

A Simple Ritual For Banishing Fear Monsters

BY MONIKA CARLESS

I've just watched the movie "The Ritual". Have you heard of it? I'm not into "horror" as a genre in filmmaking but it was recommended by someone I love and so I did.

"The Ritual" is the story of four friends who embark on a hike of King's Trail in Sweden, (called Kungsleden). For a practicing witch, which I am, the word ritual evokes a certain meaning aligned with magical pursuits. I wondered whether there would be a Pagan-ish theme and the trailer, which shows the four men lost in the deep, dark woods, certainly promised to scare me with such.

I suppose the world is intrigued by the "dark arts" as they are called, with fear, and even a bit of a macabre fascination of watching humans struggle against unknown forces.

So I sat with my blanket handy, because it's winter here and also, I needed something to hide under if things got out of hand. But the monster that I expected to scare me wasn't the one in the movie. Okay, let me back up a bit.

A few years ago, fourteen to be exact, I decided on a long-distance hike of my own, this one in Northern England, on what is called the Coast to Coast path. It's a mostly un-signposted, 309-kilometer hike through the rugged landscape of the Lake District, The Yorkshire Dales, and the North York Moors. From the Irish Sea to the North Sea on the opposite side of England, this walk eschews roads and instead takes you along a series of paths indistinguishable from sheep trails and other highly questionable routes.

But it's England, right? How hard can it be? It's not the

friggin' Alps!

Let me state right here that the day I got lost in the Lake District and faced the biggest fear of my life is a blank page in my travel journal and this is the first time I'm writing about it.

So where were we? Oh yes, precisely at Black Sail Hut, a remote, stone built hostel near the River Liza, accessed by foot or bicycle, near Pillar Mountain and Great Gable. There are not adequate words in the English language to describe the unspoiled beauty of this location nor its utter solitude.

My walking partner and I were on day two of our trek, complete novices in long-distance hiking, and already escaping near death by scrambling over the wrong side of a slippery cliff, with a direct, steep fall into a cold, unwelcoming lake. I need to add here that I am a non-swimmer and that the foibles of English mountain weather were something I was keenly unversed in.

Much like the four friends in "The Ritual", we found ourselves leaving Black Sail Hut on a hopeful shortcut. We had just made a proper tea while at the hostel, which was abandoned at that time of day, left our two pounds in the jar and began to travel upward along the side of a waterfall to hopefully cross a mountaintop and descend into the village below.

Our big backpacks had been sent ahead to said village...alas, with our trusty compass. So now, having slipped and filled my one boot with cold water, we met along the way a lone traveler on his way down, who warned us that the weather up top was horrid and that we should not continue on.

That was the moment that defined the rest of the day. Although in my gut I knew that we should turn around, I reasoned that our bags had already been sent, we were meeting a third person for a picnic the next day, and well, how bad could it be up there?

I didn't listen to intuition, the knowing that never fails me, and plodded on to face an unrelenting monster.

When we did reach the top, it was night. Not really night, it was still sunny below, but in the wilds of Lake District mountaintops, it was dark, pouring rain with much-reduced visibility. No trail markers to direct us, no compass, just dense fog, and a chilling wind.

Can I say right here that I was scared as fuck? I was trained in outdoor survival, I knew how to forage for wild food, I knew how to look for a cave to hunker down in if things became dire, I could even have started a fire without matches, except, I became hypothermic and was absolutely no help to my also frightened walking companion. We had sweat so much climbing that hillside, and what with my boot being wet from my fall, I began to cool very quickly. And now, every direction one looked, only bogs, only fog, only fear.

As happens with hypothermia, I was at best, delusional. We wandered for quite a while and while my dear friend contemplated how she would tell my children that I was dead, I slipped in and out of reasonable thought. People do get lost and die up there – a surprising amount of them each year. This particular night, we later discovered, there were many who were lost and the conditions were so bad that there would have been no helicopter sent had anyone wanted to call for our rescue.

I have been very afraid in my life as a child, but this topped all those moments without a doubt. In my nonsensical mumblings, I did manage to convey to my friend that should we be able to hear the waterfall, we could take the route back down to Black Sail, and save ourselves. She knew that I wouldn't make it overnight. So she dragged me around while I

begged her to let me sleep until she heard the sound of tumbling water and we began our descent.

At Black Sail, we were met with a hostel full of lost and weary travelers, were stripped of our wet things which hung limp from the rafters by the fire, the stench of many wet hiking boots and a resident sheep filling the air, along with the aroma of the best meal I have eaten in my whole human life.

Cooked over a wood stove, soup, fresh bread, sausages, and potatoes, plus sticky toffee pudding to finish. But wait...also, a wine list to rival any London or New York – all cooked by the hostel keeper, whose long toenails oddly resembled those of his sheep's hooves. But I digress.

That night, lying by the fire in my make-shift sleeping cot, realizing that I had just eaten dinner in my knickers with twenty strangers, I fell in and out of nightmares. My poor brain tried to make sense of the day, my fear, and many long-forgotten fears. And so I got up a few times to wake my friend and tell her that the helicopters were flying overhead, ready to fetch us, and on it went. You're not going to believe this, but she actually has done two more long-distance hikes with me since then!

While watching "The Ritual", I was poignantly reminded of that fear, and how it controls us unless we de-monster it. That's a thing, by the way.

I had stuffed the memory of that night somewhere and had never breathed through it, felt it, tasted it, transformed it. I went on more hikes, got lost another time, suffered injuries, and refused to amend that blank page in my journal. I'm going to go back to it, draw the monster that almost killed me, and make friends with it.

Sometimes, I look back at all the monsters in my past and see how sad they seem. I even have compassion and empathy for them, because they have absolutely no power except the amount we afford them. We can strip them clean of their ability to destroy us. We create them. We dismiss them.

"All that we see or seem is but a dream within a dream."

~ Edgar Allan Poe

"The Ritual" reminded me that many times, fear and its associated monsters are an illusion, one that we grant a lot of room in our lives. And when fear is real, we can let it manifest into courage and strength or we can let it eat us alive.

I'd like to say that it didn't take me fourteen years to finally find grace about my poor decision-making at the time, but we grow as we grow, we learn about ourselves as we're ready. We forgive ourselves when we admit that hanging on to it was purely ego-driven masochism, and that the scariest monsters live inside our thought process.

If you watch "The Ritual", you may discover something similar in your past. Here is some magic to help with that.

A Simple Ritual for Banishing Fear Monsters

Create a small altar:

One white and one red candle – representing Spirit and Unconditional Love

Smudge stick – sage and cedar is nice

A small sprig of rosemary and a mortar and pestle

Any crystals that you have and desire to work with

Light your candles and play some music that inspires you to tap into your inner Self.

There's no hurry, spend as much as you need on integrating into the sacredness of this simple ritual.

Smudge your altar and your whole body.

Know that Love and Fear exist on opposite ends of the energy spectrum, and that when your heart chakra is open to Unconditional Love during ritual work, fear has no place within that boundary.

Crush the small sprig of Rosemary with your mortar and pestle, releasing the banishing power of the herb, and looking into the flames of the candles.

On a piece of paper, write your fear, and that you wish to release it to where it came from with love, peace, forgiveness, compassion, and conclusion.

Add some of the crushed, aromatic herb to the note and fold it over three times and tie with string.

In a suitable container, (be careful when inviting the element of fire into ritual) burn the prayer bundle.

Sit quietly for some time, feeling the release of the fear and thanking it for its valuable lessons. Transmutation of Fear to Unconditional Love will be taking place in the Heart Chakra, a safe space for this work to be done.

You may bury the ashes of your ritual in the ground, or release into a flowing body of water (seriously, a toilet will do, if you are in the city and there aren't any handy rivers, remember it's all about intention).

Allow the candles to burn out or snuff.

Banishing work is best done under a dark moon.

For more self-study, [The Urban Howl](#) recommends [The Universe Has Your Back: Transform Fear to Faith](#) .

Sip a little more:

[*Woman, I Worship At The Altar Of Your Womb*](#)

"May your longest nights be molten crucibles for your transformation, and may you be forever held by this wild ground. Whatever the nature of your pain in this moment, may you brew a warm salve from the kind words of a long-gone stranger and build yourself a soft nest out of your grandmother's legacy. "

DANIELLE DULSKY

*The Wolf-Woman's Grace: A Witch's
13th Moon Prayer*

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