner's Kaddish. The first conversation might be new to those who regularly pray with others who are committed to *tefillah be-tsibur* as a normative daily experience. It is not saying Kaddish that brings them to shul three times a day and it is not to enable others to say Kaddish that motivates the other congregants to support and guarantee the *minyan's* existence.

But there are many congregations—especially in smaller communities—where Kaddish drives the service. Mourners who do not regularly pray with a *minyan*—be they *shomer Shabbat* or far removed from daily halakhic observance—suddenly find themselves forced to wreak havoc with their daily schedules. They do so out of a sense of obligation—to halakha or to their parent's memory—and one might well recognize the possibility that the eleven-month journey evokes a sense of resentment.

Yet, while Kaddish is said to elevate the deceased's soul, more often than we realize, it is the mourner's soul that is elevated as well. This anthology, then, gives us a window to appreciate what generations of mourners feel and have felt as they worked through months of saying Kaddish. These are not necessarily universal reactions; nonetheless, it is uplifting for the average shul-goer to read these dozens of personal narratives and reassuring for those who begin the process after the trauma of burying their dead. The following four reminiscences are illustrative:

I understood the prayer to be a vehicle for exalting God on behalf of my father, its purpose to facilitate the journey of his soul to eternal rest. I also understood it to be a tool for mourners, compelling us to pray with a community so we would not be isolated in our grief. From the minute I first uttered the Aramaic words so familiar from years of listening to them in *shul*, there was never any question for me that I would utter them again and again for my entire year of *aveilut*. My father never had a chance to say Kaddish for his own parents, something I knew pained him greatly. I and my two brothers

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would make sure this piece of family history would not be repeated (26).

Saying Kaddish for my father through the year was surprisingly healing. The daily *davening* was comforting. Feeling obligated to say Kaddish gave me *kavana*, purpose and intention.... I was boosted up each day as I prayed for sustained life, as I chose life each day. Every morning or every afternoon or both, I would say Kaddish and at the end, after taking steps forward I would say, “I love you, Dad” (68-9).

During the eleven months of Kaddish, I grew to think of Hashem as a truly close personal friend.... Once I completed my Kaddish I was unwilling to let this go.... I therefore continue to go to *shul* regularly. Now, when I do miss a *minyán*, on my next visit, I particularly focus on *tefillot* that express thanks and appreciation. I want Hashem to know that even though I occasionally turn down His invitation, He nevertheless remains my closest friend and confidant (71).

I count the saying of Kaddish as among the highest privileges of my life. I entered a world and emerged a different person.... Throughout the year, my soul was shipwrecked, but my body, that automaton, walked and bent and intoned. And from the *na’aseh ve’nishma* of assumed obligation has come a restored delight in my father’s essence and in the profligate gifts he gave us, which I can see and savor (121-2).

The second discussion to which this volume adds a new chapter is the conversation about the appropriateness of women saying Kaddish. This dialogue has been going on for centuries, but it has become more open over the last few decades as more Torah-educated women take a more public role in religious life. (To cite a non-controversial example of this latter phenomenon, consider that in the past it was common for men in the family to eat in a sukkah while the women—who are exempt—ate indoors. Indeed, this is still the arrangement in many present-day communities. Yet we take it for granted that many contemporary religious women want to join their families in observing this mitzvah.) To appreciate this volume’s contribution to the Kaddish discussion, we shall have to first step back and review some of the distant and contemporary discussions.

The oft-quoted position of Rabbi Yair Hayyim ben Moses Samson Bachrac (1638–1702) arguing against women saying Kaddish actually bespeaks a community where the phenomenon was accepted.

A strange thing was done in Amsterdam and is well-known there. A certain person died without a son, and he left instructions before his death that ten men should learn every day during the twelve months

of mourning in his house, and be compensated, and after the learning the daughter should say Kaddish. And the rabbis and lay leaders of the community did not prevent her from doing so.

There is no proof to contradict this, for even a woman is commanded on sanctifying God's name, especially when there is a *minyan* of ten men. And even though the story with R. Akiva, which is the source of orphans saying Kaddish, was a case of a male son, nevertheless, it is logical that even through a daughter there is benefit and satisfaction for the soul [of the deceased] because it is his seed. Nevertheless, we must be concerned that this will weaken the strength of the customs of the Jewish people, which are also Torah ... [Therefore] one should protest it (*Havvot Ya'ir*, number 222).

Havvot Ya'ir acknowledged that the rabbis of Amsterdam did not protest and that the logic of Kaddish argues for allowing the bereaved daughter to say it. But as a matter of public policy, he argued, it should be opposed because it might weaken the customs of the Jewish people. Yet one need only read a *Mishnah Berurah* to see that R. Bachrac's policy suggestion was not universally accepted. Thus, for example, Rabbi Yehudah ben Shimon Ashkenazi (1730–1770) comes to a different conclusion. He writes:

In Responsa *Keneset Yehezkel*, the author [Rabbi Yehezkel Katzenellenbogen (1668–1749)] wrote that it is specifically the son's son [who can say Kaddish] but the son of the [deceased's] daughter may not say Kaddish. And certainly the daughter has no Kaddish in the synagogue. But if they wish to form a separate *minyan* for her, they are permitted to do so. See there at the end of the section on *Yoreh De'ah*.¹

There is a simple logic that explains the permissibility of setting up a separate *minyan* despite the fact that “certainly the daughter has no Kaddish in the synagogue.” The underlying nature of the prohibition in the synagogue could not have been based on *kol isha*² or the fact that women may not form the *minyan* required for the saying of Kaddish, for such reasoning would also apply to the private *minyan* permissibly formed so

¹ R. Yehuda Ashkenazi, *Ba'er Heitev*, commentary to Orah Hayyim, section 132. n. 5, p. 27 in vol. 2 of standard *Mishnah Berurah*.

² Indeed, Rabbi Ovadia Yosef's comment in allowing a woman to enter the men's section to say *Birkat ha-Gomel* seems applicable here: In an atmosphere of Torah and *mitsva*, there is no need to fear the prohibition of *kol isha* (*Yehave Da-at*, vol. 4, responsum 15, pp. 75–78, n. **). Note also the recent discussion by Rabbi Mosheh Lichtenstein, “*Kol Isba: A Woman's Voice*,” *Tradition*, 46:1, Spring 2013, pp. 9–24.

that the female mourner could say Kaddish herself. However, the logic becomes clear when we realize that Keneset Yehezkel's responsum, which dealt with the question of who has precedence to say Kaddish in the synagogue, assumed a synagogue protocol different from our own. In most modern *shuls*, all mourners say Kaddish together. The original custom, however, was for only one mourner to say Kaddish at any time; when two people both claimed the right, the question arose as to who had first claim. Keneset Yehezkel apparently maintains that inasmuch as a woman does not participate in the synagogue activities, she cannot displace a man who wants to say Kaddish. *Ba'er Heitev* sees no reason to extend this to a private *minyan*.

This ruling is all the more interesting when we note that the *Keneset Yehezkel's* responsum that he quotes specifically says (citing *Havvot Ya'ir*): "If they want to form a separate *minyan* they may do so for the son of the [deceased's] daughter or for anyone who wishes to say Kaddish for the benefit of the deceased, but not for any female whatsoever. *Ba'er Heitev* apparently felt that Keneset Yehezkel agreed that *min hadin* she could say Kaddish at home but that she should not exercise this option because of the reservation suggested by *Havvot Ya'ir*. *Ba'er Heitev* felt bound by *halakha* and not the policy advice.

If the reason for requiring a special *minyan* for the daughter is that she has no right to displace a man who has a right to say Kaddish in the synagogue, it would follow that in synagogues such as ours where those mourners saying Kaddish displace no one else, a woman could say Kaddish. Indeed, many people remember such occurrences in pre-war Lita. Rabbi Moshe Feinstein wrote that "in all previous generations the practice was that sometimes a poor woman would come into the *beit midrash* to ask for *tzedakah*, or an orphaned woman to say Kaddish."³ Rabbi Pinchos Zelig Prag, *gabbai* of the Mir *Minyan* (the famous Brooklyn *shul* the core of whose members were former students of the Mirrer Yeshiva who came to America after the Second World War by way of Shanghai), told me that one of the congregants, Rabbi Moshe Maaruch, who was born and raised in Vilna and who studied at the Mirrer Yeshiva, recalled that when his cousin died leaving an adult daughter and no sons, Rabbi Hayyim Ozer Grozinsky had allowed her to say Kaddish daily in the synagogue; another recalled that the *Hafetz Hayyim* had similarly ruled.

Prof. Yaffa Eliach related to me similar reminiscences that she heard in researching her book *There Once Was a World*.⁴ Tsipora Hutner Kravitz,

³ *Iggerot Moshe*, OH 5:12.

⁴ Yaffa Eliach, *There Once Was a World: A 900-Year Chronicle of the Shtetl of Eishyshok* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1998).

wife of Rabbi Yosef Kravitz, recalled that in 1935, when she was 14 years old, her brothers were out of town when her father, Rabbi Naftali Menahem Hutner, the *dayan* of the town, died. She said Kaddish at the graveside and continued to say Kaddish in both the town's new *Beit Midrash* and *shtibel* until her brother returned. She recalled that at the same time Gitel Gordon, then 18 years old, said Kaddish in the *shtibel*. Another townsman recalled that when the girls said Kaddish, they wore a beret and stood in the men's section in the first row to the right of the *amud*.⁵

Rabbi Yosef Eliyahu Henkin also recalled that in his youth young women said Kaddish.⁶ He also allowed women to say Kaddish in *shul*, provided they remained in the women's section.⁷ He noted that in past times, when only one person said Kaddish, that person would stand in the front of the *shul*, something inappropriate for a woman. However, now, he continues, when everyone says Kaddish together from their respective places, the woman can say Kaddish.

In the early 1970s, when the issue came up in a chapter of Yavneh, the National Religious Jewish Students Association, I had asked Rabbi Gerald J. Blidstein⁸ (then a faculty advisor to Yavneh and now an Israel Prize laureate in Jewish Thought) about the issue. He wrote to me:

The Kaddish matter is as follows. I was asked about the question last year, and looking into it, could find no reason beyond "general policy" for forbidding it. I spoke to Aharon Lichtenstein [then Rosh Kollel at Yeshiva University and now Rosh Yeshivat Har Etzion in Israel], who had the same reaction and said he would ask the Rav

⁵ This practice found its way to America. Writing about an Orthodox synagogue in New Bedford, Mass. in the early twentieth century, Herman Eliot Snyder ("The American Synagogue World of Yesterday, 1901–1925," *American Jewish Archives*, 42:1, Spring/Summer 1990, p. 72) notes: "Despite this strict separation of the men and women, a young girl, perhaps sixteen years old, would enter the men's section to recite the Kaddish for a parent. No one ever made protest or even a comment."

⁶ Rabbi Yosef Eliyahu Henkin, *Sefer Tesbuvoth Ibra*, vol. 2 (New York: Ezrat Torah, 1989), "Amirat Kaddish al yedi ha-Bat," no. 4 (2), p. 6.

⁷ Ibid., no. 4 (1), pp. 3–5. (This is a reprint of his article by the same name that appeared in *Hapardes*, 38:6, pp. 5–6.) See also the recently published volume of Rabbi Henkin's *Responsum Gevurot Eliyahu, Oraḥ Hayyim*, no. 29, 30 and 31. Rabbi Henkin's student and grandson, Rabbi Yehuda Herzl Henkin, published an extensive discussion and explanation of that decision in his "Amirat kaddish al yedei isha ve-tsiruf la-minyan me-ezrat nashim," *Hadarom*, no. 54, Sivan 5745 [1985], pp. 34–48, reprinted in his *Benei Banim*, vol. 2, 1992, responsum 6, pp. 23–30.

⁸ A review of Prof. Blidstein's *Society and Self: On the Writings of Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik* appeared in *Hakirah*, vol. 15, Summer 2013.

[Rabbi Joseph B. Soloveitchik, his father-in-law], which he did when I was on the other end of the phone. [Rabbi Lichtenstein] put the question to him, and then was directed to ask me whether the girl was stationed in the *ezrat nashim*. I, of course, answered in the affirmative, and the Rav then said that of course she could say Kaddish.

I also asked Rabbi Ezra Bick (then one of the Yavneh student leaders who was learning with Rabbi Soloveitchik and now a senior *ram* at Yeshivat Har Etzion) to put the question to Rabbi Soloveitchik. He wrote back:

I spoke to the Rav about the question you asked concerning a girl saying Kaddish. He told me that he remembered being in Vilna at the “Gaon’s Kloiz”—which wasn’t one of your modern Orthodox shuls—and a woman came into the back (there was no *ezrat nashim*) and said Kaddish after *ma’ariv*. I asked him whether it would make a difference if someone was saying Kaddish along with her or not, and he replied that he could see no objections in either case—it’s perfectly all right.⁹ Coincidentally, checking around, I came across a number of people who remember such incidents from Europe, including my father (in my grandfather’s *minyan*—he was the *rav* in the town).¹⁰ [Rabbi Chaim Yechiel Bick was the *rav* in Medzhibush in the Ukraine.]

While European rabbis apparently did not always demand this, I suspect the American *poskim* insisted that women stay in the *ezrat nashim* because they were concerned about the mixed seating that was gaining hold in many American synagogues. These opinions allowing a woman to say Kaddish in *shul* seem to be lenient ones breaking new ground. Actually, they are *conservative* opinions that require that, in opposition to some existing customs, the woman not enter the men’s section to say Kaddish.

Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli, while noting opposition, concludes that a woman may say Kaddish if she does so in a regular voice (*be-keol ragil*) from

⁹ There is nothing surprising about allowing the female mourner to say Kaddish unaccompanied by anyone else. The private *minyanim* that many *poskim* allowed to be set up for a female mourner were by definition services where she alone said Kaddish. Nonetheless, some prefer (or require) that a man say Kaddish along with the female mourner.

¹⁰ I published these two letters in *HaDarom* (the halakhic journal of the Rabbinical Council of America), Elul 5748/1988, vol. 57, pp. 157-58, and in a number of other venues.

the *ezrat nashim*, and that this does not involve weakening customs.¹¹ Rabbi Aaron Soloveitchik makes a more forceful public policy statement:

Nowadays, when there are Jews fighting for equality for men and women in matters such as *aliyyot*, if Orthodox rabbis prevent women from saying Kaddish when there is a possibility for allowing it, it will strengthen the influence of Reform and Conservative rabbis. It is therefore forbidden to prevent daughters from saying Kaddish.¹²

Needless to say, modifying the public policy advice of *Havot Ya'ir* does not sit well with everyone, and a debate on the issue emerged in Israel more than a decade ago in the journal of *Zohar*,¹³ the Israeli rabbinic organization famous for trying to reach out and be sensitive to secular Israelis who are “put off” by the approach of the official rabbinate (its most popular activity being marriage services).

Rabbi Dr. Neriah Gutel (now head of Orot Women's College in Elkana, Israel) attacked the notion of allowing women to say Kaddish. Conceding the reality that many *poskim* had allowed it, he proposed that this was often done reluctantly in individual cases without intention of creating a new public policy. While *me'ikar hadin* it might be permitted, he maintained, they feared the “slippery slope.” Moreover, he argued *ad hominem* that those who proposed or supported such innovations were out to undermine halakhic observance.

The issue of motivation surely legitimately plays an important role in contemporary discussions regarding women's increased involvement in public religious Jewish life. For example, when the *rashei kollel* of Makhon Eretz Hemda concluded, while noting opposition, that it was acceptable for a woman to say one of the *sheva berakhot* honoring a newly married couple,¹⁴ Rabbi Zalman Nehemia Goldberg (who had assumed a role as advisor to the institute's *Responsa Mareh ha-Bazak* after Rabbi Shaul Yisraeli's death) dissented with technical objections and this concluding statement:

This discussion was to establish *ikkar hadin*, but in contemporary times, when all they wish to do is to innovate in the spirit of the non-Jews in America, God forbid that we should follow in that path and

¹¹ *Responsa Be-Mareh ha-Bazak*, volume 1, number 4. The responsum was prepared by members of the kollel and approved and signed by Rabbi Yisraeli.

¹² R. Aaron Soloveitchik, *Od Yisrael Yosef Beni Hai*, no. 32, p. 100.

¹³ The discussion extended over issues 8 (Fall 5762 [2001]), 9 (Winter 5762 [2002]) and 11 (Summer 5762). My translation.

¹⁴ *Responsa Mareh ha-Bazak*, vol. 5, number 113. Available at <<http://goo.gl/pwFe5i>>. My translation.

mimic these *apikorsim*... And whoever studies the pattern of the early Reformers will see that their main purpose was to imitate gentile ways; therefore they moved the *bima* [of the synagogue] from the center to the side so that it resembles the gentile [church], introduced the organ to the synagogue to resemble gentile practices... [If they really cared for the honor of women,] they would not mock women by saying that their [traditional] roles are of lesser value and that what the men do is of central importance.

The *rashai kollel* remarked here: “This point expresses the fundamental difference regarding the spirit of the responsum as to the question of how to relate to women who want greater involvement in [public] worship.” This is really a crucial point. Evaluating motivation and implications should play a significant role in responding to any contemporary issue. But in the case of women saying Kaddish, this has been virtually the *exclusive* concern (as opposed to halakhic textual analyses) once the norm changed for all mourners to say Kaddish together in the synagogue.

Prof. Yehuda Eisenberg had addressed this in his response to Rabbi Gutel:

Rabbi Gutel indicated that *al pi din* a woman is not constrained from saying Kaddish and that the opposition stems not from halakhic considerations but from tactical concerns. He then portrayed the slippery slope down which this will lead: changes in the liturgy (“*shelo asani isha*”), synagogue activities (*hakafof*), *tsniut* (head covering) and dress (pants), circumcision (forgoing *metsitsa*, and circumcising the child of a Jewish man and gentile woman), conversion (without fully accepting mitzvot), and more.

And I ask, what is the connection between saying Kaddish and not fully accepting the yoke of mitzvot? How does one lead to the other? Why should we regard a woman wanting to say Kaddish as a threat to the fundamentals of Judaism? She does not want to do this to arouse men sexually or to strengthen the Reform or Conservative movements. She only wants to sanctify God’s great name, to thereby express her grief, and show respect to her parents—this and nothing more!

Moreover, says Eisenberg (quoting Rabbi Aaron Soloveitchik), the slippery slope goes both ways: If we prohibit what is really allowed, it will lead to permitting what is really prohibited.

Rabbi Gutel had indicated that even if the circumstances of American Jewish life had justified American *poskim* allowing women to say Kaddish, there was no justification to extend such reasoning to Israel. It is therefore significant to note the discussion the past year sparked by the statement

of Beit Hillel on the subject. Beit Hillel is an Israeli religious Zionist forum made up of men and women who hold rabbinic and communal leadership roles. They maintain that “Recent events have presented our Holy Torah to the Israeli public in an inappropriately narrow-minded, exclusionary light. We, who are engaged daily in teaching and studying the Torah, believe that this has misrepresented Judaism, and that only the authentic, enlightened, inclusive Judaism—whose ways are pleasant and peaceful—has a true message for Israel today.”¹⁵

The Beit Hillel “*Beit ha-Midrash ha-Hilkhati*” reviewed the range of opinions on the issue, from those who forbid it completely, to those who limit it to a very young girl or those who have no brothers or those not saying it in the synagogue proper, to those who allow any orphaned woman to say Kaddish alone from the *ezrat nashim*. They concluded that while it is preferable for a man to accompany a woman saying Kaddish while she is in the *ezrat nashim*, if she wishes she may say it alone from there. They cautioned against creating discord in the community, admonishing everyone that “just as the woman must take into account the sensitivities of the congregation, so too must the congregation take into account the sensitivities of the woman who wants to say Kaddish.”¹⁶

Interestingly, the press took the opportunity to report this in sensationalist terms. Thus Ynet¹⁷ reported: “A surprising new halakhic ruling issued by Orthodox rabbinical organization Beit Hillel allows women, for the first time, to say the Kaddish prayer in memory of their deceased parents.” Accompanying this paragraph was an unrelated archive photo of a woman wearing *tallit* and *tefillin*. However, as the Beit Hillel responsum clearly pointed out, this was hardly the first time that *poskim* had allowed women to say Kaddish, and these precedents were available long before Beit Hillel undertook to study the issue. Needless to say, the photo was not only unrelated to the issue of women saying Kaddish, but further created the impression that this was a radical feminist position.

¹⁵ <<http://www.beithillel.org.il/english.asp>>.

¹⁶ The *Beit ha-Midrash ha-Hilkhati* responsum may be accessed at <<http://www.beithillel.org.il/show.asp?id=60598>>. One contributor to the anthology at hand writes: “I believe that I can say Kaddish without the accompaniment of a man. And I have in my *shul*. But others do not. I do not feel secondary when someone joins in. I want others to feel comfortable just as I want to feel comfortable; it is *our shul*. The halachic understanding that I can say Kaddish alone must be joined with the halachic imperative to respect. That is the Judaism I choose to practice” (235).

¹⁷ The internet Ynet news article of July 25, 2013, is available at <http://www.ynet-news.com/articles/0,7340,L-4396702,00.html>

A response by Dov Lieberman to the Beit Hillel responsum appeared in the July 5, 2013 literary supplement of the Religious Zionist newspaper *Mekor Rishon*.¹⁸ Lieberman challenged the responsum on some technical points, some of which were surprising. For example, he reiterated Rabbi Gutel's charge that Rabbi Feinstein had expressed reservation about the historical fact that women had said Kaddish in the past, ignoring the fact that Eisenberg (in his *Zohar Journal* response) and Beit Hillel (in its responsum) had shown that Rabbi Feinstein was referring to the conclusion of the halakhic issue at hand (the need for a *mehitza* when one woman is in the room) and not the historical precedent that he had included as a non-remarkable side comment. Lieberman charged that Rabbi Yisraeli had allowed a woman to say Kaddish only in a quiet voice, when he had specifically allowed it in a "*kol ragil*." He argued that the permissive precedents were only for a young girl, ignoring the fact that many of the sources ambiguously referred to a "daughter," others specifically mentioned an adult daughter, and Rabbi Yehuda Henkin had argued that even those who restricted permission to minor girls did so in a situation where the mourner comes into the men's section but would allow an adult to say Kaddish from the *ezrat nashim* while men are saying Kaddish in the men's section.

However, Lieberman's main objection to the Beit Hillel responsum was that it was flawed methodologically. An authentic responsum, he argued, moves from the sources to their logical conclusion, not from a presumed agenda that selectively picks from among minority sources to meet needs that really do not exist among committed bereaved women. "Over the generations," he concluded, "we have had many attentive rabbis and *poskim*, and many female orphans came to their homes to search out the true halakha. It would seem that this was not the case here, that these rabbis came to the orphan's home to ask her—or rather perhaps to explain to her—what she wants." (There is some irony to the objection that a proper responsum moves from the sources to its logical conclusion without reference to societal pressures, as the original *Havot Ya'ir* responsum concedes that logically a daughter should be able to say Kaddish, but forbids it for societal reasons.)

The next week *Mekor Rishon's* literary supplement carried a response from Rabbi Zev Veitman, the head of the Beit Hillel *Beit Midrash Hilkhati* (and rabbi of Tenuva).¹⁹ Rabbi Veitman addressed the technical objections, but his main focus was on the nature of an authentic *posek*. A competent *posek* must know the wide range of legitimate opinions that relate

¹⁸ Available at <<http://goo.gl/JgFc1p>>. (My translation.)

¹⁹ Available at <<http://goo.gl/VqO7bx>>. (My translation.)

to the subject at hand, he said, but must also know and take into account the sensitivities of the community or individual raising the question. The Beit Hillel *psak* had laid out the full spectrum of opinion and did not try to delegitimize any opinion, or suggest that its position would be appropriate for every community, or argue that any woman should consider it obligatory to say Kaddish. It set out to establish that when an individual woman feels a deep spiritual need to say Kaddish it should be respected and not dismissed as illegitimate, “and that in doing this the woman does not become a Conservative or Reform [Jew], *halila*, or one of the Women of the Wall.”

The anthology at hand does not suggest that every bereaved woman say Kaddish; indeed, it includes a contributor who reminds us of the integrity of the position of daughters *not* saying Kaddish. A woman's focus should be in the private domain, she argued:

My *not* saying Kaddish is a reminder to me, and I hope to others, to actualize the words of Kaddish themselves, to draw the focus higher, to seek inward, to highlight the centrality of personal *kedushah*. As a Jewish woman, I have been entrusted to safeguard personal *kedushah* not only for myself, but also for my community, my world. That is first circle.

My mother showed me what *kedushah* in life means. To honor my mother's life, to continue to bring elevation to her *neshamah*, I must live my life with the same dedication to Hashem and the Torah that she showed, proud and confident and “ahead of her time.”

By constantly striving to do as she did—by bringing more Torah and more *kedushah* into my life ... I hope that I will fulfill my lifelong obligation: To *be* her Kaddish (192).

This anthology speaks to women who are considering acting on the permissibility of saying Kaddish. But it also speaks to those living in a community where no women say Kaddish—where (aided by a sensationalist-seeking press) the image of women saying Kaddish is that of the Women of the Wall protesting at the Kotel wearing *tallit* and *tefillin*. It helps them understand how halakhic authorities of the first order actually did permit it—because in these communities a woman wanting to say Kaddish is no different from her wanting to eat in a *sukkah*. She does so not “to be like a man,” but to be like a member of the family now able, because of unprecedented increased opportunities in Jewish education, to more fully participate in the traditional mourner's expression of grief and loss. Indeed, the reminiscences in this anthology generally give poignant

testimony to Eisenberg's portrayal of the women's motivation to say Kaddish. These are not the Women of the Wall engaged in a public protest to challenge halakhic norms. These are simply heartbroken mourners using a time-honored and legitimate norm to confront and express their grief. This will no doubt come as a surprise to some people.

The anthology also gives the opportunity to hear of the pain some experienced when their motives were wrongly denigrated.

Once, the tenth man in a *Mincha minyan*—a personal acquaintance of mine—walked out just as Kaddish was starting, knowing that I wouldn't be able to say Kaddish as a result. My internal struggle to be kind and understanding vs. feeling angry and resentful was a serious challenge at times (217).

Once, I had a rather toxic experience, ironically at the school that I was running. When it came time for Kaddish at a *Maariv minyan*, after an evening event for families, I joined in. I heard murmurs and whispers from the men's section and could feel eyes piercing through me. When I mustered up the courage, I looked up. Jaws were dropped. Some men left the room, asking whether this was a school for Reform Rabbis. *I have never felt more humiliated as a member of the Orthodox community than during the time that I said Kaddish for my mother* (141).

We were going to Atlantic City. I knew there was an Orthodox community near our hotel, and I called the rabbi to ask where I could find a *minyan* the next morning. He told me, "There is none." I asked about the yeshiva high school and he said, "No." I asked if he knew where I could go to say Kaddish, and he answered: "Why don't you call the Conservative rabbi?" I'm sure if my husband had called him to find a *minyan*, he would have had no problem. I did call the Conservative rabbi, and he was so nice! He told me he would make a *mechitza* for me and have a *minyan*. I went the next morning and was relieved and honored that he went out of his way for me (112).

There were other pleasant surprises:

One time, we stopped in Savannah, Georgia and arrived at an Orthodox *shul* just minutes before *Mincha*. When we entered the sanctuary, there was no place for women to pray and men occupied every corner, so I stood in the doorway. I was soon approached by the most religious-looking man in the room, with a full white beard, long *peyot* (sidelocks) and Chassidic garb which included a large hat, black coat and *gartel*. I explained to him that I wanted to say Kaddish, but there was no place for me. He said, "Come with me." In moments, he cleared the men out of that part of the room, and moved a small bookcase over to serve as a *mechitza*, so I could enter the room and

daven. He commented, "That's what we call Southern hospitality."
"No," I said, with tears in my eyes. "That's pure kindness" (144).

Kaddish, Women's Voices allows us to reconsider how we want to understand the motivations of those who follow a legitimate halakhic position different from our own. As the *rashei kollel* of Makhon Eretz Hemda pointed out, this informs the spirit of the responses to the questions of how to relate to women who want greater involvement in public worship. It is an important read both for women who are considering saying Kaddish and for anyone who opposes their doing so. 