

Just One Thing: Be Amazed by Rick Hanson

Rick Hanson reminds us to see existence with delight, awe, gratitude, and wow!

We are pleased to bring you another installment of Rick Hanson's Just One Thing (JOT) newsletter, which each week offers a simple practice designed to bring you more joy, more fulfilling relationships, and more peace of mind and heart.

Last night, stressing about undone tasks, I glanced in a mirror and saw my T-shirt, with its picture of a galaxy and a little sign sticking up out of its outer swirls, saying "You are here."

A joke gift from my wife, I've worn this shirt many times—yet for once it stopped me in my tracks. In William Blake's phrase, the doors of perception popped open and it really hit me: Yes we are actually here, off to the edge of a vast floating whirlpool of stars, alive and conscious, walking and talking on a big rock circling a bigger burning ball of gas. Here, now, nearly fourteen billion years after the cosmos emerged out of nothing. What the?!

My mind stopped yapping and I felt the delight and awe of a little kid who for the first time sees a butterfly, or tastes ice cream, or realizes that the stars above are really far away. Gratitude and wow and something edging into dare I say it sacred washed through me.

In a word, I was amazed—which means "filled with wonder and surprise," even "overwhelmed with wonder."

Besides the simple happiness in this experience, it lifted me above the tangled pressures and worries I was stuck to like a bug on flypaper. Amazement is instant stress relief. It also opens the heart: I couldn't any longer be even a little exasperated with my wife. Perhaps most deeply, being amazed brings you into the truth of things, into relationship with the inherent mysteries and overwhelming gifts of existence, scaled from the molecular machinery of life to the love and forgiveness in human hearts to the dark matter that glues the universe together.

Wow. Really. Wow.

How?

Opportunities for amazement are all around us. I think back to that look in the eyes of our son and daughter as they were born, blinking in the light of the room, surprised by all the shapes and colors, entering a whole new world. Seen with the eyes of a child, the simplest thing is amazing: a blade of grass, being licked by a puppy, the taste of cinnamon, riding piggyback on your daddy, or the fact that running your eyes over lines of black squiggles fills your mind with tales of dragons and heroes and fairy godmothers.

Look around you. This morning I sat down to my computer, clicked a mouse, and chanting recorded in a Russian cathedral filled the room. Crazy! Imagine being a Stone Age person transported 50,000 years forward into your chair. Glass windows, pencils, flat wood, the smell of coffee, woven cloth, a metal spoon... it would all be amazing.

Try to see more of your world in this way, as if you are seeing it for the first time, perhaps through the eyes of a child if not a caveman. Beginner's mind, zen mind. If you're not amazed, you're not paying attention.

Explore "don't know mind"—not "duh" mind, but an openness that doesn't immediately slot things into boxes, that allows a freshness and curiosity. The mind categorizes and labels things to help us survive. Fine enough, but underneath this skim of meaning laid over the boiled milk of reality, we don't truly know what anything is. We use words like "atoms" and "quarks" and "photons," but no one knows what a quark or photon actually is.

We don't know what love actually is, either, but it is all around us. It's amazing to me that people love me, amazing that people forgive each other, that those once at war with each other can eventually live in peace. Consider people you know, how they keep going when they're tired, breathe through pain, get up yet again to walk a crying baby, settle down in the middle of an argument and admit fault and move on. To me, that a mother can embrace the young man who murdered her son is more amazing than an exploding supernova. And just as others are amazing to you, you are also amazing to them.

If we were brave enough to be more often filled with wonder and surprise, we would treat ourselves and others and our fragile world more gently.