

*The Patchwork Jacket* offers its readers a monthly, contemplative theme that seeks to lift us beyond dogma and religious or cultural norms to a universal perspective of the path of individual transformation and its many different forms and practices. In a world of division, differences, conflict, and polarization, the patchwork jacket as a symbol aspires to a unity within diversity that is not only an ideal but within our immediate reach as ordinary human beings.

Inspired by the iconic dress of the Bauls of Bengal, the patchwork jacket is a metaphor that represents a commitment to the evolutionary potential that exists within every human being. It advocates a way of life that synthesizes wisdom from many traditions, cultivates the compassion, insight and clarity of an open mind and the *rasa* (mood) of an open heart. May all beings benefit from this endeavor.

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## Awen

*I saw a highway of diamonds  
With nobody on it*

— Bob Dylan

The ancient Celts were renowned for their gold-en-tongued eloquence and rich imagination, their lime-spiked and dreadlocked hair, torques of silver and gold, spiral tattoos of blue woad. Fierce Celtic warriors and wise ones were both men and women—wild spirits nourished by the goddess Ceridwen's cauldron of wisdom, poetry and song, which existed for them in the "betwixt and between" and contained an elixir of wonders that linked Nature with the infinite reality of the Otherworld. Bards and seers (ancient practitioners of wisdom) stirred the cauldron for the magic of Awen, or inspiration, to power their great journeys across the pathways of existence.

Even in the broken world of today, the sparks of Awen sing to our imagination, call to our longing in moments of wonder that are essential to everyone's journey on the spiritual path—"the highway of diamonds." In another tradition of poet-bards, the tantric Bauls of Bengal, the path is called *ulta*, which means "contrary" because it leads the traveler in the opposite direction of the conventional world. Threading their way through the snares of cynicism, violence, confusion, and the darkness of power gone wrong, Baul poets wander through this wondrous world singing songs, in search of the "unknown bird," the Beloved of the soul.

Wonder is universally human, encountered in the ordinary as well as the extraordinary experiences of life. Like me, so many of my friends speak of how beauty and nature are the harbingers of wonder—the mystic swell on the crest of an ocean wave, just before the crash, purple-blue thunderheads massed below a stretch of turquoise sky and the raw, citrine crack of lightning, the miracle of spring when winter is gone. Raging elemental forces—wildfires, floods, hurricanes—are messengers of wonder, telling us that this too is necessary for creation. Visitors from the wild bring wonder in different flavors. I'm amazed by the beauty of a kit fox coming for a drink in my desert garden but transfixed in horror when a rattle-snake appears nearby.

Attuned to wonder, I become aware of its colors, shapes, and moods. An unexpected moment of deep connection between friends or lovers. A sudden turn of melody in music that plumbs the depths or explores an edge of feeling. In the long vigil at the bedside of a loved one's final journey, wonder is in the deep dive of heartbreak, in the inexplicable and relentless truth of existence, in a searing flash of anger or sorrow. At death's door, wonder is present

in the awe that springs from the groundwater of pure love—the underlying force that permeates all, beyond passing forms.

Wonder can be curious, amazed, simple, ecstatic, hopeful, bewildered, beautiful, horrible, insightful, humbling or full of praise. It's a moment of communion between myself and the whole of life—or, between me and the Beloved, whose *Awen* flows in and through every manifest thing. Wonder is an opening to Grace, and in that unique moment, it belongs to me, though it can be shared with another.

Like all divine messengers bearing gifts, I cannot catch the "unknown bird," for it craves the freedom of the wing and flourishes in the wilderness. Such delights often come as an invisible wavelet that laps gently at the shores of perception to land and flood into the fissures, canyons, swamps and bogs of the planetary person I am. Like a rivulet on its way to the sea, it pours in through the doors of perception, splashes into the chasm of my broken heart, soaks dry ground. A flood of wonder fills my reservoir for the dry times.

What closes the doors of perception? Some things are obvious, like toxic shame, fear, cynicism, anxiety. More subtle are the concepts, creeds and dogmas of belief systems, however lofty and benign they might seem. Surely these constructs of the mind have their time and place, when they are creative and serve the deities of the greater life. But, as time moves on, they can lock our minds in the closed room of righteousness and binary thought, which hardens into a wall that defends against the transforming power of wonder. CG Jung once wrote:

*"If our religion is based on salvation, our chief emotion will be fear and trembling. If our religion is based on wonder, our chief emotion will be gratitude."*

A portal to *Awen*, inspiration, wonder brings the clear sight of the seer, unleashes the eloquence of the poet-bard within, hums with gratitude, ushers in its older sister—awe—and even its primordial ancestor, love. Wonder is a potent medicine of the soul that generates resilience, trust in the processes of life, and an intuitive sense of possibilities and openings. It is not a cure, for as all poets know, there "ain't no cure for the blues." The Buddha said it this way: All life is suffering, and each of us will have our own sufferings to endure, amplified in these epic times when tectonic plates shift and all is uncertain. Regardless of what may come, even small sips of wonder, taken every day, are a reliable tonic for the ordinary human bard who seeks to sing the song of Life.

Mary Angelon Young