



### Week One: Mapping the Journey

This week, we introduce the journey with a reading from Chapter One of *This is Real and You are Completely Unprepared*, by Alan Lew. (If you would like to buy a copy, Amazon has several options, including an eBook.)

#### FOR REFLECTION:

As you read the Deep Dive reading for this week (below), notice how the author's dream-like description walks us through each sign post of the High Holy Day journey. At the end of his "dream sequence", he lists each sign post with a description of its significance.

After reading, think about where you are as you enter the high holy day path this year. Is this your first time treading this yearly journey? Or have you encountered this path each year for a lifetime? For all of us, this is a first high holy day journey during a pandemic, an therefore an unprecedented opportunity for inward travel!

After reviewing the "map" for the journey ahead, create an initial intention. It can be as simple as choosing to engage each week in this "Road to the High Holy Days" journey! Perhaps it's also setting aside time each day, or week, to jot some notes in a journal, to take a walk to think, or just to sit quietly to reflect on this work. **The time you invest in your journey through the High Holy Days is what will make this holiday season meaningful. Only you can give yourself that gift.**

Next week, we will map out a personal inventory and plan for action.

#### Deep Dive READING:

*You are walking through the world half asleep. It isn't just that you don't know who you are and that you don't know how or why you got here. It's worse than that; these questions never even arise. It is as if you are in a dream.*

*Then the walls of the great house that surrounds you crumble and fall. You tumble out onto a strange street, suddenly conscious of your estrangement and your homelessness.*

*A great horn sounds, calling you to remembrance, but all you can remember is how much you have forgotten. Every day for a month, you sit and try to remember who you are and where you are going. By the last week of this month, your need to know these things weighs upon you. Your prayers become urgent.*

*Then the great horn sounds in earnest one hundred times. The time of transformation is upon you. The world is once again cracking through the shell of its effort to be born. The fate between heaven and earth creaks open. The Book of Life and the Book of Death are opened once again, and your name is written in one of them.*

*But you don't know which one.*

*The ten days that follow are fraught with meaning and dread. They are days when it is perfectly clear every second that you live in the midst of a chain of ineluctable consequence, that everything you do, every prayer you utter, every intention you form, every act of compassion you perform, ripples out from the center of your being to the end of time. Anger and its terrible cost lie naked before you. Grievance gives way to forgiveness. At the same time, you become aware that you also stand at the end of a long chain of consequences. Many things are beyond your control. They are part of a process that was set in motion long ago. You find the idea of this unbearable.*

*Then, just when you think you can't tolerate this one moment more, you are called to gather with a multitude in a great hall. A court has convened high up on the altar in front of the hall. Make way! Make way! the judges of the court proclaim, for everyone must be included in the proceeding. No one, not even the usual outcasts, may be excluded. You are told that you are in possession of a great power, the power of speech, and that you will certainly abuse it -- you are already forgiven for having abused it in the past-- but in the end it will save you.*

*For the next twenty-four hours you rehearse your own death. You wear a shroud and, like a dead person, you neither eat nor drink nor fornicate. You summon the desperate strength of life's last moments. A great wall of speech is hurled against your heart again and again; a fist beats against the wall of your heart relentlessly until you are brokenhearted and confess to your great crime. You are a human being, guilty of every crime imaginable. Your heart is cracking through its shell to be reborn. Then a chill grips you. The gate between heaven and earth has suddenly begun to close. The multitude has swollen. It is almost as if the great hall has magically expanded to include an infinity of desperate souls. This is your last chance. Everyone has run out of time. Every heart had broken. The gate clangs shut, the great horn sounds one last time. You feel curiously lighthearted and clean.*

*Some days later you find yourself building a house; a curious house, an incomplete house, a house that suggests the idea of a house without actually being one. The house has no roof. There are a few twigs and branches on top, but you can see the stars and feel the wind through them. And the walls of the house don't go all the way around it either. Yet as you sit in this house eating the bounty of the earth, you feel a deep sense of security and joy. Here in this mere idea of a house, you finally feel as if you are home. The journey is over.*

*At precisely this moment, the journey begins again. The curious house is dismantled. The King calls you in for a last intimate meal, and then you set out on your way again.*

This may all sound like a dream -- a nightmare-- and it is. It is a deep dream of human existence. It is also a description of the round of Jewish rituals that are observed every year between midsummer and mid fall -- roughly early August to mid-October, although this varies slightly from year to year. It is a gesture-by-gesture description of the stages of the Days of Awe, each one constituting a passage in this ancient journey of transformation:

- **Tisha B'Av**, the day of mourning for the destruction of the Temple in Jerusalem, the day of the crumbling of the great walls.
- **Elul**, the last month of the year, when the great horn of remembrance is sounded to begin the month of introspection that precedes the Days of Awe.
- **Selichot**, the last week of fervent prayer that precedes Rosh Hashanah.
- **Rosh Hashanah** itself, the head of the year, the day of remembrance the day of the one hundred blasts and the two books.
- **The Ten Days of Teshuvah, the Days of Awe proper**; the period of intense spiritual transformation that begins with Rosh Hashanah and ends with Yom Kippur, ten days fraught with meaning and dread.
- **Kol Nidre**, the eve of Yom Kippur, when the great court is convened above and below.
- **Yom Kippur itself**, the Day of Atonement, the day we rehearse our own death, the day that comes to a close with the clanging shut of the great gates.
- **Sukkot**, a joyous coda to the journey, the autumnal harvest festival, a booth, the barest outline of a house.

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