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September 18, 2010: How Should a Hallowed Secularist Live: Like a Believer

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Title: How Should a Hallowed Secularist Live: Like a Believer

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9/18/2010—Last night I attended a Kol Nidre service at a messianic Jewish community. It struck me that their model might be an important piece of a secular future. The question for that future is, how am I to live? That question includes the sub-question, how am I to raise my children? So far, since I left Judaism, the answer to the question of how to live has been a void: I just don't engage in religious activities. That life, as I suggested in the book, *Hallowed Secularism*, is empty and flat. There must be a better way. I start with several assumptions that other secularists will not share. First, the religions of humankind are true—they contain the blueprint for how to live flourishing human lives. Second, humanism in all of its guises is basically false. Humanism is false in that there really is power in reality—you could say structures to avoid any theistic misunderstanding—to which human beings must accommodate themselves and which humans tend to resist through self-centeredness, hatred and indifference. Third, flourishing human life requires rhythm and prayer. Fourth, flourishing human life requires stories. Fifth, of all the religious traditions, the one best suited to a secularist in the West, (for lots of reasons) is the Judeo-Christian tradition. Jesus, understood as a Jew, is the best example of how to live a human life. Religious believers have the stuff of flourishing human lives. However, the secularist cannot actually join any of these religious traditions in good faith because the secularist rejects core values of all of them. So, what then is already available to the secularist? There are two existing models, both great, but neither one for me. One is really liberal religion, such as the various Unitarian traditions. I talk about this in *Hallowed Secularism*, but here let me say that many Unitarian churches are open to all religious traditions except Christianity. It is hard to be Jesus centered in a Unitarian Church. The other is humanistic Judaism or other forms of humanism. The former excludes Jesus and the latter is insufficiently Judeo-Christian. What we are left with is, ironically, the entire Bible, Jewish and Christian, reinterpreted along secular lines. Eventually, I could see a community forming around the Judeo-Christian calendar, including a Sabbath (Saturday? Sunday?). The Sabbath is absolutely necessary to resist voracious capitalist consumption as the only goal of human life—today's secular heresy. One more thing. Secular life also requires a secular Mishna—the original form of Jewish law. Secular life requires continuous reflection on how people should live. People are not free to live as they choose. If they think they are free, they will likely end up as slaveholders or destroyers of nature and think they have done nothing wrong as their world deteriorates.