



EUDAEMONIA **Wonder, with Fabiana Fondevila**

May 19, 2021

Kim Forrester 0:00

In Zen Buddhism, the concept of Beginner's Mind asks us to remove all expectations and preconceptions, and see the world with completely fresh eyes. Imagine how life could be if we lived with that level of curiosity, awe, and amazement. I'm Kim Forrester, you're listening to the Eudaemonia podcast and today we're going to discuss the breathtaking beauty of wonder.

Intro 0:30

Welcome to Eudaemonia, the podcast that is all about flourishing. Plug in, relax and get ready for the goodness as we explore the traits and practices that can help you thrive in life ... with your host Kim Forrester.

Kim Forrester 0:49

Fabiana Fondevila is a writer, speaker, ritual maker, and teacher helping individuals bring forth their best selves with wonder and enthusiasm. Fabiana is the author of several books in both Spanish and English, including her newly released English title, "Where Wonder Lives - Practices for cultivating the sacred in your daily life". It's a delight to be connecting with Fabiana today to discuss the power of amazement and awe, and to learn how a sense of wonder can help us flourish in life. Fabiana Fondevila it is just wonderful to have you here with me on the Eudaemonia podcast. Thank you for gifting your time today.

Fabiana Fondevila 1:34

Oh, it's my pleasure to be here. Thank you so much for inviting me.

Kim Forrester 1:37

Fabiana, I do imagine that our lives could be so much more inspiring, so much more joyful, if we would tap into this concept of wonder in our daily lives. Let me start with this question. How would you describe an experience of wonder? Is it a thought? Is it a feeling? Or is it more of a way of being?

Fabiana Fondevila 2:04

That's a wonderful question, I would say it's all of those and more. But mainly for me, it comes up as a feeling. And it comes up very spontaneously. I do think some people for some reason are more awe- or wonder-prone, and seem to stumble on it all the time. But even if that's not the case, and what I propose in my book is that we can court awe and wonder. We can cultivate it, we can look for it, we can create it. So we don't need to wait for it to be spontaneous. But again, coming back to your question, it's mostly an experience of feeling, and it can become a way of life.

Kim Forrester 2:43

You were talking there about actively going out and inviting wonder into our lives. So how do we do that is wonder something that we have to actually go out and actively search for in our environment? Or is it perhaps about getting still, and clearing the space for awe and wonder to bubble up into?

Fabiana Fondevila 3:08

In a way it's both. But I would like to say that for some people, it's easier to go with the second avenue that you mentioned, because if you are naturally awe-prone, as I said at the beginning, then maybe just sitting still will allow you to get in touch with that wondrous dimension of our own being, just wondering who we are and just being alive in this moment today can fill you with awe. It certainly happens that way for me. But I find that when that is not something that is just so spontaneously available, or it's just because some people tend to be more in their minds, or they have an approach to life that is more mediated by their thoughts. So if that is the case, it's better to find awe practices, or practices of wonder, which are always through the body as far as I have found. So going out and looking at the sky. And of course, that's also the case for me when I'm not so filled with inner peace, which of course happens a lot when I'm busy or worried or you know, filled with thoughts that drive me away from wonder and into concern and small-mindedness. Then I need to actively go and look for awe and to me, there are many pathways - we're going to discuss them throughout our talk - but one very easy, simple and universally available doorway into awe is the sky. If you look up, if you take the the opportunity to look up when you when you're walking. One thing that happens is when you're self absorbed when you're absorbing your thoughts, or your worries or what you have to do that day, you tend to look down. Something, something about being intensely self-absorbed makes you look down into the ground. So just looking up, up to the sky, to the treetops, even to the tops of buildings, will tend to break that self absorption and put you in touch with the world. And it's expansive by nature, this, this gesture, and wonder is expansive. So what it does is it makes you transcend, very- I would say almost immediately, makes you transcend the boundaries of your, what some authors call your self-encapsulated ego, your, your idea of yourself as being this very specific kind of individual that has nothing to do with the world around you. So it transcends that. And it reminds you in a very embodied and immediate way, that you are part of this huge, unfathomable, immeasurable universe. So, wonder really is a doorway into connection, and connection, not just with our surroundings and everything in our lives, but with the very mystery that is the centre of it all.

Kim Forrester 5:51

You're describing there, Fabiana, the sense of wonder, literally, in the sky above us. And it makes me think that maybe we're really misguided in what we believe wonder to be. When we talk about the things that we define as wonderful, "Oh, you know, that's a wonderful cake", or "I had a wonderful holiday". Do you think that we're misguided or perhaps mistaken about what wonder truly is? And/or do you think that maybe we've just forgotten to look for wonder at all in our lives?

Fabiana Fondevila 6:30

Yes, I think the use of the word wonder has become perhaps a little bit overextended. Because, we use it, we equate it, with something that is good or lovely or beautiful. And that's not necessarily wrong, because many instances of wonder include beauty, but not everything that is beautiful, is wondrous. So if I may, I'll give you the technical or scientific definition of wonder, which is what

scientists such as Dacher Keltner, in Berkeley University, and others have found. And they describe wonder as the perception of something so vast - whether it be in size, or number, or quality, or dimension - so vast that it challenges our understanding of life and makes us rethink and sort of find a bigger filter, because we can't fit whatever it is we're seeing or feeling or witnessing in our ordinary frame of consciousness. Of course, many things can do that for us. It's not just the sky, or the Grand Canyon, or an amazing waterfall. It's architecture, it's art, it's music, it's nature in almost any form. It's other people, it's ourselves, it's our inner worlds, it's our accomplishments. But what really sets awe apart is the way we face, the way we come into contact with any of those realities. You can be underneath a starry sky, or staring at a starry sky, and not be connecting with awe at all - you can be thinking about what you have to do tomorrow, and the whole immensity of the universe will just fly right past you, and would do nothing to you. Or you can be sitting in front of your cup of tea, and just feeling awe that you have that tea to drink and thinking, where perhaps where those leaves were cultivated, and who dried them and how they got to you, maybe across half the world. And that can be an experience of awe or wonder. So really, it's in the quality of your attention, and your willingness to enter the frame of surprise and astonishment. And just wondering about ... you know, how wonder is also a verb. So when you wonder about something, you let yourself come into contact with the mystery. You don't take it for granted. You ask a question about it.

Kim Forrester 8:42

You explain there, this concept of looking at your cup of tea and feeling the wonder in the way that beautiful concoction has been made and has been brought into your life. Truly beautiful. But have you been surprised by the things that fill you with wonder, Fabiana?

Fabiana Fondevila 9:01

All the time, all the time, because I never cease to be amazed at how extraordinary the ordinary can be if you look at it the right way, if you stop for a moment to look at it with fresh eyes. And I think the difference between wonder in children and wonder in adults, is that wonder in children is very spontaneous, and it's almost inevitable because they're seeing everything for the first time. So all the time they're running into things that make them go, "Oh, wow, what is that?" You know, because it's everything's new, everything's fresh. As we grow older, of course, things become more normal. They become naturalised and not every sunset is your first sunset. Not every cup of tea is your first cup of tea. So even though we're going to have natural experiences of wonder as adults as well, of course, we do need to have an attitude of wonder. Because that allows us to rediscover the freshness in the ordinary, in what we have seen, perhaps a million times. So we need to - I don't know if we need to - it's wonderful if we can, it's an invitation to have a willingness, or an attitude, of rediscovering everything in our lives freshly every day, including the people in our lives.

Kim Forrester 10:17

You're saying there how children are naturally drawn to wonder - so much more so than adults, I believe. And I'm not sure that it's just that children are seeing things for the first time. Children don't necessarily need things to make sense, Fabiana. Do you think that wonder makes sense? When you are in a state of wonder, or awe, or amazement, does it have to sort of make sense in that moment?

Fabiana Fondevila 10:47

Not at all, not in the ordinary sense of the word sense. When we talk about something making sense, normally, we're talking about a rational explanation for things. And there is nothing rational about awe or wonder because it is trans-rational. It's not irrational, it's trans-rational. What that means is that embodied experiences put us directly in touch with feelings and emotions. And we were not constructing explanations for them. If you look at a flower, and you're amazed by it, what is the sense of that flower? There is no sense, in the sense of an explanation for why it's so wonderful. It just is a sense, it will open your heart in a moment, in a flash of amazement, and you don't need to explain to yourself, well, it must be that colour and that colour and the fact that it's so large, none of that would make sense. Explanations come afterwards, if you need to explain it to a friend, you might say, well, it was this particular shade of, you know, whatever, the clouds were positioned in such a- such a way. But really, that is also kind of destroying the experience because the experience was wordless, awe launches us, it thrusts us into a state of wordlessness, which is a state of nonverbal expansion. Having said that, though, I want to explain that- the word sense, and this is a recent discovery for me, it's something I've always wondered about. And I just recently found a paper by these obscure researchers - I mean, not anybody well-known - about the three meanings of the word "meaning", and that kind of explained it to me. Because there's three ways to talk about something making sense. You can ... sense can be, as I was saying, a rational explanation. In that sense, awe is completely outside it. And wonder is completely outside a rational mindset. It doesn't need it, is what I mean. The second one is related to purpose. So when you say, "Does this make sense?", what is the sense of doing such a thing, you're talking about the future. You're talking about something making sense, at some point in time. And then there's a third dimension, which is the significance of something; the inherent value of something. So you say, you know, my life has meaning, or makes sense, not because I'm doing something special or particular, but just because of a person alive in this planet, and I have a heart that wants to connect. So any of us, any of our lives make sense, without any rational explanation, or any specific purpose. So that's the third meaning of sense. In that sense, if I may, moments of awe and wonder make profound sense because of the inherent value of what we are witnessing. So this cup of tea may only last as long as I have the time to drink it; as long as I drink it. But it makes profound sense to me nonetheless. It doesn't have to be important, or, you know, fit into a neat description of my world, to make sense in that third assumption of the word, which is the inherent value of the experience.

Kim Forrester 13:53

Fabiana, I'm sure that most of my listeners - in fact, I think most of us around the world - are a little worn out, a little worn down from everything that's been going on in the world and in our lives. And we'd love nothing more than to stand on a mountaintop and be amazed by what we see below. Or look at our cup of tea, right, and feel a sense of wonder in the way that it's been concocted. But do we actually have to feel happy, in order to find wonder? Is there a way to get from wherever we are emotionally, and find our way to awe and amazement?

Fabiana Fondevila 14:35

Yes, that is an amazing question. Thank you. One of the things I love about this emotion is precisely that you don't need to feel happy to connect with it. It is sometimes very hard to go from despair or confusion or frustration directly into happiness. It's almost impossible to force yourself to feel a sense of joy, but it's not at all impossible to connect with awe and wonder from wherever you are, because awe is not even necessarily connected to joyous and beautiful things. It's also connected to terrible things, to scary things. So the pandemic that we are going through is definitely filled with awe of both kinds. Because there's the wonder of the way we're connecting across the world and

being able to share this experience and help each other out in a way that our ancestors who went through other pandemics did not, were not able to do. There's a lot of good that has come of this, as far as our understanding of our lives and what is important to them, and not taking anything for granted, and making more time to be with what really matters. So that's the wonder-full aspect of what has happened. But at the same time, of course, there's been so much suffering, and still is, and so much pain and so much fear and uncertainty. And that is also filled with awe, not necessarily in a joyous way. But, the fact that we ... that the entire world is going through the same experience just does not cease to amaze me. You know, lockdown and, and missing our loved ones and trying to find alternate ways to connect. This oneness experience we're having is certainly filled with awe for me, and wonder. So definitely no, we don't need to feel joy first as a pathway to awe. Rather, very often it happens the other way around. Awe, or wonder, may not lead us directly into joy, but it can lead us into contentment, peace and acceptance.

Kim Forrester 16:36

Oh, I love that. The big question is, of course, why should we care about wonder? Our lives are busy, right? They are demanding; they are drawing so much of our time and our resources and our energy. What is the benefit of spending time and energy focusing on the small wonders of our world?

Fabiana Fondevila 17:00

Well, I would answer that with another question. What is the sense of being alive? I would say, why are we even alive, if we're not going to notice we're alive and enjoy being alive? To me wonder is about aliveness. The time that we are here is the time that we're aware and awake to what is happening to us. That is the true value of our time. So on a very personal level, what wonder does it makes us live longer. Because the time that we have, is time that we are enjoying, experiencing, noticing, wondering about. So that is a very personal level. And the amount of positive emotion that comes with that is enormous. But then from awe research and wonder research, we know that this is a very prosocial emotion. That means that it makes us aware of others and it makes us care about others, and act with more concern towards others. That's probably why wonder evolved as an emotion in the first place, because it's so collective an emotion. So, another reason to partake in it, another reason to cultivate it is because it makes us more connected with our loved ones, and it improves our relationships. And so it's a very necessary emotion. It's not just pleasant. I seek it out because it's my joy. But really, it deepens our experience of our connections. So that's one important reason to try and find a little space for awe and wonder in your life every day. Even if it's just through a morning practice and evening practice, a time when you stop whatever you're doing to connect with wonder.

Kim Forrester 18:38

You were a journalist for many years dealing with the facts, right? Dealing with rationality. How has your life flourished since you started moving into this space of wonder?

Fabiana Fondevila 18:49

Well, I feel that it has led me back to myself, to my original self. Because I was very curious as a child. I was very attracted to nature, even though I didn't have a lot of it because I was a city child. But I loved whatever I could find. And when I became a journalist, of course, that is a ... it's a very

lovely profession for curious people, because it allows us to ask a lot of questions and meet a lot of people and even travel the world. But what started to happen gradually, is that the facts side of it began to feel too small, insufficient. In fact, I was very briefly a war correspondent for a newspaper I worked for. I went to the former Yugoslavia, just during the beginning of the war that broke up that country, through the process where it broke up. And I remember that the stories I was sending were not focusing on the facts of the political situation and the news of the war, but more on what was happening with the people around me. And even with the nature around me the places that I was visiting the small towns, the expressions on the people. So very naturally, I would say, I began to find a language that was closer to my heart, which had to do with wondering about the details of life and not the headlines in the newspapers. So I began to find a different kind of journalism. In fact, I worked for the international news section. And I started working for the magazine, which also reflects this idea of focusing on a different dimension of experience - not so much on the factual side of things, but on the embodied emotional side of things. And that just grew and grew. And eventually, I kind of left journalism and began giving workshops, teaching workshops, on all of these matters, which is what I do today.

Kim Forrester 20:39

Now, I'm sure that understanding that beautiful space of wonder does not stop you from having tough days and hard challenges in life. Does wonder help you through those moments, though, in ways that were perhaps more difficult without that sense of amazement and awe?

Fabiana Fondevila 20:58

Absolutely, yes. Not because it disqualifies or diminishes the very genuine hardships of life. In fact, the most difficult thing we all have to deal with, the experience we all have to deal with probably is death and loss. And I have had my share of those, and my parents and my sister died in a, kind of a relatively short time span, many years ago now. But when it happened, it all kind of happened in a relatively short period. And those were, of course, very dark days. And perhaps in those moments I wasn't aware, because I hadn't even begun this whole journey of discovering awe. But now, when I look back on the fact that these people who are so crucial to my life, and are now not physically here, at least, that fills me with awe. And it's kind of awe that I can spend time with. It's not something I recoil from. And again, it's not that it makes you miss somebody less. But it does open up a space of the heart of mystery, being with the heart of mystery, this person that was so hugely important - is now still hugely important but in a different dimension, I need to contact them in a different dimension, even of myself. And, again, this helps us to see that life, that there's nothing in life, not a single moment, that we can take for granted. And it helps us also to remember that when we're going through a difficulty with a person in our lives today - for example, we, I don't know, got upset with them, or they got upset with us or we had a falling out. If you are a person that is prone to wonder, you will quickly remember that this person is hugely important and the fact that they're even there at all in your life, and that they are a part of your life and that they love you or trust you is so much bigger than whatever just happened. That that really does help you overcome whatever disagreement or minor setback you just had. And this is with everything. If you lose a job or if you have an accident, in the larger frame of awe and wonder - which is understanding that everything is a mystery - you tend to fight less against things that happen and sort of embrace them as "Oh, look at that. So now this is happening. So now this is a situation". There is an attitude of curiosity, and just looking at things as if everything was unique, and unexpected, and a surprise.

Kim Forrester 23:29

Oh, that sounds beautiful and rather liberating, Fabiana. Now, my final question is one that I asked every guest on the Eudaemonia podcast. Can you offer a morning reminder, this might be a practice, a mantra or an affirmation, something that can help my listeners find more wonder in the world around them?

Fabiana Fondevila 23:49

Sure, my difficulty is choosing which one because I have so many. Maybe I'll share two. One is just to simply go outside if you can, if you have a balcony, or patio or backyard or even into the street if you, if you can, and just open your arms up towards the sky and smile up into the sky. And perhaps words come to you, or they don't inside your ... you don't need to say anything. But this gesture of saying good morning to the day in an embodied way sort of as if you were hugging the sky. And then perhaps, just to follow that up, you can, if you have a situation that's troubling you or a question that you need answered, you might just sort of pose that to the sky as a metaphor, you know, towards infinity. And then when you feel kind of the tingling of energy that you will feel in your arms after a moment of doing that. You bring your arms back slowly towards your heart as if you're carrying that answer, that illumination, that inspiration back into your heart and you just let your hands sit there on your heart for a moment. You can even couple that with your breath. So you inhale and you open your arms up into the sky. You let your your forehead sort of unfurl, you know that you usually have that wrinkled look when you're worried. So you let it open up your forehead, your smile, and you bring your arms slowly back with whatever energy you've received. That's one. And the other one is to take a bowl, and every morning, you keep it close to your bedside, if you can, you fill it with water. You just simply fill it with water. And you can say, "Good morning world", or "Thank you for being alive", or "This is going to be a wonderful day" or whatever comes to your mind. And you leave that bowl. If you have an altar, you put it there, if you have a shelf by your bed, whatever, you leave it there during the day. And then the evening, you empty it out. If you can onto the earth, if you have a pot or garden or balcony, you just have or wherever you can you empty out the water. And as you pour it, you give an expression of thanks. You can say it out loud, or you can silently think it. And so you leave that empty vessel, that empty bowl by your bed. And as you know, ritual intelligence goes, your soul will understand even without words that, every morning, the energy is new and fresh, and different, and unique. And when you let it go at night, you're also saying to your soul, whatever happened happened. This day is over. I'm going to go to sleep with a lightness and an emptiness and a freshness. So that tomorrow, the day can be new. So that is the other ritual that I would recommend.

Kim Forrester 26:26

Oh, they are two exquisite practices. Thank you for sharing them. Fabiana Fondevila, your latest book just released in English is called "Where Wonder Lives - Practices for cultivating the sacred in your daily life". If people want to find the book, if they want to learn more about you and the message that you have to share around wonder, where can they find you?

Fabiana Fondevila 26:49

Well, thank you for that question. The book is in Amazon. And if anybody finds it interesting, and they'd like to leave a review, that would be super helpful because it just came out. So it's just making its way out into the world. You can find it on Amazon or other booksellers. And my web page has my name, www.fabianafondevila.com/english. So you write out my name, and

.com/english because I'm now creating a English version of my website. And I teach workshops in English on all these subjects. So if you sign up for my website, you will receive the invitations to those workshops. So I'll be very happy to see you there in my inbox.

Kim Forrester 27:37

Thank you so much. I'm personally so grateful to you for gifting your time and energy on the podcast here today. But also really grateful for the work you do and amplifying this entire concept of wonder and inviting people back to the understanding that our world is full of amazing, sacred and blessed and incredibly inspiring things and moments. So thank you for all you do, Fabiana.

Fabiana Fondevila 28:09

Thank you, Kim. It has been really lovely to talk to you. I really enjoyed it. And I hope we connect again. Thank you so much.

Kim Forrester 28:16

As the astronaut and luna explorer, Neil Armstrong said, "Mystery creates wonder and wonder is the basis of man's desire to understand". You've been listening to the Eudaemonia podcast. If you'd like to learn more about how to live a truly flourishing life, please subscribe. Check out www.eudaemoniapod.com for more inspiring episodes, or come join me on Instagram @iamkimforrester. I'm Kim Forrester. Until next time, be well, be kind to yourself and find joy in life's little wonders.