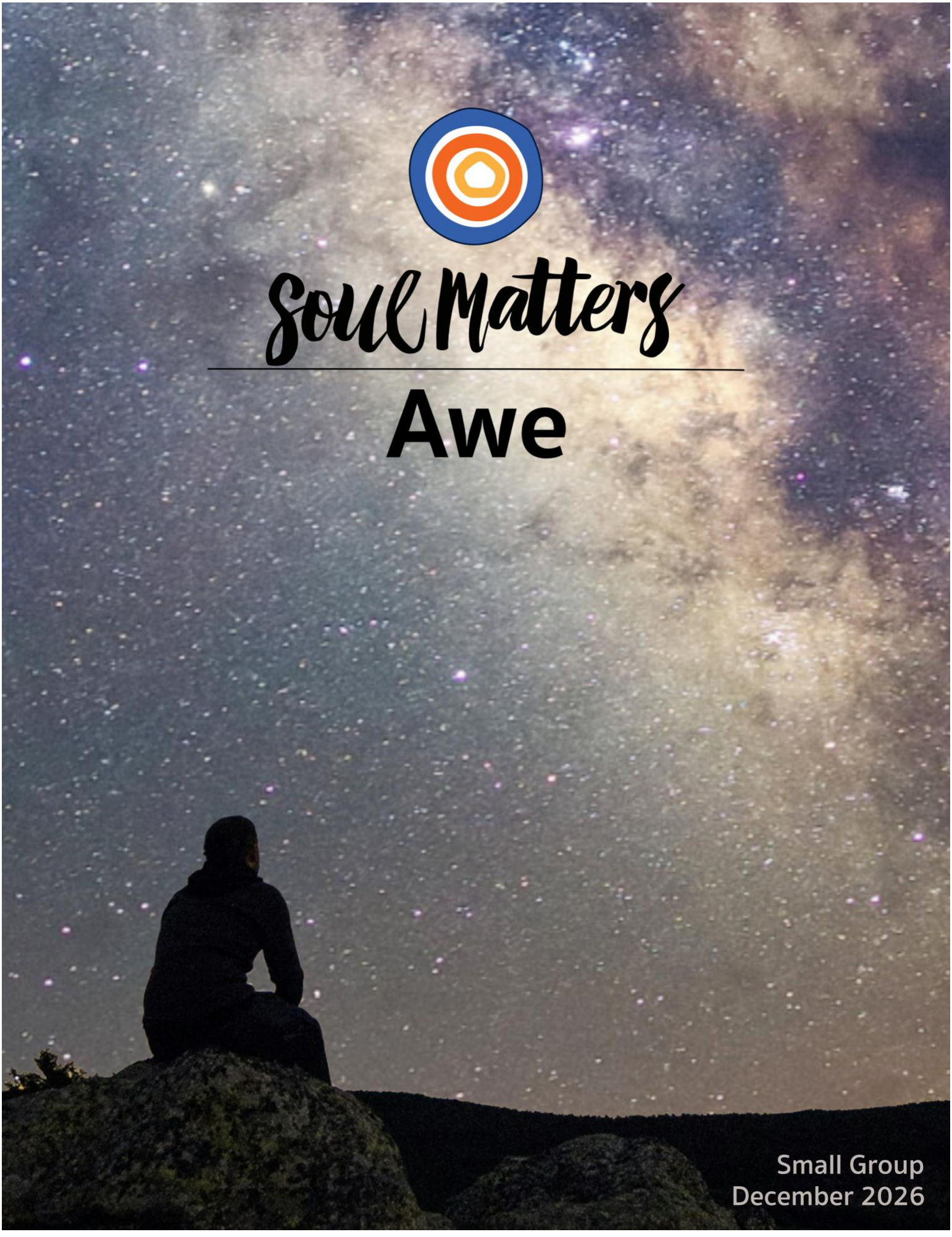

Soul Matters
Awe
Small Group
December 2026

# Welcome to Awe

*The world presents itself in two ways to me: The world as a thing I own, and the world as a mystery I face… Forfeit your sense of awe, let your conceit diminish your ability to revere, and the universe becomes a marketplace for you.*
*- Abraham Joshua Heschel*

We met awe in the stars.
Our parent pointed upward
and whispered, "Look! Quick!"
And we watched as that point of radiant light
raced across the sea of black,
as if it was telling the other celestial beings,
"Catch me if you can!"
We spent the rest of the night looking up at them,
while also sure that they, in their aliveness,
were looking down at us.

After that we got older.
Adult enough for those anxious thoughts and self-deprecating voices to sink their claws in deep.
Awe came along and said, "Let me help you."
And so it lured us to bigger things:
The grandness of canyons.
The ethereal elegance of northern lights.
The terrifying beauty of lightning storms.
Awe used the size of it all to shrink our worries
and quiet that chorus of cruel self-doubt.
Who knew bigness could be so kind?

Then awe asked us to return the favor.
To return the kindness we'd been given.
So it brought us face to face with a deer,
caused us to lose ourselves in a field of fireflies,
had the night ocean rock us into nothingness.
With this, awe removed our skin,
leaving no barrier between us and the world.
It made us part of these larger things,
so we would take care of them.

And maybe that's where awe has left off,
still stuck in its efforts to make us kind,
because it knows something has been lost.
What did the rabbi say?
"Forfeit your sense of awe,
and the universe becomes a marketplace for you."
Maybe that is what awe is trying to whisper to us
every way it can, constantly and quietly pleading,
"Don't let your conceit diminish your ability to revere."

And so now, when we are bowled over by beauty,
or feel our heart swell at the sight of grandeur,
what if we see it as awe calling us to start over?
To go back to the time when the world wasn't a thing to own, but a mystery that drops to our knees and a holy presence we can't help but protect?

And what if alongside all that,
awe is still trying to protect and help us?
Because it sees how we've become
part of that marketplace too,
no longer treated with reverence
by those puffed up with power
and made giant by their billions.

That is to say, what if awe's work is now about
waking us up to what worth really is,
so much so that we won't allow the marketplace to continue to rule?

What if, back then, awe *did* want us to catch it,
so we could take it down from the stars
to locate it in each other
and this world?

# Spiritual Exercises

It's one thing to analyze a theme; it's quite another to experience it. By pulling us out of the space of *thinking* and into the space of *doing*, our spiritual exercises invite us to figure out not just what we have to say about life, but also what life has to say *to us*!

With that in mind, pick and complete the one exercise that speaks to you the most. **Come to your group ready to share why you picked the exercise you did, how it surprised you and what gift it gave you.**

## Option A
## *Which Companion Piece Speaks to You?*

Sometimes we come across a quote, song, article or movie and it perfectly captures what's going on for us right now or allows us to view our current circumstances in a new light.

With this in mind, spend some time this month going through the Companion Pieces section below to find the one piece **that speaks most powerfully to you. (Or "shimmers" most strongly for you.**)

Come to your group ready to share the piece you picked, why it called to you and what insight, memory, or message of comfort or challenge it offered you.

## Option B
## *Take an Awe Walk*

Awe is often associated with grand scale marvels, like the Grand Canyon, ancient pyramids or expansive sight in the sky like the northern lights. So it would seem that the benefits of awe might be out of reach for most of us much of the time. And yet more and more researchers agree that tapping into awe is more a matter of attention than scale. Which is why these researchers regularly promote *awe walks*. So this month, give them a try.

There is no one right way to do this. Your walk can be in a familiar place or somewhere brand new. It can happen in nature or in the middle of a city. Do it once or do it daily for a week. Keep it general or structure the walk by focusing on sounds, then colors, then the new, then the curious. The point is not to seek out the extra-ordinary but to notice the ordinary in a new way.

Here are some resources to help you on your way:

- Turn Your Daily Walk Into an Awe Walk: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cB-4FDRVbSk
- Awe Walks: How To Start: https://www.diygenius.com/awe-walks/
- Try going from small to vast: https://www.facebook.com/reel/1719257952786302
- Awe walks as medicine: https://wisdomschool.com/p/awe-is-the-cheapest-medicine-weve

# Option C
## *An Advent Calendar of Awe*

Whether we were raised Christian or not, many of us remember Advent calendars from our childhood. They are simple cardboard containers decorated to look like a December calendar, with each day on that calendar designed with a small door that, when peeled back, would reveal a magical new gift, usually a chocolate. Getting that chocolate treat would transform our entire day! As kids, we couldn't wait to open that day's surprise.

While chocolate is good, what if there was an Advent calendar filled with daily gifts *of awe*? If the science of awe is right, this would also transform our days!

So, this month, we've put together a type of *Advent Calendar of Awe*! Instead of cardboard cut outs for each day, we've assembled a playlist of 35 online awe videos, enough for you to watch one or two every day of the month!

As you engage in this daily practice, be sure to bring our practice of disciplined listening to each video, asking yourself after you are done watching: "How might this video be trying to offer me a message of comfort or challenge or trying to reconnect me with an important memory?"

Here's the link to the YouTube playlist that contains all 35 of the videos:

**https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLf4HdfhZwPdE&si=be0BNLGnZrhgY-ht**

The goal is to see if these daily "treats" really change your days. We bet they do!

# Option D
## *What Shimmers for You?*

As Soul Matters small group participants, we are used to listening *to each other* with our practice of disciplined listening. This exercise invites us to apply our disciplined listening to a conversation of two people *outside our group*.

The *Turning Towards Life* podcast is a clear cousin to Soul Matters. Each week, the two hosts pick a poem and take turns sharing how the poem spoke to them - very much like how we take turns listening to each other talk about how the questions or spiritual exercises spoke to us.

One of their podcasts focuses on a portion of the poem, Astonishment. It leads to a beautiful conversation about choosing astonishment and awe, even when the human story seems to be rushing toward conflict and collapse.

For your spiritual exercise, you are invited to listen to this conversation and identify for what part of the conversation shimmers for you and how those shimmering words might be offering you a message of comfort, a message of challenge, or reconnection to an important or forgotten memory.

Here's the link to the podcast conversation: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ycrjS1HWM94

Come to your group ready to share the gift that the podcast offered you.

# Option E
## *Ask Them About Awe*

One of the best ways to explore our monthly themes is to have conversations about them with people who are close to you. It's also a great way to deepen our relationships!

Below is a list of questions to guide your conversation. Be sure to let your conversation partner know in advance that this won't be a typical conversation. Telling them a bit about Soul Matters will help set the stage. *Remember to also answer the questions yourself as they are meant to support a conversation, not just a time of quizzing them.*

Come to your group ready to share what surprised you about the conversation and what gift or insight it gave you. As always, keep a lookout for how your inner voice is trying to send you a message of comfort or challenge through these conversions with others.

### Awe Questions

- What was your earliest memory of being in awe?
- If you could go back and re-experience a moment of awe, which one would it be? Did it change you in some way?
- It's said that awe makes us feel small in a good way. Has that ever been true for you?
- Awe often shifts as we age: from the stars to the woods, or from the birth of planets to the birth of your child, or from the extraordinary to the so-called ordinary. How has the location of awe changed for you as you've aged? And how has that shift caused or been accompanied by a shift in your spiritual and/or emotional life?
- If a small child asked you to explain awe to them, what would you say? And what part of your answer do *you* need to remember more often or hold more tightly?
- Have you ever been awestruck by an ordinary and everyday household item?
- Have you ever found God in awe?
- Do you find it easy or hard to be in awe of yourself?

# *Finding Your Question*

*This list of questions is an aid for deep reflection. How you answer them is often less important than the journey they take you on.*

*So, read through the list of questions 2-3 times until **one question** sticks out for you and captures your attention, or as some faith traditions say, until one of the questions "shimmers." Or as we like to say, "Read over them until one of the questions **picks you**."*

*Then reflect on that question using one or all of these questions:*

- *What is going on in my life right now that makes this question so pronounced for me?*
- *What might my inner wisdom be trying to say to me through this question?*
- *How might this question be trying to wake me up or get me to realize something through this question?*
- *How might Life or my inner wisdom be trying to offer me a word of comfort or challenge through this question?*



1. If you could go back and re-experience a moment of awe, which one would it be? Did that awe moment change you in any way? What message of comfort or challenge might that memory hold for your life today?

2. It's said that awe makes us feel small in a good way. How might your life benefit from a little "right-sizing"?

3. Awe often shifts as we age: from the stars to the woods, or from the birth of planets to the birth of your child, or from the extraordinary to the so-called ordinary. How has the location of awe changed for you as you've aged? And how has that shift caused or been accompanied by a shift in your spiritual and/or emotional life?

4. Philosophers argue that habit is the enemy of awe. Which of your habits have become an enemy?

5. If a small child asked you to explain awe to them, what would you say? And what part of your answer do you need to remember more often or hold more tightly?

6. Yes, awe shrinks our problems down to size. But what if it wants to also shrink our judgements and harsh expectations? Could it be that awe is trying to get you to go easier on yourself? Or others?

7. Some say awe is trying to help us notice and peel back the veils that keep us from seeing the world, others and ourselves as they truly are? Is it possible that you have a blinding veil that needs torn away?

8. When was the last time you stood in awe of your life partner?

9. When was the last time you stood in awe of your child?

10. Is it time to step back and stand in awe of yourself?

11. **What's your question?** Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to find it.

# *Companion Pieces*

### *Recommended Resources for Personal Exploration & Reflection*

*The following resources are not required reading. Nor are they intended to be analyzed in your group. Instead, they are here to companion you on your personal journey this month, get you thinking and open you up to new ways of embodying this month's theme in your living and loving.*

## *Word Roots & Definitions*

The expression "awe" is rooted in the Greek word "achos", which also gives us the word ache. So, the experience of awe opens an ache in our hearts and thereby expands them with a desire to hold on to the change in perspective, the expansion of understanding that we are given by such experiences."
*Rev. Chris Jimmerson*

## *Wise Words*

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

Certainty has never made me pull over because the sunset looked like God dropped a jar of peach jam across the whole midwestern sky…
No. It has always been awe. Awe was the first church. Before steeples. Before committees…
Awe was there, with its wild hair and muddy feet,
Saying: Look. Look again. Look until looking becomes love…
*Matt Moberg*

The world presents itself in two ways to me: The world as a thing I own, and the world as a mystery I face… Forfeit your sense of awe, let your conceit diminish your ability to revere, and the universe becomes a marketplace for you.
*Abraham Joshua Heschel*

Stay away from anything that obscures the place it is in. There are no unsacred places; there are only sacred places and desecrated places.
*Wendell Berry*

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*

Surely the Lord is in this place — and I did not know it. How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven.
*The Book of Genesis*

Awe is not a lens through which to see the world but our sole path to seeing. Any other lens is not a lens but a veil. And I've come to believe that our beholding—seeing the veils of this world peeled back again and again, if only for a moment—is no small form of salvation.
*Cole Arthur Riley*

To sense that behind anything that can be experienced there is a something that our mind cannot grasp and whose beauty and sublimity reaches us only indirectly and as a feeble reflection, this is religiousness. In this sense, I am a devoutly religious person.
*Albert Einstein*

Don't let the world become familiar…
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…
Don't forget the sheer strangeness of this world of form where matter pulses with consciousness.
It's a strangeness even stranger because it's not hostile or indifferent, but right and reassuring, somehow warm and welcoming.
*Steve Taylor*

The banal world of our habits, the dulled sense of life, the smug calmness of our conscience, our good taste and common sense, our little happy egotism, all this is disturbed and overwhelmed by the monstrosities of the sublime.
*Victor Hugo*

What you encounter, recognize or discover depends to a large degree on the quality of your approach… When we approach with reverence, great things decide to approach us. When we walk on the earth with reverence, beauty will decide to trust us. The rushed heart and arrogant mind lack the gentleness and patience to enter that embrace.
*John O'Donohue*

You sing your song in your own key, in your own beautiful voice, and the cosmos listens, reverently.
*Rev. Victoria Safford*

Don't you realize that sitting around here in this room with our ordinary everyday faces and clothes, we are sitting smack in the middle of the beatific vision and that this is infinity and eternity precisely. This is God.
*Alan Watts*

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

The opposite of life is not death. The opposite of life is habit… Lifeless are they who drift through on dead patterns instead of giving the omnipresent Holiness its due reverence. The alive ones…
They do not think: they wonder.
They do not watch: they marvel…
They do not wait: they worship.
Awe was never meant to be exceptional… The alive ones know this… The mundane does not exist for them…
*Caitlin Johnstone*

At the end of all things, the blessed will say,
"We never lived anywhere but in heaven."
*C. S. Lewis*

When it's over, I want to say: all my life I was a bride married to amazement. I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.
*Mary Oliver*

## *Videos & Podcasts*

**On The Awe-Inspiring Luck Of Being Alive**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y4Q1BGVKqAE

**We Were Cooked Inside Stars! What More Do You Want?!**
https://www.instagram.com/reels/DWqE2JYjFJK/

**Welcome To This Strangely Beautiful World!**
https://www.facebook.com/reel/1027804746259403

**What If *We* Are On Every Miracle's Bucket List?**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SgampVX-JiE

**In Awe of a Life Without Language**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_C3NpYvVH9Y

**When You Seek The Magic, It Reveals Itself**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Odp6cClYjBI

**Want Awe? Check Inside?**
https://www.youtube.com/shorts/ykxxtOHvRTE

**What Awe Does For Us And Enables Us To Do**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7YKR7Gn21ok

**How to Find Awe in The World's Beauty**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4G0tq0mLC30

**Consciousness is a Mystery**
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dymZLlyhH6Y

## *Articles*

**Who Benefits From a Disenchanted World?**
*Relik Notes*
https://docs.google.com/document/d/1fdjbposVRv-LlwZrucHoSW0KEbYvw1b8-k0rqpT2uXw/edit?usp=sharing

**Awe Isn't a Luxury. It's Maintenance.**
*Thom Hartmann*
https://wisdomschool.com/p/awe-isnt-a-luxury-its-maintenance

**The Gift of Feeling Small**
*Dr. Vivek Murthy*
https://vivekmurthy.substack.com/p/the-gift-of-feeling-small

## *Books*

**Awe: The New Science of Everyday Wonder and How It Can Transform Your Life**
*Dacher Keltner*

**The Radiance**
*Ayad Akhtar*

**The Hidden Life of Trees**
*Peter Wohlleben*

**A World Appears: A Journey into Consciousness**
*Michael Pollan*

**The Law of the Sublime**
*Robert Greene*

## *Movies*

Nine Days
The 'Up' Series
The Diving Bell and the Butterfly
My Octopus Teacher
All That Breathes
Silent Friend
Psychedelia
Skyscraper

## *Music*

*Our thematic playlists - on Spotify and YouTube - are organized as a journey, so consider listening from beginning to end and using them as a personal musical meditation.*

Click here for the **Spotify playlist** on Awe
Click here for the **YouTube playlist** on Awe

Special instrumental playlist on awe, "***The Sound of Awe***," on Spotify here and on YouTube here.

### More Monthly Inspiration from Soul Matters!

Our Facebook Inspiration Page: https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/
Our Instagram Page: Find us as "soul_matters_circle"

**Packet Introduction Credit Note**: Unless explicitly noted otherwise, the introductions of these packets are written by our Team Lead, Rev. Scott Tayler. Rev. Scott gives permission for his pieces to be used in any way that is helpful, including in newsletters, worship and online service/recordings.

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