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Title: Hallowed Secularism and the Secret of Life

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7/8/2007--There is a popular book, in fact it has been a best-seller, called *The Secret*, by Rhonda Byrne. The premise of the book is that there is a secret wisdom that can satisfy our desires, which has been hidden by the masters and is now revealed for the price of the book. Not surprisingly, the secret turns out to be ridiculous—a law of attraction, so that if you think about a car you get a car, as the reviewer Julia Rickert put it. (That is a fair summary, both of the method and the goals in the book). But the problem with the book is not that this secret method to happiness is not true, or that the goals Byrne sets forth are shallow and selfish, but that people are looking for a secret to life at all. I suppose people know that there is no such secret, just as we know that the key to weight loss is to eat less and exercise more, though no diet book best seller is going to say that. So, what is the key to fulfillment in life? Hallowed secularism will have to work out both the personal and the social life. Social life means building just social, economic and political arrangements. Personal life includes how you and I and our families should live. Our religions already teach us their answers to social and personal life. For the personal life, Jesus, for example, tells us to love God and our neighbor (and our enemy for that matter). If that is not enough for us, we are to sell all we have, give the money to the poor, and follow him. But Hallowed Secularism does not have the religious option. We cannot love a God in whom we do not believe and we cannot follow Jesus, at least in any obvious way. But there are masters who can help us translate the wisdom of our religions into secular, or at least, accessible terms. One terrific recent example is *My Grandfather's Blessings* by cancer physician Rachel Naomi Remen. In contrast to *The Secret*, Dr. Remen teaches that we belong to each other and that serving others heals us. She learned this from her grandfather, a spirit-filled orthodox rabbi and master of Kabbalah. Hallowed Secularism has to be open to messages like this or secularism will lead us to emptiness and despair. The question is, can secularism sustain such lives? After all, Remen is here a parasite, living off the accumulation of soul-wisdom that comes from living a life of Torah (or Gospel). Who says that such wisdom can live apart from the traditions that created it? And who says that one can live such wisdom apart from study, worship, prayer and thanksgiving in holy time and holy space? That is our challenge.