



FROM THE VIRTUAL DESK OF THE OU VEBBE REBBE RAV DANIEL MANN



Reconciling Conflicting Kaddish Considerations

Question: Every year, I am the one who says *Kaddish* for my mother-in-law (=mil) on her *yahrtzeit*. This year it falls out during the twelfth month of *aveilus* for my father, when one should not say *Kaddish*. How should I reconcile the conflict?

Answer: Before suggesting solutions, let us discuss the value of saying *Kaddish* on your mil's *yahrtzeit* and refraining from *Kaddish* in the twelfth month of *aveilus*.

While the *yahrtzeit* is considered a potentially difficult day for the deceased and/or his children (Mahari Mintz 9), the focus in saying *Kaddish* is to improve the state of the deceased's soul (Avodat Hagershuni 62). Causing others to sanctify Hashem's Name is a powerful merit, which helps the deceased. When it is done by the deceased's son, the idea is that the son's continuing good deeds are a credit to those who brought him into the world (see story of R. Akiva, Kalla Rabbati 2:9; Binyamin Zev 201). For this reason, a son is singled out over other relatives (see Rama, Yoreh Deah 376:4). Because it is a once-a-year opportunity (Divrei Sofrim 376:67), a

yahrtzeit commemorator has high *Kaddish* priority (similar to an *avel* in *shloshim* – see Rama *ibid.*).

Missing reciting *Kaddish* on your mil's *yahrtzeit* is not particularly damaging. First, a son-in-law cannot provide the greatest gain, as above. In fact, according to many (see Piskei Teshuvot 132:30), a grandson, who is a descendant, is a better option when feasible. This is not to belittle your yearly contribution. Anyone who says *Kaddish* with a deceased in mind (or even for all departed Jews – Rama *ibid.*) has a positive impact. You have the advantages of being obligated to show respect to a mil and that feeling close to the deceased enhances its impact (Divrei Sofrim 376:83,87). However, we see no reason your mil's soul should suffer if you are replaced this year by another relative, a friend, or a recipient of her *chesed*. Add to this that other matters are largely presumed to help the departed soul more than saying *Kaddish*. These include being *chazan*, doing extra *mitzvot*, and learning *l'iluy nishmat* the deceased (see Divrei Sofrim 376:99).

How problematic is it to say *Kaddish* in the twelfth month? A mourner's recitation of *Kaddish* for twelve months helps the deceased during his time in *gehinom*, which can be up to twelve months. Saying *Kaddish* for twelve months disgraces the parent, implying the expectation they need the maximum time (Rama *ibid.*). The *Kaddish* does not otherwise hurt their soul; the problem

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is the appearance. Therefore, if it does not look bad, e.g., both parents died within the year, so that the mourner needs to recite *Kaddish* for the second one during the first's twelfth month, he can continue (Divrei Sofrim 376:108). On the other hand, we are quite particular about this, and it is not unlikely that the exception is only for a competing obligation to recite for the other parent, not a voluntary recitation for a *mil*.

With the above in mind, we present, with short explanations, two good “compromises” to choose from. Both include getting someone else to do a full set of *Kaddeishim*, in addition to your wife/(others) doing the other elements properly.

1. Say one *Kaddish* for your *mil* sometime during the *yahrtzeit*. When only one person used to say a given *Kaddish*, giving one *Kaddish* for the *yahrtzeit* was sufficient when he was “beaten out” by *avel* in *shloshim* (Rama *ibid.*).

2. Arrange to be *chazan* at all or some of the day's *tefillot* and say only the non-mourners' *Kaddeishim*. A mourner in the twelfth month may be an occasional *chazan* (Shevet Halevi III:165), and by not saying *Kaddish Yatom* you are showing it is not to “save your father.” We mentioned above, that this is “better” for the deceased than to say *Kaddeishim* without being *chazan*.

These are “win-win” compromises (which *mechutanim* hopefully got used to during their lifetimes), which all should be happy

with. However, if special sensitivities cause your or your wife's family to be upset by such arrangements, doing either a full *Kaddish* regimen or none at all is justifiable. ■

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