

THIS IS REAL
AND YOU ARE
COMPLETELY
UNPREPARED

THE DAYS OF AWE
AND THE DAYS
OF TRANSFORMATION

The Days of Awe as a Journey of Transformation

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There are moments in life when one is caught utterly unprepared. Drawing on both his rabbinical training and his scholarship in Buddhism, Lew leads readers on a journey from confusion to clarity, from doubt to belief, as he opens a path to self-discovery that is accessible to readers of all faiths.

This Is Real and You Are Completely Unprepared: The Days of Awe as a Journey of Transformation Details

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Jordana Horn Gordon says

This book took me so long to read...not because it was long or hard, but because it was magnificent. It was such a wonderful addition to my high holiday experience. I will have to come back to this every year. I could not recommend it more highly for anyone who wants to reinvigorate Rosh Hashana and Yom Kippur with meaning.

Amy says

Reading this book is helpful for Jewish practice during the time between Tisha B'Av and Sukkot. However, anyone Jewish or not could benefit from reading it any other time too. I read it last year during that time and now again this year.

from p. 18 - chapter one - The Soul Stretches Out to Contain Itself - A Map of the Journey -

"So this concatenation of ritual -- this dance that begins on Tisha B'Av and ends on Sukkot, that begins with the mournful collapse of a house and ends with the joyful collapse of a house, this intentional spasm that awakens us and carries us through death and back to life again -- stands for the journey the soul is always on. It is a map, drawn by the soul, of the journey it must take, of the journey it is already taking. Beginning from the barest of biblical outlines, the soul has filled in this map with its own imperatives.

Our souls are making this journey, yours and mine.
The trip will go better for us if we know where we're going."

- from p. 33 -

"Standing in that river I could feel all the loss in my life -- all the people I had loved who were no longer there, all the people I loved now who were slipping away, all the things I had hoped for myself and my family which hadn't happened and which I now realized never would. But I could also feel the strength and the love that had come in the wake of this loss."

Andrew Ordovery says

A beautiful, bracing, poetic, loveing, and ruthlss look at the high holy days in Judaism and the ways in which they invite us to confront what are making of our lives and our world.

It's that time of year again. Time to re-read...

Estee says

Life changing read. That I read every year.

Alex says

I will be rereading this book for the rest of my life.

I'm so grateful that that is the second time this year I've been able to say that. The moment I first stumbled across the title of this book on goodreads I knew that I needed it. Last year, the high holy days were the first services I attended in Edinburgh - not only was I on unfamiliar geographic ground, but I was still on very unfamiliar, anxiety inducing spiritual ground. This book put me right, and will keep putting me right forever. I literally read the epilogue and began the introduction again in one breath - there is so much I learned reading this book that had already fallen away under the onslaught of new insights. I'll just have to keep reading. It's a timely finish as well - Tisha B'Av, where Lew begins, is this weekend.

Amy says

For the fourth year in a row I am reading this to get ready for the jewish High Holy Days. And each time I get more out of it.

Getting ready once again ...

It's that time of year aagain.

Reese says

The value of this book is real, and I am completely unprepared to discuss it -- at this time.

Sleepless says

I'm very pleased I read this book today.

So as some of you may know, the high holidays are indeed approaching. It's already Alul now. All of this means that this book was perfect to read today, especially on a Shabbat. I knew I couldn't read it at any other time of the year.

I'm becoming more conscious of religion, of my religion. I realize there is so much to learn and I hope book by book I'll know more. There's so much depth to everything.

This book does a good job. I appreciate that the author uses his own life as well as plenty of examples from classical Jewish thought and poetry. He is an eloquent writer.

That said, this book isn't quite compelling to read. You need to be in a very specific mood in order to enjoy it and reap the benefits.

All in all, if you want a nice summary of this period of the Jewish year, this book is for you.

what I'm taking with me:

- Yom Kippur is like a rehearsal of death, it's a time to plan out our life and look for meaning.
- Being a rabbi sounds like a weird job.
- Hebrew is such a beautiful language, I totally don't respect it enough. Like, yishuv daat- your mind sitting down, settling down.

Sydni says

Some of the teachings were very helpful, but it was also a very repetitive book and hard for me to read for long stretches of time.

Chava says

There are very few books that really change the way you look at things: this is one of them. The combination of Jewish sources and Alan Lew's personal stories, with a little Buddhism on the side, made my holiday season so much more meaningful. It will also make my life more meaningful, as he delves into the differences between happiness and joy, how to embrace suffering as a part of the total human experience, and realizing the beauty of the Jewish calendar as a schedule for improving your life.

Love, love, love this book - highest recommendation possible.

Selena McDevitt says

Let me preface this review by saying that I am Christian. Not only am I Christian, but I honestly had no idea about Judaism except what you learn from a historical standpoint.

In saying that, I was astounded by this book, so much so in fact, that I have asked for permission to observe the High Holidays at a local Synagogue. This book spoke so profoundly to me and solidified my own faith, that I simply must experience this at least once. I think that the author certainly achieved his intentions with this book, and then perhaps more. I highly recommend it.

Kerry says

I first read this about six years ago, and picked it up again this year the day before Yom Kippur. It's very Bay Area Californian - and I say that as someone born in Marin County - often more earnest than I feel comfortable with, but it makes me think I should maybe be more comfortable being more earnest. It blew through me like a clear wind and I don't think that was just because of the fasting.

Naomi says

Wow. This book floored me. It is rich, compelling, and astounding in its purity. The late Rabbi Lew addresses the beautiful transformation and soul searching ritual that takes place each year during the Jewish holidays of Tisha B'Av and Sukkot. He writes that we are constantly redefining ourselves, that we must become conscious of our blunders, and that the healing and repentance that we undergo at this time of year can heal us. Inner healing requires self-acceptance, forgiveness, and a willingness to let go of mistaken beliefs.

Lew likens the holiday rituals and meaning to the journey each person makes from birth to death and back again, as if life were a circle and traveling it teaches us what is most important. "It takes the living of a whole life—a life and a death, the complete journey—to learn that. We are all making that journey, and the High Holidays are a dress rehearsal for it, a time when we are all stripped down—a time that gives us an intimation of what this long, strange journey home is all about."

"So we can pray, we can meditate, and we can set aside a moment every day for reflection. Or we can simply choose one thing in our life and live that one small aspect in truth, and then watch in amazement as the larger truth of our life begins to emerge. The truth is, every moment of our life carries with it the possibility of a great blessing and a great curse, a blessing if we live in truth, a curse if we do not. All that's required of you is to see what's in front of your face and to choose the blessing in it."

So many eloquent passages. Reading this book adds such a richness to this time of year. I will definitely read it again. For readers of ALL faiths, this book will change the way you look at life. Highly recommend.

Nikki Morse says

What a wonderful book. As a prickly, non-Hebrew-reading or speaking, atheist, sentimental Jew, it's often difficult for me to find texts about Jewish ritual and practice that speak to me. This fits that bill, and I think it has so much to offer anyone who is thinking through personal transformation, spiritual meaning, honest self-judgment, and how to be honest with yourself. It discusses the High Holidays in detail, from Tisha B'Av through Sukkot, offering traditional readings of each and reinterpretations based on the author's experience as a Rabbi and a meditator. This is the kind of book to make use of every year, and I'm grateful to have been suggested it this year as I know it will enhance my practice.

Evan says

Jews always look at me funny when I say the high holidays are my favorite of all Jewish rituals. To be honest, it has something to do with the fact that it always falls around my birthday when my thoughts naturally turn again to the fact that I continue to survive my long dead twin sister, whose life recedes further and further into the past with each passing year.

This book explains why the high holidays are, or should be an incredible time of reckoning. It probably took a rabbi steeped in Buddhism like Alan Lew to get to the heart of why the "Days of Awe" should take an entire community through the most intense process of coming to grips with their lives. A process so huge, that as Lew admits, you can't possibly do it all in the 10 days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur. You can't even do it in the month leading up to Rosh Hashanah. The high holidays serve as a reminder to continue the process of coming to grips with your own mortality and learning to be aware and present in your life throughout the year.

Anyhow, yes this is one of those self-help type spiritual books that I usually can't stand reading. But this particular book was right on target at a time when I was really thinking about which book we were all going to get inscribed in for this coming year. Now, if I could only find a rabbi steeped in Buddhism, I might start going to schule...
