**Ritual Bath for Reentry after a Long Illness**

By Lara Vesta

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Illness is a rite of passage, a transformative journey into the underworld. The journey of illness follows a path similar to other initiations:

Separation from the known: at the first sign of symptoms we are taken out of our expected trajectory—plans are withdrawn or put on hold, we are suspended for an indefinite amount of time from the usual activities of our lives.

Transition/Initiation: the duration of the illness is the liminal phase, sometimes readily felt as fevers and fatigue bring us more into a dream state. The fundamentals of the waking world can feel illusory, and there can be a sense of both mystery and peril—what is happening, will we survive? While some illnesses are predictable, others—or for vulnerable folks with chronic or compromised health conditions—are infused with a sense of being outside time or place, without a known outcome. In this between there can be many emotions, a sense of suspension or surrender, a need for letting go of expectations, patterns and habits, in order to further facilitate the transformation.

Return: the phase of return from a long illness can seem immediate—a cessation of symptoms—and there is often real pressure to resume the activities from “before,” to “get better soon,” and pick up life without reflecting or integrating the passage. Often the return phase is long, sometimes more difficult than the illness itself, as both body and mind are irrevocably changed, and so the pressure to be healed or normal adds a dimension of loss to the initiate, for as much as we might like to go back to where we were before illness, we can’t. The primary questions of return are: What was the teaching of this illness? What gifts did this time illuminate? What did I have to let go of in the underworld of the illness? What is my new status, my new name after such a transformation?

How can I share this with my community?

Even if these answers come easily, the path of return takes time. However long you were in the illness you might consider that return could take equally long, and the path is never backward to where you were before, but always spiraling through, always initiating and refining your unique gifts, your purpose in this life.

In 2018 I recovered quickly from years of chronic health cycles. I spent 2019 in perfect health. Then, last April, I caught COVID. I was severely debilitated for two weeks, my lungs compromised, my body weak and feverish. I spent the rest of the year in cycles of illness again, my body compromised by the virus so that environmental toxins and minor infections became big problems again. I was finally recovered in November, my physical symptoms resolved. Then, in March I had the COVID vaccine and developed what we now know was an allergic reaction. My doctors didn’t figure it out until after my second shot—where I had a delayed serum sickness like reaction. I was ill through November 2021 when the inflammation finally subsided. In January I caught covid again, and though the infection was very mild I had lasting health issues due to reactivation of the Epstein Barr virus. Once I finally treated this I began to improve, only to contract covid for a third time in June of 2022. I am currently healing from my third infection.

My initial response to physical setback is anger. Then, grief. The loss of more days to illness feels like being flayed. But then I am called back into practice, and to memory: there is a purpose in this. My work is to be open enough to allow it.

As I heal I have been thinking of ceremony. When I work with folks I have found that so many of our challenging transitions can be supported by ceremonial understanding. If I perform a ritual at the opening of illness, knowing it is a next level of initiation, how does that alleviate some of my initial feelings of anger and loss? If I create micro ceremonial support for the dreaming of transition/initiation, how does that work to illuminate the gifts of this painful process?

This ritual is an answer to my queries of the final phase of this rite: how can I integrate this experience as I emerge from the underworld of illness?

Ritual Intentions

To integrate energetically the experience of emergence from illness, articulate some of the initiatory gifts received and prepare to return to more regular patterns of work and engagement—without expectation.

To release grief and fear roused again in this cycle by old trauma, working it through the wyrd.

Ritual Preparation

This is a wyrd ritual, weaving with the web of wyrd, the Dísir and Nornir to determine the purpose of this initiation and its orientation on the path ahead. To prepare I begin by meditating with the Web of Wyrd and my Dísir, getting strong visualizations around the web and my place in it at this time. I also ask them to help me notice any areas that need repair, so that I can bring attention to this in the ritual.

I elected to perform this ritual at a waxing moon as the year tips toward the summer solstice, using the energy of increase to facilitate my integration and release.

Ritual Tools

A bucket or bowl of water, drawn with intention and left out by the light of the moon and stars. Ideally I would draw my water from a stream running north, but since I live in the city and have limited energy I have made due by envisioning my watershed, the journey of the water from rain to watershed to containment to my home, blessing the water in all of its flow.

Mugwort or other abundant ancestral herb, cut with intention. My mugwort is grown from seed and in its third year, so it is really abundant right now. Mugwort is called “weaver’s beam” in the Lacnunga, and it is a vibrant, vital herb for blessing, reweaving and protecting in the wyrd. I offer it tobacco from a local source (this is not based in lore but in my own journeys with helping spirits and my ancestors) and cut it with words or songs of praise.

Other flowers or plants that wish to come in blessing and beauty.

A candle

Herbs for smoke blessing—I use dried mugwort here but pretty much any herb you have a relationship with will do. In my lineages mugwort, juniper, lupine, lichen and many other plants were used for fumigation. I find smoke blessing helps me move into the trance states that make ceremony more rooted.

Words of power

I am choosing to use the following phrases from the Nigon Wyrta Galdor, or Nine Herbs Enchantment, a healing spell recorded in the eleventh century (my translation):

***Mindful thou, mugwort, why thou revealed,***

***Why thou arranged with a solemn announcement,***

***A weaver’s beam thou commanded, eldest herb,***

***Thou power toward three and toward thirty,***

***Thou power toward poison and toward onflying disease,***

***Thou power toward then loathsome particle thee through land conducts.***

***If any poison come from the east to fly***

***Or any from the north come, or any from the south come,***

***Or any from the west over people.***

***I one know water to run***

***Where then nine snakes near beholds;***

***To be able all weeds and herbs to spring up,***

***Sea dissolve, all salt water,***

***Then I this poison of thee to spit.***

Sea salt

Ritual Structure

On the day of the ritual I assemble the mugwort, sea salt, plants and other tools. I wait until the afternoon to bathe, though if you are bathing indoors this can be done at any time (pre-dawn is a classic power time in my lineages).

I light my candle and use the smoked herbs to cast a circle, speaking the following to invoke the spirits of the directions. I visualize the web of wyrd around me, allowing the directions and spirits to amplify and appear in the wyrd.

Spirit of the East

Spirit of the New Day Dawning

Spirit of the Bright Light and the Rising Sun

I call to you Spirit in Gratitude

I call to you Spirit and ask you for your aid

Spirit of the East, I am releasing those patterns that no longer serve me

I am invoking a whole, true love, my own divine power and sovereignty

Be with me as I do this work, oh spirit, be with me as I begin

Blessings on you spirit of the East, Blessings on you

ALU ALU ALU

Spirit of the South

Place of fire, place of desire, place of the unseen creative force

That lives within us all

I call to you Spirit of the South in Gratitude

I call to you Spirit and ask you for your aid

Spirit of the South, I am releasing those patterns that no longer serve me

I am invoking a whole, true love, my own divine power and sovereignty

Be with me as I do this work, oh spirit, be with me as I begin

Blessings on you spirit of the South, Blessings on you

ALU ALU ALU

Spirit of the West

Place of Release and Flow, Place of Letting Go

Place of Heart, Place of Blood

I call to you Spirit of the West in Gratitude

I call to you Spirit and ask you for your aid

Spirit of the West, I am releasing those patterns that no longer serve me

I am invoking a whole, true love, my own divine power and sovereignty

Be with me as I do this work, oh spirit, be with me as I begin

Blessings on you spirit of the West, Blessings on you

ALU ALU ALU

Spirit of the North

Place of History, Place of Ancestry, Place of Mystery

Place of Grounding and Connection

I call to you Spirit of the North in Gratitude

I call to you Spirit and ask you for your aid

Spirit of the North, I am releasing those patterns that no longer serve me

I am invoking a whole, true love, my own divine power and sovereignty

Be with me as I do this work, oh spirit, be with me as I begin

Blessings on you spirit of the North, Blessings on you

ALU ALU ALU

Sky Spirit Sun Spirit Universal Spirit

Spirit of the Void Spirit of the Beyond

Space Between the Stars Spirit

I call to you

Spirit in Gratitude

I call to you and ask you for your aid

Spirit of the Sky, I am releasing those patterns that no longer serve me

I am invoking a whole, true love, my own divine power and sovereignty

Be with me as I do this work, oh spirit, be with me as I begin

Blessings on you spirit of the Sky, Blessings on you

ALU ALU ALU

Mother Earth Who I Love

Mothers of My Sacred Ancient Line

I call to you Mothers in Gratitude

I call to you Mothers and ask you for your aid

Sacred Mother Earth I am releasing those patterns that no longer serve me

I am invoking a whole, true love, my own divine power and sovereignty

Be with me as I do this work, oh spirit, be with me as I begin

Blessings on you spirit of the Earth, Blessings on you

ALU ALU ALU

Ancestors, Guardians and Guides, Spirits of this Place

Spirits of Blood and Bone, Ash and Stone, Spirits of Plant and Tree

Spirits of the Animals

I call to you Spirits in Gratitude

I call to you Spirits and ask you for your aid

Sacred Spirits, I am releasing those patterns that no longer serve me

I am invoking a whole, true love, my own divine power and sovereignty

Be with me as I do this work, oh spirits, be with me as I begin

Blessings on you, Blessings on you

ALU ALU ALU

Once I complete the circle I am in what I call the wyrdward, a web of support and connection. I bless and see this wyrdward all around me as I place my hands on the surface of the water in the bucket. Channeling energy through me from the earth into my wyrd and the wyrd of all around me I speak these words:

***Mindful thou, mugwort, why thou revealed,***

***Why thou arranged with a solemn announcement,***

***A weaver’s beam thou commanded, eldest herb,***

***Thou power toward three and toward thirty,***

***Thou power toward poison and toward onflying disease,***

***Thou power toward then loathsome particle thee through land conducts.***

I bless the plants and thank them, I speak the intention for my ritual. I thank the water and the sun for the alchemy they provide.

Then I begin to splash the water up and around me. I use a bundle of plants to splash the water in far arcs above and all over, brushing the plants over my bare skin and envisioning the illness leaving me, the wyrd beginning to repair.

Sometimes I speak or sing at this point. Sometimes I dance. I always see so many spirits around me, shimmering in the wyrd.

When I am down to the last quarter of water in the bucket I add a little salt to it, blessing the salt. I speak the following words:

***If any poison come from the east to fly***

***Or any from the north come, or any from the south come,***

***Or any from the west over people.***

***I one know water to run***

***Where then nine snakes near beholds;***

***To be able all weeds and herbs to spring up,***

***Sea dissolve, all salt water,***

***Then I this poison of thee to spit.***

I ask for a vision in the wyrd, to show me where in my body I need to clear blocks in order to fully integrate and release this illness. I rinse the areas with salt water, then splash the remainder over me.

When fully drenched I lie in the sun until I am dried, visioning the cleansing water, clearing the wyrd from my body out into the world.

When this feels done I rise and use the smoke herbs again to close the circle, going backwards through each of the beings and directions I invoked, offering my heartfelt thanks and listening for any guidance that might come through.

For the rest of the day I stay offline and work with the simple tasks shown to me, clearing my way for any dreamtime messages the spirits might have.

Then, I share my love with my community.

And here you are.

By this and every effort may the balance be regained.

To all of you, ALU.

Lara