



Can Awe Buy You More Time and Happiness? by Stacey Kennelly

Always plugged in and constantly juggling tasks at work and at home, many of us feel like there aren't enough hours in the day to do all the things we need to do.

But wouldn't it be awesome to feel like you had more time? In fact, a new study suggests that experiencing awe—which psychologists define as the feeling we get when we come across something so strikingly vast in number, scope, or complexity that it alters the way we understand the world—could help us do just that. What's more, awe might make us more generous with how we spend our time and improve our overall well-being.

In one part of the study, researchers induced feelings of awe in participants by showing them video clips of people encountering tremendous things like waterfalls and whales; among members of a comparison group, they induced awe by showing them video clips of people surrounded by confetti in a joyful parade.

The results, published by *Psychological Science*, show that members of the awed group were more likely to report feeling like they had more time than those who felt happiness.

"Awe-eliciting experiences might offer one effective solution to the feelings of time starvation that plague so many people in modern life," write the researchers, who were based at the Stanford University Graduate School of Business and the University of Minnesota's Carlson School of Management.

This led the researchers to predict that people who experience awe would be less likely to feel impatient—since people feel impatient when they think they're short on time—and would be more willing to devote time to activities like volunteering.

To test this hypothesis, they instructed participants to write stories about events in their lives. One group was prompted to write about an experience that was vast and altered their perceptions of the world, while the other group was told to write about a time when they felt contentment or joy. Then, all participants completed a survey assessing their impatience and willingness to lend time to others.

As the researchers predicted, people who felt awe were less likely to feel impatient and more likely to volunteer their time than study participants who felt happiness.

However, awe did not make people more likely to donate money, suggesting that awe does not make people more generous in general. Instead, it was the sense that they had more time to spend that seems to have made participants more willing to lend a hand.

In another experiment, the researchers induced awe in some people—by having

them read a story about ascending the Eiffel Tower and getting a high-up view of Paris—but not others. Afterwards, they found that members of the awe group reported feeling more satisfied with their lives than the other group. Also, when given a choice between material goods and positive experiences—such as a watch vs. tickets to a Broadway show—the awe group was more likely than the other group to choose the positive experiences.

Prior research has found that positive experiences are more likely than material objects to bring us happiness. After analyzing their data, the researchers conclude that the awe group's higher life satisfaction and preference for experiences over objects could be explained by the fact that they felt like they had more time on their hands.

Melanie Rudd, the lead author of the study and a PhD candidate in marketing at Stanford University, says the results show how something as subtle as our perception of time can have a big influence on our lives.

"It impacts our willingness to volunteer to help other people and even our well-being," she says. "The idea that an emotion can alleviate this problem is an incredible idea to me."

She suggests that people evoke more feelings of awe in their lives by exposing themselves to nature, art, and music.

"Put yourself in situations where you're experiencing new things," she says.

This article is printed here with permission from the Greater Good Science Center (GGSC). Based at UC Berkeley, the GGSC studies the psychology, sociology, and neuroscience of well-being, and teaches skills that foster a thriving, resilient, and compassionate society. Stacey Kennelly is a Greater Good editorial assistant.