

JEWISH WAYS OF DEATH AND MOURNING



NEW TIME: 10 am

taught by

Rabbi David Edleson and Rabbi Amy Small

Sundays, 10-11:30 am

January 10, 17, 24

Want to learn more about Jewish approaches to death, burial and mourning? Wonder about your choices and options? This class will explore you both traditional and modern approaches to this important issue. The epidemic reminds us of our mortality, so use this opportunity to reflect more deeply on your choices.



Jan 14 2021
1 Sh'vat 5781 ט"ב

Happy Rosh Chodesh, Temple Sinai,

Tonight is the new moon, or *rosh chodesh* of the Hebrew month of Sh'vat. Rosh Chodesh is a time for giving thanks, and for putting out our hopes and prayers for the coming month, that as the moon grows, we move from conflict to peace, from danger to safety, from poverty to satisfaction, from fear to security. Let that be our prayer this new moon.

NOTE: Please note that the class on **Jewish Ways of Death and Mourning** begins at **10 am**. This week we will look at more of the details of funerals, so please join us.

Dr. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR DAY EVENTS

We will be honoring the legacy and challenge of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. a few ways this weekend.

1. **MLK-Themed Kabbalat Shabbat Service Friday, 6:30** with Social Action Committee.
2. **Film: SHARED LEGACY: The African American-Jewish Civil Rights Alliance. Saturday, 6 pm – Tuesday at 6 pm.** Members of Temple Sinai will get a link to watch this film, that won the Building Bridges jury award at the Atlanta Jewish Film Festival. *SHARED LEGACY* explores the alliance between Jewish and African American civil rights leaders in the 1960's, but also explores the fraying of that alliance and the need to rebuild it. We have rented this Jewish film festival favorites for three days, and then we will have a chance to talk about the film and its implications for us on **Wednesday, Jan at 7:30 pm.**
3. **Roots of Racism and Anti-Semitism in Europe. Social Action "Race and Responsibility" Series. Tuesday, January 19th, 7-8:30 pm. Alan E. Steinweis** is Professor of History and Raul Hilberg Distinguished Professor of Holocaust Studies at UVM. His books include Kristallnacht 1938 and Studying the Jew: Scholarly Antisemitism in Nazi Germany; the latter a finalist for the National Jewish Book Award in the Holocaust category.

SERVICES THIS WEEK -

KABBALAT SHABBAT FRIDAY NIGHT at 6:30

We'll honor MLK in our service with songs, readings, and reflections.

SATURDAY MORNING SERVICE AND TORAH STUDY

We will have our chanted **Shacharit** service at **9:30**.

TORAH STUDY begins at **10:30**. This week, we complete the Book of Genesis with our study of **Va-Eira, when the struggle for freedom begins**. Click [HERE](#) to jump to the URJ page on this portion, and [HERE](#) for the text itself on Sefaria.

A NIGHT AT THE GARDEN.

Judy Alexander shared the link to this short documentary film that was nominated for an Academy Award last year. It is under ten minutes, and centers on footage of an American Nazi rally at Madison Square Gardens in 1939. Judy sent it to me to show my 7th graders who are studying the Holocaust, but as soon as I saw it I wanted to share it with you. [HERE](#) is the link.

SHELDON ADELSON, Zichrono livracha?

This week, on the Facebook group for Reform rabbis, there was an interesting thread of discussion: should we put Sheldon Adelson in the list for Kaddish since he passed away this week. There were arguments back and forth, with some with synagogue policies not to include anyone who is not a member, and others that regularly list people outside their community, but admitted it is a choice that reflects their values and their bias. Many argued for including him because of his incredibly significant philanthropy in the Jewish community, while others felt he shouldn't be included because of his support for right-wing politicians here and in Israel, and his open admission that he is against a Palestinian state.

I thought it was an interesting thought-experiment. I certainly have included people in our Kaddish list, Ruth Bader Ginsberg most recently. Or the victims of the shooting in Pittsburgh. I certainly included Rabbi Sacks and Adin Steinsaltz, z"l, even though I have very significant disagreements with them on issues of religious pluralism within Judaism.

But what if Jerald Kushner dies? Stephen Miller? Stephen Mnuchin? Should we include people many of us think have done harm in our Kaddish list?

What if Ruth Bader Ginsberg had been the most conservative justice on the Supreme court? Would we not have included her?

The answer of Jewish law that comes closest to this is that a child with a wicked parent is still obligated to say Kaddish for them unless it causes them tremendous distress (if the parent was abusive). However, Sheldon Adelson is not our father,

and neither are the others. I do take a lesson, though, that we say Kaddish for people without doing an assessment of their righteousness according to our personal scales.

Sheldon Adelson genuinely worked himself up from poor immigrant family in Dorchester, Mass, selling newspapers and then candy-vending machines. He managed to jump into casino and gambling resorts, particularly the Venetian-themed variety, and amassed an incredible fortune from it. He was ranked as one of the top-three richest people in the US by *Forbes*.

His wife was Dr. Miriam Adelson, and Israeli physician born in mandate-era Palestine to Polish parents who had fled the Holocaust.

Sheldon Adelson avidly supported political projects and candidates that are considered right-wing. He was a key supporter of Benjamin Netanyahu, and he generously supported Donald Trump. He strongly advocated for moving the American Embassy to Jerusalem, and to recognize the Golan. He opposed Palestinian statehood, and supported organizations that advocated for expanded settlement.

He also gave great amounts of money to two causes very dear to him: 1) Birthright Trips to Israel for American young people, and 2) Holocaust Museums and organizations. When Birthright didn't have money to accept many the applicants, Adelson stepped and funded the gap and continued to generously support this program, which has been very successful in connected young Americans not only to Israel, but to their Jewish identity. He allowed Birthright to almost double its size, along with sponsoring others sorts of trips to Israel for young people.

His support for Birthright and organizations advocating for Israel on campuses has been controversial, including here at UVM. He has often been the target of student campaigns against Israel on college campuses. Much like George Soros has become the "poster-child" for anti-Semitic dog-whistles in the nationalist right, Sheldon Adelson has become the "poster-child" for those in parts of the left.

He also was a key benefactor of Yad VaShem and other Holocaust memorials and projects that kept the study of the Holocaust alive. His family was mostly wiped out as were his wife's family, and he was deeply and personally committed to keeping that memory alive. It influenced his worldview profoundly.

I have thought about this a great deal, and I intend to include Sheldon Adelson in our Kaddish list this week. I do it because his generosity has done a great deal of good for causes I believe meet the mission and values of our congregation. I believe he has also given to causes that have done harm to those same values. In other words, it is not simple, but Mr. Adelson has died, and it is our tradition to say Kaddish for people in the hopes that they can find peace. I don't think we should cancel people when it comes to Kaddish, and certainly not if they did not actually kill innocent people or intentionally and directly do harm.

When I say Kaddish for people who died in the Holocaust, I'm quite sure that some of those people were not people I would like or agree with. But in death, our arguments are over, and we are Jews. Adelson gave generously and worked relentlessly for what he believed was in the best interest of the Jewish people's survival, and while I disagree with some, and I very grateful for others. It is also a good opportunity to remember that there are members you know who agree with Adelson's politics and don't feel at all conflicted about this. I believe that for those of us that cringe a bit at Adelson's name, this will be a very useful challenge to remember our shared humanity, our shared Jewishness, and to release ourselves from old resentments as we praise God and life in the Kaddish.

I am not going to try and include every Jewish celebrity who has died each week, but when people who are cultural icons, great teachers or scholars, or great supporters of the Jewish world pass, I will include them unless there are obvious reasons not to do so, which does indeed raise the challenge of Stephen Miller. Your thoughts?

Shalom,

David