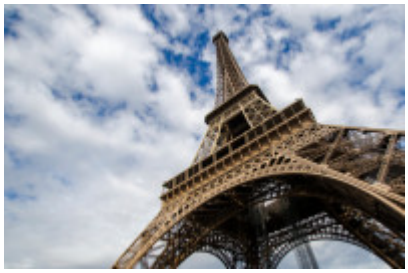
AWE STORY

Difficulty: CASUAL | Frequency: 1X/WEEK | Duration: 10 MINS



WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

It's easy to feel bogged down by daily routines and mundane concerns, stifling our sense of creativity and wonder. Feeling awe can reawaken those feelings of inspiration.

Awe is induced by experiences that challenge and expand our typical way of seeing the world, often because we sense that we're in the presence of something greater than ourselves. Research suggests that experiencing awe improves people's satisfaction with life, makes them feel like they have more time, makes them feel less self-conscious, and reduces their focus on trivial concerns.

But in our everyday lives, we might not regularly encounter things that fill us with awe. That's where this practice comes in. It's a way to experience awe even if you can't make it to an inspiring vista or museum. It involves reading a story that has been shown to induce awe, giving you the chance to infuse even your most mundane days with a dose of wonder.

TIME REQUIRED

10 minutes to read this story. For a regular dose of awe, try to make time to read a story like this at least once per week.

HOW TO DO IT

Set aside at least 10 minutes to read the story below. Of course, reading a story like this is not the only way to elicit awe, and there are many different types of stories that could have this effect. The stories and other stimuli that inspire awe tend to share two key features:

1. They involve a sense of vastness that puts into perspective your own relatively small place in the world. This vastness could be either physical (e.g., a panoramic view from a mountaintop) or psychological (e.g., an exceptionally courageous or heroic act of conscience).
2. They alter the way you understand the world. For instance, they might make your everyday concerns seem less important, or they might expand your beliefs about the reaches of human potential.

Read the story below to experience these dimensions of awe.

> Imagine you're getting ready to go on a trip to Europe. Although you've seen parts of Europe in photos and on television, you know that seeing things in person will be a completely different experience. You're particularly excited to begin the trip in one of the most inspiring capitals of the continent—the magnificent city of Paris.

As soon as you arrive in Paris, you're overwhelmed by the grandeur and beauty of the historic city. The sights, smells, and sounds are like nothing you have ever experienced. Everywhere you look there is something new to capture your imagination. Scanning the view from left to right, you're surrounded by beautiful buildings. Famous museums and churches beckon for you to absorb the stories of their rich past, while centuries-old hotels and city buildings exude majesty and history. As you pass by them, you're amazed by the elaborate architectural designs and the ornate details. Between two of the buildings, you catch a glimpse of the Eiffel tower in the distance. Seeing it for the first time in person, your eyes widen and your senses feel wide awake. Although it looks small from where you are, the incredible height of the tower becomes clear as you walk toward it.

Standing a block from the tower, you're overwhelmed by the sheer size and grandeur of the structure. The intricately woven beams of steel rise high from the ground, and you feel completely dwarfed standing next to it. You look up, but you can't even see the top. The magnitude of the tower is enormous and it feels even more amazing being there in person than you could have ever imagined. The metal beams rising from the ground are larger than the biggest tree trunks you've ever seen. You touch them: As your hands come in contact with the cold metal, you feel the presence of something greater than yourself, not just physically, but in human history. You can't believe that something so tremendous was built by man.

You take the elevator to the top. During the ride you can't help but think back to the first time you saw the Grand Canyon—that moment when everything around you stops as you try to comprehend what's in front of you. Finally, the elevator doors begin to open, and there it is—Paris all around you. As you take in the overwhelming sight, your mouth opens and you catch your breath. The famed City of Lights stretches for miles in all directions around you, yet from this vantage point the hustle and bustle below cease to exist. As your body is enveloped by a strong feeling of wonder, you scan the enormous panorama and try to take in everything that's in front of you. You lose yourself in the beauty of the sight.

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Rudd, M., Vohs, K.D., and Aaker, J. (2012). Awe expands people's perception of time, alters decision making, and enhances well-being. *Psychological Science, 23*(10), 1130-1136.

In three experiments, participants were induced to feel awe—such as by reading the story in this practice—as well as other emotions. People who experienced awe felt that they had more time available to themselves, were less impatient, were more willing to volunteer their time to help others, preferred having positive experiences over material products, and reported greater life satisfaction.

WHY TO TRY IT

Taking time out to experience awe can help people break up their routine and challenge themselves to think in new ways. Evoking feelings of awe may be especially helpful when people are feeling bogged down by day-to-day concerns. Research suggests that awe has a way of lifting people outside of their usual more narrow sense of self and connecting them with something larger and more significant. This sense of broader connectedness and purpose can help relieve negative moods and improve happiness.

SOURCES

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This practice is part of Greater Good in Action, a clearinghouse of the best research-tested methods for increasing happiness, resilience, kindness, and connection, created by the Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley and HopeLab.