

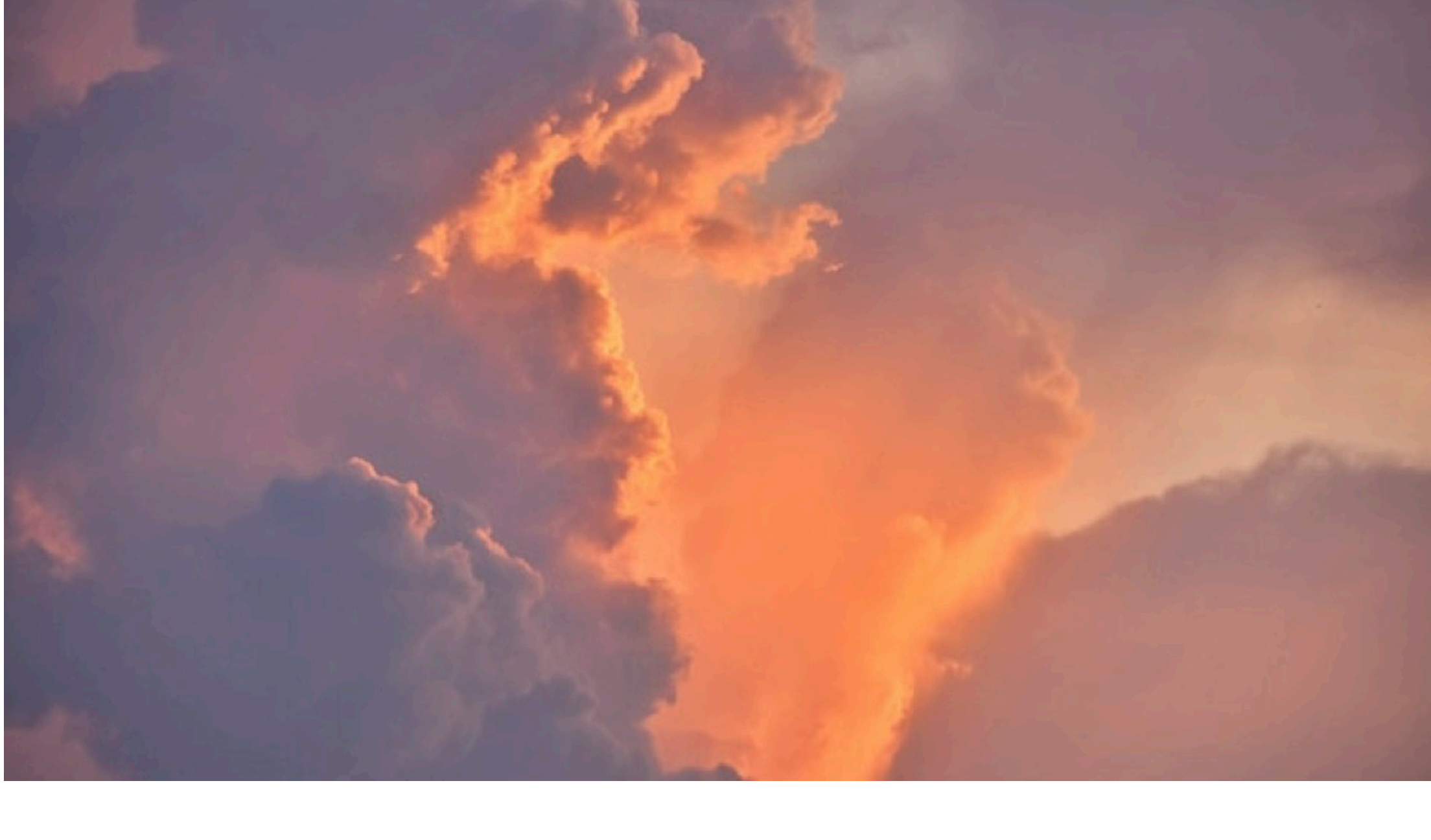


MAINTAINING PRACTICING

Take An “Awe Walk” for A Positive Health Impact

BY GINA KELLY
FEBRUARY 22, 2021

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It's easy to get caught up in our own daily chaos. Internal dialogue rattles around our brains day after day, rarely giving us a break. Many people turn to meditation or mindfulness to get that much-needed breather from their thoughts and self-absorption. Although it's often overlooked, being in “awe” is another way we can discover that space within our minds.

Related: [“5 Ways to Make An Ordinary Walk Extraordinary”](#)

What does it mean to be in “awe?”

Awe is a complex emotion. It's described as a feeling of openness and freedom and a realization that you are part of something much larger. When someone experiences awe, they have an overwhelming sense of wonder and amazement.

Awe-inducing stimuli are mysterious and transformative. Seeing the Northern Lights or the Taj Mahal can trigger awe. Experiencing catastrophic events, such as surviving a destructive hurricane or devastating car accident, can also induce awe. Awe can also be found in smaller things, such as a beautiful piece of artwork or watching birds fly throughout a canopy of trees.

Being in awe is actually good for our health. [Studies](#) show that awe can boost immunity. Sometimes awe-inducing moments can also change our value system in ways we'd otherwise never experience because awe triggers a prosocial emotion. Since humans are social beings, we thrive when we feel connected with one another. Awe inspires humility and generosity toward peers and even reduces feelings of loneliness.



What are “Awe Walks”?

The Global Brain Health Institute (GBHI) is a program dedicated to protecting brains against memory loss and dementia. GBHI asked researchers to identify low-cost interventions to improve brain health. Ph.D. psychologist, Virginia Sturm, decided to study the effects of awe on an aging population.

Sturm and her team split participants into two groups. One group was asked to take a simple walk. The other group was instructed to take a walk during which participants should turn their attention outward and approach their external environment with a sense of wonderment.

Both groups recorded their feelings and facial expressions before, during, and after a 15-minute walk once per week for eight weeks. After reviewing selfies and surveys, researchers found that the participants instructed to walk in awe were happier, had bigger smiles, and expressed more compassion and gratitude. The research group dubbed the activity as an “awe walk” and published their [findings](#) in the psychological journal, *Emotion*.

How do you take an “Awe Walk”?

The instructions are pretty simple – for at least 15 minutes per week, take a walk, and concentrate on your surroundings. Listen to a bird's song, breathe in the scent of freshly cut grass or drink in the pinks and yellows of a sunset. Awe will hit you when you shift outward.

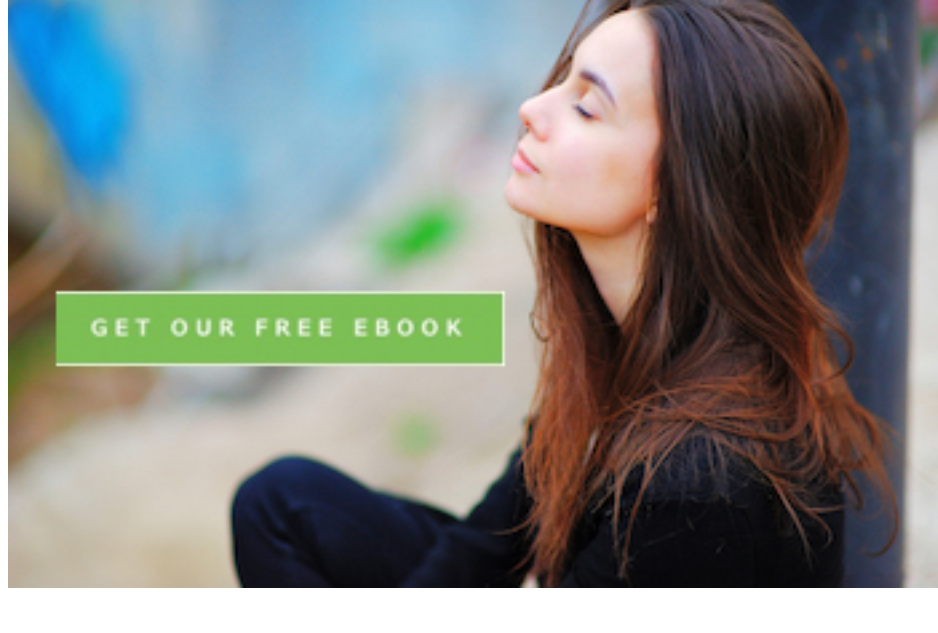
If your thoughts continually get in the way, that's okay. Just like with meditation, it may take some practice to train your mind. A couple of tweaks to your awe walk routine may help you tune into your surroundings.

Coming up with a mantra about your awe walk environment might help you better concentrate. By repeating a word or series of words, for example, repeating the word “sky,” can lead your mind to focus outward. You can also set an interval alarm to go off every two minutes to reset and place your attention outward. Continually reminding yourself to focus outward will eventually “click” and you'll be able to do it without even having to think about it!

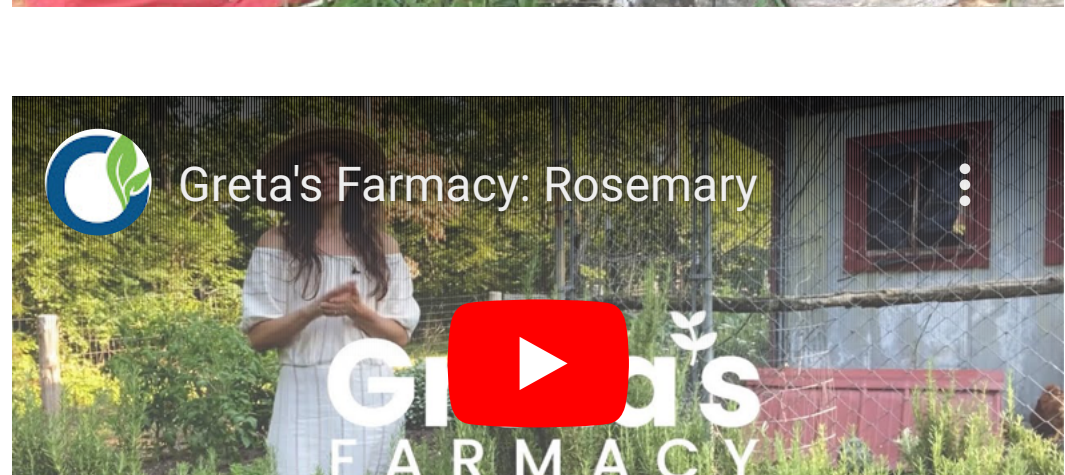
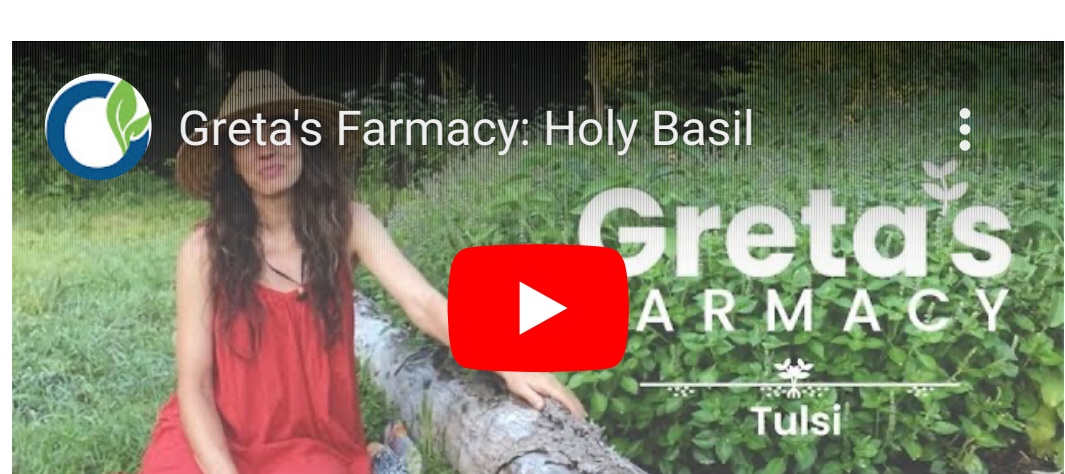
It's remarkable what our minds are capable of when we don't focus solely on ourselves. Something as simple as taking an awe walk promotes a sense of community and compassion, which is needed more than ever before. Not only that but you're getting some physical exercise too!

-Gina Kelly

Photo by [Soubhagya Maharana](#) from [Pexels](#)

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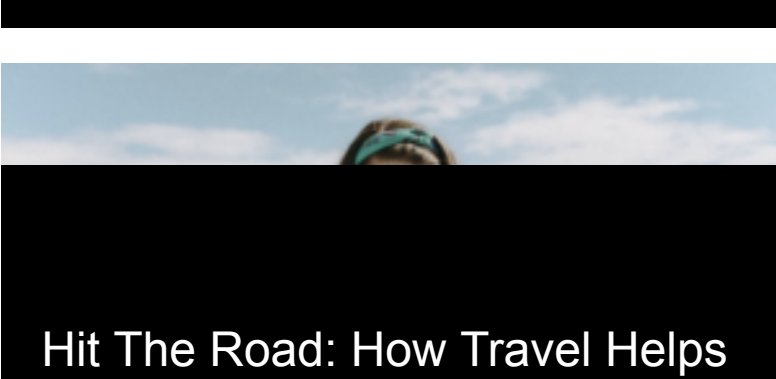
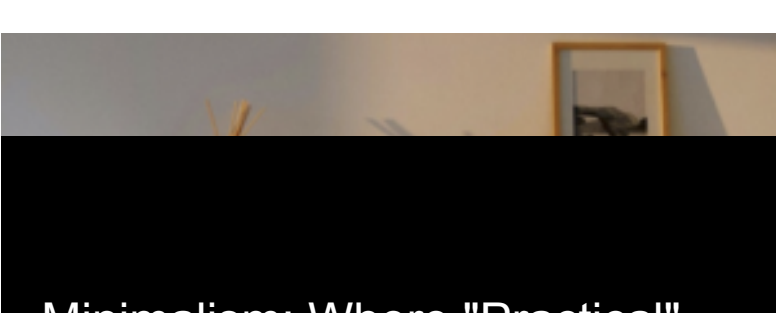
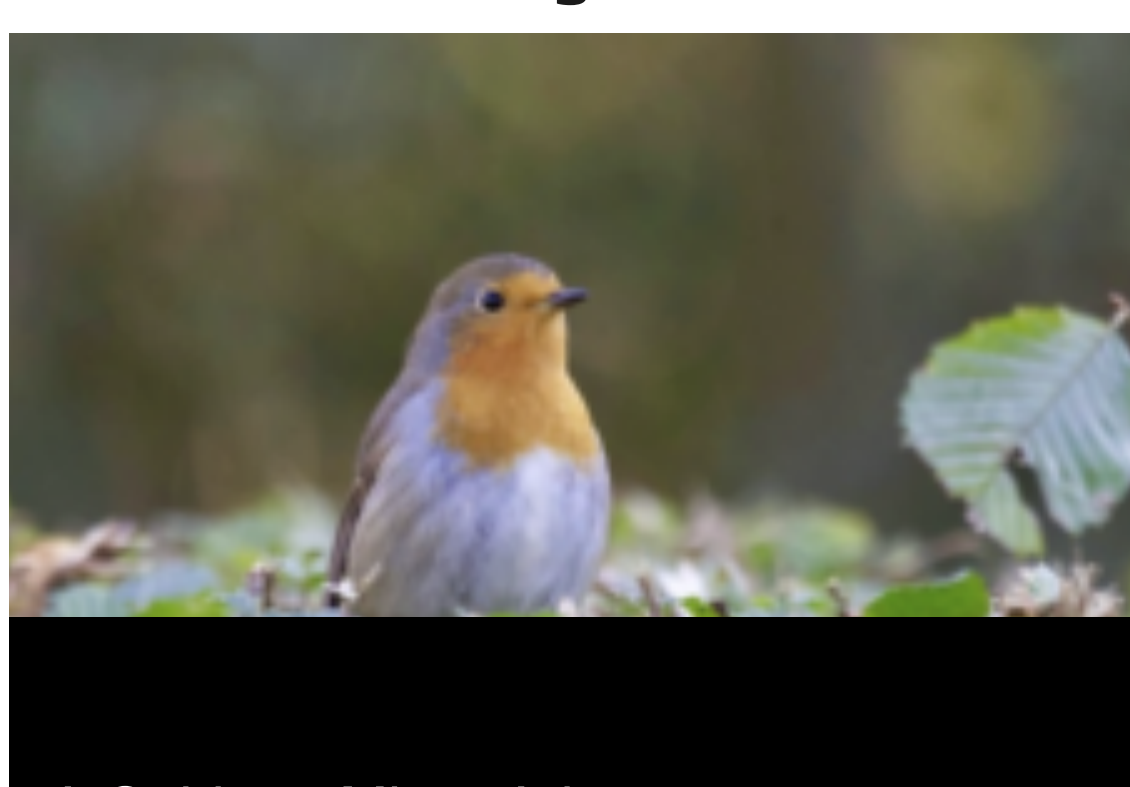
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Gina Kelly is a freelance wellness and lifestyle writer. She specializes in copywriting, content writing, and editing. When Gina isn't writing, you can find her hiking the hills of northern New Jersey or reading historical fiction. Connect with her on Twitter @GinaNicoleKelly or visit her website, [www.ginanicolekelly.com](#).

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