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September 27, 2014: How to Pray

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Title: How to Pray

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9/27/2014—We are in the midst of the Jewish Days of Awe. The question arises at this time, how does one pray? And, in particular, how does a hallowed secularist pray? In the meditation entitled Contributions to Philosophy, which Martin Heidegger composed around 1934-35, but did not publish until years later, there is language that straddles the usual boundaries of philosophy and poetry and perhaps theology. In the section we are reading now, Heidegger is describing preparation for a new beginning for humanity away from the technologized and aggressive present. He writes that only in the “great stillness” does the “lordship of the ultimate god open beings and configure[] them.” “Therefore, the great stillness must first come over the world... . This stillness arises only out of silence. And this bringing into silence arises only out of restraint.” There is more and I will return to it. But here certainly Heidegger is teaching us how to approach the holy. The scene in Jerusalem when Yom Kippur begins in Kol Nidre is like this—I am told there is silence as the worshippers dressed in white walk toward the synagogues. So, here at least is a beginning for how to pray. And it is also an antidote to the everyday business in which we are generally enmeshed. When and where and how do secularists do this? How do secularists find the approach to prayer?