

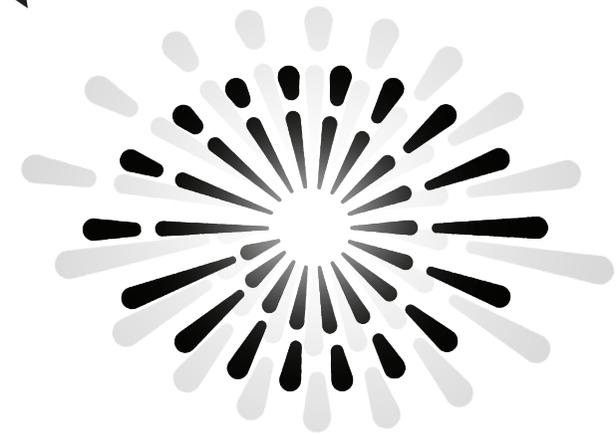
TRACKING
WONDER



Reclaiming a Life of Meaning
and Possibility in a World
Obsessed with Productivity

JEFFREY DAVIS

TRACKING
WONDER



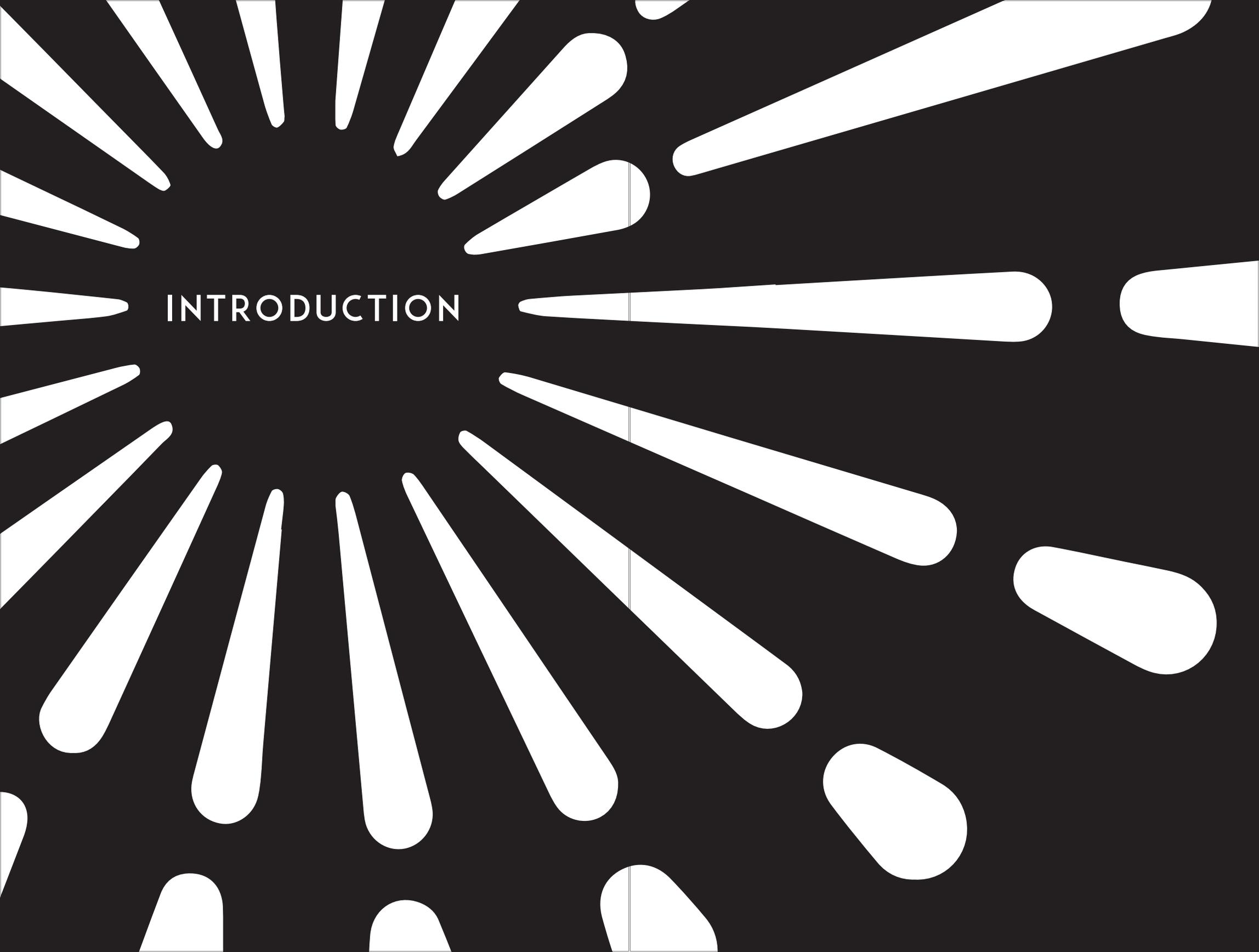
Reclaiming a Life of Meaning
and Possibility in a World
Obsessed with Productivity

JEFFREY DAVIS

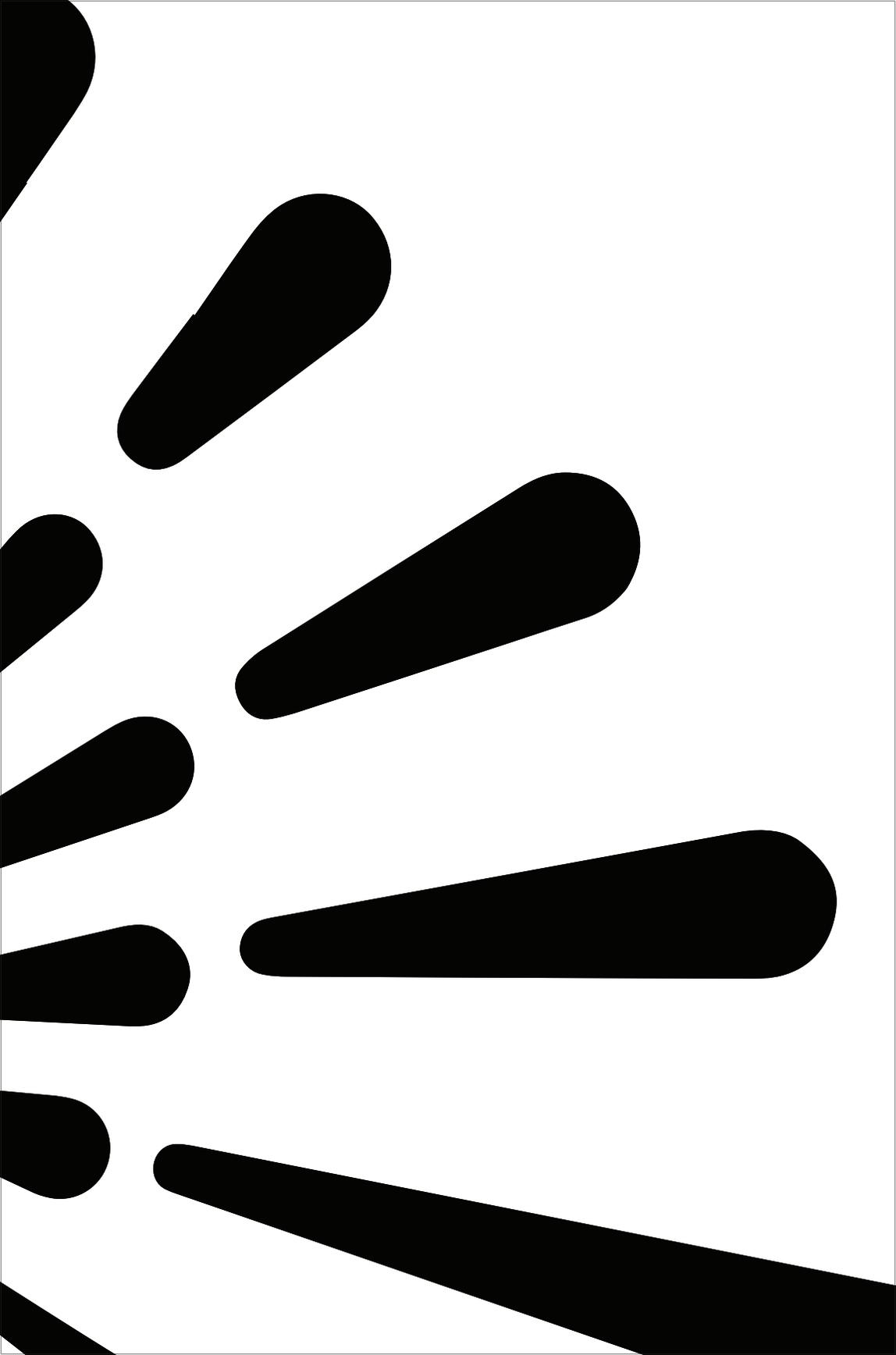
CONTENTS

| | |
|-----------------------------------------------------|----|
| Introduction | xx |
| CHAPTER 1 Flames | xx |
| CHAPTER 2 Biases Against Wonder | xx |
| CHAPTER 3 The 6 Facets of Wonder | xx |
| Your Young Genius | xx |
| CHAPTER 4 Openness, the Wide-Sky Facet | xx |
| CHAPTER 5 Curiosity, the Rebel Facet | xx |
| CHAPTER 6 Bewilderment, the Deep Woods Facet | xx |
| CHAPTER 7 Hope, the Rainbow Facet | xx |
| CHAPTER 8 Connection, the Flock Facet | xx |
| CHAPTER 9 Admiration, the Mirror Facet | xx |
| CHAPTER 10 Stand in Wonder | xx |
| Five Wishes of Wonder for This One Life | xx |
| Acknowledgments | xx |
| Notes | xx |
| About the Author | xx |

CR page TK



INTRODUCTION



THE DAWN OF POSSIBILITY

TO EXPERIENCE WONDER IS our birthright—especially in times of challenge and change. In a fleeting moment with rippling effects, wonder can transfix us with the elegant design of a coat hook or the massive wafer of a harvest moon. It can help us delight in a mathematical insight or the surprising eloquence of a six-year-old child. For wonder is the one human experience that dissolves our biases so we can see the beauty of ourselves, one another, and our world more clearly. Wonder cracks us open to the beauty of this one life amid rampant uncertainty. But how does it do so—and what gets in our way with wonder?

Mornings can brim with possibility. Sunlight breaks the dark sky, your eyes open onto the ceiling, and you might wonder, “What could I experience to day?” Maybe you imagine the ways your hours could unfold so that by night you felt you’d had a meaningful adventure. Or maybe your mind simply starts fretting about that unanswered email from your colleague or your child’s lost retainer that exhausted your budget.

I begin the first hours of almost every morning with both minds. One is a summer camper who relishes the idea of mornings because I equate them with open opportunity to make the most of the day. I’ve been known to ask my family to join me in impromptu dance parties at breakfast, sometimes to their grumbling annoyance. As a result, even on a gray winter’s morn, the inner light of our family amps up a few watts. Yet I also have a nervous Piglet mind. Even before I get out of bed, tiny worries can hijack huge amounts of mental megabytes that threaten to fritter away my energy. To waste time with constant worry seems like a petty crime to me. I’d rather expire at the end of a day with my pockets stuffed with wonder.

Wonder? Yes, even as a bespectacled, silver-haired man weighed down with responsibilities, I say *wonder*. Let me say this to you from the outset: Wonder is not simply for kids. Wonder is also radical grown-up stuff. It’s for you, too.

“ Wonder is not simply for kids. Wonder is also radical grown-up stuff. ”

This book begins with this simple premise: when we look at visionaries, artists, scientists, and inspirational figures, we see that some of them have indeed practiced the proverbial ten thousand hours or demonstrated remarkable grit and focus in order to manifest their great work and fulfilled lives. But even more of them have a surprising advantage: they’ve kept alive an abiding sense of wonder. We now have increasing scientific evidence that experiences of wonder play a big role in sparking innovation, motivating us, and allowing us to derive meaning from what we create and experience.

The good news is that we all have access to this capacity to wonder. We always have. We just forget. Tracking wonder is the approach I have developed and tested so you can learn again how to reclaim a life of meaning and possibility without burning out. For as you will discover and as this book argues, wonder offers a beautiful counterbeat to our culture’s obsessive drumbeat of productivity.

Imagine wonder as a multifaceted prism through which you can see and experience your days anew. In this book, we explore six such facets of wonder. Track wonder through each of its facets and you can live more creatively, deepen your relationships, and navigate surprising challenges with more flexibility.

The science, stories, and invitations I share here allow you to sharpen your understanding of wonder’s dimensions and, if you choose, to apply them toward advancing an endeavor (personal, business, or otherwise) *creatively*.

Tracking wonder, then, is in part another form of paying attention. Maybe you’ve tried to “app your way to happiness” by downloading a dozen apps to help you meditate, measure your steps, and calculate your calories, all before 10 a.m. For some peo-

ple, these methods are tremendously helpful. But many people are unsettled by messages of “Crush it!” “Hack your productivity!” and the incessant command to “Get things done!” If that sounds familiar, yet you’re still looking to boost your creativity and find more fulfillment, you might benefit from experiencing wonder’s facets.

Or perhaps you have a steady meditation or mindfulness practice but find that it doesn’t give you the clarity and agency you’re craving. A dose of wonder could be the missing ingredient of your practice that helps you foster a wholly new relationship with your mind. Tracking wonder every day in fact could help you measure the real value and beauty in your life.

THE HEART OF LIVING CREATIVELY

If you ever doubt your own creative potential, you’re not alone. Over two-thirds of Americans believe creativity is valuable to our world, and a solid 75 percent value their own creativity in addressing personal and professional challenges, yet only one in four believes they are living up to their own creative potential.

Part of the problem is we sometimes get creativity all wrong. We don’t view ourselves as creative or as leading fulfilling creative lives because we misunderstand what creativity is. When we talk about “creative” here, I mean creative in the sense of *how* you handle the inevitable uncertainties, doubts, and challenges in your life. *Creative* is not something reserved only for artists. *Creative* refers to how you can bring your ideas to fruition. What if the surprising advantage to living a life rich with creative possibility, meaning, and mastery is something we *all* have access to? What if each of us could shape such a life, no matter our circumstances?

In this age, your ability to fulfill your creative potential has less to do with developing a single-track talent in a specific domain and more to do with how you finesse challenges in pursuit of your aims. And as we’ll see, it turns out that tracking experiences of wonder is the ideal skill set to do so.

RIPPLES OF WONDER

Imagine an experience of wonder like a pebble dropped into the pond of your perception. These moments, often quiet and fleeting, make ripples that expand and linger. Attend to enough of these rippling moments over time and your overall outlook just might shift for the better. What are some of those rippling effects?

Wonder is what can nudge your most meaningful ideas toward fulfillment even amid inevitable challenges: a computer crash, the toddler tantrum, or your own mental fatigue. Wonder, as we will see, also can provide the perspective to push through difficult experiences of grief, illness, or failure. For unlike almost any other emotional experience, wonder can keep us buoyant amid waves of uncertainty, sorrow, and fear without sinking into complete despair.

That's because wonder momentarily dissolves our habitual ways of seeing, relating, and thinking so we can glimpse again what is real and true, beautiful and possible. Consider what the English poet William Blake said about our perception: "If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things through narrow chinks of his cavern." We each are wired to see things through narrow caverns for survival, but we human beings also have this extraordinary ability to trip our wiring with wonder and cleanse our perception.

Wonder also is a healing force. It snaps us out of cynicism and disbelief. It interrupts patterns of negativity, rumination, and monotony; rescues us from maelstroms or downward spirals; and offers us glimpses of another reality, right where we are. In addition, wonder turns us away from self-absorption and attunes us to others. People who experience wonder with each other develop strong bonds. Martha Nussbaum, a renowned theorist of ethics at the University of Chicago, says wonder is responsible for giving rise to other emotions—compassion, empathy, and love—that draw us out of ourselves and toward others. Experiencing more wonder can open us up to the folks we deem "different" from us.

Wonder can favorably tip our emotional and psychological scales in areas such as generosity, optimism, and making a difference in other people's lives.

In part because of wonder's unique and subtle effects, René Descartes called wonder "the first of all the passions," while Socrates said that "philosophy [or the study of wisdom] begins in wonder." Wonder is with us from our first morning in this world and stays with us until the last. This book invites you to open up to it again for the dawns in between.

Tracking wonder and its six facets offer three avenues to help you fulfill your dreams:

LIVE MORE CREATIVELY. Through tracking wonder you can frame every day as a creative quest directed by your curiosity and insight. You can trace your unique force of character that has been with you since your best childhood days and that guides you toward your most fulfilling activities.

BUILD YOUR RESILIENCE. Tracking wonder shows you how to "fertilize confusion" when you're bewildered and how to find hope amid adversity—all as opportunities for creative, personal, and spiritual growth.

DEEPEN YOUR RELATIONSHIPS. Tracking wonder shows you how to dissolve your unconscious judgments, open up your mind so you can develop deeper connections, and practice the art of admiration.

And let's remember this: As anyone who has ever gazed up at the stars on a clear night knows, wonder is ultimately inexplicable, connecting us to the divine mysteries of the universe. It reminds us humbly that the more knowledge we gain, the more we discover we do not know.

WHERE I COME FROM AND WHERE YOU MIGHT COME FROM

To guide your tracking wonder journey as clearly as possible, I write from my singular perspective. I'm a cis male of European ethnic heritage residing in the Hudson Valley of New York. I'm neither wealthy nor poor, and don't experience disadvantage or discrimination regularly, if at all. I am well supported by my family, and I have been able to overcome hardships in part because of their help and love, as well as because of the tracking wonder practices I will share with you. I grew up in the 1970s, came of age in the 1980s, and have been a husband and father for over a decade. Sometimes I am able to step out of the bounds of my perspective and articulate a universal truth, and other times I am limited by who I am and can only speak to what I know. I no doubt maintain undiscovered biases and privileges, and I may not even know when these instances are, though I am committed to dismantling them whenever they crop up. I have made every attempt to consider feedback from people of different backgrounds and identities as I developed my teachings for tracking wonder, but I know that I can never speak for everyone. I write with humility, and I invite you to read with an unbiased openness so that wonder can work its magic through these words.

In interviews and conversations, people sometimes ask, "Shouldn't we just leave wonder alone?" and "Can you really teach something as spontaneous as wonder? Isn't that something that just comes with surprise or inspiration?" These questions might stem from a belief that something as truly exquisite and beautiful as the experience of wonder should not be reduced to pragmatism. I get that. I don't want to pin down wonder in my butterfly collection as a specimen of the human experience. If anything, over the past ten-plus years, I have aspired to unravel my assumptions about wonder and have explored well beyond my subjective experience, but at some point, one must be willing to make the case for what one believes so that many people can benefit.

My studies of Western wisdom traditions, philosophical hermeneutics, Eastern wisdom traditions, Native American stories, mythology and storytelling, creativity, entrepreneurship, and especially psychology and neuroscience have influenced my study of wonder, as has my direct and immediate experience in the world. My intellectual and empirical journey has guided me toward certain truths. One is this: wonder is a portal of consciousness that lets us see again what is beautiful and real, true and possible.

Every single one of us has this truly extraordinary capacity for wonder. Why *not* foster it in ways that help us individually and collectively contribute to the world in a positive way?

My work has led me especially to test these ideas among everyday geniuses of creativity. They are the people who teach *me* what is possible. They are the entrepreneurs and executives, teachers and makers, parents and caretakers who have "out there" ideas and find ways to bring those ideas from fantasy to fruition. Sometimes they do so at great odds, without the ready resources of the rich and famous. Maybe they have young children or aging parents or a middle-aged brain or a full-time job. Inevitably, unbidden surprises and obstacles could ambush their best-laid plans. What fascinates me about them is less their outward successes and more how they fashion lives of meaning and mastery along the way. More than any scholar, scientist, or obscure text, my clients, students, participants, audiences, and community members have taught me the most about wonder and its very real applications. These people are my heroes. This book puts their stories next to some of the more renowned geniuses of the world. This book is for them as it is for you.

In my consultancy and community, I hear people hungering for something beyond what they can attain with money. They don't just want to get a promotion, move into a bigger house, or take more expensive vacations. They don't want to hack time just so they can work more. This book is written specifically for people who want to feel alive in pursuit of ideas and activities that mean something to them at their core. They might desire to work through problems—big and small, personal and public—in novel

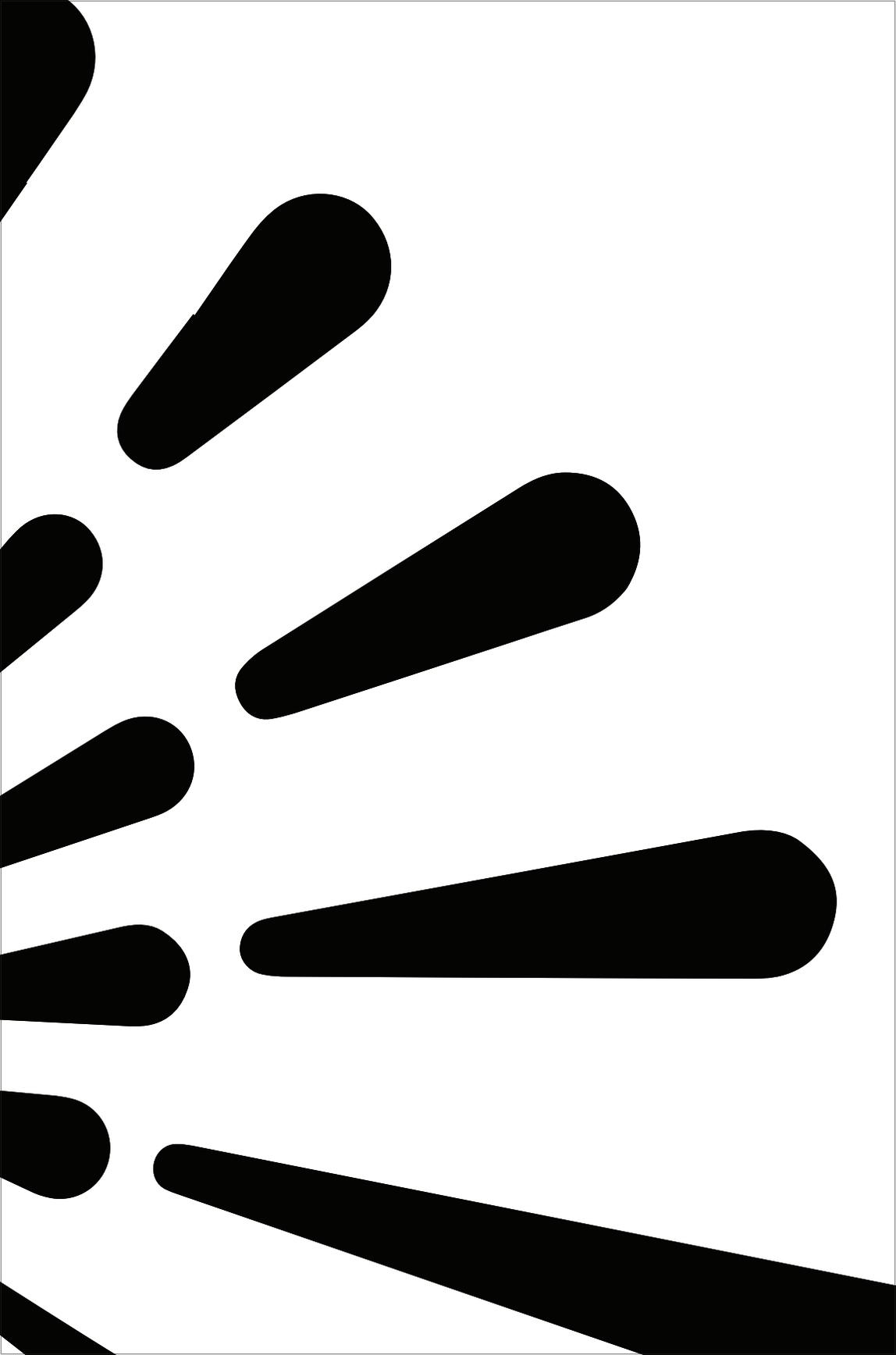
and useful ways. It's also written for those people who want to contribute to something that makes other people's lives richer or better. Along the way, they want to navigate—not escape—disappointments and persistent challenges with more wit, flexibility, and fortitude. And they want to experience life's mysteries with wide-eyed openness and appreciation. Wonder, it turns out, is at the heart of these desires. If this describes you, read on.

When we bring wonder to the forefront of our daily, business, and creative endeavors, it makes our fullest expression of creativity possible. It also enables fruitful connections. It is time for our culture to evolve beyond an ideal of productivity that foregrounds control, efficiency, and discipline while ignoring what truly motivates us. Making this transformation requires that we develop a new set of skills and modes of perception, grounded in the infinite possibility of the present moment. This is Tracking Wonder.

The background of the page is a white field filled with numerous black teardrop-shaped elements. These shapes are arranged in a radial pattern, appearing to emanate from a central point on the right side of the page. The shapes vary in size and orientation, creating a dynamic, sunburst-like effect. A thin vertical line is visible on the left side of the page, possibly indicating a page fold.

CHAPTER 1

FLAMES



I PEELED A PAPERBACK edition of psychology's founding figure William James's *Essays on Psychology* from the burnt, blackened wall of my study. The book—the one that included the early American psychologist's prescient observations on different kinds of focus, on the need for relaxation, and on different states of consciousness—had been compressed into the wall from the pressurized fountain of the firefighters' hoses. I ripped from my singed walnut desk a copy of the Buddhist psychologist Mark Epstein's book *Going to Pieces Without Falling Apart* as I tried to hold it together. In a bit of a stupor, I scanned the room and took in the soaked books strewn on the hardwoods, a heap of ash where my modest meditation table had been, and dim rays of sunlight coming in through the holes the firefighters had knocked in the walls so the flames could escape.

It hadn't been an easy summer. My wife, Hillary, and I were newly married. A year before our wedding, we'd bought an 1850 farmhouse in New York's Hudson Valley. "The House of Great Strength," we called it. I—the wide-eyed dreamer, writer, and entrepreneur—had my sunny study that looked through a wide window onto my version of Walden Pond. Hillary—the acupuncturist, professor of Chinese Medicine, and business owner—relished her home office and sunny garden. We were ready at last to build our lives, our mutual businesses, and maybe someday a family. My parents divorced when I was thirteen, and as a teenager growing up with my bachelor father, I was on my own a lot—shopping for my own groceries, caring for the house, doing the laundry, and getting to school. Hillary and I each had had fleeting first marriages, and since we both savor prolonged solitude and quiet, neither of us were certain if we'd ever find a partner we could live with for several years. This was the first stable relationship and the first stable home we both had ever had. The morning that we moved in, we sat out back, gazing upon the large pond fed by a mountain stream. I said, "I think I could die here." We felt at home.

But that first summer, Hillary had two miscarriages. Our plans for children postponed, we weren't sure if we'd ever have the family we both deeply wanted. While I was leading a retreat not

far from where we lived, I got what I thought was a spider bite. It grew black and red, and the night I came home I had fevers and cold sweats all night. The doctor saw a bull's-eye around the bite and quickly made the diagnosis of Lyme disease. The brutal antibiotics used to treat it slammed me on my back, leaving me exhausted and brain-fogged.

Then, on a July afternoon, Hillary and I had set out for a self-guided local farm tour in the hamlet where we live. By the time we left the first farm, an eerie, purple-colored storm had rolled in without warning. We pulled over and gawked at the lightning bolts that laddered from the sky to the earth. By the time the downpour sent us back home, four red trucks' worth of firefighters were pointing hoses toward our farmhouse. Lightning, the fire investigator later explained, had likely hit a black walnut tree that stands outside my study. The voltage apparently traveled under my floor, found a faulty electric wire that extends to the attic above my study, and fused the wire.

Flames roared through the room, burning twenty years of paper archives, destroying three hundred volumes of books, and melting my laptop that contained all the files of a new endeavor. This fire came way before the digital cloud, and I would never recover most of my work. Firefighters arrived, waterlogging what remained. After the smoke subsided, we were out of our home for nearly a year and a half. And within ten months, bitten by another tick, I was confirmed to have Lyme disease. Getting through the day with all my symptoms felt like trying to drive seventy miles per hour in second gear.

You likely have had your own version of house fires and tick bites—perhaps much more dire than this account—and if you have, I am truly sorry. We each construct a home of beliefs and values, relationships and work that makes up our reality. When the one you've made burns, how do you respond? How do you navigate these times when you're just starting a new dream or in the middle of one? Is the highest aim merely to get through the day as unscathed as possible? If you view life as a quest, as I do, then you acknowledge that challenges are part and parcel

of what to expect on this path you've chosen. But, whoa!—and woe!—when those challenges are relentless, accumulative, and seemingly personal.

“ We each construct a home of beliefs and values, relationships and work that makes up our reality. When the one you've made burns, how do you respond? ”

When I returned to our property to assess the damage, the sky showed through holes knocked out of the study's walls and ceiling. I am not one to give in easily to self-pity, but I really did start to question how it could be that once we had finally launched our dream, it could all vaporize in a flash of lightning. I wanted to cry, but I couldn't find the tears. I wanted to scream, but I couldn't direct the rage. Instead, I calmly gathered William James and Mark Epstein, bell hooks and Henry David Thoreau, and a score of poets, trying to build a familiar alliance of soul, music, and inner fire. I knew I had to muster every ounce of soldierly grit to persist, but I stood before that charred wall dizzy with both a load of anger and a shred of acceptance about what was to come next. I can only describe this mixed state as confusion, if not vertigo. I felt an uncomfortable urge to shut down.

Yet amid the black rubble, a small fluttering of yellow appeared. A monarch butterfly—likely appearing in an uncanny color morph—had slipped in and landed on a smoked-out shelf. Its fuzzy torso was the size of a baby's finger. It carried two enormous paragliding wings, etched like stained glass panels. They waved back and forth, back and forth, back and forth, like two palms pulsing in prayer.

For a moment, the pieces I was fiercely holding together inside me dissolved. For a moment, a strange sense of opening swept

through me, wide and free. For a moment, among the ruins of our simple dreams, there fluttered a small, winged hope. Feeling that beauty and recognition, fleeting as it was, I knew ultimately we would be okay, maybe someday even better.

In the ensuing months, that monarch's surprising effect would remind me of what I had been pursuing before the fire: tracking wonder. I had been attuned to ordinary magic since I was a boy and into adulthood. In my earliest memory at four years old, I awoke in the middle of the night to see three smiling sea turtles waltzing over my bed. That surreal moment lingered with me into my youthful forays. I yearned to discover such magical surprises in the everyday world, whether wandering through the woods or a book. At age eleven, I banged out adventure stories on my father's typewriter, with my neighborhood friends and me as characters. But by sixteen, I feared my imagination and capacity to experience the world through metaphors was slipping away. Yet in college I pursued writing poetry as a way to open my eyes again and express delight at the small things of the world. Writing and teaching as a young adult seemed to be the best ways to hold on to that dream space. But it was in my thirties while researching the imagination for another project that I found a name for what I had been seeking most of my life.

Before I met Hillary, I had traveled to the South Indian city of Chennai to study yoga with my teacher, Sri T. K. V. Desikachar. Desikachar's down-to-earth approach as well as yoga's flow of postures and breathing practices had unwound my tight body, unraveled my heart, and cleared my overwrought mind, but it had also reignited my imagination. Thanks to Desikachar, I discovered a text called the *Siva Sutras: The Yoga of Supreme Identity*. In a few commentaries, the scholar Jaideva Singh references a central passage that says, in essence, that the yogi who is able to experience the unity of consciousness throughout states of wakefulness, dreaming, and sleeping also experiences wonder, a joy-filled amazement at life.

Another kind of recognition struck me. That space where the waking world meets dreaming and wonder—that space has tanta-

lized my imagination since I was a towheaded boy climbing trees and recording dreams. I read the passages again, relieved that this sage was advising me that I didn't have to renounce the world to attain fulfillment. The aspiration he described was to experience the delight of being, in all its peace and fire, right here. The drive to experience wonder, I realized, is what led me to all my areas of study and eventually to my professional teaching and consulting. "That's what I've always been seeking," I thought.

Adversity and uncertainty can spur a crisis of identity and of creativity. In such confusion, with little view of the future, you can slip into despair. You can feel as if you're dropping down that rabbit hole with no control. "Who are you?" the caterpillar asks Alice in Wonderland, and she doesn't know. From that dark and low place, your creativity seems shattered, just at a time when you need hope and openness to create something new. After my house burned, I could have remained in that hole. But wonder showed me a way out. Wonder lets us receive the uncertainty rather than flee to the next easy answer.

By the time of the fire, I had already scoured the journals, interviews, memoirs, and biographies of other writers, innovators, scientists, and artists to corroborate this feeling so many of us share but have difficulty articulating. It was a project of its own unwieldy nature, not yet explicitly connected to my career as an entrepreneur, consultant, and teacher. I had identified the state of wonder as the inspiration for the philosophy that gave rise to the *Siva Sutras* as well as to the first section of the *Tao Te Ching*. I had traced the concept in the mythologist Joseph Campbell's descriptions of the hero's journey. I had tracked the centuries-long debates about wonder among Christian theologians and Western scientists and philosophers.

I had tried to find explanations of my findings in the fields of psychology and neuroscience—although the literature was scarce at the time. I used my vacation time to pursue certain threads. Hillary and I once ventured to the Rio Grande border to spend a few days among North America's largest collection of cave rock art. With the guidance of Carolyn Boyd, an artist, archaeologist,

and founder of the Shumla Archaeological Research and Education Center, we took a boat down the Pecos River. We encountered sophisticated images inscribed on stone by the people of the Lower Pecos Canyonlands over four thousand years ago. Boyd calls these sites North America's "oldest known books." I had another entry for my personal encyclopedia of wonder.

But then came the summer of lightning and fire that brought urgency to my wonder quest. Shortly after the yellow monarch alighted from the burnt, black wall, I realized that it had launched my practice of tracking wonder. I knew I would only recover from all these setbacks if I learned how to harness wonder's force for my creative endeavors—right here, right now in this extraordinarily ordinary world. I couldn't let the butterfly become a beautiful fleeting moment. I needed it to be the first notes in a new symphony I would compose.

When Hillary and I finally moved back to the farmhouse, we also remodeled a room for our three-month-old baby girl. It seemed like no small miracle that this human being came to us amid such hardship. One crisp morning, I took our baby, Dahlia, for a walk down the road. Her tiny body snuggled into a swaddle strapped to my shoulders, she took in the crimson and golden leaves around us. I walked slowly, still affected by Lyme. Just as I felt a surge of fear that I might never be the larger-than-life papa I had at last imagined I could become, I paused.

I gazed into my infant girl's sky-blue eyes. I recognized in her gaze what I had been tracking since my boyhood—a natural capacity to see what is real and true, what is beautiful and possible without the filtered prejudices and judgments of adulthood. I made two silent vows. First, I promised to relearn from her the art of not-knowing. I also pledged to live a life so rich with creativity and wonder that she would embrace becoming a grown-up, too, instead of desperately clinging to her childhood.

I now have a more fully realized appreciation for wonder, and regularly open my Wonder Eyes. Doing so has guided me through many passages in life. I welcomed our equally miraculous second daughter four years after our first, helped build Hillary's business,

recovered from Lyme, and developed Tracking Wonder into a dynamic brand consultancy and international community. Getting to the other side of trying times made me want to explore this question: *How could you practice fostering experiences of wonder in times of adversity and challenge?* My project of tracking wonder took on greater urgency as I deliberately tested out how to guide professionals, entrepreneurs, and others to harness their experiences of wonder. After testing out some new practices in training workshops, I witnessed wonder's magic on a diverse set of individuals. One insight especially stood out: *You can captivate, elevate, and enchant others. You can gift wonder.*

As I built the Tracking Wonder business, I devoted even more attention to tracking my personal practices at home and work, but I also continued to assimilate the emerging scientific studies on resilience, emotions, creativity, and innovation. I have interviewed and worked with people in many fields to get insight on other questions:

How do creative people thrive and keep open to possibility in times of challenge and change?

How do people advance their best ideas for a better world—without working themselves into the ground?

How do they keep pursuing a creative life of meaning and deep connection over several years?

It's no surprise that wonder keeps appearing in their lives.

FIVE INSIGHTS ABOUT WONDER

There are five other central insights about wonder central to this book.

1. Wonder Is Fleeting Yet Enduring in Its Effects

An experience of wonder can happen like a flash of lightning or a fluttering of a butterfly, but it can have long-lasting effects. Most of our daily awareness is set unconsciously on a default mode of getting things done. We see each other and our work through biased filters. The more we experience, the thicker those filters can become. For a few seconds or minutes, an experience of wonder can dissolve those filters. We can see ourselves, others, our work, and the world around us in startling, even disorienting ways that are nonetheless real, true, and beautiful. Those few seconds or minutes experienced more often can gradually shift our general outlook and capacity to make things happen and make our lives extraordinary.

“ For a few seconds or minutes, an experience of wonder can dissolve those filters. We can see ourselves, others, our work, and the world around us in startling, even disorienting ways that are nonetheless real, true, and beautiful. ”

2. Wonder Begins with an Infant's Eyes and Evolves to Adult Perception

My baby girl's eyes looked up at me searchingly. From our first breaths, wonder is initially visual, brought to us through our eyes.

If we can imagine wonder in part as a practice to regain this childlike visual perception, we can actively disrupt our eyes' default overfamiliarization with our physical world. As we age, our brains naturally categorize things, which helps us adapt to our environment but also leads to narrowed perception. As our weary eyes become Wonder Eyes again, we can appreciate the simple forms, shapes, and designs of things. When our perception widens, we can see new possibilities.

3. Wonder and a Creative Life Are Partners

In fact, recent developments in psychology corroborate those ancient tradition's insights. Wonder is the singular experience that resets our outlook outward to what is possible and expands our perspective. When we actively foster wonder daily, we are less likely to compartmentalize wonder to “creative pursuits,” apart from the rest of life's “drudgeries.” We bring more openness and curiosity to whatever challenges may arise—from finessing a four-year-old's temper tantrum to fulfilling a client deliverable to holding a team meeting to advancing your dream. We lead a creative life with less inner battle and more integration.

4. Wonder Is Not Child's Play

A range of environmentalists, biologists, and theologians have called for a renewed sense of wonder to help us grown-ups learn how to live more openly and optimally in relation to one another as well as with the earth and all living beings. If we are going to advance our best ideas for a better world, then tracking wonder assumes a new height of responsibility. To put it simply, what we wonder at, we are more likely to care for. I want you to care about your best ideas to bring forth the best possible world. This book humbly invites you to do so.

5. Tracking Wonder Is a Skill and Mindset We Can Learn and Practice

Wonder, I have discovered, can be fostered and invited to accompany us as we endeavor to live, relate, and create fully in this

complex world. We can track our own cognition and experiences and thus more readily appreciate and even extend these moments of wonder. The chapters that follow provide methods for developing these skills.

YOUR TRACKING WONDER JOURNEY

You cannot defer your own wisdom to the author of this book. It's essential that you go out and test things for yourself. This book's purpose is not only to offer a new understanding of wonder but also to help you trust your own experiences of wonder in your own full life.

Within each chapter you will find sections titled "Your Tracking Wonder Journey." These are invitations to reflect, assimilate, and test out one or more of the frameworks or principles presented. I suggest you keep all your tracking wonder exercises in one "Tracking Wonder" notebook. I recommend notebooks with dot-grid pages because they allow you to follow the form of expression wonder calls you to—whether you write, sketch, or doodle.

SNOW

While writing part of this book, my firstborn daughter was nine years old. It's a time when most children's brains develop in such a way that they grow ever more emotionally complex, develop more awareness of their own thoughts, and become more attuned to what other people think of them. She's given to a range of complex emotions like any healthy human being. She manages to spend many of her free hours absorbed in her own creation: writing and crafting her own storybooks from paper and yarn, sewing pillows for friends, knitting tiny clothes for her younger sister's stuffed animals, and composing quirky songs. One winter morning she had a snow day at home. I was in my study writing when she peeked in to ask what I was doing.

"I'm writing about this idea I have about young geniuses."

"Oh, that's me," she said with a smile.

"Ha. That's right"

"Papa, do you want to come out and play in the snow?"

"Oh," I said, "that sounds great, but I'm in the flow here and I don't want to interrupt it. Maybe later."

"Okay," she said, nonplussed, and off she went on her own adventures.

The room was quiet again, but of course now my mind wasn't. I typed a few more sentences, but Dahlia's invitation lingered. Outside the study window, snowflakes fell and started to cover the boughs as if miniature clouds had come down to roost. It would likely be this winter's last snow. I stared again at the screen and the blinking cursor.

Who was I kidding? I had a vow to keep.