

# AWE: FOR ALTRUISM AND HEALTH?

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*Slate:*

By now you're probably mulling over some of your New Year's resolutions – do five planks a day, eat more quinoa, keep better track of expenses. Let me add one more to your list: seek more daily awe.

Awe is the feeling of being in the presence of something vast that transcends your understanding of the world. Early in human history, awe was reserved for feelings toward divine beings – e.g., gods humans invoked in the village ritual houses that sprang up some 10,000 years ago, the spirits Greek families felt guarded over their fates, and encounters with the divine at the center of the world's great spiritual traditions.

In 1757, a revolution in our understanding of awe began thanks to Irish philosopher Edmund Burke. In *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, Burke detailed how we feel the sublime (awe) not just during religious ritual or in communion with God, but in everyday perceptual experiences: in hearing thunder, in being moved by music, in seeing repetitive patterns of light and dark. Awe was to be found in daily life.

Read the whole story: [\*Slate\*](#)