

Awe: The 'Little Earthquake' That Could Free Your Mind

January 19, 2022

Whenever Ethan Kross finds himself in a mental rut of worrying and negative self-talk, he walks five blocks to his local arboretum and contemplates one of the magnificent trees in front of him, and the astonishing power of nature.

If he can't get to the arboretum, he spends a few moments thinking about the astonishing possibilities of aeroplanes and spacecraft. "I think about how we went from struggling to start fires, just a few thousand years ago, to being able to land safely on another planet," he says.

The aim, in each case, is to evoke awe – which he defines as “the wonder that we feel when we encounter something that we can't easily explain”.

Kross's habits are founded in scientific evidence. As a professor of psychology at the University of Michigan, he knows feelings of awe can have a truly profound influence on the mind – enhancing our memory and creativity as well as inspiring us to act more altruistically to the people around us. It can also have a profound impact on our mental health, by allowing us to put our anxieties into perspective.

...