If The Dead Could Speak

BY RABBI DAVID WOLPE

Why do we recite the mourner's *Kaddish*? In his lyrical, insightful *Kaddish* Leon Wieseltier speaks of reciting Kaddish as "evidence" — he is the proof that his parent lived such that he raised a son competent enough and concerned enough to recite the prayer.

But why *this* prayer? The *Kaddish* glorifies God but makes no mention of death. For many interpreters, it is an affirmation of life — in community we express our gratitude for the years we have left in the shadow of the death we memorialize.

I heard in the name of Rabbi Shlomo Carelbach a memorable and beautiful interpretation. The *Kaddish*, said Carelbach, is what the dead would say to us if they could speak from where they were. They would sanctify and glorify God as we do in the ancient Aramaic prayer. We become the conduit for a truth that we just begin to intuit in this world.

When I recited the *Kaddish* for my father I did what I knew he would have wished. In that sense I served, alongside all those others in the minyan who joined me, as the evidence. But I dearly hope that I was also speaking the words he would speak to me, offering the encouragement and reassurance in death that he did, so often, in life.