



USG SGM – Awe – December 2019

*Drawn from Soul Matters materials,
see the full December packet for more of all of these elements*

Intro

The path of awe seems well worn. It's a journey intended to bring us down to size. Pictures of our galaxy with a note that there are 100 billion more just like it. Videos of deep-sea creatures with bioluminescent bodies. Images of the northern lights that are utterly otherworldly. All of them remind us that the universe is more vast than we can imagine.

As physicists tell us, contemplation of the vast universe doesn't make them feel smaller, it makes them realize the larger story of which they are a part. We are stardust, as they say. From the vastness we came and to it we will return again. In other words, to be a people of awe is not so much about feeling small; it's about feeling connected.

And not just connected to the stars, but also to each other. Awe reduces our size in order to make room for something more than our personal needs, wants and worries. With our narcissism shrunk down to a reasonable proportion, it becomes possible to notice that we are not the only ones up there on the stage. It's in this way that looking up into the cosmos allows us to look across at each other.

Spiritual Exercise: Collect Awe Stories

One way to get more awe into our lives is to borrow it from others. So this month, dive into some vicarious awe. Here's your assignment: collect five stories of awe. Anyone is fair game. Friends. Life Partners. Parents. Siblings. Neighbors. Co-workers. Even strangers! Take them out for coffee or just ask if they have 5 minutes. Sure, you'll be nervous. It's a peculiar thing to ask people about. But trust us, everybody's got a great awe story, and everybody is secretly dying to share it! Before you come to your group, spend a bit of time comparing and contrasting the stories. Which of those similarities or key differences spoke to you? Where was the gift (or challenge) in that for you?

Spiritual Exercise: An Hour of Stillness

Often the easiest way to encounter awe is just to sit still. And December offers so many perfect moments to sit back and soak in awe. Put on a jacket and sit on your stoop and watch the snow fall for an hour. Go to the park and sit on a bench watching the neighborhood kids sled down the giant hill, like you used to decades ago. Take an hour to look up at the stars while your favorite classical album plays in your earphones. Take a seat in the corner of the holiday gathering and just watch the emotional energy ping pong back and forth. The aim is to sit back and still long enough to watch some piece of life unfold before you. In its unfolding, awe inevitably shows its face.

Chalice Lighting

The other world is this world rightly seen. *Nisargadatta Maharaj*

Check-in *Share briefly what's been on your mind lately, or your highs and lows since we last met. We give each other the gift of listening without asking questions or offering advice to allow people the safety to share what's in their hearts.*

Quotes for Inspiration/Readings

On the way to the play, we stopped to look at the stars. I felt in awe. And then I felt even deeper in awe at this capacity we have to be in awe about something. Then I became even more awestruck at the thought that I was, in some small way, a part of that which I was in awe about. *Lily Tomlin*

Don't let the world become familiar — don't forget the sheer strangeness of being alive. Don't forget the sheer strangeness of being here on the surface of this spinning globe. Don't forget the sheer strangeness of being this body that breathes and blinks and heals and grows a miracle of precision and complexity. *Steve Taylor*

One way to open your eyes is to ask yourself, “What if I knew I would never see it again?” *Rachel Carson*

Here dies another day/During which I have had eyes, ears, hands/And the great world round me;/ And with tomorrow begins another. /Why am I allowed two? *G.K. Chesterton*

Let me keep my mind on what matters, which is my work, which is mostly standing still and learning to be astonished. *Mary Oliver*

Questions *Pick the one question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The goal is to figure out what being part a part of a people of awe means for you day today.*

Has age impeded or assisted awe for you?

How has the location of awe changed for you over time? Has it shifted from the stars to the woods? From the birth of planets to the birth of a child? From the physical feats your body allows to the storied wrinkles of your hand? What now leaves you most in awe when you look at it?

Have you ever turned to the stars for support? Comfort? Escape? Connection?

Do you most often complain about your body or stand in awe of it?

Have you ever sat in the middle of nature and it suddenly came to life? What gift did that experience leave you with?

Is it possible that awe is where God is found?

Sitting in Silence *Take a few moments to sit quietly and reflect upon your thoughts*

Sharing/Deep Listening *Respond with your thoughts and experience with the topic. We create a safe space by listening deeply and not responding. When sharing, connect with what is true for you. When listening, give the speaker your full attention rather than thinking about what you will share.*

Reflection *This is a time to respond briefly to something another person said or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared.*

Singing *What a Wonderful World* <https://www.youtube.com/watch?reload=9&v=wOp8s3pYgQM>

Extinguishing the Chalice *Wonder takes our breath away, and makes room for new breath. That's why they call it breathtaking. Anne Lamott*