

10 PRACTICES FOR HONORING DARKNESS AND BEING WITH THE ENERGIES OF NIGHT



1) NOTICING ILLUMINATION

Befriending darkness can take many forms. In an over-illuminated world, could it be that we've let go of some of our ancestral connection to the gifts of night? Some have even proposed that because of light pollution, kids growing up without the wisdoms and mystery of the night sky are deprived of something essential to being human. Could we begin to treat darkness as a long-lost elder or lover with whom we can reconnect?

Practically, we can begin to notice how our easy access to nighttime illumination in our homes and neighborhoods can override our body's messages or *the season's recommended daily allowance of darkness*. Or what about that all-too-common modern urge to scroll our phone before we lay our head down for the night? Where are we banishing darkness? What effect do these habits have on our nervous system? Our quality of sleep? Our natural rhythms?

Invitation: Once a week to start, commit to turning off lights and devices a set time before your habitual time. Or only have candles after a certain time in the evening. You might start with just 10 minutes, then maybe half an hour on one day, slowly dimming lights in the evening. Check in with how you are responding.

Sit with the impulse to illuminate. Ask yourself: *What parts in me are unwilling to slow down?*

Are there unnecessary lights in parts of your house? It can be good to swap out bright white (blue spectrum) bulbs with softer (red or amber) bulbs. In time you might find yourself adopting this for more hours and more days, leaning into the natural cycles. After getting your reps in, you may even find your body and psyche craving a less illuminated world in the evenings.

2)DARK BATHING

You've heard of forest bathing. You've maybe flirted with rain bathing and snow angels. How about Dark Bathing? Dark bathing is like sky-gazing but you sit or lay in complete darkness. Allow yourself to float on the waves of darkness, becoming permeable to its soothing waters.

In darkness, our perception of form dissolves, which can allow us to experience different textures inside and out. We find that when we calm our dominant sense of sight, it invites many other senses to come alive.

Allow yourself to do nothing. Notice where your habits of thought and body, or inherited scripts of "DOING" live in you. If you do anything, take note of sensations and perceptions that may emerge in your body, mind, and heart. What if this was enough for the moment?

3)SILENT NIGHT WALK

Just what it sounds like. Find a nice, safe area to take a meander when it is dark. What do you notice (hear, see, smell, touch) that you don't notice in full visibility of daylight, in yourself and the surroundings? If darkness is a growing edge for you, knowing what's in dark can alleviate fears (see befriending the night below). If going alone does not feel good, go with a friend or group, and make a commitment to keep part of the walk in silence.

Pro tip if it is actually very very dark: walk slowly as close to heel to toe to assure your footing.

Whatever way you experiment with, ask yourself: *Can I let the season re-pace me?*

4)BE WITH THE NIGHT SKY

To be with the silence of the night sky and a trillion star siblings, a kin often hid from us by modernity's light and noise pollution. Since long before civilization, the night sky has enchanted and awed humanity. What treasures have fled from us in this 'progress'? It is said that more than half the present generation of children has never seen the full glory of the Milky Way. And what if the stars need us too? Read 'The Stars Used to Fall' in the Poetry section.

The Invitation: Find a place where more of the night sky is visible, and spend some time just gazing at the night sky. Do this on the regular and you will start to become legible in some of the habits of our cosmic kin. For guided inspiration, check out [Bear Guerra's Being With the Dark Photo Essay in Emergence Magazine](#).

I recently camped for a few days in an area officially designated a Dark Skies Sanctuary in Northern Nevada, about which I didn't know much about until recently. But I like the idea. You can find out more at [Dark Sky International](#).

5)BEFRIEND THE NIGHTLY ONES

Owls, foxes, and bats, oh my! How familiar are you with the multitudes of unseen, but heard critters in the night? The skunks and coyotes? Or the bats, salamanders, moths, fireflies? Some ecosystems have night-flowering plants.

Sometimes people have fear of the night in part because they don't know who lives and thrives in the night. By befriending and learning about some of the night magic, we can grow our comfort with darkness.

What about those owls and fireflies? That snail and the piece of lichen they are munching on? Or how about the unseen critters under the leaf mulch? The purple russula mushrooms or maple candy caps, that visible aspect of a wondrous underground mycelium network.

The invitation is to slow down and be in wonder at these beautiful kin, who have their vital role in the ecosystem. To say hi to tree's dark form and the bioluminescent larvae of glowworms, to be in awe at the undulating behavior of black slug, to put your head to the foreground in surrender to bolete mushroom, to marvel at the spiral beauty of snail.

6)SENSE WALK

The sense walk is a simple, but often profound, practice that drops you immediately into your senses and body. Since sight is such a dominant sense, if we close our eyes, our other senses can become enhanced. Thus, it is also sometimes called the Blind Walk. A sense walk opens us to a new experience of ourselves, our senses and the natural world and awakens us to the present moment and our innate curiosity.

The activity is best done in pairs. Find a partner and determine who will guide first (leader) and who will close their eyes first (follower).

- Ask your partner how they'd like to be guided: holding their hand, or a hand on their shoulder.
- The leader guides the person to several different sensory experiences, such as with trees, plants, ground, water, stones.
- Try to engage as many of the senses as possible : touch, taste, sound, scent.
- Leader attunes to how long partner needs with each sensory experience.
- If possible, use non-verbal communication instead of speaking unless there's a physical safety issue.
- Be creative, have fun, explore!
- Set a timer for 5-10 minutes and then switch roles without talking.
- Finally, share with each other about your experiences. Journal or draw about the experience.

7)WRITE A LOVE LETTER TO DARKNESS

Darkness as Lover? An love affair not in the dark, but *with* the dark?

Invitation: Write a love letter or poem to Darkness. Court the night. Let Darkness know you've noticed how they move. Tell the moon how shapely she is. Woo the stars into your heart. Be surprised by your affection for bats and things that go bump in the night. This may also be a love letter to the dark parts of yourself. (see Shadow and monster love below)

8)DARK MOON RITUALS

The Dark (new) moon can be a monthly invitation to befriend darkness. It is also an invitation to practice inquiries:

What darkness and stillness may I need to honor in my life?

What seeds of my new self, habits, ideas, projects, am I planting or needing to cultivate?

Many people conduct dark moon rituals in a wide variety of ways, including a new moon altar. A quick internet search reveals ideas. **This year the December dark moon falls on Friday the 19th.**

9)PUT ON YOUR GRAVEYARD BOOTS

Cemetery Date - Spend time walking or sitting in a cemetery. Give time for being still in the dark and reflection on Life's impermanence. It can be fruitful to take note of and work with sensations and images that arise. Be sure to be mindful of the cemetery's rules, such as not walking on graves and being quiet.

Death practices are a separate, but related, category. Many spiritual traditions have had practices of graveyard meditations. For example, the Tibetan Buddhist Chöd tradition has practices in the (inner and outer) charnel grounds, a particular place that holds powerful teachings on impermanence and is important for slaying the ego.

10)SHADOW STALKING AND MONSTER LOVE

"One does not become enlightened by imagining figures of light, but by making the darkness conscious. The later procedure, however, is disagreeable and therefore not popular."

—Carl Jung, *The Philosophical Tree* (1945), *Collected Works 13: Alchemical Studies*

If I had to summarize my understanding of shadow work it would be: **meeting, welcoming, and integrating unacknowledged, previously disowned or suppressed facets and vital energies ("positive" or "negative") into the Circle of our Whole Self.**

By definition Shadow is that which is unknown, unconscious, so how can we even talk about it or see it? That's the trick, right? We catch glimpses of the tail of the dragon on which we can pull on by asking questions, cultivating the appropriate attitudes of curiosity and compassion and gratitude. Unconscious stories and energies live within us that can be contrary to our consciously stated or societally accepted goals, intentions, and ideas.

Poet Robert Bly referred to it as the "long black bag we drag behind us" in his "A Little Book on the Human Shadow, saying we arrive into the world whole with a '360-degree personality' as a 'living globe of energy', spend our early years splitting parts of ourselves off in order to gain acceptance with parents and peers, putting them in the long black bag, and then spend the rest of our life unpacking that bag. Quite an image!

All of this "shadow work" has importance for our own lives, as we reclaim energies, aspects, and gifts. But also, by extension, shadow work is equally important for the world, as we show up in our embodied integrated wholeness, and contribute less to the collective shadow.

Poet David Whyte speaks of living with the "largest conversation we can have with the world" - When we apply that to include all elements of our Self, we can ask, "what bigger conversations can we have with our shadow material and monsters?" Monsters can be in the shadow or well-adjusted to daylight living.

Bly also suggests, "Every part of our personality that we do not love will become hostile to us."

So what are some ways to stalk our shadow and kiss our monsters on the snout?

The Playground of Beloved Monsters is where we take our elegant demons out for a little walk. We practice playing footsie with all the beautiful ghouls that haunt our halls. Where we risk the syrupy ache of opening ever-more fantastic cracks out of which our most fearless frogs and moon-faced monsters crawl, and with whom we eventually fall in love.

We might discover that sometimes monsters and the secret password are the same thing. We might find that the energy trapped in the nether regions can be re-enlisted to be aligned with our consciously-aligned values and vision.