## The Sounds of Kaddish: Discussion & Study Guide

by Cantor Andrew Bernard, D.M.A.

## A. Reclaiming nusach

The *Reform Judaism* magazine interview describes Chatzi Kaddish as introducing the melodic atmosphere of the section to follow. This section explores how music, memory, and emotion are connected. It asks how together these might enhance worship, and if there is a way to reclaim the legacy of traditional *nusach* for our contemporary congregations.

1. The power of memory. Think of melodies that evoke memories, such as television theme songs (e.g. "I Love Lucy," "Get Smart," or "M\*A\*S\*H\*"), a popular song from your teenage/college years, or music associated with specific events and ceremonies (e.g., "The Star-Spangled Banner" at ball games, "Pomp and Circumstance" at graduations, or "Here comes the bride" at weddings).

What memories are most powerful for you? What images do they evoke? What emotions do they evoke?

Imagine, for a moment, hearing some of these melodies out of context: "The Star-Spangled Banner at a baby naming (instead of a ball game) or "Pomp and Circumstance" at a wedding (instead of a graduation). How strange would that be? Even substituting tunes with similar themes might seem absurd: could you replace "L'cha dodi" on Friday evening with "Here comes the bride?" Ridiculous — but it shows us the power of association that melody carries.

Are there melodies you need to hear in order to feel that you have fully experienced a particular day or holiday (such as "Kol Nidrei" on Yom Kippur, "Avinu Malkeinu" on the High Holy Days, "Ma'oz Tzur/Rock of Ages," "I have a little dreidl," or the special candle blessing on Chanukah)?

What melodies evoke Jewish memories for you?

2. Reclaiming traditional nusach. Melodies that are new or unfamiliar cannot, by definition, evoke memories. But can this be a learned response? Marketing people certainly count on it. Can you name a recently composed melody that elicits a response? (Think of the theme of a current television show or movie, a current piece of popular music, or a new synagogue melody.)

How do melodies come to evoke specific associations? Is your response mostly intellectual or emotional? We learn these responses in a number of ways: through repetition; or by connecting the music with a particular event, idea, or program--the melody then becomes an integral part of the branding.

The challenge for synagogue professionals: how would you try to give a new melody a particular association in the worship context, given that many congregants do not attend synagogue regularly?

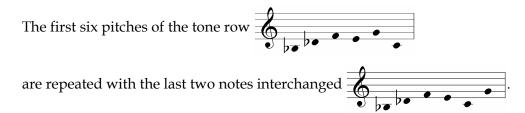
## B. Mourner's Kaddish: Our Personal Recitation

The interview discusses that the words "Yitgadal v'yitkadash sh'mei rabba" or "Magnified and sanctified be the great Name" immediately evoke an emotional response. What response do they evoke in you?

- 1. Why we recite Mourner's Kaddish. There are a number of traditional and contemporary explanations as to why we recite Mourner's Kaddish, both daily for the first eleven months after a death, and annually on the Yahrzeit. Among them are:
  - a. elevating the souls of our loved ones to heaven (redemption from purgatory/Gehenna)
  - b. thanking God for the gift of their lives
  - c. out of respect; out of obligation; to honor our loved ones
  - d. committing ourselves to perpetuating their memories through acts of charity or by living the lessons/gifts they gave us to better our own lives and the lives of those around us
- 2. <u>Kaddish and Grieving</u>. Recitation of Mourner's Kaddish can elicit many emotions, often depending upon where we are in our grieving and healing process. When you recite Mourner's Kaddish, is it a sad time? Do you feel the joy embodied by the spirit of the literal text? Are you comforted by the text? and, if so, in what way? How does the recitation of Mourner's Kaddish become part of your own healing process?
- 3. <u>Musical settings of Kaddish</u>. The musical settings of or called Mourner's Kaddish referenced in the interview were created with non-liturgical references in mind: Bernstein expressed his dismay with the Cold War; Raphael commemorated the victims of the Holocaust; Beveridge explored the concepts of the memorial service shared across religious traditions. Yet each piece of the music could easily reflect our personal experience of mourning.
  - a. <u>Bernstein: Three Statements of Kaddish</u>. Listen again to <u>Track 1</u>. What aspect of the grieving process does this music evoke in you? What images or emotions come to mind? the tearing of the k'riah ribbon? Fear? Anger? Disbelief?

Listen to <u>Track 2</u>. Do the words of Mourner's Kaddish bring you comfort, soothe your pain? Are these words ever soothing to you?

Jewish tradition believes that the recitation of Mourner's Kaddish is essential to our healing process. Bernstein takes us on that journey from pain (in <u>Track 1</u>) to healing (in <u>Track 3</u>). Musically, the 12-tone row of the former is transformed through a process called interval expansion, until it morphs into the sweeping tonal melody of the latter. Here is the musical technique:



Gradually, the intervals are expanded (observe the intervals between the 2nd & 3rd notes, and the 3rd & 4th notes):

and then again (observe the intervals between the 2nd & 4th notes and the 5th & 6th





As we heal through grieving, over time our tears turn into smiles; emptiness is filled with memory. The transition takes time and patience. It is gradual. How did you perceive that transition? What or who sustained you through that transition?

b. <u>Raphael's "Kaddish."</u> Like the Bernstein "Kaddish Symphony," Raphael's instrumental "Kaddish," while intended as a Holocaust memorial, also reflects our personal experience with grief and mourning. Notice the tones of lament (<u>Track 5</u>), anger and despair (<u>Track 6</u>), and resolution/healing (<u>Track 7</u>).

Throughout the grieving process, our emotions are sometimes reflected in various types of music. During the first year after you experienced a death, were there pieces of liturgical music that accurately represented your mood? Did this music help you to heal? If so, were different pieces of music instrumental to your healing process over time?

c. <u>Beveridge Mourner's Kaddish/Lord's Prayer</u>. This music not only pays tribute to the feelings of the mourner, but also reflects the joyful and hopeful words of the texts.

Listen to the difference between the exuberance of the doxological portion (the first three paragraphs) in <u>Track 8</u> and the soulful prayer for peace in <u>Track 9</u>. Which of these moods express your emotions during Sh'loshim? On the yahrzeit of a loved one? At other times when you think about him or her?

d. Other Settings of Kaddish. We've talked about the sadness, pain, comfort, and healing associated with the music of the Mourner's Kaddish; and, in the Beveridge, some of the exuberance of the doxological text. Although both the "Chassidic Kaddish" and Jack Gottlieb's "Chatzi Kaddish" — Tracks 16 & 17 — are not settings of Mourner's Kaddish per se, both, in different styles, evoke feelings of joy. Can we incorporate these settings into the gamut of emotions we experience in the aftermath of a death?

## C. Mourner's Kaddish: The Condition of the World

A. <u>The World of Leonard Bernstein's "Kaddish Symphony."</u> Some of the philosophy behind Bernstein's work — especially the *Din Torah* challenging God's role in a tumultuous world —

comes from the Kaddish of Rabbi Levi Yitzchak of Berdichev. Born out of Jewish persecution in 18th and 19th century Europe, Rabbi Levi Yitzchak challenges God, attempting to understand why a people dedicated to praising the Almighty should suffer so. It is said that he broke from the traditional liturgy on Rosh Hashanah to state:

Good morning to You, Lord, Master of the Universe. I, Levi Yitzhak, son of Sarah of Berditchev, I come to You with a *Din Torah* from Your people Israel.

What do You want of Your people Israel? What have You demanded of Your people Israel? For everywhere I look it says, "Say to the Children of Israel," And every other verse says, "Speak to the Children of Israel," And over and over, "Command the Children of Israel."

Father, sweet Father in Heaven, How many nations are there in the world? Persians, Babylonians, Edomites.

The Russians, what do they say?
That their Czar is the only ruler.
The Prussians, what do they say?
That their Kaiser is supreme.
And the English, what do they say?
That George the Third is the sovereign.

And I, Levi Yitzhak, son of Sarah of Berditchev, say, "Yit'gadal v'yit'kadash sh'me raba — Magnified and sanctified is Thy Name."

And I, Levi Yitzhak, son of Sarah of Berditchev, say, "From my stand I will not waver,
And from my place I shall not move
Until there be an end to all this.
Yit'gadal u'yit'kadash sh'me raba —
Magnified and sanctified is only Thy Name."

The parallel to the post-Holocaust world is obvious. But Bernstein was also concerned about the growing Cold War with the Soviet Union: the nuclear arms race, the launch of Sputnik in 1957 and its implications for the firing of nuclear weapons, and the Cuban Missile Crisis of 1962.

What are the parallels of the Cold War to the world of early 2007? How do these Cold War events compare to the North Korean and Iranian nuclear programs, China's successful test of a satellite-killing missile, Middle East instability, the Iraq War, and terrorism? In what ways are these events parallel? What are the qualitative differences? Are we/should we be as afraid now as we were in the early 1960s?

B. How Do You See God's role in this Troubled World?

1. <u>Leonard Bernstein and Re-Envisioning the Covenant</u>. Bernstein's solution to his frightening world of the late 1950s and early 1960s was not to abandon faith in God, but to renegotiate the Covenent between God and humankind.

Bernstein states that the parent-child relationship at the time of Noah and the covenant of the rainbow must now become that of partners.

- a. Do you think of God as a parent? In what way is God like your biological parent?
- b. Has your relationship with your parent(s) changed over the years? How? Is there a corresponding change in your relationship with God?
- c. In what ways and at what times do you rely on God for strength? Is that compromised in a partner-like relationship? Does that relationship become equal? Mutual? When our biological parents age and we must now care for them, some aspects of our relationship with them changes. Yet, are there ways we still rely on them as parents?
- d. According to Jewish tradition, creation and judgment are the sole prerogatives of God. Humans are supposed to imitate the compassionate qualities of God: "Lift up the fallen, heal the sick, free the captive, and keep faith with those who sleep in the dust."
  - Bernstein's narrator says to God, "We are one, after all, You and I; together we suffer, together exist, and forever will recreate each other." What does he mean by "recreate each other?" Are we overstepping a boundary?
- 2. The Issue of God's Role Leads to Many Other Even More Challenging Questions:
  - a. Does God control events? If so, why is the world the way it is? If not, what is God's role?
  - b. What is the sphere of God's influence? Can God influence groups of people? Can God influence whole countries?
  - c. How does our belief in God or our conceptualization of God inform our individual acts? How can those acts change our behaviors? Can those behaviors change the world in which we live?
  - d. What prayer would *you* offer to help heal the world? "Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruler of the universe, who...."