

JUST BENEATH THE SURFACE OF EVERYDAY LIFE – EXPERIENCING AWE

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“The world is full of magic things, patiently waiting for our senses to grow sharper.”

- William Butler Yeats



Just beneath the surface of everyday life lies something remarkable – opportunity after opportunity for experiencing awe. In fact, it’s a wonder that we all don’t walk around with our jaws dropped all the time.

The Sufi mystic Rumi wrote a poem entitled “How does the Divine Keep from Fainting Looking at Itself all day?” That’s a good question.

Awe is an overwhelming feeling of amazement for something that is grand, special, or unique. It is a very powerful emotion that can have a transformative effect on our lives.

Studies have shown that awe usually involves two basic components:

1. When we personally connect with something vast that broadens our thinking.

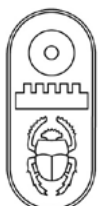
This could be in terms of:

Physical size – the starry sky, the Grand Canyon, or a blue whale (the largest animal on Earth).

Age – dinosaurs (who lived 240 to 65 million years ago), or the 20,000 year old handprint left by a shamaness at the entrance to an initiation cave in Altamira, Spain, or 10,000 year old Gobeki Tepe with the most ancient temple structures ever discovered.

Complexity of detail – how our body heals itself, air traffic control, or the remarkable self-organization of ants.

An individual’s skill – Michelangelo, Johann Sebastian Bach, or Serena Williams.



Impact – Moses, Buddha, Yeshua, Mohammed, Galileo, Abraham Lincoln, Susan B. Anthony, Marie Curie, or Martin Luther King, Jr.

What or whom do you find awe-inspiring related to:

- Physical size
- Age
- Complexity of detail
- An individual's skill
- Someone's impact on the world.

2. When the situation creates a need for accommodation.

This means that our experience challenges our normal understanding of the world and we need to reconfigure the mental constructs that we use to understand the world.

For example, when Dr. Edgar Mitchell, the sixth human to walk on the moon, traveled back from the moon amid the vast darkness of the cosmos, his eyes became fixed on Earth. As he neared Earth, he was enveloped by a profound sense of universal connectedness.

He wrote, “I realized that the story of ourselves as told by science – our cosmology, our religion – was incomplete and likely flawed. I recognized that the idea of separate, independent, discrete things in the universe wasn’t a fully accurate description. What was needed was a new story of who we are and what we are capable of becoming.”

Many astronauts have reported similar experiences. A similar search for a new

story may have led you to the Rosicrucian Order.

We have all had experiences of awe – perhaps when gazing upon the vastness of the stars and humbly realizing a diminished sense of self. It isn’t negative to feel smaller – it’s humbling and we can then reassess and modify our idea of where we fit in with the interconnected universe – we’re part of something grand.

Westerners, perhaps especially Americans – value the individual and being bigger. We may be able to appreciate a diminished sense of self though by thinking of the Statue of Liberty and all that she stands for.

This colossal statue is fifteen stories tall.

Millions of immigrants have gazed upon “Lady Liberty” as they entered Ellis Island. Think of what this statue symbolized for them or possibly for you – freedom and the potential for expanded opportunities.

That’s humbling.

Or perhaps you have experienced awe while giving birth or being present at the birth of a new being. Think of this for a minute – this person wasn’t on Earth and then, the next minute she was! That alone is enough to keep our jaws dropped for a lifetime.

Then the little ones smile for the first time and roll over and figure out how to walk. How do they do that? That’s awe-inspiring.

And there are many more opportunities to experience awe.





Outer Space

Solar eclipse: A solar eclipse occurs when the moon gets between Earth and the sun, and the moon casts a shadow over Earth. On August 21, 2017, 88 percent of Americans (261 million people) took time to witness this awe-inspiring event. Hundreds of Rosicrucians and neighbors gathered at Rosicrucian Park to experience this moment together.

Aurora Borealis (the Northern Lights): Sten Odenwald, author of *The 23rd Cycle: Learning to Live with a Stormy Star*, explains how the Northern Lights are generated:

When a coronal mass ejection collides with Earth's magnetic field, it causes complex changes to happen to the magnetic tail region. These changes generate currents of charged particles, which then flow along lines of magnetic force into the Polar Regions. These particles are boosted in energy in Earth's upper atmosphere, and when they collide with oxygen and nitrogen atoms, they produce dazzling auroral light.

Earthrise: The photo at left was taken by Apollo 8 astronaut Bill Anders on December 24, 1968. What feelings arise in you when you gaze upon this photo?

And closer to home there are many awe-inspiring opportunities in the Natural World.

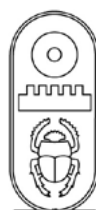
More than Humans

Cheetahs are the fastest runners on the planet. They are capable of running 83 miles per hour. Think about that for a moment and compare it with the speed that you drive. One exceptional cheetah was reliably recorded running 93 miles per hour. This video captures the grace and power of this amazing animal: https://youtu.be/THA_5cqAfCQ

Bees have been shown to understand the concept of zero. Scientists discovered this after training bees to count shapes, following previous research that revealed that they can count to four. A hive of bees will fly over 55,000 miles to make one pound of honey and can create 100 pounds of honey in a year. One third of the food we eat depends on bees for pollination.

Bears can count too and they use tools. They can solve problems and communicate across species, including expressing their emotions. A male grizzly bear can weigh up to 790 pounds and stand nearly ten feet tall. A grizzly bear's bite is strong enough to crush a bowling ball.

Plants can feel, see, smell, and remember. The biggest tree is a giant sequoia in California's Redwood Forest. It is 30 stories tall and 82 feet (25 meters) in circumference.



California holds the record for the oldest living trees, too. Some of the state's bristlecone pines and giant sequoias are thought to be 4,000 to 5,000 years old.

Underneath an individual **mushroom** is a vast network that can spread for acres. It is made up of tiny threads known as mycelium that connect different plants in a forest. Scientists call this underground ecosystem made up of roots, fungi, and bacteria the "wood wide web."

Human Beings

Every second our body produces 25 million new cells. DNA contains the instructions needed for an organism to develop, survive, and reproduce. The lifespan of our DNA is tens of thousands of years. Neurons send information to our brain at more than 150 miles (241 kilometers) per hour. There are about one hundred billion nerve cells in our brain – that's a one followed by 11 zeroes. The human brain will grow three times its size in the first year of life.

Awe-inspiring Art



Tibetan Sand Paintings are created by Buddhist monks who mindfully tap tiny colored grains of sand through a small tube. When completed, the paintings are swept away as part of an ancient ceremony symbolizing the transitory nature of material life.

Page 10



The **Cueva de las Manos** (Cave of the Hands) in Argentina is named for the hundreds of hand paintings stenciled on the rock walls. The art dates from between 13,000 and 9,500 years ago.



The Journey of Humanity, the world's largest canvas painting, is the size of ten tennis courts. Based on artwork created by children during the pandemic, it recently sold for \$78 million.

Awe-inspiring Architecture



Pyramids of Giza



Machu Picchu



Tiger's Nest

Mysticism

Consciousness is most definitely awe-inspiring. I think this is what attracted most of us to the Rosicrucian Order.

Here are the first three points of the Rosicrucian Ontology – our statement regarding the nature of being.

- The Divine is the Universal Intelligence that thought, manifested, and animated all Creation according to unchanging perfect laws.
- All of Creation is permeated by a Universal Soul that evolves toward the perfection of its own nature.
- Life is the vehicle for cosmic evolution, such as it manifests in the universe and on Earth.

The Rosicrucian monographs tell us that we are all mirrors in which the Divine contemplates Its own reflection, Its own magnificence. It experiences Its own Beingness through our lives.

Now, doesn't that inspire awe?!

We contribute to the evolution of consciousness by expanding our awareness.

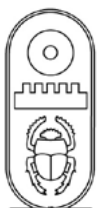
Past Emperor H. Spencer Lewis wrote:

There is nothing so inspiring,
so filled with peace,
happiness, perfect health,
joy, and contentment
as the development of the
spiritual nature.

Benefits of Awe

- Awe decreases stress levels, especially when we are awe-inspired in Nature. Physicians have begun prescribing spending time in nature or in green spaces. In Japan, sixty-four Forest Bathing Forests have been established as a part of their national well-being program.
- Awe increases generosity and kindness. In a study published in the Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, researchers gave ten raffle tickets to their participants and then asked them how many, if any, they would like to give away to another participant who had no tickets. They discovered a strong link between the experience of awe and how many tickets they were willing to give away. They theorized that awe helped to diminish people's egos and self-importance and that can lead people to be more kind, generous, and social.

Awe researcher and psychologist Jonah Paquette suggests that these studies help explain why awe evolved. Feeling awe makes us more willing to help those in need, and in turn increases our sense of connection to others. At a community level, looking out for everyone and placing collective needs above our own gives us a greater chance of survival.



- Awe experiences make us happier and more satisfied with life and impact our mood. These experiences can make us happy in the short term and this benefit lasts too, even weeks later.
- Awe leads to new perspectives. Many people feel a stronger sense of unity with humanity or creation as a whole following an experience of awe.
- Awe experiences can also alter our subjective experience of time. In a study conducted by Stanford University Business School, people often reported feeling “rich” with time during the experience and afterwards. It can be as if time had stood still.
- **Tune into your senses** – Be aware of color, texture, scent, taste, touch, and sound.
- **Step away from your computer** – You may find it helpful to set aside certain hours of the day when you will not be on your computer or take the weekend off.
- **Awe journals** – Keep a journal of your awe experiences, from the simplest to the most moving.
- **Listen to music** – Enjoy music that creates the feeling of awe. Practice recreating the feeling without the music.
- **Engage with others** – Spend time just being with a child or your dog or watching wild animals.

How to Experience More Awe

In his book *Awestruck: How Embracing Wonder Can Make You Happier, Healthier, and More Connected*, Jonah Paquette shares these suggestions:

- **Linger** – When you find yourself experiencing awe, stay with that feeling for as long as possible.
- **Slow down** – Allow time each day to be more mindful.

As Rumi asked, really, how does the Divine keep from fainting looking at Itself all day?

“How Does the Divine Keep from Fainting?”

Rumi

The wonder of water moving over that rock in the stream justifies existence.

The swish of a horse’s tail—again I am stunned by the grandeur of the unseen One that governs all movement.

I resist looking at the palms of my hands sometimes.

Have you ever gotten breathless before a beautiful face, for I see you there, my dear.

There is a wonderful problem waiting for you that the Divine and I share:

how to keep from fainting when we see each other.

In truth:

how does the Divine keep from fainting looking at Itself all day?

Light is moving like a stream, and the myriad celestial beings applaud.