



READING BETWEEN THE LINES

Three books are opened in heaven on Rosh Hashanah: One for the completely wicked, one for the completely righteous and one for those in between. The completely righteous are immediately inscribed in the Book of Life. The completely wicked are immediately inscribed in the Book of Death. The fate of those in between is suspended until Yom Kippur. - Rosh Hashanah 16b

Rosh Hashanah begins what is known as the “Ten Days of Repentance.” This period, dedicated to reflection and self-improvement, begins the process of *teshuvah* — correcting the mistakes of our past year as a new one begins. More often than not, only a few moments truly stick out to us when we reflect on our past. But in his book “This is Real and You are Completely Unprepared,” Rabbi Alan Lew reminds us that on Rosh Hashanah, we need to do more than that.

There are several volumes entitled the Book of Life on our shelf, but we want to be sure to pull down the one that will be useful to us. - Rabbi Alan Lew

We all have full lives of experiences that have much to teach us. The task for this time of year is to take a closer look at the whole to find the lessons in our past that we need now, as our “new” Books of Life are written on Rosh Hashanah and sealed on Yom Kippur.





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Rabbi Lew elaborates on the need to reflect on our lives by suggesting that each of us has different volumes of our Books of Life that represent different aspects of our past, and to fully understand ourselves, we need to read between the lines of those books. One volume is the Book of Our Successes, which reminds us of the ways we have presented ourselves to the world through our accomplishments, whether they are the work we have done or the activities we have engaged in. If you dig a bit deeper, however, you will recognize that this book was written to hide away our flaws or our mistakes, reflecting the public persona we want others to see.



What things are you trying to NOT think about? What power do they have over you, and how can you overcome these barriers to experiencing a better self?

Rabbi Lew also highlights the Book of the Heart, which contains our self-perceived failures and our shame. It is the hardest book to open up and review – and perhaps the most feared book of our lives.

During the Days of Awe, we pound our heart repeatedly as we recite the Vidui, the confessional prayer that is repeated over and over again in the High Holiday liturgy. We point at the heart. We pound it until it opens and we can read it. – Rabbi Alan Lew

This book exists in each of us. It records every moment we would like locked away but can't let go of, and upon self-reflection, we are left asking ourselves what to do with this shame. How can we come face to face with the book that records our misdeeds?





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These questions are challenging and the journey difficult but incredibly rewarding. Only by facing those things that hold us back can we try to feel whole. But we must remind ourselves of two important mental health **middot** (Jewish values) — **b'tzelem Elohim** (being made in the image of God) and **refuah shleima** (healing and wholeness) — as we begin this journey exploring our heartbreak. We need to remember we are made in the likeness and image of God, and we are inherently worthy of dignity and respect.

When we embark on this next leg in our journey of healing toward wholeness and seeing the godliness within ourselves, these **middot** and perspectives will enable us to be courageous and self-compassionate. And, in a way, they will enable us to truly perform **teshuva** (repentance) for the mistakes of our past in how we treated ourselves. This is the only way to learn and grow from the more difficult parts of our Book of Life.



Activity - Writing Your Story

What is written in your version of the Book of the Heart? Practicing self-compassion, write a letter to yourself that identifies two or three things that might bring you shame from your past year, and identify how you might change the narrative you tell about yourself.



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