AWE VIDEO

Difficulty: CASUAL | Frequency: 1X/MONTH | Duration: 5 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 infuse your day with a dose of wonder even if you can't make it to an inspiring vista or museum.

TIME REQUIRED

Four minutes

HOW TO DO IT

Set aside four minutes to watch the video below. Put the video in full screen mode and try to give it your full attention.

Note that this video is just one example of a visual experience that can elicit awe; there are countless others, and being exposed to them can have similar effects. The videos 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.

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, American university students were induced to feel awe—such as by watching an awe-inspiring video—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.

Who Has Tried the Practice?

While there is no demographic information in the study above, additional studies explore how the Awe Video benefits various groups:

- European university students became more generous after watching an Awe Video, regardless of whether they were Catholic, Muslim, or non-religious.
- Ethnically diverse college students in the U.S. spent five minutes watching an Awe Video, funny video, or emotionally neutral video before playing a partner-based game. Students who watched the Awe Video were the most generous toward their game partner.
- American college students (mostly Latino or Asian) took an intelligence test and waited 10 minutes for their results. During that waiting period, students who watched an Awe Video experienced greater positive emotions and less anxiety than students who watched a neutral video on padlocks.
- American and Chinese undergraduates who spent five minutes watching a nature Awe Video felt a stronger sense of vastness in the world and reported positive changes in their social connectedness. American students saw their social network as more expansive, while Chinese students felt more closely connected with others.
- Chinese undergraduates became more tolerant of unpredictable situations and more likely to engage in thrilling, mentally beneficial activities (such as extreme skiing or waterfall kayaking) after watching an Awe Video.
- Japanese university students who completed this practice felt more awe, became more generous while playing games, and increased in tolerance toward people who violated social norms. A brain imaging study showed that Japanese individuals experienced the two key features of awe (a small sense of self and a change in worldview) when watching an Awe Video.

More research is needed to explore whether, and how, the impact of this practice extends to other groups and cultures.

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.

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