

## An Invitation: Practicing Wonder by Dawna Markova

I invite you to sit with me under the wide umbrella of the old fig tree that was planted behind this house before we were born. All around us life is breaking open: the orange trees are covered in white buds, which, softened by yesterday's rain, will release the rapturous scent that always reminds me of new beginnings and weddings. It is a perfect time to visit.

I want to remind you of a way of thinking and offer you the gift of a practice. Both have helped me travel across the tumultuous terrain of learning to live the life I love and love the life I am living.

I am asking you to reclaim what may have become a dusty and numb habit and transform it into a practice of breaking open into a new aliveness. There's no time for small talk or even medium talk. Instead, let's have an experience of what is involved in opening our minds in wonder. I invite you to read the next paragraph, then pause for a moment and try this practice for yourself.

### Step 1

Fold your hands in your lap the way you've been doing since you were a child •the way you did when you were taught to "pay attention."

### Step 2

Bring your attention to your hands and notice how you folded them. Is the right thumb folded over the left, or vice versa?

### Step 3

Unfold your hands.

### Step 4

Refold your hands in the opposite, nonhabitual way (if right was over left, then place left over right, etc.).

### Step 5

Go back and forth between the habitual way and the nonhabitual way while asking: Which way feels the most awkward? Which way feels the most secure? Which way feels the most

alive?

The first time I did this, I was amazed to discover that the habitual way felt so secure that I barely noticed my hands were there. They were numb to me. The nonhabitual way was much more awkward but also more alive. In and of itself, that has been a major lesson: in order to feel more alive, I need to allow myself to feel a little awkward. Even more important was what I noticed in step three •the uncertainty that exists after unfolding my hands and letting go of the comfort of habit and before refolding them into the new possibility. Step three is the place where wonder can grow.

Wonder is how we open “the hand of thought.” It can lift our minds out of the mud of rational resignation and open them into wild relational cartwheels of insight. Wonder is the place where prejudices fall away and our capacity to notice life increases. You have known how to do it since you were a child.

A warning though: As your mind opens and your thinking begins to diverge into possibilities, you may experience what is commonly called “confusion.” When you were young, you didn’t mind confusion any more than you cared if your tummy stuck out a little after eating too much. But many of us were shamed when we were confused.

Do you remember a moment long ago, perhaps before you went to school, when you were trying to figure something out, but your mind got stuck and you gave up? Perhaps you began to hum or whistle, trace patterns in the dirt, or doodle “mindlessly” on a piece of paper, forgetting about everything, or so it seemed, until pop! •understanding came. That pop was a flash of insight •a breaking through after breaking down •that occurs when a tiny portion of your brain lights up like a shooting star across a dark sky.

You and I are hard-wired to enter the unknown and transform chaos into ingenious possibilities. It is our birthright. And it is as simple as flying a kite. You don’t have to know anything or be anything. Here are a few questions to help you throw the kite of your mind up into the wind. Choose one and let the string out into a daydream:

What if everyone who came before you, everyone who ever prayed for you, everyone who ever loved you, everyone who hoped that someday there would be one such as you •what if they were all behind you now? What if they could feel and hear and see the world through you in this moment?

If Life made a promise to the world the moment you were born, what would it be?

What happens when you imagine you are sitting still, holding a challenge you are currently facing in one of your hands, and all of your life’s wisdom in the other, as they learn to open and dance together?

I invite you to remember that you’ve drifted into this way of imagining possibilities your whole life. Wonder is a pilgrimage toward what is most original and shining in you.