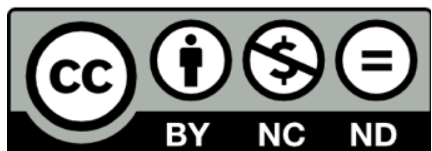


Nurturing Discussions and Practices

Nurture Nature, Yourself and Your Relationships

Rev. Dr. LoraKim Joyner and Gail Koelln



One Earth Conservation, 2019

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All proceeds go to directly to helping the people and the parrots of the world.

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This book is dedicated to all the nurturers and naturers who have been part of our programs over the years, guiding each other into letting the soft animal of our bodies love what they love, and to the other beings who welcome us into the family of living things.

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*Legend: Emotional Intelligence (**EI**), Social Intelligence (**SI**) Multispecies Intelligence (**MI**), Ecological Intelligence (**EcI**), Spiritual Intelligence (**SpI**). Items in bold are emphasized in the guide next to which they appear as such.

Guide #3: Awe and Wonder



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Thanks to Rev. Meredith Garmon and Community Unitarian Universalist Congregation (<http://www.cucwp.org/>) for compiling some of these materials as part of their Journey Group program.

Format for Nurture Nature Community

We speak and listen deeply with our hearts and minds, allowing each to speak without interruptions, questions, or advice (unless solicited). The facilitator will help guide us in this, so we can make the deepest connections possible to ourselves, others, earth, and earth's beings.

Arriving/Warm Up

As you arrive, make a name tag and draw a picture or write a word representing where you have experienced awe or wonder. Share with one another why you drew what you did.

Opening Words

“Those around you are also you – their wonder and beauty is yours, as is the whole world’s. We need to own how awesome is our thinking, feeling, actions, and presence in the world. If we do not wonder at ourselves, we shut down the possibility to marvel and connect with all of life. This takes practice, and for that we gather today.”

– LoraKim Joyner

Check In

Share your name, why you are here today and where you are from. If inclined, share where have you recently experienced wonder. If your group meets for a longer time, and the group is not large, share what’s been happening in your life; How is it with your soul, spirit, mind, body today? (Pause between each sharing for 10 seconds, and have a minute of silence after all sharing.)

Shared Exploration

Review the Main Reading and points that you think are helpful for you and others.

Our Shared Nurture Nature Practice (Discussion and Reflection)

You are invited to share a story from your own life – a relationship you have with another species (flora or fauna) that was wondrous and awesome.

Discuss what these stories and resources in this packet mean to you (to guide reflection – see Reflection Questions)

Our Nurture Nature Practice (embodiment)

Nurturing Wonder and Inner/Outer Wildness with a Walk. Go for a short walk together, sharing with one another what is wondrous and awesome by using the phrases, “Wow, Really, Dude, I’m Good.”

Next Steps

What does your deepening on this theme ask of you to do? Of us together?
Confirm facilitator, location, date/time and subject of next meeting

Check Out

From everything we’ve shared during this time together, what overall message stands out for you?
What gratitude and affirmation would you like someone else to know?

Closing Words

If you really experienced the awe and wonder of this earth...
“What song would come out of your mouth, what prayer, what praises, what sacred offering, what whirling dance, what religion, and what reverential gesture would you make to greet that world, every single day that you were in it?”

– Victoria Safford

MAIN READINGS

Nurturing Wonder

Rev. Dr. LoraKim Joyner

People report having three awe-inspiring experiences a week. How many do you have? Think back on this week – how many times did you drop your jaw or open your eyes in amazement? Do you wish you had more wonder in your life? Whatever you answer, there are reasons to cultivate more wonder.

To understand why we would want more wonder, let's think about why it exists at all. Where did it come from? No one is sure, but it seems that it comes from a long way back. Jane Goodall was observing her chimpanzees in Gombe when she noticed a male chimp gesturing excitedly at a beautiful waterfall. He perched on a nearby rock and gaped at the flowing torrents of water for a good 10 minutes. Goodall and her team saw such responses on

several occasions. She concluded that chimps have a sense of wonder, even speculating about a nascent form of spirituality in our simian cousins.

Wonder helps us connect with that which is good. Wonder, like other emotions, evolved as a motivator to help us move towards satisfaction or benefit, and away from discomfort or harm. It balances with other emotions. A classic example of this how people react to live encounters with a bear in the wild, at least classic for those of us who have lived in Alaska where all life can be distilled down to bear stories or metaphors. Wonder draws us out to the woods in hopes of seeing a bear, and fear makes us keep our distance. Too much fear and we never go out, too much wonder and we are lunch.

Wonder helps us move towards that which is good or might be good for us. We open, we connect, and life's possibilities open before us. Wonder helps us engage with the world to live in ways that integrate the reality that beauty is ever present. And it helps us face the also true, but harsher, reality of harm, illness, death, and disappointment. Without wonder, we risk closing off to life, living shallower lives, experiencing less intimacy and vibrancy. One study showed that if you take teenagers rafting, a week later they report being more engaged and curious about the world. Wonder also lifts depression, and research has demonstrated that after experiencing wonder people have less inflammation in their bodies, as measured in their saliva. It also helps our prosocial behaviors – we become more empathetic, humble, and generous. When we have more empathy, others resonate with us better and we have improved relationships. Our self identity moves from a separate self to being part of a whole, or the whole itself. By merely writing about awe, we become kinder and more compassionate, and this can extend to other species and the biotic community as a whole.

I lead Nurture Nature workshops and retreats where we look out how we have choice in moving towards that which is good for us and others. How can we nurture human nature so that we can nurture all of nature is, I believe, an important question in this time of climate change, loss of biodiversity, and extinction. And two primary aspects of human nature we nurture is wonder and its partner, empathy.

There are many ways to nurture wonder, as Rumi wrote: “Let the beauty we are be what we do, there are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the ground.” Let me suggest four ways that all involve slowing down. An overall methodology is this:

- Notice the small things
- Learn side by side,
- Provide resources for deeper exploration. This means learning the science and mechanics of existence.
- Make connections showing how we all are part of the web of life. Repeat, repeat, repeat this understanding of reality.

To do all of this we need to first slow down. We can then go deeper and deeper into the following four general areas where wonder can be nurtured.

The first area is to wonder out in nature. These are “wow” experiences. For example, I was leading a multigenerational bird tour once in New Mexico with one of our congregations there, and the children were out of their daily routine, and were perhaps a bit hesitant, especially Joey. His mother had a cocaine habit, and he was born addicted to cocaine and had issues with connecting and resonating with others. We had come across a field full of snow geese, bright white in the sun. Suddenly they all took to the air, their wings vibrating in the very depths of our body and ancestral knowing. The children, transformed, came alive with pure joy and connection, especially Joey, who jumped, danced, cried out, and ran to his grandparents to be close to them, to be held, to connect, to share in that wonder together.

Nature is full of unexpected and surprising events that we cannot foresee, and this is good for us. James Austin, a neurologist, encourages us to have nature experiences, because they help integrate our neurological processing and contribute to mindfulness and living in the present moment with attention and gratitude. He particularly suggests looking up, and in his writing he describes an example of what happened to me years ago.

I was out walking in Guatemala studying parrot nests, and my guide was a local Guatemalan. We weren't seeing many birds and so we began to talk. He wanted to tell me of his love of Jesus and Mary, and I put up my guard a little bit, unsure if he was proselytizing and expecting something from me. I was disconnecting and moving away. Then we came up to the forest's edge where the sun was just rising over the tree tops in a shroud of misty fog. Suddenly a loud flock of parrots burst forth from the tree canopy. Before I knew what happened, I was on my knees in the grass, weeping. I had been so startled with awe and beauty, I just fell. Afterwards I was a little embarrassed, but more than anything I had a sudden clarity and connection to humanity and the world. I knew that when people said words like Mary and Jesus, it was like when I said birds and trees. That experience was part of moving towards things spiritual, towards beauty, towards service, and towards an ease around religious differences, for I see the wonder moving beneath it all.

According to Dr. Austin, my experience was not usual. Indeed, in another study he asked students to gaze up at trees, a task shown to evoke awe. The other half (the control group) turned their backs to the trees. Afterwards the researchers approached each group of students with a questionnaire and pretended to trip and drop pens on the ground. The awe-struck group picked up 10% more pens than the control group, and also felt less entitled to receive payment for their participation in the study.

So, looking up is good for us. Look at trees, birds, the moon. Why not take a moment right now to look up at trees? Experiences of wonder in nature are “wow” experiences. As with other emotions, making the facial expressions of wonder and even acting as if you are experiencing it, helps to actually evoke it. Would you say it loudly with me now? **WOW!**

The second area in which to develop wonder is in the ordinary. Nature isn’t just out there, it’s everywhere, and it’s in us. How do we evoke wonder for the ordinary, and move towards the banal and boring? The uncomfortable even? It’s one thing to wonder at the rainbow of colors in our trees this time of year, but how do we do it when the leaves are brown and gone? Or on a train ride, reading headlines of disaster and death? Can’t there be something more to wonder at than the last audacious thing a crazy politician said? Really? It takes practice to cultivate wonder in daily things, and move from saying “really” as an exasperated, disappointed, or bored response to saying with positive amazement “really!” when encountering what at first glance appears mundane. Say it with me, would you? **“REALLY?”**

To grow wonder, slow down and ask this: How did that get to be here? Why is it here? What is it doing and thinking? How is it connected to me and the web of life? Pick something in the room you’re in that is boring. Maybe pick a piece of wooden furniture. How did it get to be here? Woody trees only evolved in the late Devonian period about 360 million years ago. The appearance of trees and forests were one of the triggers for the two major extinction events in the Devonian where over 50% of the world’s genera went extinct. Today there are 3 trillion trees, 400 for every human. There are more of them than us, and they caused terrible drastic climate change and extinction when they first appeared. We’re not so bad, eh?

This leads us to the third area for evoking wonder and to learn about nurturing nature; that is, by seeing wonder in our own kind. If we could tap into the wonder of the miracle of our own existence, not just in babies and geniuses, what might our lives look like to see beauty in all the faces around us, for much of the time? How are we here at all? What are we thinking and feeling? How can we build bridges and go into space? Why is it that we can be kind to others, given all the challenges of life?

From my experience as a minister and conservationist, one of the biggest spiritual challenges I see is for people to see wonder in our own kind. We need to go from being bored or blaming, which can be summed up with a negative attitude of “Dude!” Instead we move to the Dude kind of attitude that is a softer, more positive and grateful “Dude!” Say it with me please and then look at those around you. **“DUDE!”**

Those around you are also you – their wonder and beauty is yours, as is the whole world's. We need to own how awesome is our thinking, feeling, actions, and presence in the world. If we do not wonder at ourselves, we shut down the possibility to marvel and connect with all of life. This takes practice. So, let us practice together. Repeat after me, "***I'M GOOD!***"

Now, let's put it all together: ***WOW! REALLY? DUDE! I'M GOOD!***

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Definitions of Awe

awe (n) c. 1300, *awe*, "fear, terror, great reverence," earlier *aghe*, c. 1200, from a Scandinavian source, such as Old Norse *agi* "fright;" Old High German *agiso* "fright, terror," Gothic *agis* "fear, anguish." From Proto-Indo-European *agh-es* (source also of Greek *akhos* "pain, grief"), from root *agh* "to be depressed, be afraid" (see *ail*). Current sense of "dread mixed with admiration or veneration" is due to biblical use with reference to the Supreme Being. To *stand in awe* (early 15c.) originally was simply to *stand awe*. *Awe-inspiring* is recorded from 1814.

awestruck (adj.) 1630s, "overwhelmed by reverential fear"

awesome (adj.) "profoundly reverential." Meaning "inspiring awe" is from 1670s; weakened colloquial sense of "impressive, very good" is recorded by 1961 and was in vogue from after c. 1980.

awful (adj.) c. 1300, *agheful* "worthy of respect or fear." Weakened sense "very bad" is from 1809; weakened sense of "exceedingly" is by 1818.

Synonyms: wonder, reverence, respect, admiration, dread, fear, esteem, astonishment, stupefaction

Definitions of Wonder

wonder n. something strange and surprising; a cause of surprise, astonishment, or admiration; the emotion excited by what is strange and surprising; a feeling of surprised or puzzled interest, sometimes tinged with admiration. From Old English *wundor*, "marvelous thing, miracle, object of astonishment." In Middle English it came to also mean the emotion associated with such a sight.

wonder v. to think or speculate curiously; to be filled with admiration, amazement, or awe; marvel (often followed by at); to doubt. From Old English *wundrian* “be astonished,” also “admire; make wonderful, magnify.” Sense of “entertain some doubt or curiosity” is late 13c. Synonyms: doubt, reverence, surprise, astonishment, amazement, bewilderment, awe, uncertainty, meditate, ponder, question, marvel, conjecture

“Do Animals Have Spiritual Experiences? Yes, They Do” by Mark Bekoff

So, what can we say about animal spirituality? Of course, much turns on how the word “spiritual” is defined, but for the moment let’s simply consider nonmaterial, intangible, and introspective experiences as spiritual, of the sort that humans have.

Consider waterfall dances, which are a delight to witness. Sometimes a chimpanzee, usually an adult male, will dance at a waterfall with total abandon. Why? The actions are deliberate but obscure. Could it be they are a joyous response to being alive, or even an expression of the chimp’s awe of nature? Where, after all, might human spiritual impulses originate?

Jane Goodall (2005. *Primate spirituality. In The Encyclopedia of Religion and Nature*. edited by B. Taylor. Thoemmes Continuum, New York. Pp. 1303-1306) wonders whether these dances are indicative of religious behavior, precursors of religious ritual. She describes a chimpanzee approaching one of these falls with slightly bristled hair, a sign of heightened arousal. “As he gets closer, and the roar of the falling water gets louder, his pace quickens, his hair becomes fully erect, and upon reaching the stream he may perform a magnificent display close to the foot of the falls. Standing upright, he sways rhythmically from foot to foot, stamping in the shallow, rushing water, picking up and hurling great rocks. Sometimes he climbs up the slender vines that hang down from the trees high above and swings out into the spray of the falling water. This ‘waterfall dance’ may last ten or fifteen minutes.” Chimpanzees also dance at the onset of heavy rains and during violent gusts of wind. Goodall asks, “Is it not possible that these performances are stimulated by feelings akin to wonder and awe? After a waterfall display the performer may sit on a rock, his eyes following the falling water. What is it, this water?”

Goodall wonders, “If the chimpanzee could share his feelings and questions with others, might these wild elemental displays become ritualized into some form of animistic religion? Would they worship the falls, the deluge from the sky, the thunder and lightning — the gods of the elements? So all-powerful; so incomprehensible.”

Goodall admits that she'd love to get into their minds even for a few moments. It would be worth years of research to discover what animals see and feel when they look at the stars. In June 2006, Jane and I visited the Mona Foundation's chimpanzee sanctuary near Girona, Spain. We were told that Marco, one of the rescued chimpanzees, does a dance during thunderstorms during which he looks like he is in a trance. Perhaps numerous animals engage in these rituals, but we haven't been lucky enough to see them. Even if they are rare, they are important to note and to study.

**“Animals Said to Have Spiritual Experiences”
from *Discovery News***

Animals (not just people) likely have spiritual experiences, according to a prominent neurologist who has analyzed the processes of spiritual sensation for over three decades. Research suggests that spiritual experiences originate deep within primitive areas of the human brain -- areas shared by other animals with brain structures like our own. The trick, of course, lies in proving animals' experiences.

“Since only humans are capable of language that can communicate the richness of spiritual experience, it is unlikely we will ever know with certainty what an animal subjectively experiences,” Kevin Nelson, a professor of neurology at the University of Kentucky, told Discovery News.

“Despite this limitation, it is still reasonable to conclude that since the most primitive areas of our brain happen to be the spiritual, then we can expect that animals are also capable of spiritual experiences,” added Nelson, author of the book “The Spiritual Doorway in the Brain.”

**“Two Hearts” from *Leaping: Revelations and Epiphanies*
by Brian Doyle**

Some months ago my wife delivered twin sons one minute apart. The older is Joseph and the younger is Liam. Joseph is dark and Liam is light. Joseph is healthy and Liam is not. Joseph has a whole heart and Liam has half. This means that Liam will have two major surgeries before he is three years old. The first surgery – during which a doctor will slice open my son's chest with a razor, saw his breastbone in half. And reconstruct the flawed plumbing of his heart – is imminent.

I have read many pamphlets about Liam's problem. I have watched many doctors' hands drawing red and blue lines on pieces of white paper. They are trying to show me why

Liam's heart doesn't work properly. Blue lines are for blood that needs oxygen. Red lines are for blood that needs to be pumped out of the heart. I watch the markers in the doctors' hands. Here comes red, there goes blue. The heart is a railroad station where the trains are switched to different tracks. A normal heart switches trains flawlessly two billion times in a life; in an abnormal heart, like Liam's, the trains crash and the station crumbles to dust.

There are many nights just now when I tuck Liam and his wheezing train station under my beard in the blue hours of night and think about his Maker. I would kill the god who sentenced him to such awful pain. I would stab him in the heart like he stabbed my son. I would shove my fury in his face like a fist. But I know in my own broken heart that this same god made my magic boys, shaped their apple faces and coyote eyes, put joy in the eager suck of their mouths. So it is that my hands are not clenched in anger but clasped in confused and merry and bitter prayer.

I talk to God more than I admit. "Why did you break my boy?" I ask.

I gave you that boy, he says, and his lean brown brother, and the elfin daughter you love so.

"But you wrote death on his heart," I say.

I write death on all hearts, he says, just as I write life.

This is where our conversation always ends, and I am left holding the extraordinary awful perfect prayer of my second son, who snores like a seal, who might die tomorrow, who did not die today.

**"Embraced by the Night" from *War Zone Faith:*
An Army Chaplain's Reflections from Afghanistan
by George Tyger**

Darkness falls. I sit outside on a clear night looking up at the vast starlit sky. One more day down. How many more to go?

Above, the dome of the sky rounds gracefully into the dark horizon. Beyond that, mystery and wonder. Some things are too vast to fathom. To attempt to understand them ends only in misunderstanding. Other things are finite. They have a beginning. They have an end. Our time here is one of those comprehensible things. Sometimes it can seem like an eternity, but it is not. It had a beginning. It has an end.

One of the great mistakes is to confuse ultimate mystery with finite reality. We want to understand things, so we bring them down to our level. But some things can only be felt in our souls as awe and wonder.

Human beings have tried to name this Truth. We have tried to capture it in words. The great religious traditions each give us a glimpse of it. But none of these words or glimpses can describe the Holy.

We can hold the finite. We must allow the infinite to hold us. Mistaking the two leads to disappointment when the finite slips from our grasp and we are left reaching for empty air.

For a moment, I look at the stars and long to be home. I long to hold my wife and children in my arms and feel the familiar warmth of their touch. At this moment, even one day more seems too much.

Then I look again. I imagine I am not held captive by the finite days ahead, but embraced by the infinite Truth beyond. I know somehow that the same mystery and wonder that embrace me embrace my family, embrace all. In a real sense, if just for a moment, embraced by God, I am home.

Excerpt from “The Greatest Gift” from *Red Bird*

by Mary Oliver

What is the greatest gift?...

Something else – something else entirely
holds me in thrall.

That you have a life that I wonder about
more than I wonder about my own.

That you have a life – courteous, intelligent –
that I wonder about more than I wonder about my own.

That you have a soul – your own, no one else's –
that I wonder about more than I wonder about my own...

“The Art of the Commonplace”

by Wendell Berry

We have lived by the assumption that what was good for us would be good for the world. And this has been based on the even flimsier assumption that we could know with any certainty what was good even for us. We have fulfilled the danger of this by making our personal pride and greed the standard of our behavior toward the world – to the incalculable disadvantage of the world and every living thing in it. And now, perhaps very close to too late, our great error has become clear. It is not only our own creativity – our own capacity for life – that is stifled by our arrogant assumption; the creation itself is stifled.

We have been wrong. We must change our lives, so that it will be possible to live by the contrary assumption that what is good for the world will be good for us. And that requires that we make the effort to know the world and to learn what is good for it. We must learn to cooperate in its processes, and to yield to its limits. But even more important, we must learn to acknowledge that the creation is full of mystery; we will never entirely understand it. We must abandon arrogance and stand in awe. We must recover the sense of the majesty of creation, and the ability to be worshipful in its presence. For I do not doubt that it is only on the condition of humility and reverence before the world that our species will be able to remain in it.

“The Pleasures and Sorrows of Work”

by Alain de Botton

For thousands of years, it had been nature – and its supposed creator – that had had a monopoly on awe. It had been the icecaps, the deserts, the volcanoes and the glaciers that had given us a sense of finitude and limitation and had elicited a feeling in which fear and respect coagulated into a strangely pleasing feeling of humility, a feeling which the philosophers of the eighteenth century had famously termed the sublime.

But then had come a transformation to which we were still the heirs. Over the course of the nineteenth century, the dominant catalyst for that feeling of the sublime had ceased to be nature. We were now deep in the era of the technological sublime, when awe could most powerfully be invoked not by forests or icebergs but by supercomputers, rockets and particle accelerators. We were now almost exclusively amazed by ourselves.

“What If”

by Victoria Safford

What if there were a universe, a cosmos, that began in shining blackness, out of nothing, out of fire, out of a single, silent breath, and into it came billions and billions of stars, stars beyond imagining, and near one of them a world, a blue-green world so beautiful that learned clergymen could not even speak about it cogently, and brilliant scientists in trying to describe it began to sound like poets, with their physics, with their mathematics, their empirical, impressionistic musing?

What if there were a universe in which a world was born out of a smallish star, and into that world (at some point) flew red-winged blackbirds, and into it swam sperm whales, and into it came crocuses, and wind to lift the tiniest hairs on naked arms in spring when you run out to the mailbox, and into it at some point came onions, out of soil, and came Mount Everest, and also the coyote we've been seeing in the woods about a mile from here, just after sunrise in these mornings when the moon is full? (The very scent of him makes his brother, our dog, insane with fear and joy and ancient inbred memory.) Into that world came animals and elements and plants, and imagination, the mind, and the mind's eye.

If such a universe existed and you noticed it, what would you do? What song would come out of your mouth, what prayer, what praises, what sacred offering, what whirling dance, what religion, and what reverential gesture would you make to greet that world, every single day that you were in it?

Reflection Questions

Don't treat these questions like "homework" or a list that needs to be covered in its entirety. Instead, simply pick the one question that "hooks" you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal of these questions is not to help you analyze what wonder or awe means in the abstract, but to figure out what, if anything, the concept means for you and your daily living. So, which question is calling to you? Which one contains "your work?" You can use these questions for journaling, or to spark conversation with others. For all the readings that are not explicitly multispecies, ask yourself:

- a. How is the author addressing or not addressing a multispecies perspective?*
- b. How would you add to these readings to have them address a multispecies perspective?*
- c. Do the readings have more meaning to you with or without a multispecies perspective?*

1. What is an actual experience of wonder or awe that you have had in nature, or with a being? Can you explain why you had it? What were the lasting experiences of it?
2. Which species or individuals elicit awe and wonder most for you? Why? Which elicit the least? Why?
3. Have you ever noticed another species experiencing awe or wonder, or some sense of spirituality? Do you think that it happens more than you are able to observe?
4. Why do humans and other species experience awe and wonder? Is there a purpose to it, evolutionary speaking?
5. How often do you experience awe or wonder every week? Do you wish for more? Less? If so, what is your plan for accomplishing your goal?
6. For some, a sense of awe can be so overwhelming or intense, it feels like fear. How have you experienced the connections of fear and awe in your life? Can you describe a time that you experienced awe and fear together? Can you imagine such a feeling?
7. Can your moments of fear be transformed into awe?
8. What do pain, anguish, grief, and ailing (all etymologically connected with “awe”) have to do with awe?
9. Do you find awe in the special – or in the ordinary? Is that where you wish you experienced awe?
10. Can awe be cultivated – your proclivity for experiencing it more often or more intensely improved? Or is it out of your control? If it can be cultivated, how?
11. Are you a collector, appreciator, seeker, integrator, or ignorer of moments of awe? Do you seek them out or just notice them when they come along? Do they seem to pass you by? Or when they do cross your path, do they slip through your fingers and evaporate into the air?

12. John Milton writes about “encounters and transcendent moments of awe that change forever how we experience life and the world.” Has this been true for you? Have your moments of awe really “changed forever” how you experience life in the world? If so, how? If not, do you see that as a problem or spiritual challenge?
13. Does noticing awe require the “eyes and mind of a child?” Many religious traditions claim this to be the case. Has this been true for you?
14. Does awe require age? Is innocence or experience the best doorway into awe? How has your relationship to awe changed with time, age, and experience?
15. What’s something you know now about awe that you didn’t know when you were 18 years old?
16. What is the relationship between love and awe? Is it that love gives us access to something larger than ourselves? Poets talk about love as offering us the “promise of forever and eternity.” Is awe a part of your intimate relationships? If not, do you wish it were?
17. When was the last time you were “wholly dissolved?” Is this what awe feels like to you?
18. Does a life without awe count? Do you believe that human beings are in some sense “created for awe?” Do we have a “responsibility to awe?”
19. For you, is it really more about “aww” than “awe?”
20. When you were young, was your sense of wonder encouraged or squashed? How is the legacy of that playing out today? How do you want to change that legacy? Or build on it?
21. Do you take the time to wonder? We make time for what matters. Does your life prove that wonder matters to you? How might you need to be more intentional about making room for wonder?

22. Which wonders are you embarrassed by? Many of us have experiences of wonder we keep secret. We worry our “rational” friends would worry about us if we told them about it. Or judge us. Is this the month you might be able to finally share it out loud?
23. What’s wrong with trying to figure it out? The introduction to this packet talked about wonder and inquiry being two different things. Does that make sense to you? Have the two been more closely related in your life? What’s at stake here?
24. Why have you stopped wondering? You once were a dreamer, but now you talk more about the importance of being realistic and responsible. There was a time when you couldn’t wait to see how things were going to turn out, but now you are fine with how things are. This may not describe you at all. But then again maybe it does. Are you OK with that?
25. Do you believe in miracles? It’s not really more complicated than that. Miracles are the biggest wonders of all. How do you define a miracle? Why is it important to you that others understand what you mean?
26. What takes the wonder out of your holidays and vacations, or formal religious or spiritual events? Do you wish for more during this time?
27. What does a different generation need to know about wonder? Why haven’t you told them yet? What do you wonder about wonder? What question do you wish had been asked on this list? Why does that missing question hook you?
28. As always, if none of the above questions connect with you, identify your own.

Weekly Nurture Nature Practices

A. Share an Ordinary Wonder

What seemingly simple thing sustains your sense of reverence right now? What ordinary object or relationship reminds you of life’s preciousness? What is currently helping you not take things for granted? Or even, what keeps you curious and engaged? Hopefully, this is an

easy question for you. If not, figure out why and use this month to reconnect with the source of ordinary wonder that is surely right under your nose. Journal about this and/or share this with someone else.

Either way your task is straight-forward: bring in an object or story to your group that testifies to our everyday lives as a source of wonder. One more piece: be sure to also share why this wonderful thing sitting in the center of your ordinary life makes everything not feel so ordinary.

B. Who's Been Wonderful Lately?

We say it with a huge smile: “I love it when people surprise me!” The jerk at the office who, out of nowhere, is the one most kind. The nervous and cautious child of yours who unexpectedly turns brave. The self-sacrificing friend who finally stands up for herself. All of them leave us in wonder at what people are capable of – and of what we are capable of.

This assignment challenges you to find at least two “wonder folk” this month – two people who surprise you, two people who remind you why it’s important to never write people off. Journal about this or share this with someone else. If you are feeling courageous, share it with the person who surprised you.

C. Take a Walk Until the World Lights Up

You might want to start early in the morning or in the evening right after dinner. You could also set aside a Saturday afternoon. Whenever you start, your one rule is that you can’t stop until awe has crossed your path. In a sense, this exercise is an act of faith – faith that awe is scattered all over the place waiting for us to notice it, rather than believing that awe is this one rare thing that only shows up a precious few times in our lives.

Other Suggested Practices

D. Read all the excerpts in the background readings and then write your own reflection of what role wonder and awe have in your life. Make a plan for how you can grow your nurturing practice of awe and wonder.

- E. Invite others to attend the next gathering of this group.
- F. Help someone else (human or otherwise) have a wonder or awe experience by joining them in nature or sharing a marvel about another species.

Resources

Multispecies Perspectives

- Mark Bekoff. “Do Animals Have Spiritual Experiences? Yes they do.” <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/animal-emotions/200911/do-animals-have-spiritual-experiences-yes-they-do>
- Jane Goodall. “Primate Spirituality.” <http://www.religionandnature.com/ern/sample/Goodall--PrimateSpirituality.pdf>
- Kevin Nelson. *The Spiritual Doorway in the Brain: A Neurologist's Search for the God Experience*.
- Jennifer Viegas. “Animals Said to Have Spiritual Experiences” *Discovery News*. http://www.nbcnews.com/id/39574733/ns/technology_and_science-science/t/animals-said-have-spiritual-experiences/#.XCP-Hc_Yo8Y
- Wikipedia. “Animal Faith.” https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Animal_faith

Videos

- Neil deGrasse Tyson. *The Most Outstanding Fact*. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9D05ej8u-gU>
- Robert Fuller. TED Talk on *The Emotional Experience of Wonder*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=u3xzUzBp4BE>
- Peter Meyer. *Holy Now*. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KiypaURysz4>
- Mr. Rogers. *Wonderings*. http://pbskids.org/rogers/video_wondering.html
- Camille Seaman. *Photos from a Storm Chaser*. http://www.ted.com/talks/camille_seaman_photos_from_a_storm_chaser.html?utm_source=newsletter_daily&utm_campaign=daily&utm_medium=email&utm_content=im_age_2013-06-21
- Jason Silva. *Shots of Awe*. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Yb-OYmHVchQ>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8QyVZrV3d3o>
<http://www.youtube.com/user/ShotsOfAwe>

- *Everything is amazing and nobody is happy.* http://www.dailymotion.com/video/x8m5d0_everything-is-amazing-and-nobody-i_fun
- *Murmuration.* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRNqhi2ka9k>
- *The Observable Universe.* <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HiN6Ag5-DrU&nomobile=1>
- *We Are All Connected - Symphony of Science.* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2Ky2JQq8lag>
- *What can an atheist possibly celebrate?* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptwEV0xhTzI>

Books

- David Abram. *The Spell of the Sensuous: Perception and Language in a More-Than-Human World.*
- Diane Ackerman. *Dawn Light: Dancing with Cranes and Other Ways to Start the Day.*
- Marc Bekoff. *The Emotional Lives of Animals: A Leading Scientist Explores Animal Joy, Sorrow, and Empathy — and Why They Matter.* New World Library. 2008.
- Marc Bekoff, Pierce, Jessica. *Wild Justice: The Moral Lives of Animals.* University of Chicago Press. 2010.
- Bible. *The Book of Job.* See also, Stephen Mitchell. *The Book of Job.*
- Barbara Brown Taylor. *An Altar in the World.*
- Kelly Buleley. *The Wondering Brain: Thinking about Religion With and Beyond Cognitive Neuroscience.*
- James Carse. *Breakfast at the Victory: The Mysticism of Ordinary Experience.*
- Rachel Carson. *The Sense of Wonder.*
- Richard Dawkins. *Unweaving the Rainbow: Science, Delusion and the Appetite for Wonder.*
- Frans de Wall. *The Age of Empathy: Nature's Lessons for a Kinder Society.* Broadway Books. 2010.
- Frans de Waal. *The Bonobo and the Atheist: In Search of Humanism Among the Primates.* WW Norton Company. 2013.
- Robert C. Fuller. *Wonder: From Emotion to Spirituality.*
- Abraham Joshua Heschel. *I Asked For Wonder: A Spiritual Anthology.*
- Ann Peters. *House Hold: A Memoir of Place.*

- Chet Raymo. *When God Is Gone, Everything Is Holy: The Making of a Religious Naturalist*.
- Scott Russell Sanders. *A Private History of Awe*.
- Carl Safina. *Beyond Words. What Animals Think and Feel*. Picador Paperback. 2016.

Books for Children and Youth

- J. Baskwill. *Somewhere*.
- E. Carle. *Draw Me a Star*.
- Lewis Carroll. *Alice in Wonderland*.
- B. Gardner. *The Look Again...and Again and Again Book*.
- L. Hathor. *The Wonder Thing*.
- R. J. Palacio. *Wonder*.
- Chris Van Allsburg. *The Polar Express*.

Articles

- Julie Parker Amery. “This Little Life of Mine.” <http://www.uuworld.org/2005/03/affirmation.html>
- “The History of Everything, Including You.” <http://hannahhartbeat.blogspot.com/2013/06/a-history-of-everything-including-you.html>

Movies

- *Avatar*, a wonder-filled film about life on another planet and how one person navigates it.
- *Hubble*, follows the camera that chronicles the effort of seven astronauts aboard the Space Shuttle Atlantis to repair the Hubble Space Telescope.
- *It's a Wonderful Life*, the story of a small-town man wondering if his life really matters.
- *The Matrix*, how one person's wonder uncovers a new reality.
- *The Polar Express*, a marvelous tale about belief and wonder and the priceless gifts of Christmas.
- *Wall-E*, a possible look at our society's future and a robot who brings us back to wonder. Great for all ages.



Connecting to One Earth Conservation

This discussion guide is produced by One Earth Conservation (One Earth) as a means to serve you, and hence serve life. We hope it has been nurturing to you and yours. We'd love to hear how these guides nurtured you and how you might use this experience in the future (you can contact us at info@oneearthconservation.org). We plan to produce another edition, and other resources, for the work and joy that is necessary for all of humanity. Would you like to be part of our team? Let us tell you more about One Earth so you can decide.

One Earth Conservation is a U.S.-based 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization seeking to heal human systems that diminish individual worth and separates humans artificially from the rest of nature in many ways. We affirm that people must be healthy and develop multiple intelligences so all of life, individuals, and human and biotic systems can flourish. One Earth's mission is building knowledge, motivation, resilience, and capacity in people, organizations, and communities in the United States and internationally so that they can better cherish and nurture themselves, nature, and other beings. This is achieved by combining work directed outward toward other beings (our conservation work with parrots in the Americas) and outward towards nature with work directed inward toward one's own human nature (our Nurture Nature Program), as outer well-being and inner well-being are inseparable and mutually beneficial. One Earth invites people into a vision and practice of *interbeing*, based on:

1. All individuals of all species have inherent worth and dignity (all bodies are beautiful, have worth, and matter).
2. All individuals of all species are connected to each other in worth, beauty and well-being.
3. We are also connected in harm. There is no beauty without tragedy. What is done to another, is done to all of us.
4. Embracing this reality, humans grow in belonging to this wondrous planet and the life upon it, and so embraced and nurtured, can nurture in return.
5. This reality of interbeing makes us both powerful and vulnerable, therefore, we need each other to grow and to heal as much as possible.
6. Humans are adaptable and can change, both individually and as families, organizations, communities, and societies. We can become more effective and joyful nurturers and "naturers." This is hard, deep, intentional, and a lifetime's work.

To join our team, you can sign up for our e-newsletter, where we report on our work in the world with endangered parrots in the Americas and list upcoming events and activities. We have a Nurture Nature Academy in which you can enroll for a guided exploration of connection to nature and other species. We also enjoy working with volunteers who seek to serve life through One Earth, such as by helping with organizational growth, social media, and conservation. For more information, visit <http://www.oneearthconservation.org>.

Thank you, for being you and for being engaged,
Codirectors LoraKim Joyner and Gail Koelln

The Authors



Rev. LoraKim Joyner, DVM: LoraKim combines her experience as a wildlife veterinarian, Unitarian Universalist minister, and Certified Trainer in Nonviolent Communication to address the importance of both human and nonhuman well being in living a deeply meaningful and vibrant life, as well as caring for self, family, relationships, organizations, and life all around us. She serves as a Community Minister affiliated with the Community Unitarian Universalist Church at White Plains, and Co-Director of One Earth Conservation. As an adjunct professor at the Meadville Lombard Theological School, LoraKim teaches “Multispecies and Ecological Ministry, Theology, and Justice” and “Compassionate Communication.” She is an inspiring speaker, leading workshops and webinars all over the country in Compassionate Communication and Nurturing Nature. With over 30 years of experience working in Latin America, LoraKim currently leads projects in Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Guyana, and Paraguay. You can read about her life and work in her memoir, *Conservation in Time of War*.



Gail Koelln, MS: For as long as she can remember, animals have nurtured Gail through their beauty and wonder, and she loves to care for them. As a child, Gail was inspired by Jane Goodall and wanted to grow up to be a zoologist like her. She earned a Master’s degree in Zoology, but for various reasons left the field. However, over many years Gail volunteered for the Wildlife Conservation Society, NYC Sierra Club, Gotham City Networking (leading their Gotham Green group), and Climate Reality Project. As a grant writing professional for more than 20 years, she has worked with a number of animal welfare, wildlife, and environmental organizations. After Gail met LoraKim in 2014, she finally found her life’s work serving as the Co-Director of One Earth Conservation.