

Fabiana Fondevila: The Many Flavors of Wonder by Awakin Call Editors

Fabiana Fondevila is an Argentinian writer, speaker, teacher, and all-around wonder activist. She began her career as a journalist and war correspondent, working for the main outlets in her native country. Returning to spiritual questions, she then spent years interviewing some of the world's top thinkers, mystics, scientists and philosophers in search of a map. And then, life transpired: her older sister took her own life after a lifetime of mental illness, and Fabiana's parents died shortly before and after, undone by the pain. This led Fabiana deeper into the path. But this time, no books or schools or lineages seemed potent enough to shine a light in the darkness. By chance, she stumbled upon weeds in her garden that steered her to a treasure trove of ancient plant wisdom. Weeds led to trees, trees to birds, birds to clouds, and through this muddy, verdant trail she found her way back to herself.

What follows are 'nuggets' culled from an Awakin Call interview with Fabiana, moderated by Kerri Lake and hosted by Audrey Lin. You can watch or listen to the recording of the full interview [here](#).

Kerri Lake: I wanted to open with a quote by Mary Oliver, who I know is like a spiritual mother to you, and I feel much the same. This quote is so apt, related to your work and your book. Mary Oliver offers instructions for life: "Pay attention, be astonished, and tell about it."

When you and I connected, I shared a childhood experience of mine that brought me to a state of wonder and connection, where I realized that even -- and this applies for every human -- that even if all I did was sit on a swing and notice what's beautiful in the world, that the uniqueness of one person's awareness actually changes the world. The uniqueness of one person's wonder changes the world.

Fabiana Fondevila: When people ask me, or my students ask me about transformative experiences or what originated, I always sort of go to this place of, "I can't really say when it started, I think it's always been with me, and it's actualized every day. And it's really not something that I need to look for. It happens, it's there, and it's receiving it that really matters to me."

As I described in my book (*Where Wonder Lives*) in the introduction, my parents bought a piece of land when I was about eight years old, and it was a piece of land in the middle of nowhere. They never actually got around to building a house -- we never had the money to build a house on it, but we went there every weekend just to run around and to imagine that someday we could have a house there and live there. It was a very wild place. Much wilder than I had ever seen as a city child, and the feelings, the felt sense of being there, the grass that sometimes was up to our noses when we got there because we had nobody caring for it, and running around and feeling the eucalyptus, and the smell of the earth

and the wild plants that of course I couldn't recognize back then, all of that combined opened up a door for me to the sacred. I didn't call it the sacred back then, but it was definitely a transformative feeling. A feeling of being alive in a way I hadn't been before when I was going to school or watching television.

As a former journalist], I strayed a bit from journalistic norms and beat the journalistic rule book because I could never be objective about anything, as hard as I tried! There was a lot of me in my writing, not because I spoke in the first person or anything like that, but even when I was covering a war, as I mentioned, really I was interested in the small human dramas -- that were not small but important -- but not the kind of dramas and stories that were necessarily in newspaper headlines, but the sidelines of what was happening politically or on the war front. And that's what I wrote about. Of course I reported the news as well -- because that's what I was really interested in.

So to me, it's not been such a separate path because I do think that when you write, who you are comes across, no matter how much you try to hide it. So even though I had to stick to a certain standard, sometimes I would stray from that, and there would be a lot of emotion in my stories, and I allowed myself that, because it felt more genuine to me.

I think I was giving myself permission to wonder into these territories that included such things as looking at a pigeon making her nest on my window sill, and considering that the most important thing I could do that day, and just finding out, which was the male and which was the female?, what was going to happen to those eggs? and those kinds of concerns, so many of them really took centre stage in my life for a long time, for many years. And I suppose I felt a little guilty about leaving behind more worldly affairs. So I was giving myself permission and encouragement to explore these areas of life.

But today I say that perhaps I wouldn't even use the word naïve because I think there is a little bit of a critical element in the word naïve. I think I would say, Dare To Be Innocent, because after that time, I had been taking a lot of time studying archetypes, and there is an archetype which is innocence, and naïveté -- I think it's called in English -- is kind of one of the shadow sides or aspects of innocence. Innocence is not really a denial of reality or looking away, but simply looking at life with fresh eyes and with an open heart and with wonder, basically. So that's now the lens that I mostly use to look at everything and I don't consider it naïve. I consider it just a different vantage point.

Awe and wonder are the same emotion, but with a slightly different twist, because wonder is only connected to positive emotion and awe is the same emotion, but with negative -- or not "negative", but scarier thoughts associated with it. So to describe what wonder and awe and astonishment are, they are the emotion that arises in one in the face of something so vast and so powerful and so transcendent and so unexpected that it makes one rethink what you're looking at, because you can't comprehend it. You can't quite take it in on one side.

The first reaction, which is what happens to our breath, to me seems very telling. You know, when you see a night sky, a very majestic night sky or a mountain or a storm or sunset -- I'm naming all the natural phenomena, but it doesn't only have to be nature, it could also be a piece of music or art, or a very supremely kind act, anything that you consider, that you feel is so huge and encompassing that you can't take it in -- what you do instinctively is you hold your breath for a moment, right? We go [inhales audibly] and you sort of hold your breath. And that gives us a bit of a clue as to what's happening. And here I'm citing, I'm quoting

researchers, very respected -- people that I respect a lot and whose work I've been reading for years, Dacher Keltner and Lani Shiota, and other awe researchers -- they've found that what awe does when you experience it is it submerges you in the present. For that time, however long it lasts, there's no past, there's no future. You're not worried about anything. You're not remembering anything. You're there completely at one with what is happening. So this suspension of breath seems to me first of all -- and maybe this is just symbolic or an intuition of mine, I haven't read that anywhere -- but it's as if you want to make room for it and there's not enough room for it in your chest so you take in this big gulp of air -- which is also related to the word "inspiration," and that's no small association -- and then you hold it for a moment as everything stands still.

And at the same time, the other important thing that happens in moments of awe is that not only are you completely present, but also you are in the presence of something that is vast. And that gives you a sense of humility and of being smaller or insignificant, but at the same time, you don't feel disconnected from what you're seeing, you feel part of it. So what you're really feeling is you are a part of this unending, infinite marvel that is the world that is life. And that causes an expansion and a subversion of our normal ways of thinking that actually leaves us transformed.

The fascinating findings of the research are that it's not something you just feel. It really does happen that after a moment of awe, just to briefly cite one of the many experiments they've done, when they put people just looking at a large tree, a tall tree from underneath, and then other people are looking at just buildings, the people that are looking at the tree after they had those few moments of wonder, they answered questions that they had answered before, and the second time they say things like: they are more satisfied with their lives; they feel they have more time, which is interesting because time is a factor in awe; and they're more willing to donate their time because they feel more connected to humanity and to the more-than-human world. So this is all unconscious, of course -- we're not thinking about this as it happens -- but this does happen. Because what really happens when we are in the presence of awe is that we are in the presence of mystery, and mystery becomes undeniable. It's something that when seeing it and you're feeling it, you can't unsee it.

So what I think this emotion is about, which I consider one of the most spiritual emotions, is it's a window into the mystery. And when we allow ourselves to live it fully, and to become it, in a way, and for as long as we can to embody it, then we become what Joseph Campbell called, "transparent to transcendence," which I think is one of the pathways into the sacred that at least I am more in love with. You become transparent because you're erased for that moment and all you are is your connection to everything. So the heart is not the same after you experience a moment like that. And we all have experiences and moments like this, because we all look up at the sky, we all see sunsets, we all see flowers, we all see our children. But we're not always open to the experience in such a way that we allow it to transform us.

If after that moment you go back to your life and you completely let go of the experience, and you don't hold it in your heart, and you don't let it do something to you, then it's not such a transformative experience. It's just a nice high that you had at that moment and it doesn't really leave anything changed. So my purpose with this book is to invite us all, myself included -- because I want to remind myself of that everyday -- to dwell in the presence of the sacred, of the everyday sacred. And I think wonder is one of the doorways into that presence.

Michael Pollan said actually weeds do have some specific qualities that other plants, that domesticated or garden plants don't have. One of the things that they share in common that sets them apart from garden plants is their strength and vitality and vigor. That they can survive almost anything. That they've traveled with man and women, with "mankind" I meant, around the world. That they've been our main food source for generations and generations, and our main medicine. And all of this has been forgotten for many reasons that I won't go into here, but what our great grandparents knew, we no longer know. .. And when I realized, as you said, I started looking them up and finding where they originally came from and what witches did with them at some point or another, and the many medicinal qualities and nutritional qualities, and the many things that you could do with them, I was fascinated. There was no return from that trip! It's still a fascination to me every single day.

But mostly it was about being with the plants outside. Just the fact that we get to eat them, to me -- and the way I go about it, because I do take the time to ask permission and to give gratitude to them, symbolically -- the fact that you can eat them is a form of communion. It is an exciting thing for me that not only can I look at them and sit with them and breathe with them, but that I can take them into myself, is for some reason a very moving part of the experience.

I used to think that birds were random creatures that were never the same, that were just passing by, and it was never the same animals. Then I realized by studying that birds are territorial animals. So, they really do not move away too far. (I think it was like about 20 meters around). Once they find a place where there is food and water and shelter, they tend to stick around. They are your neighbors; they are your birds. You are their neighbors. Once I found that out, that was absolutely captivating to me because they are no longer random. Now I can know them by name or name them if I want, as Mary Oliver has done in one of her beautiful poems.

Once you start finding out, you want to know more -- if you are a curious person -- you want to know where do they sleep? They do not sleep in their nests, like I used to think. Nests are only for the fledglings and the baby birds, the chicks. The nests have a purpose, but then they also have habitats. So how they go to sleep and what places they look for, and the rhythm to their day. There is the 'dawn chorus,' which is their most elaborate song, and there are questions about why that is, which are fascinating in themselves. Then there is the morning time when they feed on the ground and you can hear different kinds of sounds. Then there is a lull in the afternoon. The second most ornate song is in the evening, at dusk just before they go to sleep. Sometimes they will sing in one place to deter predators and then move quickly and sleep somewhere else. So, birds are an endless topic of discussion of conversation for me.

Once, I had the pleasure and luxury and grace of meeting Brother David Steindl-Rast, the author of so many beautiful books on gratitude. I would now call him a friend, I love him dearly. Once we were talking about this many years ago, and he said, well, spirituality is the territory, and then religions are the different maps. You may not have maps, but you have the territory, which is the important thing. That was such an illuminating distinction for me. So I think the territory was there, but I did need maybe not a map, but I needed some actions. That is where ritual comes about and that is why it has such an important place in religions. The mystical understanding or the mystical insight or experience that gave birth to each of these religions had to be translated into actions. Actions that would usher forth these feelings and place them out in the world and give them a place and a significance in language.

So ritual is a natural way of connecting. I would say it's a symbolic way of connecting the invisible world to the visible world. It involves the body and involves gestures and the physical world, but really it is always talking about something that is not visible, that is not of the visible nature. Rather it is speaking of deep and profound insights that we need to bring out into the world. Joseph Campbell said that ritual was the enactment of myth. So if myth is a way of looking at the world -- myth is like a different station, but I can briefly mention it here. If myths are these stories that we tell ourselves to understand what life is about and to guide ourselves through life -- to give us a path and directions on how to have a good life, to have meaningful relationships, to face difficulties, to face death -- if all of that is encrypted in these stories, these ancient stories called myths, then rituals are the way that these stories were brought out into the world. We embody them.

We do not have overarching myths today, because we are living in a mythless time, or at least the myths we have are not universal anymore. And some of them are not very nutritious and fertile and illuminating. But we do have personal myths. We all have stories that we tell ourselves about what's important. I think ritual is a way to bring that into our lives in a more concrete way, and to share with our communities. Ritual is profoundly communal in its roots and its essence. It doesn't mean we can't have solitary ritual, but the most important and effective rituals usually involve the community.

I think ritual is available to all of us. It's a human need, it seems to be a human need to communicate the spiritual in embodied form. And I think we can all fall back on our instinctive creative spirituality to bring forth rituals that are meaningful to us. Because sometimes inherited rituals have lost that spark of significance. They have to be moving, too, for the person that is involved in it. They have to be meaningful. They have to speak to a person's heart.

Sample Ritual that Fabiana Does in Her Garden Each Morning

I begin by stroking an aromatic plant, to get a whiff of its loveliness, and thus connect immediately to my senses. Then I breathe into the moment and what the moment is asking for and what is the yearning in my heart at this moment. If you can do this standing bare feet on the ground it is even better, but anywhere works. And then I just like to raise my hands, resting them on my forehead.

And I look up at the sky, with eyes closed. And I give thanks to the infinite, to the transcendent, to the visions and the light that we all receive by pure grace, whatever we might call this infinity that lives in me and through me. I invite it in and I just give thanks for it, for its presence in my life and for its guidance.

And then I bring my hands down to my belly and I lower my head towards the ground. I give thanks to the earth, to its rootedness, to our rootedness. I give thanks for its support, for its nutrition, for its inspiration and to my body with its emotions, with its feelings, with everything that is earthly in me, everything that is nature in me.

And finally I bring my hands to my heart and I give thanks for this heart that is a connection and a bridge between these two worlds -- such a strange and mysterious and wondrous path between the transcendent and the immanent -- what is beyond us and what is within us, and the fact that we can be of this world, in this world, and in love with this world and every moment.

And then I give thanks for the ritual itself, before I return to my day.

The idea of joining and beginning the day with gratitude is already one of the more powerful rituals I think we can partake in, and we can give ourselves to. Especially if we can give thanks to the different dimensions of life and how they meet in us -- that to me has been powerful.

But what I'd like to say is that ritual is beyond time and space. It's beyond time and space because the heart is beyond time and space. It knows nothing about time and space -- and maybe it's all space. Maybe that's the way of saying it's infinite space. So of course we would like to be with our loved ones and we would like to be able to go through the rituals that each tradition and each religion specifies for such moments, but I think we can find some solace and some comfort in knowing that you don't need to be in a specific place to do a specific ritual in order to grieve or to say goodbye to your loved ones.

You can do it from the place you're sitting. You can do it talking to a tree or to a bird, or making an offering to the land, or cooking something for anybody else and giving it out to a person, to a homeless person, to a person you love, in that person's name. And that is all that person needs to receive your message or for your heart to feel it has honoured that passing. So, let's be free in our ways of approaching this because new times call for new measures and new ways of approaching ritual. But we can rest assured that the deep roots of ritual are wide enough and deep enough to encompass any situation.

People held rituals in concentration camps, they sent their songs, they had no props, they had no candles. They had only the things they carried around, the verses in their minds and that was enough. There's a small story, short story, I'll try to tell it briefly, in my book. It's an old Jewish tale about a village, somewhere, where there's a Jewish community and they always go out to the forest, into the forest, to a certain tree and they perform a certain ritual when they have hard times, when there's hunger. And then there's a big, there are many deaths in the community due to some kind of a natural disaster, and many people died, and so the next generation goes out into the woods, but they can't find the tree, they can't remember which tree it was. They just remembered there was a certain tree where the elders used to go. So they find any tree and they sing the songs and they perform the ritual the best they can remember. And then there's another wave of catastrophe and another generation is gone, and the youngsters go out into the woods and all they remember, all they know is that the elders used to go out into the woods and do something. That's all they know. So they go out into the woods and they do something and that is enough.

So what I'd like to say is when the heart is there, when there's an intention to honour, then the body finds a way. The community finds a way, we really don't need scripts for this, it's beyond scripts. And the scripts were also created by people living the same emotions and the same losses or celebrations. So, in that sense, we're all drinking from the same well. So just be confident and do what your heart tells you to do, and the ritual will be performed and it'll be the perfect ritual.

Kerri: I wanted to comment on something that you just said that really touches my heart Fabiana, and that is the comment about the bread and that we make it every day. I know a lot of people are wondering, where is the love, and looking for other people to demonstrate the kindness and the love. But what you just said reminds me that we are generators of love, and ritual is something that facilitates us to connect with that part of

us and watch ourselves generate and express the love that we are.

Fabiana: Of course, and one of the best rituals I know -- maybe it's my Jewish roots, I'm part Jewish -- but it's sending food. I mean sending food is something we can even do now. Or if it's not possible to send bread or to send something that's meaningful to you or to that person, maybe you can just send them a recipe or something, but we connect through the embodied a lot. And some of the most important thing -- I think I mentioned it somewhere, in maybe one of those stories that you quoted -- that at that time that was so difficult and dark in my life when my sister died, that very day, this person that we didn't even know very well, because he was a friend of a friend, I don't know how he ended up there that day in that moment, and he brought for us this tea that he had made from lemons from his garden, from a tree in his garden. And the lemons were there. The tea had pieces of lemon in it. I remember it as if it was now, I can taste those lemons because really it was the taste of kindness. It was the taste of somebody that cared, that wanted to shine a tiny little light in a very dark time. And he did, and it stayed with me all these years, even though we never saw each other again.

So really such small, tiny gestures can have such an enormous impact. And maybe the simpler they are, the bigger the impact or more heartfelt they are, and the less elaborate, the more genuine and touching they are. So really I think it's a question of keeping it small and keeping it real, but looking for that gesture. Because sometimes out of fear, we think, well, who am I to do this? I certainly went through that, I have no religious background of any kind, I don't know any ritual. So it took me a while to give myself permission to just trust that the source lives in me, as much as it did in all the wonderful creators of the different religious paths and traditions, and to seek out my own language, my own ritual language and trust that that would be enough if it was real.

Listener Question: Do you believe we can teach people to be more in awe?

Fabiana: when you're an adult, almost everything you've already seen a hundred times and done a hundred times. So the true challenge is to recover it. Some authors call it a second innocence, to recover that sense of innocence that does not have to do with lack of experience or lack of knowing, but with an open heart, with the willingness to look again, to look again at every moment with fresh eyes. And this is something that we can all do every day that I think we should all do, if I may, because it connects us to life in a very vivid way, and it brings so many gifts. And anyway, circling back to the question, I think the best way to transmit and to radiate awe is just to live it as much as you can every day.

Fabiana: Something that I've also been thinking about, from an archetypal point of view -- I don't want to make it too complicated -- but archetypes are these energies and impulses, constellations of energies and images and impulses that live in us and through us. For example, the nurturing instinct, the mother instinct, the lover, the seeker, the sage, the hero, these are different archetypes that form part of our myths. And I was thinking lately that there are two archetypes that perhaps need to meet halfway in us, in all of us. And I was thinking, what could be the new archetype that maybe in some way could help bring them together? And these two archetypes are two basic energies that I think most of us share. One is the energy of being and embracing what is, and embracing your life, enjoying what you are and accepting what your life is. And that's the archetypal energy of the lover. The lover is not looking to change the person they love. They're there to love that person and to love nature and to be with what is. And then there's this other energy, which we could call the seeker, but also the hero,

there are other nuances, which is all about creating what is new, with going after something that is not here already. What is the better way to do this? What is the new frontier that we need to conquer? And we need to bring those two energies together because we need to be, and we need to do, and we need to do that almost daily.

So I was thinking that perhaps an archetype that comes to my mind or my heart, maybe just because I love to dance, is the dancer. I was thinking that the dancer is the idea of fusing, through the power of music and the power of movement, as in a positive feedback loop or an infinity loop, the different aspects of ourselves that are also reflected in our relations to others. Because this other person speaking something that is so completely opposite to me might have something that I haven't seen. And that doesn't mean that I have to leave my thoughts behind and go completely and embrace their own thoughts. But maybe if I can ask myself, What can I learn from this person that is least like me, that is most triggering to me?, that question makes room, it opens up some room so that I can maybe perhaps listen to something that I'm resistant to.

And that would be the role of the dancer, to bring me there and back. I come back to myself, I come back to what I cherish and know and want to put forth into the world. And then I sort of saunter or dance my way to other shores and find what is there and how can I incorporate some of their wisdom into mine and bring some of my wisdom into theirs? I think there's a lot of integration that we need to do between light and dark, between such heavy and difficult times and painful times such as we are living and that capacity to manifest joy, even in such times.

The Jews have this wonderful ritual, talking about rituals, in New Year's -- Rosh Hashanah, which is they dip green apples, which are kind of sour, in honey and they eat that. And that is a way of reminding themselves of the two polarities always being together. Life is always sweet and it's always bitter or sour. And when it's being sweet, it's good to remember that there will be times of sourness or bitterness ahead. And when things are bitter and sour and dark, it's good to remember that there's also joy. I think again, for the final time, Campbell said it best. He's my spiritual father. If Mary Oliver is my spiritual mother, definitely he's my spiritual father. He said, "Life is at the same time monstrous and miraculous, and we need to embrace both aspects, but in the center of it, there is a sweetness." And I think that sweetness is love.

When we can tap into that sweetness, then we can bear with the darkness and the light, with the monstrosities of the world and the miracles of the world, without needing to cut one out in order to embody and enjoy the other. We can't, even if we wanted to, we can't decide that life will be only the light. So, to understand that all opposites are complementary to each other, and that we need the dark to be able to see the light in the first place. At least it's what I'm working on in my life. Every time I go to one side too much, I try to bring myself back and I think that's part of our journey today, we should be exploring.