

In My Past Life I Was Cleopatra: A Skeptical Believer's Journey through the New Age

Amal Awad

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Part memoir, part invitation to spiritual exploration, Amal Awad's curious and accepting book *In My Past Life I Was Cleopatra* moves through New Age practices with hope.

"The truth about humanity is that we require belief," Awad writes, "even if it's in the rejection of the idea of something greater than ourselves." For Awad, who grew up in a Palestinian Muslim household in Australia, such belief was, at first, a matter of inheritance: she clung to her family's monotheistic tradition into early adulthood, hoping it could center her. But, she admits, those modalities ultimately failed to bring her fulfillment.

In her thirties, Awad began a more intuitive search. Prompted by a self-help book that truly helped her, she investigated New Age spirituality, where she found, and continues to find, practices that sate and center her, as well as those that awaken her inner skeptic.

Interacting with mediums, crystals, yogis, and magic, Awad addresses both concerning aspects of "woo woo" and freeing ones. She talks about how aura and tarot readings helped to center her in times of need, and she interacts with New Age luminaries who help to clarify that practice is as much about what you bring to it as it is its own spiritual form. She discusses how the New Age is rooted in ancient traditions, but also how it is exploratory and daring; she makes room for doubters, and in doing so, welcomes them into New Age's varied and inviting folds.

From faerie hills to rock stores where every crystal's source is known and honorable, Awad's experiences encourage, without pushing, her audience to "experiment, enjoy, [and] be discerning in how you expend your time and energy." Surprising and delightful, *In My Past Life I Was Cleopatra* is a spiritual seeker's trapeze through the New Age.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (July / August 2021)

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