

Love Is the Higher Law Study Guide

Love Is the Higher Law by David Levithan

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Plot Summary

Love is the Higher Law by David Levithan was written in 2009. The novel for young adults follows the story of three students on September 11, 2001, the day the Twin Towers fell in New York City.

Claire, whose apartment is ten blocks away from the World Trade Center, is at her high school when the news breaks. College student Jasper is home alone in Brooklyn sleeping when the planes hit, and it is noon before he finds out what has happened. Peter is making a pit-stop at Tower records on his way to school when he gets word. He then witnesses the impact of the second plane and the collapse of the towers. These three young adults now try to get their bearings in this new post-9/11 world.

Each of these students follows their own unique journey through the horror of the tragedy. Claire wants to connect with others, but she is not sure how to do that. Peter is looking for something good to emerge out of the ashes. And Jasper retreats into himself, unable to feel.

Peter and Jasper were supposed to have a date on September 11. They cancel due to circumstances but Peter is determined that they reschedule as soon as they can. When they do go out, it is awkward and Jasper is all over the place emotionally. He is not available to Peter.

Eventually, Jasper wants to emerge from his solitude, and he meets Claire as she searches for connection. They can understand each other. He tells her about Peter, who happens to go to Claire's school, and soon Claire and Peter become friends as well. Eventually, all three students, who had solitary journeys through this maze, emerge bonded to each other, and stronger for it.



Part I (pages 3-39)

Part I (pages 3-39) Summary

CLAIRE- My First Thought (page 3-16)

Claire, seventeen years old, is in class when news arrives that a plane has crashed into the World Trade Center. The following events are told from her perspective. Confusion ensues with cell phones ringing and general panic. Eventually Claire's twelfth-grade class joins another class that has a television, and the students see live coverage of the burning building.

Claire's immediate reaction is to try to reach her mother but neither she, nor her mother, has a cell phone. She wants to collect her brother Sammy from his second-grade class in the school across the road, and she leaves the high school with Marisol, a classmate who also wants to get to her younger sibling.

Once outside, Claire sees the hordes of people, all looking up. Strangers are talking to each other, trying to make sense of what they are seeing. A man has opened his shoe shop and is giving away sneakers to women in heels. There is, eerily, only 1 ambulance rushing by with sirens blaring.

At the elementary school, parents are pouring in to pick up their children. It is only at this point that Claire realizes she can't just pick up Sammy and take him home; their apartment is only ten blocks away from the towers. She is also keenly aware that her mother has not yet materialized, and she knows that her mother would be heading straight to Sammy's school.

Claire decides to stick around and assist Sammy's teacher. She helps them with their drawings and later reads to them, trying to keep a positive tone. The kids know that something is wrong but they have not been informed of the details.

When the first tower falls, there are instructions for everyone to move north of 14th Street, so the principal arranges for the students to move to another school close by on 17th Street. Claire's growing anxiety about her mother settles when her mother finally appears during the walk.

Claire's story now jumps to nighttime when Sammy is asleep. She, her mother, and her already sleeping brother are staying with friends. They watch CNN and learn the details of the timeline. Claire learns that the second tower fell during her walk with the students. Claire both wants to know, and doesn't want to know- the details of the tragedy.

JASPER- Wake Up, It's Over (pages 17-35)

Jasper sleeps through the attack on the World Trade Center. He only finds out about it at noon when his parents call him, frantic, from Korea. Once he is caught up, Jasper's



mother advises him to stock up on grocery staples right away. He assures his nervous parents that he will be ok and that he can stay with friends if need be.

When Jasper checks his email, he is inundated with messages from college friends checking to see if he is ok. He also receives an email from Peter, a high school junior, acknowledging their date for that evening would have to be postponed.

Jasper heads towards the hospital to give blood with his friend Amanda. Outside, Jasper is hit with the acrid smell of the smoke blowing eastward. He also finds two papers on his front yard, papers that had been dispersed, along with thousands of others, when the towers fell.

When Jasper and Amanda arrive, the line to give blood goes around the block, filled with people of all ages and backgrounds. Jasper keeps his regular sarcastic personality, which Amanda and others in line do not appreciate.

There is a question on the Red Cross form asking if the blood donor has had any homosexual activity. Jasper double-checks if they mean unprotected sex, but they do not. Jasper is outraged that he cannot give blood even though his sexual activity has been protected, despite straight people not needing to divulge anything about their sexual activity. Jasper gets irate and a few people leave the line when he does, but Amanda does not join him and stays instead to give blood.

Jasper returns home and passes a packed Prospect Park on the way, full of people who had newly bonded while crossing the bridge by foot to get home. At home, Jasper becomes glued to the TV, despite the repetition of what he is seeing.

PETER- Love and Theft (pages 36-39)

Peter is waiting for Tower Records to open when someone draws his attention to what is going on. He walks to Washington Square Park and from there he can see downtown and the towers.

He speaks with strangers and they try to get information from a girl who has a radio. They witness the second tower burst into flames. And then they see the first tower fall.

Peter heads towards his school and chooses not to listen to his music along the way; he doesn't want to taint any song by being tied to the memory of today. And music has no place in this situation. And without music, Peter feels lost.

Part I (pages 3-39) Analysis

The course of the day differs greatly for each of the three characters.

Claire hears the news in a classroom setting where she knows all of the students. There is some order to the chaos that ensues because there are teachers in charge. When



she shifts to Sammy's school, again she is part of a larger organized system, and finally, she is with her family unit as well when her mother joins her.

Jasper, by contrast, misses the actual event, and he hears the news from his parents who are abroad. Jasper turns on the TV and processes the information completely by himself. By the time he is in the presence of others, it feels like he missed the window of strangers bonding.

Peter is outside among strangers when he learns what is going on. He is in the company of others who are experiencing the same bafflement as he is. Even though they are strangers, people are sharing the experience as a community.

All three characters see acts of kindness and bonding: people handing out free shoes and water, strangers spontaneously speaking to each other, and people giving blood.

A theme that runs through the stories of both Claire and Jasper is the duality of wanting to know and not wanting to know at the same time. Claire watches the live broadcast on TV at her school, but when she is outside she is determined not to look over her shoulder and see the burning buildings with her own eyes. She fears that this will change her. Later, Claire finds herself glued to the TV, as Jasper is, though they both recognize that they have heard enough. Jasper even mutes the TV for a while, yet can't bring himself to turn it off. At a certain point, Jasper figures out this feeling of being repulsed by and drawn to the TV. He finally understands that he, like the newscasters themselves and millions of others, is waiting for the silver lining- news of survivors.

Each character has a different personality and handles their shock differently. Claire steps up into action. She knows that the young kids are taking their cues from her, and this is mature in a 17-year-old. Jasper is as sarcastic and flippant as ever. He doesn't see why he should carry an air of gloom and doom. And Peter turns inward completely.



Part II (pages 43-77)

Part II (pages 43-77) Summary

PETER- The Date (pages 43-54)

Peter relates the details of how he and Jasper met at a party a short time ago. They hit it off and arranged a date, which was thwarted by 9/11. They eventually reschedule the date.

Peter and Jasper go to a restaurant where they speak of the recent events. The mood between them is strange and heavy. Jasper invites Peter back to his place. Once they are there, they watch the news and then a movie, but Jasper does not show signs that he wants Peter to kiss him. When it is time for bed, Jasper gives Peter sheets to sleep on the couch. Thirty minutes later, Jasper emerges from his bedroom in a playful mood. When they kiss, Peter feels there is emptiness and points it out to Jasper, who apologizes. They end up sleeping in separate rooms.

JASPER- Limbo (pages 55-66)

The story is told again, but this time from Jasper's perspective. Jasper identifies how a part of him is missing. He has isolated himself in his apartment. He avoids his friends but he does agree to a date with Peter. At dinner he tries to describe this newly missing, empty part of him to Peter but does not quite succeed. Jasper thinks about their age difference and the different stages they are at in life, and he knows he should say goodbye after dinner. But a part of him feels like he should care for Peter, and so he invites Peter back to his place.

At the apartment, Jasper makes some half-hearted signals of interest that are misinterpreted by Peter. As the evening wears on, Jasper tries to summon a sexual heat but he gets tired and realizes it would be leading Peter on if they shared a bed. He hugs Peter goodnight and this feeling stays with him when he heads to his room. Soon Jasper wants more hugging, or more of something that he can't identify, so he goes to Peter and brings him to the bedroom. It is raining- the first rain since September 11.

Jasper fails to ignite the spark he hopes for when Peter finally kisses him. Jasper had been hoping to be brought into the feeling world again, but it doesn't happen. Jasper feels lost.

CLAIRE- I Can't Sleep (pages 67-77)

Claire's family is not yet allowed to return to their apartment. Sharing a bed with her mother, Claire is unable to sleep. She is equally unable to engage in any other activity to distract her, for everything has lost its flavor and nothing holds her interest anymore.



When the rainstorm finally stops, there is silence, a silence New York City has never known. "It is as if the rain has washed all the life away," observes Claire. Still unable to sleep, she sneaks out of the house, forgetting to leave a note. At 3rd Avenue she starts to see others like her, wandering and lost. She heads for Union Square, which has become a shrine of remembrance for those who are missing and dead.

The rain starts up again and Claire gets drenched. At Union Square, she does not find the solace she was hoping for, and she cries. Claire notices a woman relighting all the memorial candles that have been doused from the rain and helps her.

Part II (pages 43-77) Analysis

As the first few days post-9/11 roll out, all three characters seek solace. Unfortunately, their search is not an easy one since they are not quite sure what will bring them solace.

Peter feels that because he and Jasper had planned a date for September 11, they are connected in a specific, unique way. He believes that they must follow through with rescheduling the date and carry out whatever their connection will be. He feels he may find truth in this bonded moment.

Jasper's response is quite different. He feels he's lost a part of himself and just can't find it again. Jasper hopes that seeing Peter will bring this missing part to the surface but it just doesn't happen, and he is stuck with his feeling of emptiness. Jasper does not find the solace he so desperately wants, and he is aware he doesn't know what that would even be.

Like Jasper, Claire feels she's been robbed of feeling. She feels the colors have drained from the world, and nothing will ever be the same. She seeks solace in the rain and in being near other people who are seeking the same. When she sees the woman lighting candles, she sees she can have a purpose, that her pain can take direction in action. Of all three of the characters, it is Claire who finds a way to start to fill the void everyone is so desperate to fill.

When Claire sees a sign saying Never Forget, she questions this. "Don't we have to forget some of it? Don't we have to forget this feeling? If we don't, how will we live?" The overwhelming feeling of the fragility of life and the tragedy that has taken place is too much for her, and Claire believes that people will not be able to live under the weight of it all.



Part III (pages 81-116)

Part III (pages 81-116) Summary

PETER- Turn (pages 81-89)

New York has a feeling of emptiness. Concerts and events get cancelled. School resumed six days following the incident. Peter recognizes a new air of caring among his fellow students. He also recognizes the fear. People tend to stick to quieter less obvious places when they go on outings, avoiding the obvious targets of a potential terrorist attack.

Peter and his friend John investigate whether the Travis concert will be cancelled, but it is not. They both reflect that they would also play if they were in that situation. They must go through security when they get to Radio City Music Hall, and soon they discover that though the concert is sold out, there are hundreds of empty seats. When the singer greets the audience with "Hello New York," it brings Peter to tears. The music unites everyone in the room. The lyrics take on a different meaning in a post-9/11 world, more meaningful, more poignant.

Peter feels this is the first time since September 11 that there has been a gathering of people in New York City, and they are celebrating, singing, united.

JASPER- Ground Zero (pages 90-108)

Jasper's parents return home 12 days after 9/11, two days before he sets off back to college. The drive home from the airport is an emotional one; his parents had immigrated just before the towers went up, and now they see the absence of the towers.

Jasper has cleaned up the house for his parents and he is glad they are back. He even embraces his annoyance while shopping with his mother. A night before they came home, Jasper had gone to a club and it had upset him. He had been angry at the guys wandering around like zombies, and he had been even angrier at the guys high on drugs having a great time. He had been jealous that he couldn't be like them, that he felt the burden of the tragedy and that they could release it.

At dinner, Jasper wants to convey what he has been feeling inside to his parents but he can't find the words, and he recognizes that they can't relate because they hadn't been there. He also realizes this will carry through at college, where his friends will not be able to relate.

Once his parents are asleep, Jasper heads out in the night to ground zero. It is brightly lit "like a movie set." Tourists take pictures, but the New Yorkers do not. A girl approaches Jasper and greets him. It is Claire. She remembers him from Mitchell's party- the same party where he'd met Peter. Jasper sees that Claire has been going through the same ordeal as he. They walk towards Battery Park and share their stories.



Jasper opens up to Claire, and for the first time he is able to share his feelings of emptiness. When he tells Claire that his date with Peter was a mess, she suggests that it is a choice to keep someone at bay or to bring that person into one's life.

CLAIRE- Catching Breath (pages 109-116)

Claire's story picks up where Jasper's left off, sitting together on a bench in Battery Park. Claire shares her feelings with Jasper, that now she wants to allow for more of the world to get closer to her, to be less insulated. She tells him she enjoyed breathing the air following 9/11 because it was literally breathing in the buildings, the dead, all of it.

Jasper in turn tells her he kept the papers he found on his front lawn. He pulls Claire closer to him as it gets colder. He asks Claire to recount what she can of Mitchell's party. Claire describes what she remembers, and how Jasper had been the life of the party, how everyone had been so happy. Claire wonders if she's still the same person she was that night.

They say their goodbyes and hug. Claire returns home, and breathes in the fullness of her home.

Part III (pages 81-116) Analysis

Peter's experience at the concert is healing for him. Peter processes the world through music, and the day the planes crashed into the towers, he stopped listening. He has slowly and carefully started re-introducing music to his life, but the concert smashes through the walls he'd put up. He is in a sea of six thousand people who are cheering and singing their hearts out. He is part of a shared experience in a hall full of New Yorkers who are healing and piecing together their new world.

Jasper reaches a point where he wants to share what is inside. He had attempted with Peter but failed. Now his parents are home and he hopes to speak to them about it but that doesn't work out. In meeting Claire- in meeting a stranger who is also struggling- he is finally able to put words to his feelings, to his isolation, to his emptiness.

Claire and Jasper find solace together simply by not feeling alone. They have been living in very different ways, but their struggle is the same. Jasper has been turning inward and unplugging, while Claire has been interacting more and more with her community.



Part IV (pages 119-132)

Part IV (pages 119-132) Summary

PETER- Love is the Higher Law

Peter describes his experience at the U2 concert held at the end of October. He had gone with Claire. They have always been casual friends but recently Claire reached out to him and they started sharing, and now they are part of each other's lives.

Peter is overwhelmed at the concert. During the song One, the names of the victims of 9/11 are projected onto a screen. Prior to 9/11 Peter had not been a big fan of U2, but now the music and the lyrics feel essential to him.

JASPER- December 4, 2001 (page 125)

Jasper realizes that December 4 is the first day he hasn't thought about 9/11.

CLAIRE- The Lights (pages 126-132)

It is March 11, the six-month anniversary of 9/11. After staying quite late at school, Claire heads towards the tribute beams of light. Once she reaches her destination, she continues on to ground zero. Then for the first time, she allows herself to visit Rockefeller Park. She has been too scared to go back and find it changed. But she arrives and everything is just as it had been before the attack. This gives her the confidence to check for another landmark she feared had been lost- a railing outside of the World Financial Center with quotes on it. She finds the railing intact, and marvels at the quotes by Walt Whitman and Frank O'Hara that capture the marvelous city of New York.

Part IV (pages 119-132) Analysis

Time moves on for Claire, Jasper and Peter. Life is not as it was before, but time has allowed them some distance from the pain.

Peter continues to find his way through the world through music, and Jasper is slowly able to move away from his constant thoughts of 9/11. When Claire revisits ground zero and the towers of light, she is scared everything will swallow her up again, but this does not happen. She feels the pain, but it has softened. She can breathe.



Part V (pages 135-163)

Part V (pages 135-163) Summary

PETER- A Reunion (pages 135-139)

Claire has a birthday party, where Peter and Jasper run into each other. They speak a bit. Peter is in college now and has a boyfriend. Jasper will be heading to Korea for nine weeks. Jasper apologizes for their date. Peter forgives him, acknowledging everything around that point in time was 'surreal'.

JASPER- Of Course You Have a Boyfriend (pages 140-141)

Jasper reveals what he doesn't reveal to Peter when they speak- Jasper wants to connect with him. He is disappointed that Peter has a boyfriend. Jasper feels that he, Peter and Claire all share an understanding that puts them all on the same wavelength.

JASPER- Good Night (Your Morning) (pages 142-146)

Jasper writes letters to Peter throughout his time in Korea. During this time, Peter and his boyfriend break up and the letters become more intimate.

PETER- Here to Your There (pages 147-150)

Peter's letters to Jasper contain updates about back home. Peter also tells Jasper about volunteering with Claire to build houses for Habitat for Humanity. Peter is uncomfortable on July 4, he feels it has become too much, a contest of patriotism. By the end of August, Peter asks Jasper for a second date. In Jasper's letters from earlier, it is clear he said yes.

CLAIRE- Anniversary (pages 151-153)

It is one year after 9/11. Claire is in college in town and now lives in a dorm. She skips her morning class and travels back to her mother's apartment so she can walk Sammy to school. Once he is in, she stands on the street looking at the emptiness that used to be the World Trade Center. She finds others are standing with her. At 8:46am, bells ring out, and people silently replay the series of events that took place in their minds, and where they were at each of those moments.

Claire feels an emptiness, but she also feels life, full force. She knows this one event is not everything.

PETER- Anniversary (pages 154-159)



Peter and Jasper finally have their second date on the first anniversary of September 11. They both feel odd that they are not with Claire today but she is still in New York and they are in college, just a short distance from each other.

This time, the date goes as Peter feels it was meant to go the first time. And after the meal, it is Peter who brings Jasper back to his place, and this time they stay in the same bed.

CLAIRE-March 19, 2003 (pages 160-163)

Claire speaks of the beginning of the Iraq war. It makes her cry more than 9/11. She is angry at Bush for not having learned the lessons that were there to be learned from having lived through 9/11.

Peter and Jasper are back in New York for spring break, and they spend time with Claire, consoling her, reminding her there is also so much good in humanity. All three of them recognize how meeting each other has changed them, all for the better.

And as they walk through New York, Peter looks back at the emptiness that used to be the World Trade Center. Claire and Jasper stop walking and do the same. Claire observes,

"This is what a memorial is: Standing still, staring at something that isn't there."

Part V (pages 135-163) Analysis

Part V tracks Claire, Jasper and Peter as they move on from 9/11. They've slowly transitioned back into normal life. Even though their lives will forever be changed by the events of 9/11, they rejoin the workings of the world with parties, travel, school, and budding relationships.

Peter and Jasper have the opportunity to replay their first date on the one year anniversary of 9/11. They do not try to recreate what it would have been pre-9/11. They understand they have changed and they both embrace these changes. They don't play the dating games. They listen to each other and share from their hearts.

Claire, Peter and Jasper have had a true effect on each other's lives. Jasper has not isolated himself beyond reach. Peter has gained understanding, and Claire has gained community.

The war hits Claire hard. She wants to believe that 9/11 was a learning experience for everyone, and she is devastated that her country is prepared to throw aside their new knowledge and fall back into old ways.



Characters

Claire

Claire is a seventeen-year-old twelfth-grade student when the tragic events of 9/11 occur. She lives with her mother and younger brother ten blocks away from the World Trade Center, and they are not allowed back in their apartment for quite some time.

Claire struggles to find people with whom she can share the experience of the tragedy of 9/11. She is deeply, deeply affected by the huge sense of loss. But she is also inspired by the beautiful gestures of blossoming humanity all around her.

Claire encourages people to volunteer and make a difference. This is her reaction to the tragedy. She needs to act, if only by lighting candles of remembrance.

Sammy

Sammy is Claire's younger brother and he is in grade two at the school across the street from Claire's when the planes hit the towers. Claire cares for Sammy very much and often walks him to school. Even when she has moved into her college dorm, she goes home at the six-month anniversary just so she can walk Sammy to school.

Jasper

Jasper is a college student who lives in Brooklyn. He is of Korean descent. His parents arrived in New York just before the World Trade Center was built.

Jasper has not yet returned to college on September 11, 2001. He is at his parents' home, sleeping. His parents are away in Korea at the time.

Jasper had been a boisterous, life-of-the-party kind of person before 9/11. Afterwards, he withdraws into his own world. He feels an emptiness he cannot fill. He keeps the world at a distance. Now, with time, he finds his way to people again.

Jasper is interested in Peter romantically but it takes him a long time to be okay with letting him in. Part of this journey is when he meets Claire and he starts speaking of his emotions for the first time.

Amanda

Jasper and his friend Amanda decide to go to the blood bank on September 11 because they feel they want to do something to help, and unfortunately giving blood is the only



way they can help. Amanda does not appreciate Jasper's flippant tone. She is deeply shaken and is put off that Jasper does not seem to be sensitive to what is going on.

Peter

Peter is a high school student in the same grade (and school) as Claire. Peter processes the world through music, and he removes music from the equation when the towers fall. He doesn't want to taint his music collection with memories of 9/11. He is lost without music.

Over time, Peter opens himself again to music, and the music leads him to heal. Lyrics and melodies now carry a greater weight than before the tragedy. Sharing the music is also extremely important for Peter, and he feels the crowd at the U2 concert is going through the journey right with him.

Peter is interested in Jasper and he feels bonded to him by their date-that-didn't-happen on September 11, but it takes a year for them to be ready to launch on a journey together.

Aiden

Aiden is Peter's first boyfriend, his first kiss. After 9/11, Aiden becomes more present in Peter's life and they start seeing each other again. Eventually their relationship takes a downturn and they break up over the summer while Jasper is in Korea.

Jasper's mother

Jasper's mother is in Korea with her husband to visit her dying mother when the towers fall. She loves her son and she is devastated that she can't be there with him to protect him and support him and convince herself he is alright.

When she returns, she is hit hard by the site of ground zero. She had moved to New York from Korea and had seen the towers being built, representing so much, and now they've been taken away.

Marisol

Marisol is a girl in Claire's grade who also has a younger sibling at the elementary school across the road. She and Claire go together to be with their younger siblings on September 11. Claire thinks that perhaps she can find a bond with Marisol, someone who shares her feelings, but it does not materialize.



Objects/Places

World Trade Center

This novel focuses on the events of 9/11, when two airplanes crashed into the towers of the World Trade Center and caused their complete collapse, killing thousands in the process.

New York City

New York City is used to being the center of the action, yet the attack on 9/11 is a different kind of action. People in the city now feel vulnerable. They are careful where they hang out. Tourists stop visiting the city.

The city also becomes a place of bonding. Strangers all over the city help each other, support each other, talk to each other.

Brooklyn Bridge

The day the towers collapsed, the only way to return to Brooklyn was to walk across the bridge, and thousands of people did just that.

Papers

Jasper finds papers on his front lawn and it takes him a while to understand that these have been blown across the river from the impact of the WTC's collapse. He holds these papers dear to him and he keeps them. They help him remember that there were people in the building- that it is not just a building that fell down, but individual lives were torn away forever.

Tribute in Light

As a memorial tribute two beams of light, made up of many smaller beams of work lights, shoot up into the sky where the towers used to be.

Candles

In the days following 9/11, people light candles and set up makeshift memorials for the missing and the dead.

Korea

Jasper's parents are in Korea during 9/11. A year later, Jasper goes to Korea with his mother for nine weeks.

Airplanes

Two airplanes crash into the WTC on 9/11. As a result, all air traffic completely stops. When it resumes, people feel fear when they hear the planes.



Themes

Community

Claire recognizes that 9/11 is an opportunity for people to be better. From the moment the planes crash, people are being generous with each other, offering free water, free shoes, and other necessities within a culture firmly planted in taking advantage of opportunities to make some money. Yet nobody sinks to that level. People keep rising above, again and again.

Each individual carries his or her own reality of the events of that day. This novel looks at the challenges of finding ways to feel less alone. Strangers talk to each other everywhere as events unfold. Jasper and Amanda are confronted with a waiting line around the block full of people who want to give blood. Claire wanders into the darkness and finds comfort at a makeshift memorial. She finds even more comfort when she can light candles with someone else - a common, shared act. Peter finds community in sharing the experience of music with thousands of other people singing and cheering in unison.

Jasper's reaction is to pull back into himself but Claire brings him out of his shell; she brings him back into the community of New York, a city full of people suffering deep loss.

Remembrance

Love is a Higher Law explores the many ways people hold on and the many ways people let go. The intersection of holding on and letting go comes when a person finds a way to remember and honor what happened without becoming or remaining a slave to it. Life is forward-looking.

Claire's tribute to those who lost their lives is to live better and inspire others to do the same. She wants to engage more fully in life and in caring. She is inspired by the levels of humanity possible within us. Peter honors the fallen with music. And Jasper allows himself to access the world,; he gives himself permission to find happiness again.

Love

The theme of love is present throughout Love is the Higher Law, and it shows the power of love in times of need.

Familial love is expressed through Claire's protective feelings for Sammy and her desire for her mother's presence. It is also shown in Jasper's mother's many phone calls to make sure Jasper does not feel alone.



The love of friendship is shown through Claire's relationships with Jasper and Peter. All three of them are able to share a similar understanding of what happened in the city and what happened to them. Their love for each other helps them move forward.

Romantic love is visible in Peter's connection with Jasper. From a playful flirtation pre-9/11 to a sobering and disturbing date, to allowing time to work its magic and the rediscovery of each other, finally Peter and Jasper find a plane on which they can meet.

Style

Point of View

Love is a Higher Law is written in the first person singular. What makes the novel slightly unusual is that instead of just one person speaking, the perspective rotates, so that each character has a turn to tell their story with their own voice.

The advantage to the first person singular in this novel is hearing the thoughts behind the sometimes confusing actions. It also adds insight when Peter tells his version of an event and then Jasper tells his version of the exact same event. This demonstrates just how subjective experiences are.

A big advantage to this means of storytelling is that it allows the reader to really get into the head of the person who is sharing their story. Claire's restlessness, Jasper's desire to reach out even though he is unable, and Peter's desire for significance are all revealed as each of the characters speaks.

Setting

While cities are backdrops to any novel, in the case of Love is the Higher Law, New York City is a full-fledged character. The damage - the tragedy - is borne by the city. After the towers fall, the skyline is not the same. The people are not the same. Tourism is not the same. The sense of safety, of security, is not the same. And the city of millions of strangers becomes a little bit more of a community.

Language and Meaning

All three characters are well-spoken and educated. This is reflected in the clarity with which they present their thoughts, and it is also apparent in their vocabularies.

Often, the author David Levithan conveys thoughts to the reader in an indirect manner. Instead of a character directly saying they feel alone, he may show that character wandering the streets late at night.

The events of 9/11 have such heavy symbolism that whether or not the author intends it, the novel is full of symbolism. Terrorists destroy the ultimate symbol of the core of America, literally and metaphorically leaving a gaping hole in the city. The love and community that emerges fills this hole.

Structure

Love is the Higher Law is divided into five parts. The first four parts have three chapters each, each one belonging to Claire, Jasper and Peter in turn. The fifth part flips a few times between each character's voice.

Part I takes place on September 11. Part II takes place in the days that follow and Part III in the weeks that follow. Part IV spans a few months, including the 6-month anniversary of the attacks of 9/11. The final part covers the following summer through to the one-year anniversary and then jumps ahead to the beginning of the war in Iraq in March 2003.



Quotes

"He's crying about the wrong thing, and I find myself almost jealous of that." (Claire, Part I, p. 11)

"I feel like I'm in one of those myths where the one thing the woman can't do is turn around and see what's behind her." (Claire, Part I, p. 13)

"I don't want to know anything, and I want to know it all." (Claire, Part I, p. 16)

"Something as mundane as two sheets of paper from an office file could provide the final evidence of how vulnerable we are, how we live our lives not knowing how or when they will end." (Jasper, Part I, p. 24)

"I know immediately this is going to be one of the true historic moments of my life - that the personal and the historic are converging. I know people will ask, Where were you when you first heard?" (Peter, Part I, p. 37)

"I had no idea what I wanted, only that I wanted something, which is the worst kind of wanting." (Jasper, Part II, p. 63)

"How the other buildings, which once seemed so small in comparison, have now revealed their true height." (Claire, Part II, p. 68)

"What a small, almost petty thing to want- to feel better." (Claire, Part II, p. 74)

"I guess it's a choice we make," she said. / "What's a choice?" I asked. / And she said, "How much of the world we let in." (Jasper, Part III, p. 108)

"Maybe in the end that's all we need. Talking and listening." (Peter, Part V, p. 158)

"An eye for an eye. Blindness. I believe we're better than this." (Claire, Part V, p. 161)

"'I honestly thought we were going to be better,' I tell them. 'After what happened. As a country.'" (Claire, Part V, p. 162)



Topics for Discussion

Where were you during 9/11? Were you alive? Do you remember when you first heard about it? What were your first thoughts? How did it make you feel? Were your reactions similar to any of the characters in the book, and if so, in what way?

Why do you think Claire wants to get her brother when she gets the news? How did the schools handle it- both Claire's and Sammy's school? How do you feel about watching TVs in the high school? What information is given to the kids in Sammy's school and why? What would you have done?

What does Jasper find as he leaves his house on September 11? How does this affect him? Why is he so flippant when he is with Amanda on the day of the event? Why doesn't Jasper end up giving blood?

What is Peter's relationship to music? Where is he when he hears the news? Why does he cut himself off from music at that point?

Why can't Claire return to her house? How does Claire try to find solace? Why does she feel alone even though she is in a sea full of people who have gone through the same thing?

What is Jasper like before September 11? In what ways does he change? How does he act on his date with Peter? Why do you think he acts this way? What is Jasper seeking and why can't he find it?

How do Claire, Jasper and Peter help each other through the process of mourning and moving on?