



Mornings at the Stanton Street Shul: A Summer on the Lower East Side

Jonathan Boyarin

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This lively ethnography traces a fraught three months in the life of a Jewish congregation stubbornly persisting on the Lower East Side, and affords a candid, lucid and intimate introduction to contemporary synagogue practice.

In these pages Jonathan Boyarin invites us to share **the intimate life of the Stanton Street Shul**, one of the last remaining Jewish congregations on New York's historic Lower East Side. This narrow building, wedged into a lot designed for an old-law tenement, is full of clamorous voices the generations of the dead, who somehow contrive to make their presence known, and the newer generation, keeping the building and its memories alive and making themselves Jews in the process. Through the eyes of Boyarin, at once a member of the congregation and a bemused anthropologist, **the book follows this congregation of "year-round Jews" through the course of a summer during which its future must once again be decided.**

The Lower East Side, famous as the jumping off point for millions of Jewish and other immigrants to America, has recently become the hip playground of twenty-something immigrants to the city from elsewhere in America

and from abroad. Few imagine that Jewish life there has stubbornly continued through this history of decline and regeneration. Coming inside with Boyarin, **we see the congregation's life as a combination of quiet heroism, ironic humor, disputes for the sake of Heaven** and perhaps otherwise, and above all the ongoing search for ways to connect with Jewish ancestors while remaining true to oneself in the present.

Mornings at the Stanton Street Shul illustrates in poignant and humorous ways the changes in a historic neighborhood facing the challenges of gentrification. It offers readers with no prior knowledge of Judaism and synagogue life a portrait that is at once intimate and intelligible. Most important, perhaps, it shows the congregation's members to be anything but a monochromatic set of uniform "believers" but rather **a gathering of vibrant, imperfect, indisputably down-to-earth individuals coming together to make a community.**

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