



MAKE OVER

your

OUTLOOK

REAL LIFE *inspiration*

the
POWER
of

AWWE

Moments of wonder do more than take your breath away: They can reduce stress, enhance bonding and improve your health. Find out how easy it is to infuse your everyday life with more experiences that make you go *Whoa!*

by JENNIFER KING LINDLEY



what is awe?



AWE IS THE MIND AND BODY'S REACTION

to being pushed outside of their normal way of looking at the world, according to Michelle Shiota, Ph.D., associate professor of psychology at Arizona State University. "It takes you off autopilot and makes you feel you are in the presence of something bigger than you, but that you are also connected to this bigger thing."

The state is defined by two important elements, says awe researcher Melanie Rudd, Ph.D., assistant professor of marketing at the University of Houston. First, "you feel you have encountered something vast in size, complexity or power," she says—a monumental skyscraper, an enormous school of tropical fish or even a huge celebrity can qualify. Also, the experience must change your perspective in some way. (Ever look down from an airplane window at thousands of twinkling city lights and think, *Hmmm, I guess that misspelling in my e-mail is not that important?*) In nonscientific terms, awe blows your mind.

While many different things elicit awe, we all tend to express it in the same way: with raised eyebrows, widened eyes, a dropped jaw, a sharp intake of breath. Physically, awe seems to curb the fight-or-flight response. "It may calm our bodies and chill us out," says Shiota, perhaps allowing us to pause and take it all in. (In some cases, however, it may inspire excitement and fear, like when you see footage of a tornado's destruction or the Twin Towers crashing down.)

Scientists are still puzzling out why we're wired to experience awe. Meanwhile, they're finding out more about what awe does for us.



BIG BENEFITS of wonder



1

AWE EXPANDS YOUR SENSE OF TIME. Most of us suffer from "time famine," the feeling that we have too much to do and not enough time in which to do it. In one of Rudd's studies, people who viewed awe-inspiring video montages (whales, waterfalls, astronauts in space) felt as if they had more time than those who watched cheery but uninspiring footage of a colorful parade. In fact, those in the awed group reported a greater willingness to volunteer their time to help others. Why the difference? "Awe brings you into the present moment," says Rudd. It makes you feel as if time has stopped: You cease worrying about the future or stewing about events in the past—your brain focuses on the here and now so as to make sense of what you're seeing.

2

AWE CAN BOND YOU TO OTHERS. In a study at the University of California, Berkeley, volunteers spent a minute either gazing up at 200-foot Tasmanian blue gum eucalyptus trees or looking up at an ordinary building. Then an experimenter purposely spilled a boxful of pens. Those who had looked at the trees helped pick up more pens than the building viewers. "Awe shifts your attention away from the self," says lead researcher Paul Piff, Ph.D., now an assistant professor of psychology and social behavior at the University of California, Irvine. "It gives people a broader sense of meaning and purpose in life by connecting them to something larger than they are. As a result, we are more likely to behave generously and less selfishly."

3

AWE MAY MAKE YOU HEALTHIER. Science has long linked chronic inflammation to serious illnesses, including cardiovascular disease, diabetes and depression. Now a new study in the journal *Emotion* suggests that awe may have an anti-inflammatory influence: Those who reported having more experiences of awe in the past month had lower levels of pro-inflammatory cytokines (proteins that promote inflammation in the body) than those who reported having fewer. The connection between awe and inflammation isn't clear, but "one possibility could be that people with chronic levels of inflammation are more likely to withdraw and less likely to want to explore the world, which opens you up to novel experiences," says study author Jennifer Stellar, Ph.D., of the University of Toronto.

ways to get

MORE AWE IN YOUR LIFE

“Our culture is awe-deprived,” says Paul Piff, Ph.D. “We spend more time looking down at our phones than up at the sky.” But once you know how to seek out awe, it’s easy to find more and reap its benefits.

CHASE WHAT INSPIRES YOU. “Awe is not one-size-fits-all,” says Stellar. The subjects in one of her studies describe a range of things that spur awe, from the beauty of nature to admiration of the accomplishments of a blind chef. “Whatever tends to make you feel awe, tap more of that,” she recommends.

ZERO IN ON DETAILS. Look with fresh eyes at ordinary things, says Shiota. “Slow down to examine one flower carefully. Really pay attention and take in all its complexity,” she advises. Try this approach, and the frost on your car’s windshield might amaze you with its lacy symmetry instead of agitating you.

DO SOMETHING NEW. We move through our days such that “one is similar to the next,” says Shiota — same coffee, commute, lunch order. New experiences

increase the chances that we’ll encounter something surprising. So, break routine: For example, instead of eating lunch at your desk, stroll to a scenic vista or sculpture.

TAKE MINI AWE BREAKS. “Squeeze in bursts throughout the day,” says Rudd. Use breath-taking images as a screen saver. Keep a stash of go-to awe items, like a YouTube clip on the cosmos, or follow @homnick, an L.A. photographer who posts an inspiring nature photo daily on Instagram.

TRY BIG STUFF, TOO. The types of experiences that tend to elicit the greatest awe are often dismissed as frivolous: traveling, going to museums, gazing through a telescope. “Such experiences are essential to well-being, so make them a priority and don’t feel guilty,” says Stellar.

SPEND TIME WITH KIDS. “They’re in a state of awe all the time, finding things they’ve never encountered before,” notes Piff. Try studying the mysterious comings and goings at a backyard anthill together, or let them help you cook up something delicious in the kitchen. “Being around kids gets us to question our own understanding of the world,” Piff says.

REFLECT ON PAST MOMENTS OF AWE. One way researchers elicit awe in a lab setting is to ask people to think back on experiences of wonder: the first time they saw their newborn baby, watching a bright comet streak across the night sky, viewing city streets from the peak of a skyscraper. When you’re stressed, recall your own personal moments of amazement and enjoy the bliss.

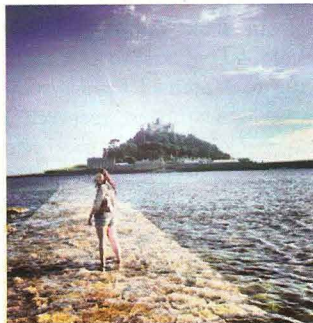
#POWEROFAWE

Inspire others with your miracles by sharing what moves you — *GH* staffers did! Use #powerofawe.



Me with a week’s harvest of squash from my garden. I was awed by how much grew from a few tiny seeds.

— **BEAUTY DIRECTOR**
APRIL FRANZINO



My husband and I were in St. Michael’s Mount in Cornwall, U.K. — at low tide, you can walk a water wall to an island with a castle. It’s the coolest thing I’ve ever done!

— **EDITORIAL ASSISTANT**
CHRISSE KOPACZEWSKI



I asked my daughter, Gemma, how she felt being a big sister to her new baby brother. She jumped up and said, “I love him!” Melted my heart.

— **STYLE DIRECTOR**
LORI BERGAMOTTO