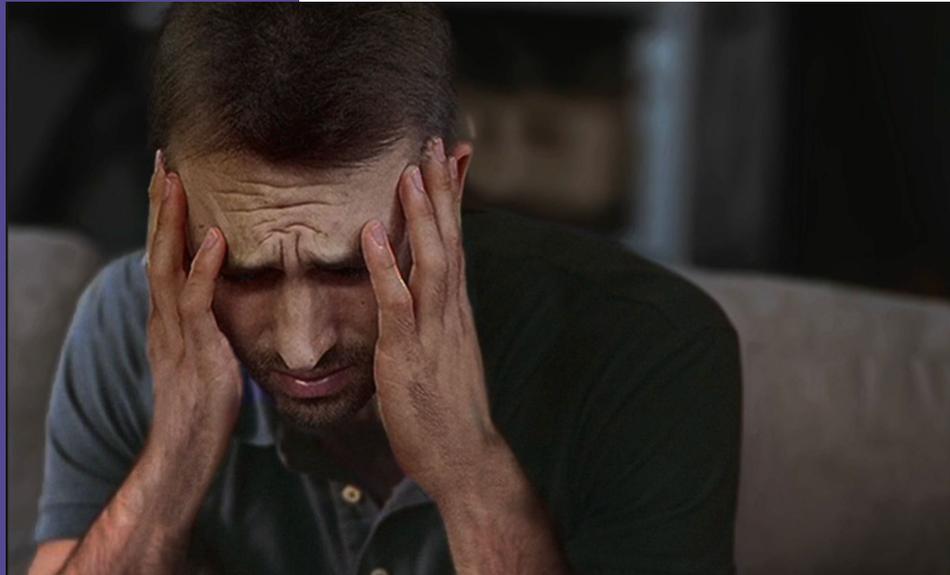


# Could Nightmares Heal the Trauma of War?

Most anyone who has experienced trauma or slept beside someone who has might find this question preposterous. Chronic nightmares are, after all, one of the primary indicators of a PTSD diagnosis. Disturbing dreams that remind someone of past trauma are often considered the reason that someone cannot “get over” PTSD.

In his newly released film, *Dreaming to Heal PTSD and Moral Injury*, psychologist-trained author and filmmaker Len Worley departs dramatically from our conventional understanding of disturbing dreams. They are, he says, Nature’s attempt to heal, not perpetuate trauma.

The 43-minute film tells the story of Jason, a young, troubled war veteran whose world is falling apart because he cannot sleep. At least, not long enough. He is too often awakened by nightmares of being chased by people who wish to kill him.



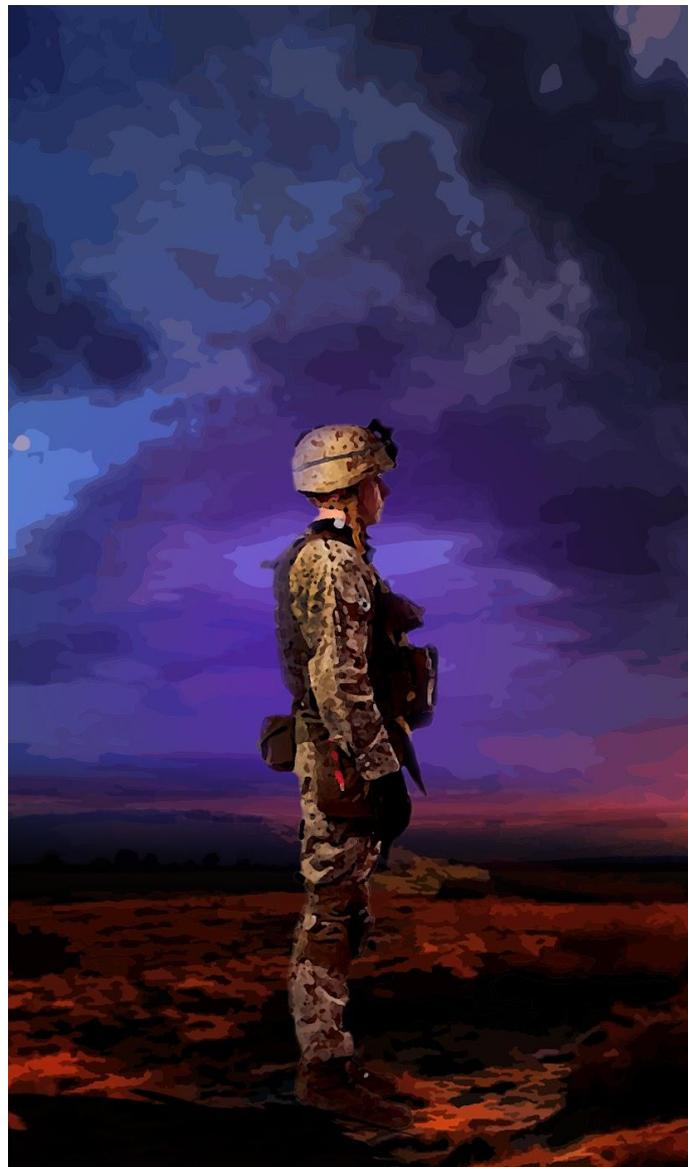
Jason, a burly, tattooed soldier desperate for help, finally turns and studies his recurring dream with the encouragement and guidance of a seasoned dreamworker. The sleep-deprived soldier has assumed that his nightmares are simply a remembering of the dangers he faced in war. Dr. Worley’s gentle and unbiased inquiry into the dreams reveals a different story. He notes that it is ordinary citizens – not soldiers – chasing Jason, a critical element that eventually offers the troubled soldier a solution.

Jason does not suffer from the memories of explosions and near-death experiences. His trauma is not fear based. Instead, his conscience has been harmed. He suffers from profound shame from what he did in war.  
Moral injury.

Often overlooked and misdiagnosed, moral injury requires a different solution than what is used for classic, fear-based PTSD. An accounting must be done with one's conscience. Given shame's overpowering and undermining effects, it must be approached with enormous respect and compassion.

Interspersed throughout Jason's story, Dr. Worley offers an unconventional, hopeful, and compelling assertion: "Nightmares," he says, "are Nature's attempt to help us face anything that has left us weakened, fearful, and disempowered."

The film's release coincides with the publishing of Dr. Worley's book *How to Complete a Nightmare: Responding Creatively to Disturbing Dreams*. Here he describes the courage and creativity used by a wide range of nightmare sufferers, not only soldiers, to end their nightly ordeals by understanding and thus cooperating with a dream's intention.



*Dreaming to Heal PTSD and Moral Injury* can be viewed on Dr. Worley's website: [EvolutionaryDreaming.com](http://EvolutionaryDreaming.com)