

FACING YOUR FEAR

BY DIANA OLSEN

You have your candles picked out and a place away from distractions. You have your book of ritual. You're ready to go except for one little thing that keeps gumming up the works: you haven't dealt with your fear.

Fear is that emotion that made you wait six months until you felt comfortable buying a black candle. Fear made you hide all your altar materials, even though you live alone and only entertain your cat and your goldfish. Fear led you to store your tarot cards in the freezer.

Since this article assumes you're new to experiments in spiritual development, we'll also assume that you haven't crossed the maxim "let it flow and let it go" when dealing with any really strong motivating or un-motivating emotion.

This essay isn't about psychology and facing old resentments toward parents—leave that to professionals. This is about finding a way to ease into ritual so you can start experimenting within your chosen path. Reading about magic and earth worship is all fine and well, but if you don't add experience, a lot of that learning can go for naught.

Fear can prevent you from exploring rituals. For some, it even prevents reading about Paganism for fear of "going to hell" for witnessing "forbidden" information. Fear can prevent people from finishing rituals in process. Worst of all, it can prevent you from working through a valid learning experience.

The reason why this happens is similar to the reasons most of us survive a bed-wetting phase as children. We're afraid of the unknown; crossing into ritual practice means possibly raising the monster that used to live under our beds—and he doesn't just want toenail clippings anymore. We fear failure: what if disaster happens when we mispronounce a syllable? Will the cat turn into a puma and the house burn down? Will we have to face the embarrassment of doing this silly ritual only to find it doesn't work, and end up feeling even more foolish? These fears can't be blamed on all the times we had to wake our