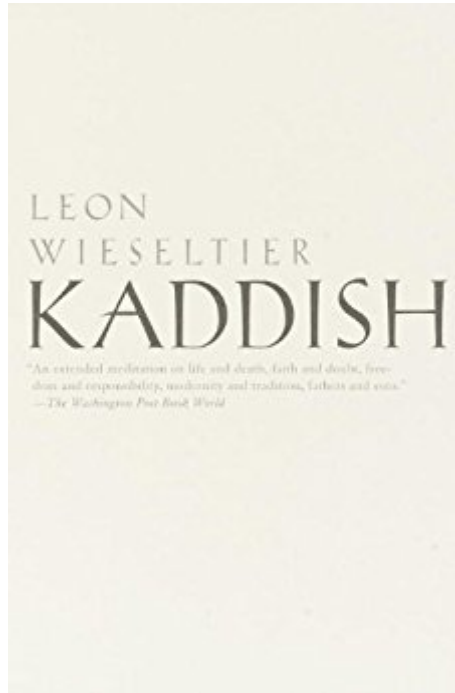




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# Kaddish



## Synopsis

Children have obligations to their parents: the Talmud says "one must honor him in life and one must honor him in death." Beside his father's grave, a diligent but doubting son begins the mourner's kaddish and realizes he needs to know more about the prayer issuing from his lips. So begins Leon Wieseltier's National Jewish Book Award-winning autobiography, *Kaddish*, the spiritual journal of a man commanded by Jewish law to recite a prayer three times daily for a year and driven, by ardor of inquiry, to explore its origins. Here is one man's urgent exploration of Jewish liturgy and law, from the 10th-century legend of a wayward ghost to the speculations of medieval scholars on the grief of God to the perplexities of a modern rabbi in the Kovno ghetto. Here too is a mourner's unmannered response to the questions of fate, freedom, and faith stirred in death's wake. Lyric, learned, and deeply moving, Wieseltier's *Kaddish* is a narrative suffused with love: a son embracing the tradition bequeathed to him by his father, a scholar savoring the beauty he was taught to uncover, and a writer revealing it, proudly, unadorned, to the reader. Winner of the 1998 National Jewish Book Award "An astonishing fusion of learning and psychic intensity; its poignance and lucidity should be an authentic benefit to readers, Jewish and gentile." •The New York Times Book Review

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

This book was both interesting and intensely moving. Despite the difference in my cultural background, Irish Catholic, and my shallow intellectual understanding of my own faith tradition in contrast to Mr Wieseltier's apparent deep immersion in his, I found this book a deeply resonating answer to the challenge of grieving for a dead father that you have fundamental emotional bonds to. Grief takes a long time, but to express your grief even briefly rapidly degenerates into maudlin sentimentality. Mr Wieseltier's solution of channeling his grief into a traditional Jewish ritual and the investigation of the evolution of that ritual over time seems to find the balance between honoring his father and his grief and achieving enough detachment most of the time to avoid diminishing the dignity of his grief and love for his father by lapsing into inarticulate emotional excess.

Very deep book. Three themes: a history of Kaddish as prayer Jews recite for the dead; an account of Wieseltier honoring his father's memory by participating in prayer ritual for a year, though he, Leon, is not religious; and a reflection on why we mourn. I read it during the course of a year after my own wife died, and found it very moving and very meaningful, very helpful in its own way. Not all people will react that way, but I often given it to friends who have lost someone and some do appreciate it. Superb bookpetya

Very good.

Very well researched investigation at the origins of the Kaddish with personal reflections mixed in. I highly recommend this for anyone saying Kaddish.

It's impossible to categorize this book, because it simply doesn't fit into any conventional category. I'll have to explain exactly what it is: a journal kept by the author in the year after his father's death, in which he researches, ruminates, and comments on Judaism. The book is so intense that I got the impression that he spent the entire year (a) saying kaddish and (b) sitting in a tea room poring over ancient manuscripts. It's a privelege to get a chance to peek into the results of an entire year of study -- not to mention the mind of the author, who at times is brilliant. He is not trying to apologize

for anything or to prove anything: he is simply, and honestly, thinking. This is not a book to be read in one sitting; I found myself reading a few pages at a time and then thinking about them. But the book is so well-written that I was in no rush to finish.

Superb book. Leon Wieseltier has beautifully and meaningfully woven together Jewish history, tradition and textual sources, and his own thought and experience. I genuinely learned from his scholarship and writing, made all that more important because I myself am currently in the midst of a year of mourning for my mother, a"n.

This book was terrific to read during the year following my father's death. I have given the book as a gift to my brother, to about 4 or 5 friends, and all have loved it. Very thought inspiring

More than I ever thought I would want to know about the evolvement of this wonderful prayer. However, the consistent inquiry into its meaning by the author kept me entralled.

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