

During the most recent Stamford clergy meeting, one of our members, Dale Pauls, offered a review of the books that he has read and facilitated discussions on over the past three years in the Interfaith Book Group. The list is impressive. As is Dale. What struck me as Dale offered brief synopses of some of the books was the depth of analysis that he brought to the various pieces and the concise synthesizing of the thrust of each author's argument. If you know Dale, you know that he is not the type of person to toot his own horn. Thus, an opportunity to discuss readings in current affairs offered an unexpected window into the gifts of this remarkable man. Had he not done this, we may never have known the depth of skill of one of our own. (Please find Dale's reading list [here](#). Some books will be obvious. Others not so much. All of them come recommended, and Dale knows what he is talking about.)

When it comes to the phenomenon just described--stumbling, as it were, into the brilliance or giftedness of another--I suspect that we are surrounded by myriad missed opportunities. On the one hand, these missed opportunities can become opportunities for regret. How is it that we can miss what is amazing or profound or inspiring as it stands before our very eyes? Indeed, we have all walked past wonder unaware.

On the other hand, I like to think that these reminders of giftedness and skill that we bump into from time to time are serendipitous moments that wake us up to the beauty and wonder of the world and life and our companions on the way. When we become so busy with the demands of life and work and family and schedule and on and on, we may suppress the very posture of curiosity and openness that allows us to glimpse these diamonds in the rough that daily barrage us. Indeed, there are times that we become so weighted down by the cares and concerns of life that it is impossible for us to see the wonder before us.

When we find ourselves in such a place, we are--as the mystics of the tradition would say--in the wilderness. Spiritually dry. Barren. Lost. Deprived. Lifeless. Residing in such a place is like residing in the wilderness. It's HARD. And there are times when we cannot simply call an Uber to drive us out of that wilderness. At times we find ourselves circling around and around to find our way out, but we return to where the journey began. If nothing else, we are in good company. The people of Israel wandered 40 years in the wilderness. Yet, such company is little comfort when we are struggling in the wilderness.

Perhaps one of the ways through (and not always out) of the wilderness is to develop the spiritual muscle of an openness to wonder. Even in the midst of the struggle, the ability to see and acknowledge the beauty and serendipity and awe that is a part of this world and our lives is something that can help us along the way. Waking up to Dale Paul's gift and his sharing is an example. This does not happen overnight and it is not something that we are necessarily born with. Seeing and acknowledging wonder is something that we have to practice, something that

we develop. Which is why I think that Christianity and Buddhism share a lot in common when it comes to this facet of life. We create structures so that we might not miss what we otherwise would overlook, precisely because we know ourselves well enough to recognize our propensity to overlook, and we have long ago lost faith that we can will it into being. We need to work at it.

However, this type of work is not tedious. This awareness is something that we hone, and, like the muscles that we exercise, the more we engage, the more we enjoy the fruits of such labor. To that end, I offer another book for your perusal. It is a compilation of Rabbi Joshua Heschel's writings. The title of the book says it all: *I Asked for Wonder*. You can find it [here](#). If you pick it up, I hope that it may help in your living into wonder. Regardless, blessings on your tending of this spiritual practice to be open to and glimpse from time to time the wonder of being.