

# “Remember the Alls”

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Psalm 145

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We begin with this clip: [www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHwjGwgSQxM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EHwjGwgSQxM)

That was a scene from Rocky III. A rabbi is leading Rocky through the Mourner's *Kaddish* for Mickey, who was like a father to him. A few moments ago, as we were remembering our departed, the music playing is called *Kaddish*.<sup>1</sup>

In Jewish tradition and practice saying *Kaddish* is a vital part of mourning. That's wise. It can be wisdom for us, we who are blessed to also worship the God of Israel, through Jesus. So let me tell you about it.

When someone dies, if it's your spouse, sibling, or child you say *Kaddish* for at least 30 days afterwards, and also on each anniversary of their death. If it's you parent, you say *Kaddish* daily for 11 months.<sup>2</sup>

Jews don't say *Kaddish* alone. *Kaddish* is for the community to join with you in praying. That teaches dependence on our community to carry us in our grieving. So every daily public prayer service includes the *Kaddish*.

The rabbi leading the service might say it, or the entire congregation. It's also said for the victims of the *Shoah* (the Holocaust), who have no one left to say *Kaddish* for them. The names of those whose death-anniversaries are being marked might be read by the rabbi. People might then add names of others they are mourning.

II

We're not going to say the *Kaddish*. It's not our tradition, so not ours to say. Still, let's look at it. It's in Aramaic, a language similar to Hebrew.<sup>3</sup> Here's an English translation.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Kaddish* by Maurice Ravel. Arranged and performed by Koen Plaetinck and Wim Van Hasselt. From the album *Imaginary Mirror*. [music.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_JA8pfSVvp0&list=RDAMVM\\_JA8pfSVvp0](http://music.youtube.com/watch?v=_JA8pfSVvp0&list=RDAMVM_JA8pfSVvp0)

<sup>2</sup> As much as we of course grieve a spouse, sibling, or child, we are obligated by the Commandments to "honour our father and mother."

<sup>3</sup> The *Kaddish* practice "developed in Babylonia where most people understood only Aramaic and sermons were given in Aramaic so *Kaddish* was said in the vernacular. This is why it is currently said in Aramaic." From the article "The Mourners *Kaddish*" in the online Jewish Virtual Library. <https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-mourners-kaddish>

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

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*May His great Name grow exalted and sanctified  
in the world that He created as He willed.  
Amen*

*May He give reign to His kingship in your lifetimes and in your days,  
and in the lifetimes of the entire Family of Israel, swiftly and soon.  
Amen. May His great Name be blessed forever and ever*

*May His great Name be blessed forever and ever.  
Blessed, praised, glorified, exalted, extolled, mighty, upraised, and lauded be the  
Name of the Holy One,*

*Blessed is He  
Blessed is He*

*Beyond any blessing and song,  
praise and consolation that are uttered in the world.  
Amen*

*May there be abundant peace from Heaven, and life  
upon us and upon all Israel.  
Amen*

*He Who makes peace in His heights, may He make peace,  
upon us and upon all Israel.  
Amen*

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One thing jumps out at me.

It never mentions death.

It has hope: hope for God's kingdom, hope for peace, hope for Israel, hope for those praying.

Still, this is the Mourner's Kaddish. Not once, however, does it talk about dying or grieving.

The central part is this line. Everyone says it together.

*May His great name be blessed forever and ever.*

The "name" is not the deceased's. It is God's, the LORD Almighty.

The whole *Kaddish* is about God. From beginning to end, God. Though it's prayed on the occasion of death and in the grieving time afterwards, it is not a prayer for the dead.<sup>5</sup>

This prayer focuses the mourners, in their sorrow, on God.

There is wisdom in this.

### III

As I said, we're not going to say *Kaddish*. We are going to pray together in few moments. Our prayer will be Psalm 145.

The Psalms is a collection of Israel's ancient prayers and poems. Psalm 145 shaped prayers like the *Kaddish*. It is in Jewish prayer books more than any other psalm. The Talmud commends those who pray it many times daily. It's something like what the Lord's Prayer is to us Christians.<sup>6</sup>

Like the *Kaddish*, this Psalm is about God. It starts with one person contemplating who God is. Then their voice joins with all the generations, celebrating God together.

When we pray it together, you might notice all the "alls."

It talks about blessing God on all days (not just the good days). About all generations passing on praises of God to the next. About all creation praising God, looking to God, and blessing God for whom God is.

So many alls:

- to all, God is good;
- in all God's ways, God is just.
  
- for all creation, God has compassion;
- the desires of all that lives, God satisfies;
  
- all God's promises, God keeps;
- all God does, God does graciously and lovingly;
  
- to all who call on God in truth, God is near;
- all who love God, God watches over;
  
- all the wicked, God destroys.

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<sup>5</sup> Another prayer, the *El Malei Rachamim*, specifically prays for the souls of the deceased.

<sup>6</sup> Jason Byassee, Psalm 100-150, Brazos Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2018), 223.

That last bit might rub us the wrong way. It's a reminder — if we need it — that in this world of God's everything-embracing alls, there still is evil being done. When those caught in evil's grip trample on others, God is not neutral. God is all-ways on the side of all-victims. Remember, though, that even toward the wicked, God is all-ways good, all-ways just, all-ways has compassion, all-ways gracious, and all-ways loving.

It was poet Malcolm Guite who tuned me into the alls. He talks about reading this Psalm a short while before he became a Christian. *"I remember the effect that little word had on me, coming again and again, . . . how as each 'all' seemed to widen the circle of God's love, till I began to wonder if even I might be included in one of those alls."*

Then he read again these two lines, and knew the answer:

- all who are falling down, God upholds;
- all who are laid low, God raises up.

All are included. Bless God, then, that all God's Kingdom lasts forever, through all generations

#### IV

Still, nothing about death.

So why pray this prayer today? Or any day we are grieving? Why the Mourner's *Kaddish* that makes no mention of mourning or those for whom we grieve? What's the wisdom?

I wonder if grief self-focusses us.

When I've got a physical pain, my focus zooms in on that pain. The rest of me might be feeling just fine, but that one place of agony pushes all the rest out.

Maybe grief does that too. Our whole being is drawn into that agony. That emptiness is like a vacuum, a black hole threatening to pull everything in. It's not that we necessarily become selfish or self-absorbed. Rather, it's as if your whole self is being absorbed.

That's understandable. It's normal. But it doesn't feel healthy.

These days we're caught in a world-wide grief. We grieve what we've lost. Because of COVID, we've lost much. And any of us who are also grieving a dear one's death, or another significant loss, it's all more complicated now. It's even harder.

Remember the alls.

The alls of God bring us back into the expanse of God. That when we are celebrating *and* when we are grieving, we are part of something so much bigger. We are held in the expansive, inclusive, embracing and encompassing love, and grace, and fullness of God.

Praying these alls joins us in with all the generations. It joins us with those we are grieving. They are experiencing the alls of God, fully and completely. Because all who fall down, God upholds; all who are laid low, God raises up.

Praying the alls reorients us, from our tight self-focus into the wideness. It fills us with air, breathing deeply.

So, let us pray Psalm 145 together.

*I will exalt You, my God and King,  
and bless Your name for ever and ever.  
All days, I will bless You  
and praise Your name for ever and ever.*

*Great is the LORD, and greatly to be praised;  
his greatness is unsearchable.*

*One generation to another shall laud Your works,  
and Your mighty acts they shall declare.  
On the glorious splendour of Your majesty,  
and on Your wondrous works, I will meditate.  
The might of Your awesome deeds they will proclaimed,  
and Your greatness I will declare.  
The memory of Your abundant goodness they will celebrate  
and of Your righteousness they will sing.*

*Gracious and merciful is the LORD,  
slow to anger and rich in steadfast love.  
The LORD is good to all,  
and his compassion is over all that he has made.*

*All that You have made, O LORD, will praise You,,  
and Your faithful shall extol You.  
Of the glory of Your kingdom they will tell,  
and of Your power they will speak to make known to all people  
Your mighty deeds, and the glorious splendour of Your kingdom.  
Your kingdom, all of Your kingdom, is everlasting,  
and Your dominion endures throughout all generations.*

*The Lord is faithful in all his words, and gracious in all his deeds.  
The LORD upholds all who are falling, and raises up all who are bowed down.*

*The eyes of all look to You, and You give them their food in due season.  
You open Your hand, satisfying the desire of every living thing.*

*The LORD is just in all his ways, and loving in all his doings.*

*The LORD is near to all who call on him, to all who call on him in truth.  
He fulfils the desire of those who revere him;  
he also hears their cry, and saves them.  
The LORD watches over all who love him,  
but all the wicked he will destroy.  
The praise of the LORD my mouth will speak,  
and all creatures will bless his holy name for ever and ever.*