Spiritual Care of American “Jews of No Religion”

Part III of a conversation with
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Series of Webinars

Part 1: Spiritual Care of the Nonreligious (2/3/16)

Part 2: Teaching Spiritual Care of the Nonreligious (2/24/16)

Part 3: Spiritual Care of the American “Jewish Not Religious” with Rabbi Sara Paasche-Orlow (3/2/16)
Today’s Presentation

• Demographics of American Jews
  – American ways of being Jewish
• Strands of Jewish “nonreligious” history
• Implication for spiritual care of American Jews
Part I: Demographics

Jews are about 2% of Americans.

Religious Affiliations in the United States:
- Evangelical Protestants, 26.3%
- Catholics, 23.9%
- Mainline Protestants, 18.1%
- Unaffiliated, 16.1%
- Historically Black Churches, 6.9%
- Other, 3.6%
- Hindus, 0.4%
- Muslims, 0.6%
- Buddhists, 0.7%
- Mormons, 1.7%
- Jews, 1.7%

Typical Jewish map

Beliefs

Behavior

Belonging
So-called “secular” calendar
Jewish calendar
Pew categorizes American Jews into 2 groups based on self-description

- Jews by Religion (JBR’s)
- Jews of No Religion (JNR’s)

- Pew, 2013
Proportion of Jews of No Religion Growing

• 2000-01: 93% Jewish by Religion
• 7%: Jews of No Religion
  – National Jewish Population Survey
• 2013: 78% Jewish by Religion
• 22% Jews of No Religion
  – PEW, 2013 (drill-down of the 2007 study of The American Religious Landscape)
Jews less “religious” than Americans as a whole

Americans as a whole who say they have No Religion: 14% (Pew, 2007)
American Jews who say they have No Religion: 28% (Pew, 2013)
JBR’s and JNR’s

• JBR’s believe in God less frequently than members of other major religious groups in the US (Pew, 2013).
• JNR’s, in turn, are more skeptical of God’s existence than the religiously unaffiliated general American public (Pew, 2013).
JBR identification decreases by generation

- Greatest Generation: 90+%  
- Silent Generation: 86%  
- Boomers: 81%  
- Gen Xer’s: 74%  
- Millennials: 68%
Some groups less likely to identify as religious
LGBT’s less apt to be religious

Religious tradition has often caused spiritual trauma in these individuals.

Depends on age, movement, personal experience, supportive mentorship
Jews from the FSU also less apt to be religious

• Some may have no interest in chaplain visits at all
• Some may be very interested in learning about their heritage
Holocaust survivors

• Apt to have lost belief
• Although some retained Orthodox belief and practice
No one interpretation of the Holocaust

The secular soldier: "Tell me, where do you get the strength to keep running?"
The religious soldier: "From God in heaven. How about you?"
The secular soldier: "From Auschwitz."

- from God, Faith & Identity from the Ashes: Reflections of Children and Grandchildren of Holocaust Survivors, p. 28
What does it mean to be an American Jew?

- 75% of American Jews have a high sense of belonging to the Jewish people.
- 94% report being proud to be Jewish.
- For 62%, being Jewish is a function of ancestry and culture.
- Only 15% say it is a matter of religion.
- Only 19% tie their Jewish identity to observing *Halakha*.
- Only 28% to being a participant in a Jewish group.
- Fully two-thirds of those surveyed (68%) believe it is not necessary to believe in God to be Jewish.
  - Pew 2013
How does age impact what it means to be a Jew?

• Of Jews 65 and older, more than half say that caring about Israel is essential to being Jewish, a higher rate than do younger Jews.
• Older Jews have a higher sense of the importance of remembering the Holocaust and working for justice than do younger Jews (Pew, 2013).
No simple differentiation between JBR’s and JNR’s

• 20% of JBR’s do *not* believe in God
• 45% of JNR’s *do* believe in God and *are* ritually observant
• “The self-ascribed definitions as religious, cultural and secular blend into one another…. In fact, about 40% of all American Jews call themselves both at least somewhat religious and at least somewhat cultural” (Fein and Cohen, 2015).
Interrmarriage complicates the picture even more

- 58% of Jews who married since 2005 married non-Jews
The two great parts of our ancient family are now the Jews of North America and the people of Israel.

And when we get together we argue, feud, finger-point and quarrel, because... ...after all it is a family!
A sea of Haredim danced, sang, and prayed in Jerusalem.

But the secular demonstration was bigger.

What?!!

It's just that secular Jews demonstrated their traditional way of taking part?

They watched it on TV.
Increasing eclecticism in American Judaism
Part II: History

Secular strands of Judaism

• From Torah
• From rabbinic texts
• From the Dispersion
• From Haskalah (Jewish Enlightenment)
• From the Shoah (Holocaust)
In Tanach/bible itself
In rabbinic texts
Dispersion
Jewish Enlightenment
Holocaust
How space exploration replaced religion in the USSR

For most of the 20th century, the thirst for space exploration replaced religion in the Soviet Union, with the cult of science disseminated through propaganda, not sermons.

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Boris Staris, *The fairy tale became truth*, 1961. Published by The Young Guard Photograph: Memorial Museum of Cosmonautics/The Calvert Journal

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Sasha Rospopina for the *Calvert Journal*, part of the New East network, *The Guardian 9/17/2005*
New secular writings emerged.
More options
And another......
Search “Jewish Humanist Prayer”

humanistprayer.com

– Sabbath Prayers;
– Early Morning Blessings;
– Morning Praises;
– Shema and its Blessings;
– The Seven Blessings;
– Torah Reading;
– Additional (Mussaf ...
Many secular Jewish communities

• **Workmen’s Circle**: Center for Jewish culture and social justice

• **Ethical Culture Society**: a humanist community dedicated to ethics, social justice, and education since 1876. We celebrate life’s joys, support each other through life’s crises, and work to make the world a better place.

• **Society for Humanistic Judaism**
Some values remain shared: Life
Study as a Jewish value
Music

What is it about music that goes so deep inside us?

“I don’t know.... We try to go to those places that are beyond words, that cannot be explained. For me these are very sacred places, when you experience something that is so profound that there is no way you can begin to express it through words....”
Niggunim

YID-STOCK
July 17-20, 2014
Live at the Yiddish Book Center
The festival of new Yiddish music
Tzedakah (Charity) Box
Gifts in memory of loved ones
Grandchildren are the crown of the aged, and the pride of children is their parents. - Proverbs 17:16
Part III: What is spiritual care in this complex context?

Art by Deidre Scherer
The spiritual care task is the same

• Spiritual Assessment:
  – Identify areas of spiritual strength
  – Identify areas of spiritual distress

• Make a Spiritual Care Plan
  – Building on spiritual strengths
    • To decrease spiritual distress
    • And increase spiritual well-being
  – Using pt’s language of meaning

• Evaluate your approach, adjust Plan as necessary
Why this may be complicated in practice

• Without asking, we don’t know if someone is religious, or not, or some combination thereof

• Some Jews will be cautious about non-Jewish chaplains (Jewish community’s trauma and separateness are still very present)
Code Switch with
your Spiritual Assessment Tool

For each theme:

• Are you hearing religious/spiritual responses? Nonreligious responses? Both?

• Think about each person as a “culture of one”

• Family members may not share the same perspectives....
Prayer

• Personalized blessings ("open-eyed prayer")
• Ask if the person would like liturgical prayer. If yes, whether in Hebrew, English, or both.
• Spontaneous prayer
  – Naomi Levy a superb resource
“an old Jewish atheist” approaches death

“And now, weak, short of breath, my once-firm muscles melted away by cancer, I find my thoughts, increasingly, not on the supernatural or spiritual, but on what is meant by living a good and worthwhile life – achieving a sense of peace within oneself. I find my thoughts drifting to the Sabbath, the day of rest, the seventh day of the week, and perhaps the seventh day of one’s life as well, when one can feel that one’s work is done, and one may, in good conscience, rest.”

• Oliver Sacks, NYTimes, August 16, 2015
Use all the secular tools in your kit

• Look at family photos
• Ethical Will
• Art
• Poetry
• Go outside
• Read to the resident/patient
• Share music
• Listen to the person’s narrative
• Etc.
Ethics: No proselytism or manipulation
Many Jews, Many Paths
For more information

• This series based on three open-access articles in *Plainviews* (2015)
• Also available on the ACPE Academy website