

## CURRENT TALMUD PASSAGE

Posted June 4, 2004 by Rabbi Judy Abrams. Please refer to Maqom's home page for information about previous passages.

**BH**

### A NEW COURSE OF STUDY: THE SIDDUR

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Dear Friends,

I would like to focus our study on that work of rabbinic literature which is probably most familiar to you: the prayerbook. The siddur (the Hebrew name for the prayerbook) may be one of the most misunderstood works of rabbinic literature. When we come to understand the context out of which our prayers come we can more fully appreciate their import and power to move us spiritually.

Let's begin with one of the most misunderstood pieces of liturgy in the prayerbook: Kaddish. First of all, there are many kinds of Kaddishes which perform different functions in the service. They can be likened to punctuation.

Chatsi Kaddish = The Half Kaddish is the first half of the kaddish, ending with the phrase "d'amiran b'alma v'imru amein." This serves as a comma: one part of the service is over and another is about to begin.

Kaddish Titkabal= The Full Kaddish is the mourner's kaddish with the line added that asks that our prayers be acceptable before God. It is a period; a full stop and is most often followed by the prayer "Aleinu."

Kaddish D'Rabbanan = The Kaddish of the Sages/Rabbis is said after one has studied Torah or other holy Jewish text. It asks, especially, that those who study Torah be given sustenance so they may continue their studies.

The Mourner's Kaddish = The Kaddish with which most worshippers are familiar. In Reform Jewish settings, it signals the end of the service.

It is odd that Kaddish has become such a "downer;" associated mostly with mourning, since it is actually a prayer of mystical ascent. The repetition of hitpa'el forms is a classic type of mystical prayer: "Synonyms are piled up in the name formulae and poetry in the way the heavens are piled up in the cosmology (Michael D. Swartz, *Mystical Prayer in Ancient Judaism*, Tübingen: J.C. B. Mohr, p. 10)." Kaddish is associated with Heikhalot mysticism wherein the worshipper must traverse seven heavenly halls to reach God's footstool. Kaddish is a reaching toward heaven and to those we mourn who live there.

#### Discussion Questions:

1. What other prayers in the service have long strings of synonyms in them? Does it help you understand those prayers and their apparently superfluous words?
2. Would it help you see the Kaddish as a prayer of ascent if it started at the bottom of the page of the prayerbook and moved up the page? Would that facilitate your being open to reading around a page (a form of reading needed for Talmud study)?