

Kaddish, Above and Beyond, By Kenneth Friedman, age 47

My life changed forever on February 25, 2020, Rosh Chodesh Adar, 5780. My role model, my advisor, my mentor, Norman Friedman, Nissan Reuven ben Shammai, AKA, Dad, passed away. I soon learned the healing effect of the gift to gather among my People to say the eternal words of the Kaddish:

יִתְגַּדֵּל וְיִתְקַדַּשׁ שְׁמֵהּ רַבָּא

בְּעֶלְמָא דִּי בְּרָא כְרַעוּתָהּ

May His great name be exalted and sanctified!

In the world in which He created according to His will!

The Jewish customs of shiva and shloshim brought an unexpected level of nechama, of deep psychological comfort. Greeting the faces and voices of longtime friends and family who knew my dad, we heard stories of simple truth and emunah pashuta, basic faith, about the man that played the lead role in my life until now. Hearing these loyal people answer Amen to our words exalting and sanctifying God somehow placed a salve on our wounded hearts.

Suddenly a fog washed over our community like much of the world with novel coronavirus, and quarantine. The shul to which I turned to hear the stirring, responsive words of Amen and Yehay Shemay Rabah, would be forced to shutter its doors to all.

Suddenly this salve for my pain was just out of reach.

Certainly, I considered the terrible pain of others unable to host a proper shiva, but the wound in my heart opened wider, my soul once again disconnecting and torn from the corporeal. I searched the enduring words of Kaddish, and within found my answer.

לְעֵלָא מִן כָּל בְּרַכָּתָא

וְשִׁירָתָא תַּשְׁבְּחָתָא וְנַחֲמָתָא

דְּאִמְרִין בְּעֶלְמָא

Blessed is He, above and beyond all the blessings, songs, praise, and consolation that are uttered in the world.

In this time in which I was unable to utter the metaphysical words of kaddish, connecting my soul to my dad's and ultimately to God, I understood that there were deeper connections to achieve. This new reality, like any when viewed from a particular angle, was a blessing.

The Lubavitcher Rebbe wrote in September, 1971 that, "When it happens that a situation arises in which it is impossible for a Jew to actually carry out the will of God despite his self-sacrifice, this stimulates in him a deep spiritual pain that pervades him to the very core of his soul, bringing him to a deeper connection with God, His Torah and mitzvot, and his Jewishness, the likes of which he could never have attained without this painful experience."

לְעֵלָא מִן כָּל בְּרַכָּתָא

Above and Beyond.

I turned to my Rabbi, who quoted the words of the Aruch Hashulchan: אַע"פ שאמירת הקדיש והתפילות מועילות להאבות, מכל מקום אין אלו העיקר, אלא העיקר הוא שהבנים ילכו באורח מישור, כי בזה הם מזכים... "Even though saying Kaddish and prayers assists our ancestors, it is not the most important thing for them. The most important thing is that their children live upright lives."

I reflected upon my life, as my increasing age lends itself, and learned that my community involvement, my leadership where I am able, my charity, and above and beyond all, teaching my children the lessons of my father, will fulfill these words of the Aruch Hashulchan.

And then after these weeks, the day would come when ten of my neighbors could gather for prayer in

our backyard, and according to government laws. This was a day of consolation as a yearlong mourner.

Within just days would come the bar mitzvah of my precious son, my father's only grandson. As my son wrapped his arm for the first time with the priceless tefillin of my father and joined the unbroken chain of generations of both his family, and his People, my heart, my soul swelled.

Above and Beyond.

These are the lessons of Our People. These are the lessons carried l'dor va'dor, from generation to generation. This is Torah M'Sinai, the lessons of the Revelation of Sinai. While Torah is supernatural, it is in our mortal world. It is in our lessons, our examples of lives lived upright, from parent to child, from generation to generation.

Above and Beyond.