

My friends, as a Jewish Hoosier I was deeply hurt by the attack on two Jewish cemeteries on the south side of Indianapolis. I was also very aware of the fact that it hurt me despite the fact that I have no family buried there. I cannot even imagine the pain of those who do, and especially those whose loved ones' graves were desecrated. My heart goes out to all whom this violation touched directly.

I sat down to write about the cemetery vandalism. I knew I wanted to write about what the act said about us as a society, to comment on how poorly it reflects on the state of America today. Over the years, I have found that there is an inner voice that inspires and shapes my writing. When I listen to that voice, good writing tends to emerge. When I ignore it, I do it at my own peril and that of my listeners. But when I tried to write along the lines I described, nothing was coming. My inner voice was silent,

and the more I tried to force words to come, the less I liked what I was writing.

I was stuck. Then came a epiphany in the form of one word: Kaddish. I could not wait to get to my computer. The voice was back. The words were flowing. The article that resulted was nothing like the one I had planned to write, but it did resonate deeply with me. I hope it will resonate with those who read it. I'm not sharing much of it tonight because I am hopeful that it will appear in the Indianapolis Star and I would like you to read it then.<sup>1</sup> What I will tell you now is that although it bears no recognizable similarity to anything in our prayer book, it is a form of Kaddish.

Let's take some time to talk about Kaddish. If you understand the Aramaic or have read the translation, you know that Kaddish has nothing to do with death. We do have a prayer for the dead, *El Malei Rachamim*, in which the deceased's name is mention and the prayer is literally

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<sup>1</sup> Provide link if article does appear in Star.

for that person. Kaddish is different. It is not a prayer for the dead; it is a prayer recited for several reasons. The Mourner's Kaddish is but one of five forms of the Kaddish. Mourner's Kaddish is recited *in memory* of someone who has died, but that's not the same as a prayer *for* the dead.

We know that Kaddish requires a minyan, the quorum of ten Jews required to hold a public service. Nine or fewer Jews can pray together, but without a minyan certain elements of the service are excluded, including all forms of Kaddish. Why?

The answer is because the purpose of Kaddish is to elicit the traditional responses from the congregation, especially *Y'hey sh'mey rabbah m'varach l'olam ul'olmey almah-ya*—May His great name be blessed forever. Therein lies the merit of reciting the Mourner's Kaddish. Kaddish talks about the greatness of God. When a loved one dies, it is one of the very worst times in our lives. What do we do?

We stand and proclaim the greatness of God and cause our fellow worshippers to do the same. Even at this terrible time, we acknowledge the greatness of God.

That was my inspiration. The article I wrote does not condemn American society, it honors and glorifies it. Just as the harsh reality of life finiteness does not diminish God, the fact that there are low-lives who got their kicks knocking over gravestones does not change the fact that we live in a glorious democratic republic whose citizens are, in the vast majority, good, kind, decent people. Yes, there are some horrible people in America, but they don't get to define our society. What does define our society is the fact that society does look with disdain and revulsion at people who perpetrate acts like these. They are not embraced as heroes or role models. They are seen as just what they are, just what I called them a moment ago: low-lives.

A terrible act was done last weekend. It is an attack not only on the Jewish community, but on all of decent society. We will repair the damage, do our best to prevent copycat incidents, and go about our lives. What we will not do is give these vandals power over us. We will not fear them, we will not cower before them, and we certainly will not give the power to define our society. We are proud Jews, we are proud Americans, and no common street vandals have the power to change either one.