

A Guide to Loving Our Inner Monsters.

~ Karisa Bigelow

Walt Whitman once said “Keep your face always toward the sunshine, and shadows will fall behind you.” This was, in fact, my life motto for a great deal of my life. And while I still think it’s lovely and carries with it great validity and merit, I think letting our shadows disappear behind us as we face optimistically toward the sun may not be the way to go, after all.

What if our shadow, as we try to forget about it, is begging to be seen? Yearning to be loved? Needing attention and acknowledgment so as to be nourished by the light?

Carl Jung was the first to write about the effects of denying our shadows, of rejecting our inner-monsters. He said “Our shadow is the person we’d rather not be.” The side of us that is jealous, fearful, enraged, temperamental, emotional, judgmental, and critical. Basically, it’s the side we’d try not to display publicly. It’s the ugly monster version of ourselves we keep chained up in the closet and beat into submission, hoping no one notices its existence. We’re told to behave. We’re told to be righteous. We’re told to be upright citizens that keep emotions in check. Our anger is looked down upon, our fears are ostracized, and our frustrations are **inappropriate**. We’re told to stay in line, and at all costs keep our monsters from ever showing their ugly faces.

Of course, our monster inevitably gnaws through its chains every once in a while and creates chaos and destruction wherever it goes, because it’s only ever longed to see the light. This monster, when left ignored, is then projected onto other people. This appears as strong emotional reactions to people and things—reactions that may feel automatic, impulsive, and like an unconscious reflex. These projections come in the form of judgments, criticisms, blame, or anger. (On a side note: I fully embrace and support the expression of emotion. However, when it becomes a reflex to act out in an emotional, fearful way that is damaging to yourself or others, something needs to be examined.)

Let’s use Star Wars as a classic, cool example: The inherent struggle between our light and dark is clearly and obviously displayed throughout the film. The dark-side of the force represents the dark side of our personality—the unwanted parts. Luke, at one point, even sees his own face in Vader’s helmet when he beheads him, reinforcing the idea that when we attack (or repress) our darkness, we are really only hurting ourselves and ultimately strengthening the power of this shadow. So just how can we face our shadows once and for all, and finally contribute to its dissolution instead of its power?

Become Aware of your Darkness.

Bring it to the light. Of course, this is going to require a ton of self-examination and self-reflection. Often, we are so unaware of our shadow that we don’t even know it exists any longer, except for when something triggers it. (The denser the shadow, the more likely you are to have reflexive, impulsive emotional outbursts or intense judgments and criticisms.) Make it your work to bring your inner-monster out into the light, and make friends with it. Listen to what it has to say. Nourish it with your light until it softens.

Face Your Own Soul.

In other words: know thyself. It's amazing the kinds of things people will do to avoid this one—be it with substances, people, material items, or television. Everyone has their way of avoiding themselves and pushing their emotions to the side. We often distract ourselves enough that we forget that our very work on this earth may just be to figure out what the hell is going on inside of us, and then make our way, no matter how tough the journey, to inner-peace. We can't do this is we numb ourselves and lock our monsters away so that we never have to actually acknowledge that they're there.

Use the World as Your Mirror.

This is an easy way to do some self-reflection. Every single thing that's currently in your existence is a mirror of your inner-world, reflecting back to you your thoughts, fears, expectations, hopes, dreams, and (you guessed it) your shadow. What do you find most irritating about other people? What angers you? What creates such fear and tension for you that you can't help but have an emotional outburst? What do you judge and criticize? Chances are, these things are all just *you vs. you*—the great battle between the light and dark. What are you denying within yourself? What are you scared of? You need only to take a look around you to see what outer conflict is taking place, stemming from that inner-conflict.

Make peace with yourself.

The light could not possibly exist without the dark. This means that the greatest, holiest, best versions of ourselves can only be known through the contrast of our inner-monsters. We are comprised of many things—within us all is the hero and the villain. We are inseparable mixtures of light and dark. The work here is not to always be the hero, but to know that we all have this battle within us, and that the light needs the contrast of the dark to shine even brighter. The darkness will always have its place—it our work to acknowledge and be ultra-aware of the various facets of our being. *Deny nothing.*

Make peace with all monsters.

When you make peace with your own inner-monster, and become so aware of its existence, your empathy will become seriously super-sized, and your apathy will begin to dissolve. You'll see conflict taking place amongst others and see what's really going on: just a bunch of people battling their own shadows. Ultimately, you cannot eradicate any part of your nature—but you can use deep, meaningful introspection to understand and more effectively deal with your inner-monster (and hell, maybe even learn to love it a little). Then, what you might find, is that you monster digs the light a little bit more than the dark, and your world is forever changed to reflect the new-found peace and harmony between *you and you*.