

Wonder

1 What is Wonder?

Jean Wise, excerpt from the blog, Healthy Spirituality

The dictionary states that to wonder is “to think or speculate curiously or to be filled with admiration, amazement, or awe; marvel.” As a noun, it can be “something strange and surprising; a cause of surprise, astonishment, or admiration.”

Psychology Today describes this state as “a complex emotion involving elements of surprise, curiosity, contemplation, and joy. It is perhaps best defined as a heightened state of consciousness and emotion brought about by something singularly beautiful, rare, or unexpected—that is, by a marvel. ‘Marvel’ derives from the Latin *mirabilia* (‘wonderful things’), and ultimately from the Latin *mirus* (‘wonderful’). ‘Admire’ shares the same root as ‘marvel’ and originally meant ‘to wonder at.’”

Anne Lamott describes this concept as something that “takes our breath away and makes room for a new breath. That’s why they call it breathtaking.”

David James Duncan writes “maybe wonder isn’t something we grab, but rather something that grabs us. And once we’re grabbed, we lose the ability to remain unchanged. The capacity to be surprised bleeds into the capacity to be transformed.”

Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat describe this practice as one that “begins in the senses, comes alive in the imagination, and flourishes in adoration of the Divine. It arises from our natural curiosity about the grand adventure of life. It increases our capacity to be a bold inner space tripper and an avid explorer of the physical world.”

2 Pausing to listen to an airplane in the sky, stooping to watch a ladybug on a plant, sitting on a rock to watch the waves crash over the quayside—children have their own agendas and timescales. As they find out more about their world and their place in it; they work hard not to let adults hurry them. We need to hear their voices. **Cathy**

Nutbrown

3 He who . . . can no longer wonder, no longer feel amazement, is as good as dead, a snuffed-out candle. **Albert Einstein**

4 The world is full of magic things, patiently waiting for our senses to grow sharper. **William Butler Yeats**

5 “We Must Abandon Arrogance and Stand in Awe”

Except from **Wendell Berry**, *The Art of the Commonplace: The Agrarian Essays*

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.

6 There are in life a few moments so beautiful, that even words are a sort of profanity. **Diana Palmer**

7 To be alive in this beautiful, self-organizing universe -- to participate in the dance of life with senses to perceive it, lungs that breathe it, organs that draw nourishment from it -- is a wonder beyond words. **Joanna Macy**

8 Look at everything as though you were seeing it either for the first or last time. Then your time on earth will be filled with glory. **Betty Smith**, *Joy in the Morning*

9 When you don't cover up the world with words and labels, a sense of the miraculous returns to your life that was lost a long time ago when humanity, instead of using

thought, became possessed by thought. **Eckhart Tolle**, *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life's Purpose*

10 The walker who marvels while walking (the blue of the rocks in a July evening light, the silvery green of olive leaves at noon, the violet morning hills) has no past, no plans, no experience. He has within him the eternal child. While walking I am but a simple gaze. **Frédéric Gros**, *A Philosophy of Walking*

11 There is an anaesthetic of familiarity, a sedative of ordinariness which dulls the senses and hides the wonder of existence. For those of us not gifted in poetry, it is at least worthwhile from time to time making an effort to shake off the anaesthetic. What is the best way of countering the sluggish habituation brought about by our gradual crawl from babyhood? We can't actually fly to another planet. But we can recapture that sense of having just tumbled out to life on a new world by looking at our own world in unfamiliar ways. **Richard Dawkins**, *Unweaving the Rainbow: Science, Delusion and the Appetite for Wonder*

12 If I had influence with the good fairy who is supposed to preside over the christening of all children I should ask that her gift to each child in the world be a sense of wonder so indestructible that it would last throughout life, as an unfailing antidote against the boredom and disenchantments of later years, the sterile preoccupation with things artificial, the alienation from the sources of our strength. **Rachel Carson**, *The Sense of Wonder*

13 I think us here to wonder, myself. To wonder. To ask. And that in wondering about the big things and asking about the big things, you learn about the little ones, almost by accident. But you never know nothing more about the big things than you start out with. The more I wonder, the more I love. **Alice Walker**, *The Color Purple*

14 I would rather have a mind opened by wonder than one closed by belief. **Gerry Spence**

15 Earth's crammed with heaven, and every common bush afire with God: But only he who sees takes off his shoes. **Elizabeth Barrett Browning**

16 Poem

Whap

goes the morning paper
on the driveway

like the paddle
of a Buddhist water wheel
designed to reveal the sound
of one hand clapping,
the sound of the tree falling
where no one hears.
The news is bad, that's known
without staining the fingers.
The human interest stories,
framed like the Nazarene
to redeem, are sugar-frosted
corn flakes spilled on pages
of official murder. Still,
I want to raise one hand
to clap for the irrepressible
rising sun, I want to stop
the presses
so we can hear
the trees spared from newsprint.

--Donald Levering, *The Unitarian Universalist Poets, A Contemporary American Survey*, Ed. Jennifer Bosveld

For Reflection and Discussion

A Is your sense of wonder flourishing? Why do you think that is? Are you satisfied with your answer or are you feeling the need to make changes?

B Are there people or experiences in life that you associate with your ability to feel wonder? Does the holiday season contribute to your feeling a sense of wonder?

C How does your experience of wonder relate to your spirituality? Is this something you can put into words?

D Would others single you out as a person they would associate with feeling wonder in some way; for instance by recommending outings or passing along recommendations for artistic events or endeavors that caused you to feel wonder?

E Can you use All Souls and "wonder" in a sentence? What comes to mind? Consider every aspect of your experience at All Souls--the sermons, the music, the social justice

work, the communities we form and nourish, the opportunities to take care of one another.

--Mary Beth Hatem, for covenant groups at All Souls Church, Unitarian