

What to See When You Visit the Hebrew Union College,  
Cincinnati, Ohio, the oldest Seminary  
of the Jewish Religion In the New World

Go to the main building, where the classrooms are.  
In the hallway are photographs of the teachers  
who taught in those classrooms,  
since 1875.

Spend a time looking at them.

Now find the chapel.

There are two doors that open into it.

It is on the main floor  
in the center of the building.

Go on Sunday,  
the door will be open  
and there will be no one there.

The chairs might be taken up and stacked  
in the back of the room,  
this will help.

Go stand in front of the Ark.

It is fifteen feet high.

It came from the town of Posen, 1720.

The Hebrew Union College claimed it,  
stuck it in a museum

where the students were drawn to pray by it.

My teacher designed the synagogue around the Ark.

He had it set against the west wall of the chapel.

Stand in front of it.

Become a Jew for twenty minutes.

If you are a Black man throwing bags at the airport, become a Jew.

If you are a Polish Jesuit, become a Jew.

Maybe you're a gypsy flamenco cantaoor,  
become a Jew.

You're a Greek, you just married a man from Istanbul,  
become a Jew.

You are Hindu, you are standing in front of the Ark  
wearing a sari and chanting holy poems to your beloved,  
become a Jew.

You're a Peruvian Indian with a flat hat on your head,  
become a Jew.

It's hard to be a Jew.

If you're a Jew, become a Czech waiter singing in a bistro  
writing poetry,

a Hungarian dairy farmer,  
if you're a Jew, become a Mexican smuggler of fine art,  
a Muslim spice merchant,  
if you're a Jew become a Black woman with earphones, dancing.  
Become each other.  
For twenty minutes,  
stand in front of the Ark,  
a brand plucked from the burning,  
become Jews, all Jews become someone else.  
Overflow yourselves into each other,  
let your pouring souls fill all that is missing within.  
Now return to your skin  
in front of the Ark.  
Bow from the waist slowly before you go.  
Say the holiest prayer you know and leave quietly.  
You may exit by either door.  
Say goodbye to my teachers whose pictures are in the hallway.  
Tell them their student who wrote this poem  
will never forget them.

james stone goodman