

**June Theme**  
***Curiosity: The Practice of Awe***  
*Be curious, not judgmental.*  
~ Walt Whitman

**Introduction**

Curiosity is a mindset that seeks to explore, to learn, to peer inquisitively into the pure nature of things. It's the very spirit of inquiry and we come into the world built for it. Children ponder dust mites in streams of light. They innately engage ALL of their senses when investigating any new object that comes their way. The young are blessed with *shoshin*, the Zen Buddhist term that refers to an attitude of "beginner's mind." Beginner's mind means to bring a stance of seeing what's in front of you as if for the first time. Even if we feel we've lost this somehow, we can rekindle a sense of openness and a lack of preconceptions by encouraging wonder and inviting awe.

While it's true that some of us are more temperamentally wired for wild adventure and others more tenacious in their desire to learn, all of us, no matter our disposition, age or expertise, can cultivate curiosity by intentionally practicing awe. Awe understood here as a feeling of reverential respect mixed with wonder or fear. We gaze at shooting stars in the night sky or the power of a hurricane and experience something vast, hard to describe. Astronauts report a sense of transcendent wonder when looking down at the earth from outer space. Emotions akin to joy arise in awe. We know this in the moments we pause to truly witness the trees in bloom, the variety of sunsets, and new life in all its forms.

And, there are moments that frighten (like being caught in extreme weather), when awe elicits fear, even dread. *Curiously*, before the overused and definition drifting word "awesome" arrived in our lexicon- *awful* was the word that meant *awe inspiring*. This etymological evolution can help us by pointing to an important reality when practicing awe, that uplifting wonder and regard for the forces of nature evoke a variety of emotions. We can be curious about *all* our reactions. Awe, curiosity and their attending feelings are qualities of being human. Through this lens, we see our relation to one another as a collective knowing and a shared mystery within this wide ocean of what it means to be.

Connection between each other and the web of creation is an equally powerful response to experiencing awe. The latest research has shown that feelings of veneration and wonder induce humility and concern for others. "Awe leads to more pro-social tendencies by broadening the individual's perspective to include entities vaster and more powerful than oneself. Awe, although often fleeting, diminishes the emphasis on the individual self, gaining a broader perspective that encourages people to be more compassionate, to improve the welfare of others." This echoes our commitment as a congregation, "to help one another."

Indeed, one of our UU sources of faith includes "direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life." We can practice this at any moment, whether on a walk in the woods or sipping our morning coffee on the back porch, by using our senses, and asking questions, like, "What senses are engaged?" or "What's here?" as we approach the fullness of our experience with curiosity. **You can begin with a daily five-minute contemplation of what's around you in the moment or take an 'awe walk' in your nearest woods or body of local water. See what happens.** And you can always just say, "Wow."

This month's theme was composed by Katherine McHugh and the Worship Associates.

## Questions for discussion and discernment on your own, or with each other:

1. Some of the culprits that stop us from practicing awe are fear (of the unknown, loss of control, etc.), complacency and busyness. Which one (or all) are stopping you? What actions can you take to remedy it?
2. Can you think back to experiences from your life, recent or distant past, when you experienced a sense of awe? Write them down.
3. What are you most curious about right now? See if you can make time to learn and explore whatever that might be.
4. Judging is inherent AND learned. Are your judgments about people, places and things serving you or getting in the way? Begin to notice this tendency, being curious about it.
5. How might bringing beginner's mind to a current situation invite a new perspective?
6. Where do you often go to experience a sense of wonder and reverence?
7. How does awe lead to curiosity? How does curiosity lead to awe?

## Quotes and Short Readings

Awe is the beginning of wisdom. Awe is the beginning of education. ~*Matthew Fox*

Stop acting so small, you are the universe in ecstatic motion. ~*Rumi*

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. ~*Albert Einstein*

All the great religions have a place for awe, for ecstatic transport at the wonder and beauty of creation." ~*Richard Dawkins*

The world is full of magic things, patiently waiting for our senses to grow sharper. ~*W.B. Yeats*

He who learns must suffer. And even in our sleep pain that cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart, and in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom to us by the **awful grace of God**. ~*Aeschylus*

For more on this month's theme go to: <http://uuac.org/worship/themes-for-spiritual-practice/>

The Worship Associates are Matt Andrus, Jeff Brown, Jen Ryan Brown, Alexandra Businger (chair), Alan Cantor, Erin Collier, Jess Jonas, Katherine McHugh, and Gary Strichartz.

How is it that hardly any major religion has looked at science and concluded, “This is better than we thought! The Universe is much bigger than our prophets said, grander, more subtle, more elegant?” Instead they say, “No, no, no! My god is a little god, and I want him to stay that way.” A religion, old or new, that stressed the magnificence of the Universe as revealed by modern science might be able to draw forth reserves of reverence and awe hardly tapped by the conventional faiths. ~*Carl Sagan*

Thinking is difficult, that is why most people judge. ~*Carl Jung*

I’m so curious about knowing the unknown; it can be scary, but I see it as a game. ~*H. Roshan*

I think, at a child’s birth, if a mother could ask a fairy godmother to endow it with the most useful gift, that gift would be curiosity. ~*Eleanor Roosevelt*

Look up at the stars and not down at your feet. Try to make sense of what you see and wonder about what makes the universe exist. Be curious. ~*Stephen Hawking*

Curiosity is the very basis of education and if you tell me that curiosity killed the cat, I say only the cat died nobly. ~*Arnold Edinborough*

I have not yet lost a feeling of wonder, and of delight, that this delicate motion should reside in all the things around us, revealing itself only to him who looks for it. I remember, in the winter of our first experiments, looking on snow with new eyes. There the snow lay around my doorstep — great heaps of protons quietly processing in the earth's magnetic field. To see the world for a moment as something rich and strange is the private reward of many a discovery. ~*Edward M. Purcell*

“Because philosophy arises from awe, a philosopher is bound in his way to be a lover of myths and poetic fables. Poets and philosophers are alike in being big with wonder.” ~*Thomas Aquinas*

Millions saw the apple fall, but Newton asked why. ~*Bernard Baruch*

Satisfaction of one’s curiosity is one of the greatest sources of happiness in life. ~*Linus Pauling*

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The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing. ~*Albert Einstein*

The cure for boredom is curiosity. There is no cure for curiosity. ~*Dorothy Parker*

When you're curious, you find lots of interesting things to do. ~*Walt Disney*

Curiosity, engagement, and awareness bring growth. On the other hand, resistance, or thinking you know, only perpetuates your way of being, your patterns. It's up to you. ~*Segyo Rinpoche*

The experience of God expands the possibilities for our lives and increases the feeling of mystery and curiosity about the world. ~*Rabbi Alan Lurie*

Are you feeling the infinite mystery of existence, so that your last moment would be one of awe and gratitude? ~*David Deida*

**Greater Good in Action:** Take an Awe walk, [ggia.berkeley.edu](http://ggia.berkeley.edu): Scroll down to discover new practices: Awe: Awe walk, Awe video, Noticing nature, Awe narrative, Awe story.

[https://www.mindful.org/awe-brings-people-together/?utm\\_content=buffer597f8&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_source=facebook.com&utm\\_campaign=buffer](https://www.mindful.org/awe-brings-people-together/?utm_content=buffer597f8&utm_medium=social&utm_source=facebook.com&utm_campaign=buffer)

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