

DEMONS ON THE BOAT

Imagine you're steering a ship far out at sea. Below the deck, out of sight, lie a vast horde of demons, all with enormous claws and razor-sharp teeth. These demons have many different forms. Some of them are emotions, such as guilt, anger, fear, or hopelessness. Some are memories of times you've failed or been hurt. Others are thoughts like "It's too hard", "I'll make a fool of myself", or "I'll fail". Some of them are mental images, in which you see yourself performing badly or getting rejected; others are strong urges. And still others are unpleasant sensations, such as tightness in your chest, or a knot in your stomach.

Now as long as you keep that ship drifting out at sea, the demons will stay below. But as soon as you start steering toward land, they clamber up from below deck, flapping their membranous wings, baring their fangs, and generally threatening to tear you into little pieces. Not surprisingly, you don't like that very much, so you cut a deal: "If you demons stay out of sight, down below, I'll keep the ship drifting out at sea." The demons agree, and everything seems okay – for a while.

The problem is, eventually you get fed up being at sea. You get bored and lonely, miserable, resentful, and anxious. You see plenty of other ships heading into shore, but not yours. "What sort of life is this?" you think. "That land over there – that's where I want to be heading". But the demons down below aren't particularly interested in what you want. They want to stay out at sea, and that's final! So the moment you start heading for land, they swarm up onto the deck and start threatening you again.

The interesting thing is, although these demons threaten you, they never actually cause you any physical harm. Why not? Because they can't! All they can do is growl and wave their claws and look terrifying – physically they can't even touch you. And once you realise this, you're free. It means you can take your ship wherever you want – as long as you're willing to accept the demons presence. All you have to do to reach land is accept that the demons are above deck, accept that they're doing their level best to scare you, and keep steering the ship towards shore. The demons may howl and protest, but their powerless, because their power relies totally on your belief in their threats.

But if you're not willing to accept these demons, if you've got to keep them below deck at all costs, then your only option is to stay adrift, at sea. Of course, you can try to throw the demons overboard, but while you're busy doing that no-one is piloting the ship, so you run the risk of crashing into rocks or capsizing. Besides that, it's a struggle you could never win, because there's an infinite number of those demons in the hold.

"But that's horrible!" you may well protest. "I don't want to live surrounded by demons!" Well, I'm sorry to be the bearer of bad news, but you already are. And those demons will keep showing up, again and again, as soon as you start to take your life in a valued direction. Now here's the good

news: if you keep steering your ship toward shore (no matter how much the demons threaten you), many of them will realise they're having no effect, and will give up and leave you alone. As for the ones that remain, after a while you'll get used to them. And if you take a good, long look at them, you'll realise they're nowhere nearly as scary as they first appeared. You'll realise they've been using special effects to make themselves look a lot bigger than they really are. Sure, they'll still look ugly; they won't turn into cute fluffy bunny rabbits; but you'll find them much less frightening. And you'll find that you can let them hang around without being bothered by them. (Furthermore, as you continue on that voyage, it's not just demons that show up. You'll also encounter angels, mermaids and dolphins!)

And it doesn't matter how far away from the shore you are. The instant you start heading towards it, you're living life; you're having an adventure; you're moving in a valued direction.

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