

The Kaddisher

By Michael Fine

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He was treated special because he was his father's Kaddisher.

In those days we only counted men in a minyan, in the little group of ten you need to daven, to pray together, to say the most important prayers, although as we all know every prayer is important, each in its own way. He was the only boy in the family, with three sisters. So according to halacha, religious law, only Howard could help make the minyan that is needed to say a proper Kaddish. His sisters could say Kaddish themselves, of course. They could go to shul and say Kaddish in the eleven months that are required after someone dies, and then once a year, at his father's yahrzeit, the anniversary of his father's death on the Hebrew calendar. But only he, Howard Levitan, could be one of the ten men needed to say Kaddish in a formal, public way, the way that matters most in Jewish tradition, G-d only know why.

Howard didn't remember when his father told him about being his Kaddisher the first time. But he knew about it deep in his soul, as if he had been born knowing it, and he knew that his father was proud of him because of the simple fact of his gender and what that meant in the community. You are my Kaddisher, his father would say to him, quietly, when they walked to shul together on Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, in the very few moments when his father considered his own mortality and legacy as they walked together and his father thought about his own mortality and his tiny place in this big and complicated world. And then his father would quote a verse from parashat Vayera, in Bereshit, in Genesis. וַיֵּלְכוּ שְׁנֵיהֶם יַחְדָּו: Vyalchoo schnehem yachdov. *And they went together both of them*, the verse that is repeated three times in the story of the binding of Isaac, as Isaac and Abraham go to the place where Abraham plans to sacrifice his only son, his beloved son, following what he thinks is G-d's order to kill his own child, until Isaac is redeemed by an angel.

The text says, *they went together*, נִתְּוּ, אִשְׁוּ, *both of them*, his father would say. Why does it say “together” *and* “both of them?” Howard’s father would ask. It is repetitive.

Redundant, yes? No, his father would say, answering his own question. It is repeated for emphasis. The Torah wants you to understand how close Abraham and Isaac were, that they were as one person, father and son, the past and the future, the tree and the fruit of the tree, the seed and its germination, two souls with one destiny. The Torah wants you to understand the depth of Abraham’s faith and the intensity of Isaac’s love for his father, so you understand what it meant for Abraham not to withhold what he cherished most.

What Howard’s father didn’t say, of course, was what he really meant, which was that he felt that same intense love for his son and wanted to feel, no, wanted to *know* Howard felt that love for him. Howard’s father was not a man who ever talked about what he felt. Ever. Only about what he thought he knew, suspected was going on behind his back, or what he was afraid of.

And then the rest of the year, when they walked to shul together on Shabbos, his father would introduce him to any old friends they might meet on the street who were also walking to shul, saying “Louie, I want you to meet my son Howard, my Kaddisher,” and those men from Russia-Poland, who were bald and wrinkled, with sad eyes but warm smiles, and who all seemed to carry the world on their shoulders, would shake Howard’s hand very formally, look him in the eye, and tell him to listen to his father, a learned and good man. This started when Howard was a small child, before he was five years old and so small that these old men towered over him, their legs as big and thick as tree trunks, their bodies blocking the light. Howard was always his father’s Kaddisher. This was a position of love, honor and trust, and it occupied a central place in Howard’s soul.

Years passed. Howard grew up. He moved away for college, from which he dropped out. It was the sixties. He had a wild youth and then he settled down. Married, children of his own, professor, expert in his field, tenure, lectureships, awards, committees, panels and boards, the whole nine yards.

During that time, of course, the world changed. The Jewish neighborhoods of the Lower East Side, the Bronx, the Upper West Side, Washington Heights and Brooklyn, small versions of Warsaw in America with their Jewish bakeries, kosher butchers, kosher fish mongers, little department stores, Jewish owned hardware and dry-goods stores, and hundreds of little shuls and shtiebelas (tiny store-front synagogues), completely disappeared. Howard's memories were memories of a lost world, just as his father's world in Warsaw had been lost as well, swept away by history. The chaos and anarchy of both those worlds, but also their familiarity, riches and wisdom were gone forever.

Now there were no men with sad eyes and warm smiles to meet walking to shul. People lived in Westchester County, New Jersey, and Long Island. In suburban tract houses and on little estates. They bought big cars which they drove proudly from place to place. No one walked to shul anymore, or almost no one. No one saw their friends from Poland on the street because that generation had died out. That generation's children moved to Berkeley and New Haven, to Cambridge and Somerville, to LA, Austin and Seattle. Everything was different. You couldn't tell who was a Jew any more just by looking and listening to them. Names were different. Faces were different. No one spoke with an accent. No one Howard knew spoke Yiddish, and you never heard Yiddish spoken on the street unless you went to Eastern Parkway

in Brooklyn, to Monsey in Rockland County, to Mea Shearim in Jerusalem or to Miami. Everyone had become Americans. Jewish Americans, perhaps. But Americans, just like everyone else.

Howard's parents died. He grieved for them – and said Kaddish, not every day, but at least a few times a week for 11 months, for both his mother and his father. After his year of mourning was over, he made sure he knew the anniversaries of his parents' deaths on the Hebrew calendar so he could say Kaddish on their yahrzeits. He went to the cemetery once a year, sometimes a little more. He was a good son. A dutiful son. He remembered.

But memory alone was also inadequate. The past was past. Lost. Dead. Gone. History, William Faulkner be damned. Even so, nothing he did now and nothing he knew did enough honor to that lost world, to its kindness and decency, to the love and the gentle holiness that emanated from those old men and women. They were gone, as was natural, but they had taken something incredibly valuable with them. The world of Howard's soul, the warm, familiar world in which people loved, laughed, and listened – that had disappeared with those old men and woman. Gone before Howard had even noticed it was there. A mist that had burned off with the morning sun. A dream that Howard couldn't remember after waking.

Before long there would be no minyanim, no places to daven where Howard felt comfortable. No one else missed any of this. No one knew. No one cared. No one else remembered.

It didn't matter. Life goes on. Change is inevitable. Shit happens.

In this certain invisible way, Howard was now completely alone. And living in a world of memories that no one else had. With emotions that no one else felt.

Then one day a letter came in the mail, addressed to his father, forwarded from his father's last address. It was from his father's synagogue in Brookline. A reminder. His father's father's yahrzeit was coming up in three weeks. There was a minyan at 5:45 pm, 7 am and 5:45 pm the following afternoon. It is customary to donate to charity in the name of a loved one, the letter said. Or make a donation to the synagogue itself, or to the Rabbi's tzedakah, or charity, fund.

Strange, Howard thought. He never knew his grandfather, his father's father. In all these years he hadn't ever thought even once about his grandfather's yahrzeit. As a child, he had been to the cemetery where his father's parents were buried a few times. It was somewhere in far distant Queens, in a cemetery plot put together by his grandfather's londsleitshrift, the burial society organized by people from Ciechanow, a city just north and west of Warsaw where Howard's grandfather was born and had grown up. Sometimes, rarely, maybe once or twice, he went to the cemetery with his father on his grandfather or grandmother's yahrzeits, and as a child marveled at the baruchhamachers, old men from Poland dressed in unpressed dark suits and wrinkled shirts yellowed with age who lay in wait for anyone who came to visit a grave. Those old men would say El Malei Rach-amin for you so you should give them a dollar or five dollars, which they'd call and you'd call tzedakah, righteous charity, which it probably was, but you and they meant different things by the word tzedakah. Howard knew somehow that those crumpled dollars were all the old men lived on, having found no real place for themselves in America after fleeing Europe just before or, G-d-forbid, just after, the war and the camps.

Howard's father had been his *father's* Kaddisher, Howard's grandfather's Kaddisher. But who was there to say Kaddish for Howard's grandfather now, now that Howard's father was gone?

In Howard's attic there was a box. In the box were his father's papers. In his father's papers there was a file marked "family." In the file was a map which showed the location of Howard's grandfather's and grandmother's grave, and a receipt, from 1928, from the Ciechanow Londsleitshrift Burial Society, for eight gravesites. Seventy-five dollars. The receipt was in Yiddish, written in Hebrew characters, so it was written on the page from right to left. There was a rubber stamp on it, in English, that said "Perpetual Care". In 1928 seventy-five dollars was a fortune, especially for a man who had come from Europe only twenty-five years before, had just started a dry-goods store in the wilds of the Bronx, and had three young children. What was it about men like his grandfather and of his grandfather's generation, the immigrants, that they bought gravesites before they bought their first houses or cars? What did Howard's grandfather know that Howard didn't know? Or were they all just depressed, just traumatized?

Queens was a three hour drive. Four and a half with traffic. It wasn't on the other end of the world.

To Howard's amazement, the cemetery wasn't the dark place he remembered from childhood. The main building, a Victorian office structure made of red-brown stone and dark wood, looked like it belonged in a park, not in a cemetery. It had flying buttresses and a slate roof that stretched out over the walls of the building like an umbrella. There was a long

rectangular parking lot filled with late model cars which glistened in the mid-afternoon sun, their tinted windshields and windows dark green against the black pavement, so the parking lot looked like the eye of a honeybee, magnified many times. Lots of little lenses. Once a upon a time, Howard thought, the bumpers and door handles of all these cars would have been made of chrome, and the parking lot would have sparkled in the sunlight like a crystal chandelier. But that was long ago and far away.

A funeral cortège pulled in and parked under the portico of the red-brown building. The funeral director hopped out of the lead car, its bumper festooned with a yellow flag held in place by a suction cup. The hearse was behind the lead car and was followed by the long black mourners' limousine, its windows dark, its fenders as long as a football field, glistening and mirror bright. Behind the limousine was a line of cars stretching into the street, each with a small yellow flag attached to the front bumper, each with its headlights on. Sadness for someone, Howard thought. But perhaps this is the funeral of a woman or man who lived a long and productive life filled with happiness and joy, their passing a cause for wistful gratitude about a life well lived, not a time for sadness. Still, Howard thought, one person's life has ended. One small flame has gone out. For that person, the end of consciousness, of both sorrow and joy. Enormous, the end of life. Unimaginable, yet an event that happens millions of times every day. From dust to dust.

It was April. The leaves were not back yet on the trees. The air was still cold and the light thin, but also stronger in the afternoon than it had been a few weeks earlier. There was a chilling wind, but the birds were back, and chirping, and the air hinted of the sweet pollens to come, of the green leaves that would soon be unfurled, of the flowers that had broken dormancy

and pushed themselves out of the dark earth, the daffodils bright yellow and pale green against the brown beds lining the road near the red-brown building.

The funeral director came out of the building and hopped back into the lead car. The sound of the closing door echoed across the parking lot. Then the funeral cortège drove off slowly into the bowels of the cemetery itself, the cars moving as if they were part of one body, like a freight train or a caterpillar, each car moving independently but obeying the invisible command of some unknown intelligence, so they moved together, as one body, their yellow flags fluttering in the bright cold spring wind.

The people in the cemetery office gave Howard a map to his grandparents' grave. A map on paper. How quaint.

Even so, it took Howard twenty minutes to find his family's cemetery plot. The thin lanes of pavement were named and numbered. The lanes were straight and marked out a perfectly logical grid. A few huge oaks and maples that each looked like they were hundreds of years old pockmarked the acres of headstones, and occasional streams dotted the landscape. Little stone bridges crossed the streams. The few trees had no leaves yet and looked lonely, set against the thin blue sky that was now streaked with gathering clouds.

But the land was otherwise faceless, without landmarks or distinguishing features. Acres and acres of headstones, the inscriptions on them chiseled characters in Hebrew or sometimes in both English and Hebrew. Dark grey and brown granite headstones weathered in the dirty air of New York, many of which had been standing for a hundred years. His own grandfather, who died before Howard was born, was now dead eighty years. Hard to believe that so much time

had passed, that Howard could remember stories of living people from another century, even another millennium. But so it was.

Howard got lost three or four times on his way to the graves. But he found the right place at last.

As he drove, Howard remembered the fears and superstitions that children have about cemeteries, thoughts he hadn't had in fifty years from a part of his memory he didn't know was there. That you have to hold your breath while you drive past a cemetery, because breathing will bring bad luck and cause a close relative to sicken and die. That you are not supposed to step on the actual grave of a person but should walk on the grass to the side of where the coffin lay buried, six feet below. The covering of the mirrors after a person dies. The shoveling of dirt by the family, so that the grave is filled before the family leaves the graveside. Things you just don't think about in the normal course of events, but that come rushing back when there is a funeral, or once in a blue moon, when you go to a cemetery on your own.

Howard parked his car. The graves lay in the middle of a field of headstones that stretched as far as the eye could see. This must have been beautiful farmland once, Howard thought. Broad and flat. Acres and acres of it. Could have fed the whole city and perhaps once it did. But there were no farms in New York City now. Not even close. He remembered reading that there are five million people buried in Queens, where the dead now far outnumber the living. A recently opened grave sat a few yards away awaiting a new arrival, next to a bright yellow backhoe and a pile of brown dirt covered with bright green fabric to keep the dirt from washing away.

He kicked at the sand-colored dirt with one shoe to dislodge a few stones to leave on the headstones of his grandparents. There were pebbles, but no stones. Generations of mourners had tried the same thing. No stones to be had, not now.

Howard didn't see a soul. He picked his way between headstones to the place marked on the map. The sun was strong and warm on his head, but the wind made him shiver none the less. A cloud passed under the sun.

“Hey mist-air! Make a misheberach, a blessing?” a voice said in a familiar singsong.

A man walked toward Howard from under a tree. He was walking with the sun behind him, so Howard couldn't really see him in the glare.

“Um, sure,” Howard mumbled.

“Make a misheberach?” the voice said again, louder, now only a few feet away.

The voice was of a short, thin man with a long black coat, a wrinkled white shirt and a black suit. The man had pais, the ear locks worn by the ultraorthodox and by Hasidim. He had pale red hair flecked with gray, a fair complexion and blue grey eyes. His tzitzes, his ritual fringes, were tucked into the pockets of his black trousers instead of hanging loose.

“I, these are the graves of my grandparents,” Howard said.

“It is permitted,” the man said. “To visit.”

“It's a mitzvah, no?” Howard said.

“No. Not a mitzvah. He who mocks the poor offends his maker. The dead cannot make a mitzvah, so we don’t tempt them. We leave them to rest in peace. Still, it is understood that you might want to visit. But there is no obligation.”

“And the mishaberah?”

“I say psalms. El Malei Rach-amim. Not a mishaberach. But no one who is not observant knows what psalms are any more. You all know the word mishaberach, from the singing of that woman. A little clever marketing on my part, no?”

“And Kaddish?” Howard said.

“Do you see a minyan?” the man said. A good Jew, Howard knew, answers a question with a question.

“Am I permitted to say Kaddish for my grandparents?” Howard said.

“Am I permitted to go for a walk on Shabbos?” the man said. “There is no law against it. But no obligation either. When a minyan is present. Ten men. We remember the dead. Respect the dead. But honor the living.”

“My father was his father’s Kaddisher. I am my father’s. Doesn’t that mean...?”

“It means only that you had grandparents. We leave the dead to sleep in the dust. There is life for every soul in the world to come. Who are we to disturb that?”

The man closed his eyes and began to chant quietly in Hebrew.

“El Malei Rach-amim,” the man sang, and sang more for a few moments. Howard knew the words, more or less, from funerals over the years and from the Yizkor services at Yom Kippur he had attended in the few years since his parents died.

The man paused.

“The Hebrew name of your grandfather?” he said.

Howard searched his memory in a kind of panic. He knew the names of his grandparents. Of course he did. But the Hebrew names? They were right in front of him, written in Hebrew on the tombstones. But could he sound them out, right there and then, while this man was waiting for a response?

“Okay. The English names of your grandparents?” the man said.

“Herman,” Howard said. He was named for his grandfather who died before he was born. “And Hannah. Levitan”

“Then Chaim,” the man said, looking at the tombstone. “And Hannah,” he said, with a little emphasis, that said, are you awake or asleep? You don’t know a Hebrew name when you hear one? Howard’s own Hebrew name was Chaim. After his grandfather. How could he have not remembered *that*? But his brain just didn’t work that fast.

The man chanted his grandfather’s name Chaim Levitan in a Hebrew singsong, and sang a few more lines. Then he began again with El Malei Rach-amim, this time adding his grandmother’s name. I could have done that, Howard thought. Wouldn’t have been able to read the psalms, though, after the man finished the chant for his grandmother and launched into more chanting.

“You’re not going to bug me about laying tefillin today, are you?” Howard said. Then, as the man finished. Howard reached for his wallet. What is the right amount to give a character like this? Howard wondered. I know how to tip a cabbie or at a restaurant. But a baruchhamacher?

“I’m a Jew, not a Lubavitcher,” the man said. ‘And put your money away. Give to charity. Feed the hungry. Care for the widow.’”

“I’m very confused.” Howard said.

“Confused about what?” the man said.

“I... You... Aren’t you here to...” Howard said.

“You think I’m asking for charity? For a handout? Mister, ah, Levitan, those old men died off forty years ago. Fifty. I’m in from Calvary. That’s Alberta. Alberta, Canada. So when I’m in New York I come to visit. My parents. Your grandparents were from Ciechanow? We are cousins. Brothers, almost”

“You are...?” Howard said.

“Schapiro, not Leviton. But also Chaim,” the man said.

“I’m still confused,” Howard said. “Why did you...?”

“I practice Judaism for a living,” Chaim Schapiro said. “The head of school in the Yeshiva of Calgary. You looked a little lost. And me, maybe a little lonely. Not very many people come here, anymore. Not many people remember. So we stand together for a moment. Two men, not ten. Maybe for a little while we remember together.”

“Your parents? “

“Are here. Just them. And you?”

“Grandparents. My parents are in Brookline Massachusetts, where I grew up. Probably some great aunts and uncles are here, but most of them were lost... I don't know. I haven't been here since I was a kid.”

“My grandparents, also, in Europe. Both sides. Aunts and uncles too. My parents were the only survivors. Lucky, in that way. But also a little lonely,” Chaim Schapiro said.

“Lucky they had you,” Howard said. “To love and remember them.”

“All I have left now is this,” Chaim Schapiro said. He held his hands out to the cemetery, to the gravestones around them “and Kaddish at Yahrzeits and Yiskor. But I have a full life and five children, and many blessings, Baruch Hashem.”

“Also a Kaddisher!” Howard said.

Chaim Schapiro nodded. Then he teared up.

The sky had darkened while they were talking. The wind had picked up and was suddenly colder. The sky was a deep metallic gray, particular to New York before a rain, muddy and harsh at the same time because there are not enough trees to block the wind, but only buildings and water-towers. They heard the rush of cars and trucks from the highways that surrounded the cemetery, now louder than the wind, noticeable because they weren't talking, a

ceaseless grinding thrum, harsher than a river and much more mechanical. The air smelled of diesel exhaust and lubricating oil, and of the dank earth from the recently opened grave nearby.

A little rain began to fall. Then it fell harder, slanted and cold, driven by the wind.

“You have a car?” Howard said.

“Uber from the airport,” Chaim Schapiro said.

“Come with me, then,” Howard said, as he lifted the collar of his coat against the wind.

“Let me give you a lift.”

“Kind of you,” Chaim Shapiro said. “Let’s hurry before we get drenched.”

They walked quickly toward Howard’s car, Howard leading the way.

וויילכו שְׁנֵיהֶם יחדוֹ: Vyalchoo schnehem yachdov.

They went together, both of them.

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Glossary

Aliyah – Literally, going up. Generally used to describe the honor of going to recite blessings before the reading of a portion of the Torah. There are generally eight such honors each time the Torah is read.

Amidah – Silent Prayer, the central prayer of Jewish liturgy, which usually consists of 18 blessings but the actual number said varies with time of day and day of the week. It is repeated at least three times a day during the week and four times on Saturday, and recited silently, standing up and facing east. When a minyan is present, it is usually repeated, chanted out loud by the person leading the service.

Baruchhamachers – Literally, the makers of blessings. Old observant men who would stand in Jewish cemeteries and read psalms for people who came visit the graves of loved ones, hoping for a little money in return for that service.

Baruch Hashem – Literally, blessed be the name. A phrase people say to indicate their recognition of and thankfulness for the blessings in their lives.

Beresheit – the Hebrew name of the book of Genesis.

Borachu – literally, blessing. A blessing repeated out loud early in each service, which functions as a call to prayer.

Daven—(verb) to pray.

El Malei Rach-amim – a Jewish prayer for the soul of a person who has died, asking that that soul be given proper rest. Usually recited at funerals, at gravesides, and at memorial services.

Gabbai – the person who calls people to have the honor of saying blessings before the reading of the Torah.

Haysedonda -- yiddishized contraction for “Hey, sit down there” a joking description of the shamesh.

Halacha – Jewish law

HIAS – Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society, an organization that looked after new Jewish immigrants a hundred years ago and again after the Second World War and the Holocaust, and then again when large numbers of Russian immigrants came to the US, in the 1980s and 1990s, and which advocates effectively for immigrants from many places today.

JCC – Jewish Community Center, usually a building which often had a gym and a swimming pool and meeting rooms for Jewish community organization, common in the larger Jewish communities of the US.

Kaddish—a prayer about the holiness of G-d, repeated a number of times in each service, and said standing by those in mourning and by people on the anniversary of the deaths of loved ones. The Mourner’s Kaddish can only be said when a minyan (ten men, or ten people, depending on the congregation) is present.

Kaddish D’Rabbanan – a version of the Kaddish than recognizes the importance of scholars, recited in Orthodox communities after a lecture on certain parts of Talmud, and in other communities as part of the morning service.

Kiddusha – a section of the Amidah (Silent Prayer) which is recited only when a minyan is present.

Kippa (s), *Kippas* (pl) – skull cap, yarmulka.

Londsleitshrift – association of londsmen, of people from the same shtetl, or small town.

Lubavitcher – a member of the Hasidic community also known as Chabad, which began in Lubavitch, in White Russia, in 1775, came to the US after the Second World War, and is headquartered on Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn. It was led in the United States by Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1994). There are just as many conflicts and controversies in the Hasidic movement and among observant Jews as there are in other faith communities. Not all observant people hold the Lubavitcher movement in high regard.

Maariv -- the evening service, often combined with Mincha, the afternoon service.

Mincha – the afternoon service.

Minyan—traditionally, the ten men required for a service that includes saying a number of important prayers out loud or at all and for reading the Torah. US conservative and reform congregations now count all people over thirteen or who have been bar or bat mitzvahed as constituting a minyan.

Misheberach—(literally, blessing) used here to mean the blessing for the one’s family.

Parasha Vayera – the portion named Vayera. The Torah, the Five Books of Moses, is comprised of five books. Each book is divided into weekly portions, or parashot (plural, parasha - singular). There are 54 parashot in all, each about long enough to consume about an hour of time when they are read aloud quickly. Jews all over the world read the same parasha each week. Many Jews in Europe used the weekly parasha instead of a calendar because everyone knew the time of year each parasha was (and is) read. Each parasha is named, usually for its first word or phrase. Vayera is Hebrew for *and He appeared*. It is the fourth parasha of the year, the fourth parasha in the book of Beresheit, or Genesis, and the fourth parasha to be read after the holiday of Simchat Torah, which is celebrated 23 days after Rosh Hashanah, so usually in the Julian calendar month of October or November.

Pikuach nefesh—A principle of Jewish law derived from Torah and developed in the Talmud, that says other Jewish laws can be violated if doing so is necessary to save a life.

Shtiebela --tiny store-front synagogue, common in the Lower East Side of New York from 1900 until about 1950, and in the Jewish cities of Eastern Europe.

Shema – A one line prayer that serves as the central coda of Judaism. “Hear O Israel the Lord our G-d, the Lord is One” is a rough translation. It is repeated at least twice a day, is said by children as a bedtime prayer, and observant Jews try to have it on their lips at the moment of their deaths.

Shemoneh esrei – the Amidah, or Silent Prayer.

Shul – Yiddish colloquialism for synagogue.

Sephardic trope – the sung pronunciation of the Torah read in Hebrew used by Jews descended from those who lived in Spain and Portugal, communities that moved to Holland, Greece, Turkey, Italy and North Africa after the Spanish Inquisition. That pronunciation used by Jews in Eastern Europe is called Ashkenazi trope.

Shabbat Shalom – tradition shabbos greeting, literally, greetings/peace on this Sabbath.

Shabbos – The Sabbath, the central organizing feature of Jewish life.

Shamesh -- traditionally, the warden or caretaker of the synagogue. Now used to describe the person who organizes a religious service. Originally and also the candle on a Hanukah menorah that is used to light all the other candles, which is the origin of the use of the word in synagogue life.

Shararit—the morning service

Shtetl – Small Yiddish speaking community in Eastern Europe. The villages where Jews lived, next to but other separate from their non Jewish neighbors.

Siddur – prayer book, singular *Siddurim* (plural)

Talmud – 63 complicated books of what was originally oral law that was transcribed to text, commentaries on that law and stories about the law and the (thousands of) rabbis who compiled it over many centuries, all developed from the law set out in the Torah.

Tallasim (plural) *Talis*, singular, Askenazi; *Tallit*, singular, Sephardic – prayer shawl, worn on shabbos.

Torah – The five books of Moses, written by a trained scribe's hand on a sheepskin scroll, which is read out loud on Monday, Thursday and Saturday (Shabbos). There is considerable ceremony attached to the reading of the Torah, and a significant body of Jewish law laying out the way it is to be read. Once upon a time, the law was read in the marketplace: Monday and Thursday were market days.

Yahrzeit—the anniversary of the death of a close (parent child or spouse) loved one, when Kaddish is recited in the presence of a minyan.

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