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### October 12, 2014: Why Judaism is Dying

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Title: Why Judaism is Dying

Date: 2014-10-12T05:41:00.001-04:00

10/12/2014—On Friday night I spoke to a youngish couple—early thirties. They are vaguely Jewish. She had been in synagogue sporadically in recent years, but had not had a Bat Mitzvah. He had not been in synagogue in years but had had a Bar Mitzvah. They both considered themselves Jewish if anything. They were in a reform synagogue for the Kol Nidre ceremony that marks the beginning of Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement. She found some elements of the service quite beautiful. Nothing seemed to have moved him aesthetically. They both knew perfectly well from childhood what the service was about—forgiveness of sin. She spoke of the spiritual discipline of the holiday, with its fast. She did not feel the need to seek forgiveness—the concept was foreign. I'm not sure about him, but certainly he said nothing about it. I did not press. Maybe I will next time. What they really remembered, negatively, was the sermon. He quoted parts of it almost word for word. The Jewish people must now become a warrior people and all Jews must support Israel. He remembered the feeling in the synagogue of support for these words. Those words, with their almost total disregard for the yearnings of the Palestinian people, angered him. He almost stood up and left in the middle of the sermon. I'm not suggesting here that Judaism is dying because of the issue of Israel. Not at all. That will change, eventually. Peace can come, after all. No, the reality is deeper than that. These two people have hopes and fears like everyone else. This service, the most important one of the year, did not touch those hopes and fears. The service did not connect with them existentially: how we live, how we die, what our lives are about, what we can hope for... . This entry is not blaming anybody. The service could presumably engage them if enough work were done to translate its meanings to where they are. They are young but they have heard of death. They are young, but they have wondered what life is about. But this would require a great deal from both sides and no one is working to bridge this gap. Whatever is happening here is large and goes beyond the talents and character of individuals. But if this couple—and I—are cut off from Judaism, then where will we turn ponder the meaning of life? Where will we turn to keep ourselves morally upright? Where will we turn for a sense of wonder and possibility? After all, there is no hallowed secularism—yet. Where would that come from?