Twitter Thread by ■■■■■ ■■■■ ■anu■■■(■)

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@rabbiandykahn

Excellent thread by Rabbi Reuvane about the level (or lack thereof) of Jewish literacy amongst Progressive American Jews. It speaks directly to a conversation I was having yesterday with a congregant in his 20s. He recently started attending Chabad shiurim, and loves them. 1/10

> Our community - American Jewish parents, schools, synagogues, & org\u2019s - have failed. We & our children are virtually all illiterate. I mean that literally. Most of us don\u2019t understand Hebrew or any Jewish language. We lack basic familiarity w/ our history & the Jewish bookshelf.
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> — Rabbi Reuvane (@RabbiReuvane) December 16, 2020

He was baffled by his Jewish education topping out at the Babylonian and Roman exiles. He was enthralled with the lives of the early Rabbis, and how Jewish intellectual culture developed over the centuries. There was more than a little bit of anger at what he'd been deprived. 2/

I had the same experience when I did my MA in Hebrew Bible at JTS. I grew up very involved in my synagogue through high school, and went on the Alexander Muss program in Israel. I came out of all that not even knowing what the Mishna or the Talmud were, and I'm a good student. 3/

My honest appraisal is that most of our Progressive synagogues were created to be institutions that helped new Jewish immigrant families integrate into American culture, and we haven't shifted from that. My one quibble with @RabbiReuvane is with the de-assimilation piece. 4/

It's not about de-assimilation, but re-integration. Our institutions broadly accomplished the goal of helping folks like my Ashki great grandparents and their descendants gain access to mainstream acceptance just like other white European immigrant groups in America. 5/

This came with loss. As @JoyousJustice asks, “What was the price your family paid to get conditional access to whiteness?" Well, one of the prices we paid is precisely the issue @RabbiReuvane is pointing out. In order to combat this, we must shift our educational focus. 6/

The fact that childhood education still remains the focus of the "cure" for many is a big part of the problem. Childhood education is important, but there's no getting around the fact that the most compelling and useful parts of Judaism are too

complex for most kids. 7/

High school kids have the capacity to understand much more, but for the most part we lose kids' interest after 13 because they and their parents see no value in devoting more of their limited time and resources to Jewish education. This means it's about convincing the parents. 8/

To end this ramble, ultimately we should be looking at orgs that have been successful in marketing Judaism as useful and relevant. Chabad has obviously done an incredible job over the past couple decades. The Kabbalah Center has too, although they are deeply problematic. 9/

Reform, Recon, Renewal, and Conservative Jewish orgs should be devoting far more resources to these kinds of initiatives than we are to re-integrate Jewish identity, history, and practice into contemporary Progressive American Jewish life. But we have to start with the adults! 10