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November 28, 2011: Death for the Hallowed Secularist

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Title: Death for the Hallowed Secularist

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11/28/2011—If I remember correctly, Pope Benedict recently stated that modern people are in despair over death. Obviously, he was suggesting that the promise of Christian life could be an antidote to this despair. I am on my way to the funeral of my father, Nathan Ledewitz. Even though he lived to ripe age of 94, and lived a good life according to his lights, his death inevitably reminds me of the decline and death of all of us. What can be said by a secularist about death? All living beings die. For that matter, all reality is transient. Even the sun will die. This universe too as far as we know. It is part of the rhythm of being. Why does the Pope think this is a matter for despair? Why should my little ego survive and live forever? It cannot be simply a religious distaste for death. For much of its history, Judaism had no notion of life after death in any form. Abraham was not promised anything but that his descendants would be a blessing after his death. In other words, the ongoing blessing of life was crucial, not Abraham himself. All we can do is live the best life we can. And we can be grateful for life itself, which is a mysterious blessing we did nothing to merit.