

The Awe Protocol

A Somatic, Relational, and Sensory Exercise for SCO Activation

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Introduction

Awe is one of the few emotional states that simultaneously quiets self-referential processing, expands mental space, activates the salience network toward something outside the self, and promotes prosocial motivation. It does this without resistance because nobody defends against wonder.

This exercise uses awe deliberately as a clinical tool. Not as inspiration or positive thinking. As a neurobiological state that temporarily creates the conditions for the structural consideration of others (SCO) activation, making others feel significant, vast, and real before the ego has time to organize a defense.

It moves in three stages:

Inward. Finding awe inside the body itself. The extraordinary already present in one's own aliveness.

Outward. Turning that awakened sense toward another human being. Recognizing shared aliveness.

Relational. Encountering a specific human story that makes another person vast, real, and consequential.

BLS anchors what opens.

What This Exercise Is About

This exercise cultivates the neurobiological conditions for the SCO consolidation through the state of awe. It targets the salience network, helping others register as significant, and the vmPFC, helping that significance become personally organizing. It uses the body, music, visual narrative, and bilateral stimulation to create a multilevel activation that is difficult for the ego to narrate over.

It is not a resource installation in the traditional sense. It is a state cultivation, opening circuits that chronic self-referential organization keeps closed.

Before You Begin

No special preparation is needed beyond creating a safe, receptive environment.

If using music, have it ready to play softly in the background before the exercise begins as an ambient field that begins shifting the nervous system before the instruction arrives. Suggested qualities: instrumental, expansive, without lyrics, building slowly. Something that feels larger than the room.

You can also use visuals. Have images or short films available, for example, of human effort against limitation. You may use them lately.

If applying the protocol to your clients, you can say:

"We're going to do something a little different. I'm going to ask you to start inside your own body, and then move outward. There's nothing to analyze, nothing to get right. Just follow where I guide you and notice what's there."

Stage 1. The Awe Already Inside

Begin with the music playing softly.

*"Find a comfortable position: feet on the floor, spine long, chest open, gaze **slightly upward** or softly forward. Not forced. Just the physical shape of receptivity. Or you can opt to close them. Up to you."*

Bring your attention to your breath, not a special breath, just the next one. Notice that it happened. Your body did that. Without you deciding. Follow the air as it comes in, through the nose, down the throat, into the lungs.

If you are there, cross your arms over your chest and begin tapping gently. Your own rhythm. Slow. One side, then the other. As you tap, stay with the awareness of your body doing what it does

Notice how it arrives warm. How the body takes what it needs from it before releasing it back. The air that leaves has been changed: oxygen extracted, carbon dioxide returned. Your body did that too. Without asking. Without stopping.

Now bring your awareness inside, beneath the skin. Into the body itself. Notice that right now, in this moment, your heart is beating. It has been beating every moment of your life, through sleep, through grief, through joy, through every ordinary weekday. Without being asked. Without stopping.

Feel it if you can. The pulse. The rhythm. Something in you that has never stopped.

Now go deeper. Into the vessels, the network of rivers running through you right now. Blood moving. Carrying oxygen to places you will never see, never feel, never consciously reach. A system of such complexity that no human mind has fully mapped.

And deeper still, into the nerves. Electrical signals firing right now at speeds you cannot imagine. Your hand resting in your lap, and yet a thousand signals per second passing through it. The warmth of the air on your skin, already processed, already registered, before you knew you felt it.

You are extraordinarily complex. Amazingly alive. Right now. In this chair. In this room.

Stay with that for a moment. The awe of your own existence. Already here. Already vast.

Pause. Let it land. (30–45 seconds of silence). Stop tapping.

Take a moment. Were you able to feel something, even briefly, of the extraordinary complexity of your own body just now?

If yes — continue (BLS).

If no — stay:

Let's pause here for a moment. What happened when I invited you to feel that? What was present instead?

You can have a moment of conversation to gather information about your client before continuing.

Stage 2. The Same Aliveness in Another

Without breaking the quality of attention, continue:

Now, keeping that sense of your own aliveness present, let your awareness expand outward.

Think of the person next to you. Or someone in this room. Or someone you care about.

They are also carrying this. Right now. The same blood moving. The same electrical storms. The same heart that has never stopped.

Keep tapping.

Feel how they are as complex as you are. As impossible and as extraordinary.

Feel what it is to be in a room full of people each carrying this incredibly complex aliveness. Each one, vast. Each one, significant.

Pause again. Let the room hold this.

Stage 3. Awe at Human Effort

Now, gently, without breaking the state, introduce the visual or story. If using film or images, let them appear now. If narrating, speak slowly, with space between the words:

I want to show you something:

(Maybe a disabled person at the start line of a marathon.)



They know what's coming. 26 miles. Every one of them a challenge. Every one of them costing something most of us will never be asked to pay.

They are doing this because something in them refuses the prediction that they can't do it. The anticipatory system says: it is impossible. And they line up anyway.

Keep tapping.

Watch what the body does. Watch what the face does. Watch what happens when someone decides that the present can be different from what the past prepared them for.

This is also what's possible. In a human body and a human life.

Allow silence. Allow whatever arises to arise.

Stage 4. Return and Ground

Let the music fade if it has been playing. Guide the return:

Take a breath. Feel your feet on the floor. The weight of your body in the chair. Let the images and feelings settle. When you're ready, open your eyes (or come back with me).

Give the room a moment of quiet before moving to reflection.

Reflection

For participants:

Where did your awareness go during the somatic opening? Were you able to find the awe inside your own body?

What happened when you turned that awareness toward another person?

What did you notice during the BLS, where did the state take you?

What is present now that wasn't present before?

For clinicians: diagnostic and therapeutic observations to hold

Did the client's self-referential processing quiet during the exercise?

Was the other person felt as significant, or did the client stay primarily inside their own experience?

Did the state deepen or thin across the sets?

Variations

Without visuals: The narrative alone is sufficient if delivered with the right quality of presence. The clinician's own contact with what they're describing carries the state.

Different awe content: Human effort is one pathway. Others include: unexpected kindness between strangers, a parent's sacrifice, a moment of genuine recognition between two people. The criterion is always: *Does this make another person feel vast and real?*

Progressive use: Run this exercise early in Phase 2 as a state-opener before other Relational Capacity cultivation work. Return to it when the client's system has contracted: when rigidity has increased, when the ego has closed ranks, when processing has stalled. Awe reopens what defensiveness closes.

With music only, no visuals: For clients who find visual material activating, music alone during the somatic stage is sufficient. The relational narrative is delivered verbally.