

## Living with your ghost – A modern approach to hauntings

The usual reaction most people have upon finding that there is possibly a ghost in their house is to find a way of getting rid of it. This is usually done by an exorcist or priest, which sometimes works and sometimes doesn't. But the idea of actually living with your non-paying lodger is an attitude that is not a frequently found one, but one that is slowly gaining ground in some communities.

I have worked as, among other things, a non-religious exorcist for twenty plus years before finally retiring from that line of work (note, retired, so don't send me requests for help). I approach it as an occultist rather than as a religious priest and do not see ghosts as an automatic problem; it depends on their behaviour, reason for being there etc.

I became interested in ghosts as a young child when my father had a startling encounter with a very amiable ghost. One foggy evening, my father became lost on the North Yorkshire Moors and upon seeing an old man and his dog slowly walking down the road, he stopped to ask directions. The old man was very helpful, gave him specific directions, chatted about the awful weather and that was that. The farm he was looking for turned out to be just a few more yards down the road, according to the old man, but was hidden by a deep wall of fog, but he finally found it thanks to the old man's directions.

My father chatted with the farm owner, who was surprised an old man would be out walking in such weather. Half way through the conversation, my father spotted a photograph of the old man, with his dog, hung in a frame on the wall. He pointed out to the owner that the picture was of the man who had helped him. "I don't think so" said the owner, "That's my granddad and he has been dead some 30 years now".

My father recounted the tale to my mother and I, pointing out that the old man was solid, as we were, and appeared full of life. He was visibly shaken, but it began a long voyage of discovery for my father who decided that such an experience was an opportunity for him to learn more. Together we began to look deeper into the issue and I knew even then, at the tender age of 10, that I wanted this to be a major part of my life. I had always had communion with dead people, I just didn't realise until that point in my childhood that the people who appeared occasionally, usually at the most inopportune moments, were dead.

I did seem to be a bit of a magnet for them, or maybe I was just more aware of them, but the first time I had the idea of living with them was just after I had my first baby. I would put my baby down to sleep for the night and use the time to get jobs done. Then, one night, an awful crying started. It was coming from the nursery and I dashed upstairs to find my daughter fast asleep, but the crying was still there. There was a terrible sadness in the room, and over the days and weeks it became more pronounced.

Then I found, quite by accident, when I sang to my baby to put her to sleep, the crying would stop also. I did a bit of investigative work and found, after grilling my neighbours, that a baby had been badly treated in the house many years ago and left to die.

My first thought was to contact the parish priest, but some instinct stopped me. The baby was doing no harm, and if I paid him attention, sang to him, he would settle. After a few months of this, we were planning to move and I became worried as to what would happen to the baby and at that time I did not have the occult skills to take the baby into death, where it belonged. I lit a candle and asked the universe to help me to help the baby and for a few days, nothing happened.

Then one night, I had a very vivid dream where I went into the nursery, picked up the abandoned baby and gave it to my paternal grandmother, who had died many years before – together we walked to the river of death and took the child over the river. The crying stopped and never came back. I was pleased that the problem had been solved, but frustrated in that I still did not know how to consciously help someone in that situation. I was not totally ignorant by that age, and had long been involved in some magical pursuits, but I knew I was skirting the shallows of something that was much deeper. In the depths of frustration one night, I called out for learning and years later the answer came. But anyway, back to ghosts.

Through my years as an exorcist, I handled all sorts of situations with dead people, some comical, some dangerous and some just very sad. I did however come to realise that unless a ghost was causing problems, often they would go in their own good time, or they wanted to stay around to help for a while. Until the Judaic religions wiped out such relationships, it was not uncommon for rooted families, special sacred sites and tribal boundaries to be populated by the ghosts of ancestors, who had chosen to stay in our realm in order to assist, warn and protect. They were accepted as part and parcel of life and death and often their bodies would be walled up in the family home or near the family boundary.

Yes, there are situations where people become trapped, people cling to the living, people bare grudges or other beings trap the human spirit in a dance of feeding and unhappiness, but there are also just folks who like hanging out.

So what do we do, in our day and age to accommodate these rather strange house guests? Well, the first thing I would say is if they cause no harm and do not seem to be troubled, then talk to them, chat as you work, ask them to watch over the house, the children etc. Honour their presence and ask them if there is anything you can do for them. When my children were toddlers, we moved to a house that had a resident ghost. The person we bought the house from did at least warn us, and the next-door neighbour would not set foot in the house. We lived there for three years and he was very friendly and amiable. We would hear him on the stairs, he would go into the children's bedroom at night and stand in the corner, and he would throw books at people who angered him. He was quite impressive in what he could do, so once again I decided to do some research to try and find out about his life.

I found through talking to locals and looking up archive records that he was a very nice man who died of natural causes in the house shortly after his wife had died. They had no children and throughout his life, the only thing he had regretted was not having children. He had only died twenty years before we moved in, so it was still early days for him. I visited the house again recently, after a twenty-five-year absence and apparently, he is still there, keeping an eye on the current family in residence.

It is important to understand though, not every haunting is a ghost, not every dead person is nice, and the reasons for someone clinging to the living world can range from good reasons to extremely unhealthy ones. So it pays to know your ghost!

My last family story highlights what sort of situations could possibly warrant the skills of an exorcist. Some years ago, my then partner and I bought an old house on top of an ancient burial mound. Needless to say it was busy with lots of strange happenings. The strangest thing that happened, which led me to do an exorcism, was a woman who began appearing to my eldest daughter. She would pop into my daughter's dreams and in the mornings my daughter would wake up covered in scratches.

At first, I assumed it was her nails, and cut them back for her. But a few days later, she woke with scratches all over her and in some places that she could not have reached. I began investigating and managed to contact a woman spirit who indicated that she was trying to make my child ugly, to save her life. I began researching the history of the house and found that one tenant, hundreds of years ago, had died as a result of a witch trial. She had been accused of witchcraft because she was very ugly and had given birth to a beautiful female child while living alone as a widow. The child was taken from her and the poor woman was distraught. She was trying to protect my child and had somehow, in her terrible grief, mixed my child with hers. I very gently eased her into passing on deeper into death so that she would let go of her grip on the living.

And that brings up an important point to remember: not every haunting that needs an exorcist is aggressive. Sometimes there is a need for patience, understanding and compassion. So, if you do acquire a house guest, the first thing to remember is not to be afraid, not to act rashly but take the time to find out what is going on and why.

Here are some tips to help you figure out whether your lodger is a worthy guest or a troubled intrusion.

1. What does the space 'feel' like, what sort of emotional change do you get when you spend time in that space?
2. What are they doing? Are they just making noises (trying to communicate), are they harming you or your property?
3. Does the presence react to you in any way? If not, it may just be an echo, like a replaying of a certain moment in time rather than be an actual haunting.
4. Are you getting help from the presence, like danger warnings, waking you in the middle of the night when there is a risk of fire etc
5. Are they intruding into your thoughts, your dreams and your everyday life, in which case they probably need moving on. A proper ritual cleaning and tuning of a space is often enough to move something on, unless they have a direct family link with the intruder, in which case you have to be firm and tell them to leave.

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