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July 2, 2016: Home and My Uncle William's Funeral

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Title: Home and My Uncle William's Funeral

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7/2/2016—My Uncle William died last week at over 100. He lived a very full life. What was noticeable to me was the difference between his funeral and that of his brother—my father—a few years ago. On the surface, these two men were very similar and led similar lives. Both were talented small businessmen. Both took their Judaism seriously. But the decision of my father to move to Florida, at first for part of the year, and then permanently, altered the parallel trajectory of their lives. When my father moved to Florida, he gradually cut ties with his long-time synagogue. No continuing, long term social institution was substituted. So, by the time my father died, he was in daily connection only with family. In contrast, Uncle William remained an active member of his synagogue and this helped keep him in contact with other people. This made for a much more vibrant social life. You could see this at Uncle William's funeral, which can be viewed online. A large turnout, mostly, but not entirely family. Part of the difference between them was health. My father was very healthy until age 90, but weakened considerably after that. Uncle William was healthy almost until the very end of his life. But part of the difference was moving to Florida. Dad did not substitute a new synagogue there and never resumed regular worship. I'm not sure why. The implications of this for hallowed secularism are troubling. Currently, secularism has no social structure. That is fitting since American secularism tends to be individualistic. But a human life requires a social network. How will secularism manage that challenge?