

AWE WALK

Difficulty: **MODERATE** | Frequency: **1X/WEEK** | Duration: **15 MINS**



WHY YOU SHOULD TRY IT

Sometimes it can feel like we're at the center of our own universe, fixated on our personal concerns without much regard for other people. Experiencing awe can jolt us out of this self-focused mindset, stirring feelings of wonder and inspiration by reminding us that we're a part of something larger than ourselves.

Researchers define awe as a response to things that we perceive as vast and that transcend the way we understand the world. Research suggests that experiencing awe not only enhances happiness and physical health but also reduces feelings of entitlement and increases generosity.

Experiencing awe may seem like something that requires travel to distant lands, but there are many opportunities closer to home—we just need to seek them out and notice them. This practice helps you do just that.

TIME REQUIRED

15 minutes

HOW TO DO IT

With the right outlook, awe can be found in almost any environment, turning a mundane experience into a flight of inspiration and wonder. It is most likely to occur in places that have two key features: **physical vastness** and **novelty**. These could include natural settings, like a hiking trail lined with tall trees, or urban settings, like at the top of a skyscraper.

You're more likely to feel awe in a new place, where the sights and sounds are unfamiliar to you. That said, some places never seem to get old.

No matter where you are, the key is to be in the right frame of mind. This practice is designed to help you get there—to turn an ordinary walk into a series of awe-inspiring moments, filled with delightful surprises.

To get started, turn off your cell phone. Cell phones (and other gadgets) can be distracting and draw your attention away from what's happening around you. Even better, don't bring your phone with you at all so that you won't be tempted to check it.

During your walk, try to approach what you see with fresh eyes, imagining that you're seeing it for the first time. Then follow these steps:

1. Take a deep breath in. Count to six as you inhale and six as you exhale. Feel the air move through your nasal passages and hear the sound of your breath. Come back to this breath throughout the walk.
2. As you start to walk, feel your feet on the ground and listen to the surrounding sounds.
3. Shift your awareness now so that you are open to what is around you, to things that are vast, unexpected, things that surprise and delight.
4. Take another deep breath in. Again, count to six as you inhale and six as you exhale.
5. Let your attention be open in exploration for what inspires awe in you. Is it a wide landscape? The small patterns of light and shadow? Let your attention move from the vast to the small.
6. Continue your walk and, every so often, bring your attention back to your breath. Count to six as you inhale and six as you exhale.

Notice—really notice—the multitude of sights, sounds, smells, and other sensations that are dancing through your awareness, usually undetected.

Once you get in the habit of taking walks like this, you may be struck by how frequently you have opportunities to experience awe—they are practically infinite.

As you move through your day, take note of the moments that bring you wonder, that give you goosebumps: These are your opportunities for awe. They may be in city areas, in front of art, listening to music, or connecting with others. Go out and find your awe moments and listen to them carefully; see where they guide you. As they stir humility and wonder, you may discover that they point you toward what you're supposed to do while you're here on Earth.

Here are some more specific ideas for where to take an awe-inspiring walk.

Natural settings:

- A mountain with panoramic views
- A trail lined with tall trees
- The shore of an ocean, lake, river, or waterfall
- A clear night when you can see the stars
- A place where you can watch a sunset or sunrise

Urban settings:

- The top of a skyscraper... or look up in an area dense with tall buildings
- A historic monument
- A part of your city that you've never explored before
- A large ballpark or stadium
- A city art walk and explore different galleries
- Botanical gardens or a zoo to see plants and animal species you've never seen before
- Walk around with no destination in mind and see where it takes you

Indoor settings:

- A planetarium or aquarium
- A historic mansion, cathedral, or opera house
- Walk slowly around a museum, giving your full attention to each piece

For more guidance, check out this 360° guided Awe Walk practice through Muir Woods National Monument with the Greater Good Science Center's Dacher Keltner:

EVIDENCE IT THAT WORKS

Sturm, V. E., Datta, S., Roy, A. R. K., Sible, I. J., Kosik, E. L., Veziris, C. R., Chow, T. E., Morris, N. A., Neuhaus, J., Kramer, J. H., Miller, B. L., Holley, S. R., & Keltner, D. (2020). [Big smile, small self: Awe walks promote prosocial positive emotions in older adults](#). *Emotion*.

Older adults took 15-minute Awe Walks every week for eight weeks. Compared to people who took regular walks, the awe walkers felt more joy, compassion, and appreciation during their walks and felt more compassionate and less distressed in daily life. Selfies they took during their walks indicated that they were happier but also exhibited a smaller self, which is associated with kind and helpful behavior.

Piff, P. K., Dietze, P., Feinberg, M., Stancato, D. M., & Keltner, D. (2015). [Awe, the small self, and prosocial behavior](#). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 108(6), 883-899.

Some people stood in a grove of towering eucalyptus trees and gazed up for one minute; others looked up at a building (not a particularly awe-inspiring one) for a minute. Afterwards, someone working with the researchers “accidentally” spilled a bunch of pens on the ground. Those who had looked at the trees subsequently offered more help (they picked up more pens); they also seemed less inclined to behave in

unethical ways and felt less strongly that they were entitled to preferential treatment.

WHY IT WORKS

Research suggests that awe has a way of lifting people outside of their usual routine and connecting them with something larger and more significant. This sense of broader connectedness and purpose can help relieve negative moods and improve happiness, and it can also make people more generous as they become less focused on themselves. Evoking feelings of awe may be especially helpful when you are feeling bogged down by day-to-day concerns.

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](#).

