The Protector

Imagery for Developing an Internal Protector Figure

Estimated Time: 16 minutes

This imagery facilitates the development of an internalized Protector -- a figure whose defining quality is the capacity and willingness to keep you safe. For people whose early experience included threat without protection, the felt sense of "someone is standing between me and danger" may never have been established. This script creates that experience in the imaginal space. The Protector is not aggressive -- it is boundaried, certain, and unafraid.

Clinical Note:
The Protector figure is particularly relevant for clients with histories of abuse where no one intervened, boundary violations that went unaddressed, or chronic experiences of being undefended. It is also useful for supporters who have been absorbing crisis after crisis without anyone standing between them and the impact. This script can be used alongside the Container -- the Container holds disturbing material; the Protector holds the space around the person.

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Script

[Instruction] The Protector may take any form -- a person, an animal, a mythological figure, a force of nature, an ancestor. Some people develop protectors that are fierce (a bear, a warrior, a grandmother who took no nonsense). Others develop protectors that are quiet and immovable (a mountain, a large tree, a stone wall). Do not direct the form. Let the person's nervous system choose what it needs.

Allow yourself to be comfortable...either lying down or sitting up -- with your back, neck and spine fully supported. Knowing that you will not be interrupted for the next little while, begin by gently closing your eyes.

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

Now begin to bring your attention to your breath -- the direct experience of your breath -- however it is...and however it changes. Allow yourself to softly focus your awareness on the breath that is arising right now...the in-breath and the out-breath...the rising and the falling. If you can, try to follow one full cycle of the breath -- from the beginning of the in-breath, through its entirety...the beginning of the out-breath through its entirety. Allowing yourself the time and the space to be in direct contact with the breath throughout one entire cycle.

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

As you continue to pay attention to the breath, you may notice distractions that arise. Just allow yourself to notice...those distractions...any bodily sensations...any thoughts that may arise. If possible, allow yourself to become aware of the separateness of those bodily sensations -- notice how those sensations are separate -- distinct from your thoughts, your ideas and your words.

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

We'll begin now with a deep breath in through your nose...inhaling slowly and deeply. Exhale through pursed lips until all the air has been released.

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

Now I would like you to imagine that standing somewhere near you -- behind you, beside you, or just outside the edge of your awareness -- there is a figure whose only purpose is to protect you. This is a being that is not afraid. Not because it is reckless, but because it is certain. It knows what it is here to do. And what it is here to do is keep you safe.

[Pause — 15 seconds]

Allow this Protector to take whatever form arises. It may be a person -- someone you have known, or someone you have never met. It may be an animal -- something large and steady, or something fierce and fast. It may be a figure from myth or story -- a warrior, a guardian, an ancestor who watches over the family. It may not have a form at all -- it may simply be a presence, a force, a wall of calm certainty between you and whatever threatens.

[Pause — 15 seconds]

When you have a sense of this figure, begin to notice its qualities. How does it hold itself? Is there a solidity to it -- the kind of solidity that says, "I am not moving"? What is its posture? Is it standing? Is it facing outward -- toward whatever might come -- so that you do not have to?

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

Now notice what it feels like to have this figure between you and the world. You may not have had this experience before -- the experience of someone standing guard so that you could rest. The experience of not having to scan for danger because someone else is doing it. Allow yourself to notice what happens in your body when you do not have to be the one who watches.

[Pause — 20 seconds]

Is there a softening in your shoulders? In your jaw? In the muscles around your eyes? Is there a part of you that has been braced -- for years, perhaps -- that begins to release, even slightly, when it registers that something strong and reliable is standing between you and harm?

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

Now look at this Protector more carefully. What is the quality that allows it to do what it does? It is not anger -- though it may be fierce. It is not aggression -- though it will not back down. What is it? Is it certainty? Is it a clear sense of what is acceptable and what is not? Is it the willingness to say "no" -- not loudly, but absolutely? Is it the capacity to hold a boundary without apology?

[Pause — 10 seconds]

Name that quality to yourself.

[Pause — 5 seconds]

Now imagine borrowing that quality. Not the Protector's size or strength or form -- just the quality. The certainty. The clarity. The willingness to hold a line. Imagine it moving from the

Protector into you -- through your spine, through your chest, through your feet into the ground. Feel yourself becoming, even slightly, someone who can protect. Someone who can say "this far and no further" -- to a person, to a pattern, to a thought, to a memory -- and mean it.

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

Notice what changes in your body as you embody this quality. Does your posture shift? Do you feel taller? More grounded? Is there something in your chest that feels more solid -- more present -- than it did a few minutes ago? This is not performance. This is your nervous system recognizing a capacity it needs and beginning to organize around it.

[Pause — 20 seconds]

This quality was not invented today. Every time someone stood up for you -- every time someone said "that is not okay" on your behalf -- every time someone put themselves between you and something harmful, even in a small way -- that experience is in you. If no one ever did that for you, then the longing for it is in you, and that longing is not weakness. It is your nervous system knowing exactly what it needed and never received. This Protector is made of that knowledge.

[Instruction] Breathe audibly with the exhalation longer than the inhalation

Before you leave, take one more look at this Protector. It is not going anywhere. It does not require a crisis to show up. It is here in the quiet moments too -- standing watch while you sleep, holding the perimeter while you do the work of living. And the quality you borrowed today -- you can borrow again. Each time, the boundary becomes a little clearer. A little more yours.

[Pause — 10 seconds]

And when you are ready, gently bring yourself back to the room by counting up from one to five. When you reach the number five, your eyes will gently open. You will be awake and alert, and feeling only peace. One....Two....Three. Take a deep breath....Four....And five.

[Instruction] Allow the person to sit quietly. Protection is often the resource that produces the most affect -- particularly grief or anger about its historical absence. Give that space.

"The Protector" by Linda Curran

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