

Working with a Nightmare

Mindfulness Worksheet

Date / Time:

So far today, have you brought kind awareness to your:

Thoughts? Heart? Body? None

To begin this Meditation, please bring kind awareness to

- why you chose this topic
- how your belly, chest, and head each feel when you reflect on this topic
- the emotions that you can associate with these visceral feelings
- the positive or negative impact of any stories you believe in regarding this topic
- the fact that many others are feeling similarly about this topic as you
- how you might feel with increased awareness around this topic
- when you can apply increased mindfulness to this topic in your day-to-day life



[MindfulnessExercises.com/Working-with-a-Nightmare](https://www.MindfulnessExercises.com/Working-with-a-Nightmare)

■ PURPOSE / EFFECTS

According to Jungian psychologist and master of dreamwork Stephen Aizenstat, nightmares represent one of the most unused natural resources for psychological healing.

Disturbing dreams that contain monsters, aliens, killers, life-threatening catastrophes, and so on represent invitations from the deep unconscious to connect with our deep Self.

The Self is a natural, wild, untamed thing, that does not conform to the needs of our safe little egoic constructions. Despite our efforts to repress and deny our own “soul” (another word for the deep Self, albeit one with strong religious connotations), it is in fact the organic, generative, natural core of our being.

Thus we cannot get away from it, and the struggle to do so can only result in our lives become flat, stale, dull, and impoverished.

Working with a nightmare is an incredibly powerful way to reconnect with the “juice” of life. It can ignite creativity, dispell depression, relieve anxiety, and reawaken us to the beauty and depth of each moment.

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METHOD

Summary

Deeply explore a nightmare image.

Long Version

1. For this exercise you need paper and a pen.
2. Bring to mind a nightmare you recently had, or a nightmarish image from any dream. A nightmarish image can be terrifying, but it could also be disgusting, sick, alien, bizarre, or in some other way disturbing.
3. Write down everything you can about this dream image. See it in your mind's eye. Describe it in great detail.
4. If the image is too terrifying to confront directly, then first connect with a dream image that you find comforting and protective. Keep this guide/protector image with you while you work with the nightmare image.
5. The nightmare image may grow bigger, get scarier, or somehow attempt to intimidate you. Alternately, it may disappear from your imagination, as it tries to hide itself.
6. It is important that the image understand that you are not trying to kill or annihilate it. Speak to it directly, saying that you simply want to see it, and that you will not hurt it in any way.
7. Simply tolerating the presence of such an image is a big accomplishment. If this is as far as you can go for now, that is fine.
8. If you can go further, attempt to investigate the sensory qualities of the image as specifically as possible. Get into the details, with as much curiosity as possible. If it is a huge tarantula, what is the texture of its spider fur like? What color are the feet of the image, and is there any dust or dirt on its "toes"? If it is not an animal or creature, but instead is some kind of natural phenomenon, like a tsunami, do the same thing with its characteristics. What does it smell like? What does it sound like?

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9. Once you get very clear about the sensory features of the nightmare image, attempt to draw it, write about it, dance it, sing a song about it, or otherwise make some creative expression about the image.

10. Repeat this process with the same image many times. Notice how the image begins to change over the weeks, months, and years. After a while, you may be quite surprised at what the image becomes!

HISTORY

This exercise is a paraphrase of many similar exercises developed by Stephen Aizenstat in his DreamTending work.

CAUTIONS

Working with a nightmare image can sometimes be quite difficult or intense. If you want to go deeply into this, it is recommended that you do so with the help of a therapist.

NOTES

It is very important that you do not attempt to “interpret” the image in any way. DreamTending sees interpretation as the attempt of the small, rational ego to control and dominate (and otherwise oppress) the contents of the deep unconscious.

Consider the nightmare image to be an actual entity, with its own life, its own purposes, and its own reasons for doing things. It is not necessarily “just part of you,” and it does not necessarily exist only to help you.

Let go of ideas like these, which only tend to deaden, neuter, and domesticate the wildness of the deep Self. Instead, encounter a dream image with all the care, caution, alertness, and wonder you might have for an encounter with a wild animal.