

Introduction to the Tarot

Years ago, when I told my brother I was studying the tarot, his first comment was, "How can a deck of cards possibly tell you anything about anything?" I laughed because I thought his reply summed up pretty well the common sense view of the cards. I, too, had my doubts about the tarot, but I found out that the cards can make a real difference in the way you perceive and deal with the challenges in your life. In this introduction, I'll try to explain why.

The origin of the tarot is a mystery. We do know for sure that the cards were used in Italy in the fifteenth century as a popular card game. Wealthy patrons commissioned beautiful decks, some of which have survived. The Visconti-Sforza, created in 1450 or shortly thereafter, is one of the earliest and most complete.

Later in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the cards were discovered by a number of influential scholars of the occult. These gentlemen were fascinated by the tarot and recognized that the images on the cards were more powerful than a simple game would suggest. They revealed (or created!) the "true" history of the tarot by connecting the cards to Egyptian mysteries, Hermetic philosophy, the Kabbalah, alchemy, and other mystical systems. These pursuits continued into the early part of the twentieth century when the tarot was incorporated into the practices of several secret societies, including the Order of the Golden Dawn [note].

Although the roots of the tarot are in the occult tradition, interest in the cards has expanded in the last few decades to include many different perspectives. New decks have been created that reflect these interests. There are Native American, herbal, dragon and Japanese decks, among others.

The tarot is most commonly viewed as a tool for divination. A traditional tarot reading involves a seeker - someone who is looking for answers to personal questions - and a reader - someone who knows how to interpret the cards. After the seeker has shuffled and cut the deck, the reader lays out the chosen cards in a pattern called a spread. Each position in the spread has a meaning, and each card has a meaning as well. The reader combines these two meanings to shed light on the seeker's question.

A simple process, but rarely presented in a simple way. In films, we always see the tarot being used in a seedy parlor or back room. An old woman, seated in shadows, reads the cards for a nervous, young girl. The crone lifts her wrinkled finger and drops it ominously on the Death card. The girl draws back, frightened by this sign of her impending doom.

This aura of darkness clings to the tarot cards, even now. Some religions shun the cards, and the scientific establishment condemns them as symbols of unreason, a holdover from an unenlightened past. Let us set aside these shadowy images for now and consider the tarot simply for what it is - a deck of picture cards. The question becomes - what can we do with them?

The answer lies with the unconscious - that deep level of memory and awareness that resides within each of us, but outside our everyday experience. Even though we ignore the action of the unconscious most of the time, it profoundly affects everything we do. In his writings, Sigmund Freud stressed the irrational, primitive aspect of the unconscious. He thought that it was the home of our most unacceptable desires and urges. His contemporary Carl Jung emphasized the positive, creative aspect of the unconscious. He tried to show that it has a collective component that touches universal qualities.

We may never know the full range and power of the unconscious, but there are ways to explore its landscape. Many techniques have been developed for this purpose - psychotherapy, dream interpretation, visualization and meditation. The tarot is another such tool.

Choosing a First Tarot Deck

Here are some points to consider if you are choosing your first deck:

Choose a deck that makes you feel comfortable and secure, but also inspired. Since you will be spending a lot of time with your cards, you don't want to pick a deck that strikes you as odd, unpleasant or boring. Later, you may seek out unusual decks for the challenges and insights they offer, but it's better to start with one that attracts you. If a certain deck calls out to you, go with that one!

There is no official tarot deck. Decks come in many different forms, but the "standard" deck has 78 cards with 22 Major Arcana and 56 Minor Arcana cards divided into 4 suits. Most decks are built on this model. You should probably stick with a standard deck to start so that you are familiar with the most common format.

Many decks are oriented around a theme. This is especially true of modern decks. Typically, the images, the names of the suits and the court card figures reflect this theme. If you choose a deck with a theme, be sure it is one that suits you and that has lasting appeal.

The Rider-Waite is probably the most common deck in the United States, and many tarot decks are based on it as well. Cards in these decks often have the same subject matter as the Rider-Waite, but are drawn with a different style and artwork. The Universal Waite is essentially a copy of the Rider-Waite, but with softer colors and less contrast. The Albano-Waite has bright, unusual coloration. Here's a side-by-side comparison of some cards from the two decks.

In some tarot decks, the pip cards, or numbered suit cards, all have unique picture scenes. In other decks, these cards simply show the suit symbol repeated the appropriate number of times (similar to regular playing cards). Some people like these symbolic decks, but for learning and memorization, it is often easier to have the pictures.

Some newer tarot decks have been created in the spirit of light-hearted fun. Two examples are the Halloween Tarot and the Silicon Valley Tarot. These decks are amusing, but not the best choices for deeper, more thoughtful tarot work.

STORING YOUR TAROT CARDS

Storing your cards

Now that you are done choosing the tarot deck that will become your closest companion, it is important that you know how to take care of it.

In tarot, as in anything else, you will meet tons of peoples with different ideological and philosophical positions: conservatives, traditionalists, liberals, heretics...fanatics and extremists.

Depending on who you are listening to, the advice concerning care taking of your deck can dramatically vary:

Some will tell you that you should wrap your cards in a black cloth given that it is the colour that concentrate all energies, it is the colour of the night and its mysteries... Others will prefer white as it represents purity, clean energy, angels... For some, the ideal colour is purple because it is the colour of spirituality, while for others, red is more indicated as representing dynamism, hot energy... Then, the material of this cloth should be silk for some, cotton for others, and all of this while a totally different set of persons advocate wooden boxes!

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Obviously, there is no consensus on that issue, which usually means that there is no absolute answer. What's more, I personally think that argumenting on this is ridiculous: tarot cards are an intimate part of your life, and therefore, the choice of how to store it is a personal one. Nobody tells you what colour your pants and bras should be or not be!?! Well, the same applies to your cards.

The point is to store the cards in a way that will allow effective protection from usual domestic damage such as little brothers, kids, cats tearing them off, coffee or nail-polish spilt over, or to prevent colours from fading away with time ... It should also be a way that inspires respect for the cards, both from you and from the people that will approach them. Of course, they are not gods or persons to be worshipped, but they nevertheless are sacred tools and should be respected as such. It doesn't give the same impression to wrap up your cards in an old sock rather than in a beautiful batik, bazin or piece of sari. Finally, the storage method should allow you cards to rest from previous readings, protect them from absorbing any energy hanging around, or keep the smell of your favourite incense.

In general, one would prefer to use natural materials such as wood, silk, cotton, linen... But again, it is absolutely not an obligation.

One of the best tarot readers I met, a Spanish young woman, doesn't store her cards at all: she just keeps them together with an elastic in her office drawer.

I personally wrap my professional deck in a red and gold piece of bazin that I also use as a layout cloth when I read with it. My personal deck is wrapped in a navy blue and gold wax piece of fabric. My spell deck is in a blue and purple silk-like jewel bag. All of these, along with my caurie shells and my pendulum are stored in a wooden box, finely carved that I bought in a hippie furniture shop.

The choice of material or colour of the fabric is entirely up to you. Choose whatever you prefer and appeals to you the most, and don't worry about the rest.

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Tarot Meaning

The Fool



Divinatory Meaning: The young man, with his carefree posture, symbolizes youth and innocence. He aims to be pure as shown by the pale rose he holds but is still inexperienced and a bit irrational because he stands so near the cliff. His face is turned upwards seeking dreams and adventure. His bag is light and so is his soul. This card can mean a new beginning or a spiritual awakening. What might seem foolhardy to others is a karmic lesson needing to be had. Positive associations with this card are freedom, new beginnings, adventure, a positive outlook and innocents. Some negative associations are irresponsibility, inexperience, and immaturity.

The Magician



Divinatory Meaning: This serene looking man with a double nimbus over his head is a person of deep esoteric knowledge who has the ability to take his magical powers and use them as he wishes. Note the Minor Arcana objects laying at his disposal on the table: The cup, sword, staff and pentacle. This card is about intelligence and creativity. The ability to see beyond the physical or ordinary. Positive associations with this card are magic, insight, spiritual evolution, and self-recognition. Negative associations would include a person who uses their special gifts for self-serving reasons, trickery, perusing risky endeavors that only

gratify the ego.

The High Priestess



Divinatory Meaning: This evolved High Priestess sits between the two pillars of life. One pillar represents Boaz (B), which is the dark force of water and earth. The other pillar is Jachin (J) the elemental forces of fire and air. This card represent that by understanding a circumstance, we can changes work on removal of emotional obstacles before moving onto other areas of our life. A negative interpretation may mean blocked energies, which prevent us from releasing old ways and habits. This card encourages us to let go of emotional attachments to that which does not serve us so the next cycle can begin. The presence of this card in any reading signifies that enlightenment will come, if even through our mistakes.

The Empress



Divinatory Meaning: Like a mother, this card represents fertility and gentle authority. The twelve stars over her head represent the twelve signs of the zodiac. She is the Empress of the universe and open to all who seek her out. The seven pearls that adorn her neck represent the seven major chakras of the Hindus. This is a powerful card of intuition, spiritual development, and the ability to control oneself. This card suggests that we should follow our natural instincts and gut feelings. This card often reveals itself at the time of new beginnings such as a new business, the birth of a child, and new undertakings. The negative variation of this card would be not heeding our inner voice, the loss of a loved one, in particular a child, or that our vanity may lead us down an empty and wasted path.

The Emperor



Divinatory Meaning: This card is the masculine counterpart to the Empress. It is the seed that brings about fertility such as creativity and ideas. Like her, he too is powerful, spiritually developed, and wise. The yellow orb he holds in his hands shows his need for feminine intuition and the value he places on his partner of choice. This card suggests that we will learn through our lessons. That wisdom will be ours to use for the betterment of self and others. It especially works well when coupled with feminine energies, such as with a mate. The positive aspect of this card states that action and self-discipline will reward our endeavors. The negative meaning would be emotional outbursts and lack of control over our feelings. Thoughts of self-importance may blind the viewer and make them resisting to the advise of others. Vanity should be kept in check.

The Hierophant



Divinatory Meaning: The Hierophant is a priestly figure with two apprentice priests at his feet. This card suggests spiritual completeness. The triple crown he wears on his head suggest that his powers come from the heavens and can be used here on earth. His left hand holds a sceptre indicating his knowledge and understanding of the seven deadly sins (lust, envy, pride, sloth, wrath, gluttony and avarice). This card represents a figure that wants to help men ascend from the negative to the positive. From evil to good. This card is about partnerships, alliances, and advise from a good friend or associate. It suggests a time for a person to better themselves through spiritual self-reflection. The negative meaning might indicate that rules have been broken by immoral behavior, ill given advice or prejudice. It may indicate that a decision recently made may need to be rethought. Seeking counsel from a trusted friend may be in order to help make the right decision.

The Lovers



Divinatory Meaning: The closed eyed angel Raphael floats above the two lovers below with a blazing rising sun rising in the background. Like the rising sun, new beginnings are coming about but those beginnings are based on the very choices we make. The card symbolizes the same choices that Adam and Eve made. Here you see eve with the serpent and apples near her. While eve is looking up at Raphael for help on what she should do, Adam is looking at Eve. The closed eyes of the angel suggests that no advice will be given. We must make those choices ourselves. The positive meaning of this card is that we need to decide which course we need to take. We have to call upon ourselves to give us the correct guidance. The negative association of this card is that we are not making decisions on what is truly best for us, but what might feel better in the moment. Like the rising sun or spring, decisions are right around the corner. This card can also represent adultery or a partner vying for attention.

The Chariot



Divinatory Meaning: Two sphinxes pull a chariot. The sphinxes are black and white in color, representing both positive and negative forces. In Greek mythology, the sphinx represented a winged creature who had the body of a lion and the head of a woman. The sphinx is the guardian of knowledge not meant to be understood by humans. The two moon plates that the rider wears symbolize the ability to bring forth from the subconscious mind both emotions and dreams and to utilize them for the betterment of life. This card is a card depicting an emotionally strong person who can make things happen. The true trick here is to utilize your abilities to their fullest to make your dreams come true. This card's emphasis is self-mastery, discipline and working on our strengths. The negative side might include not seeing how and where properly to use our energies which may mean they become wasted.

Justice



Divinatory Meaning: The scale that the woman holds is balanced. The sword, which could bring swift justice depending on the outcome of the scales, is poised and ready to use. It too offers its own balance by pointing up, while the scales counter it by pointing down. The thrust of this card is that passion must be balanced with honor. This card may also imply that tests are being put forth before you, or that you are being judged. One must pass these tests and judgments before successes can be truly realized. It could also indicate legal issues that are either in your life, or soon will be. The negative aspect of this card could indicate that one-sided opinions and biases could cloud a person's judgment.

The Hermit



Divinatory Meaning: This card shows on lone figure holding a star filled lantern representing knowledge. His lowered head represents sacrifice for his chosen life-style but his spiritual and intellectual gains have been well worth it. This old man has chosen a solitary path towards enlightenment, not one of lust and passion. He is not necessarily an ordained person, but one who is educated in the world and one that has chosen to follow his own inner voice. As in other spiritual masters, one must sometimes walk a solitary path to find true enlightenment. The positive aspect of this card is self-knowledge leading to mastery, the pursuit of truth, and that spiritual growth is its own reward. Negative associations might include false humility might bring about loneliness and isolation. It may be trying to suggest that you need to face the truth or the current circumstances.

The Wheel of Fortune



Divinatory Meaning: The Wheel of Fortune is the Gods spinning their wheel over our lives. We are at their mercy and where it lands, only they truly know. It is fate, divine intervention, and all things we don't understand. Though we think we create our existence, much of it is already decided for us. To aid in our own outcome, we need to use the wisdom of Anubis who is to the positive force of nature's elements on the right side of the wheel and we should endeavor not to fall victim to Typhon, the serpent representing self-destruction and greed, to the left of the wheel. The positive association of this card is that if we pass the tests placed before us by the God, good fortune will be ours. A negative association is that the less we see of the lesson when it's first presented to us, the harsher its outcome. It will also return in our lives until we fully understand the meaning.

Strength



Divinatory Meaning: This card represents a young maiden so strong that she may handle the open jaws of a lion. The woman represents the feminine intuitive energies while the lion is the masculine counterpart. This card suggests that true power is using both energies and not just one. This unified energy results in abundance and purity, which is depicted by the fertile land in the background. As a team, two healthy halves will make a powerful whole. The meaning of this card is that there is often a struggle between two halves; positive and negative and spiritual and animal. Everything worth having must be worked for. What we fear is often not as bad as it is made out in our minds. We must put these over inflated fears aside and use our strength to achieve our dreams. The negative counterpart to this card is strength out of balance, such as too much physical and not enough spiritual. Out of balance souls can end up ill-mannered, bad tempered and brutish.

The Hanged Man



Divinatory Meaning: The hanged man is a card that relates to self-sacrifice in order to attain a higher spiritual goal. The upside down position can reflect that this person is an outcast of society and tends to follow his or her own inner voice. The fact that the man is suspended upside down can represent a time of transition, limbo or a pause in life until something or someone is sacrificed for the greater gain of others. This card has been linked to spiritual lives such as Christ's and the legends of Osiris where the destruction of the ego brings greater meaning and awareness to society. A negative slant on this card would represent poor health, a weakness of will, selfishness and a person who uses their self-sacrifice ways to become a martyr. It suggests patience and to watch out for paths that lead in a bad direction.

Death



Divinatory Meaning: Though this card is rarely about physical death, it is about change, renewal, transformation and abandonment of that which no longer serves us such as a relationship. Like time, we cannot escape this and it is a warning that we should be paying attention to what is happening in our lives. We should take a review of our life and take note of something that may need to be shed other than our worldly body. It can also have a spiritual connotation suggesting that we have to shed old beliefs before we can take on more enlightened one. We may be heading for a spiritual impasse and may have to look at what we consume, how we feel and think. If we can, then we're ready to take on more exotic passages into the underworld. Not all change is welcome so the negative aspect of this card can mean that we are fighting

change and have become stagnant. It may mean the loss of an opportunity because we won't walk through that open door. It may mean the loss of a lover, friend, or family member.

Temperance



Divinatory Meaning: The positive aspects of this card represents moderation, self-control, harmony with self and others, and compromise. It can relate to the positive physical condition of the body depicting health and the path to healing and recovery. This card represents a person that can take something out of balance, like a relationship, and bring it into accord or the ability to take two opposites and meld them in harmonious fashion. This is depicted in the card where one fluid (historically wine) is poured into another goblet (water) and the two merge. Positive results from chaotic factors are to be had if this card is present. The negative aspect of this card is imbalance, impatience, domestic problems, lack of foresight and quarrels. This card warns of jumping to hasty decisions due to lack of patience and suggests that a time-out be taken for a full account of what should be done.

The Devil



Divinatory Meaning: The positive aspect of the devil is a healthy bond or commitment. If it's drawn with the question of marriage in mind, it's a good omen. In other cases however, the Devil is associated with lust and temptation and may mean a bondage to other things not so healthy for us such as additions, chemical abuse, drunk on power, or clinging to beliefs that do us more harm than good. There are also other kinds of bondage we can suffer from. This may be a case where we are fooling ourselves into believing something blatantly not good for us. An example might be thinking that getting drunk every night on red wine will make us live longer. If the Devil appears in your card, review the course you are on and make sure you're not following a course more out of lower emotions such as lust, greed or desire, versus higher ones like love and altruism.

The Tower



Divinatory Meaning: The positive side of this card may mean that despite the fact a person is currently in a crisis, they may come out ahead. Chaos can bring positive transformation. It does say that the person pulling the card will be going through hard times, perhaps even ruin. Words associated with this card have been disillusionment, downfall, sudden change, revelation and uncomfortable change. The trick is to look at what you're experiencing right now and see the silver lining. What is the lesson and hope behind the problem? Can you see the light? Behind every rain cloud is blue skies. Keep in mind that this storm will pass. Also ask yourself, are you the storm in someone else's life? Are you the chaos and turbulence? It may be asking for a softer stance from you.

The Star



Divinatory Meaning: The star is a positive card associated with hope, unconditional love, a renewal of energy, faith, calmness and peace. This card brings blessings into the life! If it's selected in conjunction with questions pertaining to new business ventures, paths and relationships, it's surely a good omen. This card gives us hope for the future, even when current times may be trying. Like the stars, it helps us look up from our mundane existence here on earth and look towards the heaven for blessings and guidance. Unlike the Devil card, this stirs up faith and the positive nature of belief. The reverse meaning of this card would be negativity, self doubt

and ignorance.

The Moon



Divinatory Meaning: The moon as we know has an effect over our emotions. When it's full and bright it brings illumination into our darkened world in the form of imagination and unexpected opportunities. This emotional card is linked to artistic expression such as music, writing and poetry. We should let these abilities flow which may lead to opportunities in these venues. We must realize however, that the moon does not necessarily illuminate like the sun and this card can, in the negative, be associated with lack of clarity, befuddled emotions, worry, and a blindness to what is before us. If this shows up in your spread, watch for lies and deceit from others. Look to understand what is not easily understood and be careful of your own indiscretions.

The Sun



Divinatory Meaning: Like the star, the sun is also packed with bright possibilities! In the positive, it represents happiness, joy, brilliance, vitality and optimism. This card can mean news of an upcoming birth or other glad tidings. Like the summer months it represents, this card reflects family, holidays, and a sharing of good times with loved ones. The negative association might mean delays, bad judgment or an inflated ego. The sun is powerful enough though that even if there are some negative associations, the person will pull through with a happy ending. This is considered one of the best cards a person can pull during a Tarot reading.

Judgment



Divinatory Meaning: This card is similar to the biblical final judgment of man. An angel is playing a trumpet over a group of people emerging from crypts or graves. This card represents release, a new beginning, accepting one's past, a decision, salvation and judgment. It's a time of reflection from what we've done and where we're going. If our path has been positive and true we can expect to reap rewards. If it's been selfish we can expect guilt, delays, or a chiding of self. This card is also associated with new opportunities which will require deeper reflection so that we can make the right decision. Negative associations with this card include obstinacy and great fear, which range from fear of change, death, and illness. You may find yourself locked into a corner, unable to move.

The World



Divinatory Meaning: This card depicts multiple elements of the world and beyond, signifying 'wholeness'. It is both man and angel, bird and beast. It's a good card to draw in that it represents completeness, contentment, harmony, success, prosperity and personal realization. This card can also mean the shedding of old and making way for the new. It encourages us to be patient, and if there is a negative side to this card it would be stagnation, impatience, and a soft will. However, the major thrust of this card is that the events of our life, in this world, are coming together to fulfill our dreams!

The Fool's Journey

The Fool's Journey is a metaphor for the journey through life. Each major arcana card stands for a stage on that journey - an experience that a person must incorporate to realize his wholeness. These 22 descriptions are based on the keywords for each major arcana card. The keywords are highlighted in the text. A card's number is in parentheses.

The Fool

We begin with the Fool (0), a card of **beginnings**. The Fool stands for each of us as we begin our journey of life. He is a fool because only a simple soul has the innocent **faith** to undertake such a journey with all its hazards and pain.

At the start of his trip, the Fool is a newborn - fresh, open and **spontaneous**. The figure on Card 0 has his arms flung wide, and his head held high. He is ready to embrace whatever comes his way, but he is also oblivious to the cliff edge he is about to cross. The Fool is unaware of the hardships he will face as he ventures out to learn the lessons of the world.

The Fool stands somewhat outside the rest of the major arcana. Zero is an unusual number. It rests in the exact middle of the number system - poised between the positive and negative. At birth, the Fool is set in the middle of his own individual universe. He is strangely empty (as is zero), but imbued with a desire to go forth and learn. This undertaking would seem to be **folly**, but is it?

The Magician and the High Priestess

On setting out, the Fool immediately encounters the Magician (1) and the High Priestess (2) - the great balancing forces that make up the perceived world. It is a feature of the material universe that as soon as we name some aspect of experience, we automatically evoke its opposite.

The Magician is the positive side. He represents the **active**, masculine power of creative impulse. He is also our **conscious awareness**. The Magician is the force that allows us to impact the world through a **concentration** of individual will and **power**. The High Priestess is the negative side. She is the **mysterious unconscious**. She provides the fertile ground in which creative events occur. The High Priestess is our unrealized **potential** waiting for an active principle to bring it to expression.

The terms *positive* and *negative* do not imply "good" and "bad." These are human distinctions that do not apply in the tarot. The Magician and the High Priestess are absolutely equal in value and importance. Each is necessary for balance. We may view the negative as our Shadow, but without shadows, we cannot see the light, and without a ground of potential, we cannot create.

The Empress

As he grows, the Fool becomes more and more aware of his surroundings. As with most babies, he first recognizes his **Mother** - the warm, loving woman who nourishes and cares for him. He also comes to know Mother Earth, who nurtures him in a larger sense.

The Empress (3) represents the world of **nature** and **sensation**. A baby delights in exploring everything he touches, tastes and smells. He cannot get enough of the sights and sounds that enchant his senses. It is natural to delight in the **abundant** goodness of Mother Earth who surrounds us with her support.

The Emperor

The next person the Fool encounters is the **Father** in the figure of the Emperor (4). He is the representative of **structure** and **authority**. As a baby leaves his mother's arms, he learns that there are patterns to his world. Objects respond in predictable ways that can be explored. The child experiences a new kind of pleasure that comes from discovering order.

The Fool also encounters **rules**. He learns that his will is not always paramount and there are certain behaviors necessary for his well-being. There are people in authority who will enforce such guidelines. These restrictions can be frustrating, but, through the patient direction of the Father, the Fool begins to understand their purpose.

The Hierophant

Eventually, the Fool ventures out of his home into the wider world. He is exposed to the beliefs and traditions of his culture and begins his formal **education**. The Hierophant (5) represents the organized **belief systems** that begin to surround and inform the growing child.

A Hierophant is someone who interprets arcane knowledge and mysteries. On Card 5 we see a religious figure blessing two acolytes. Perhaps he is inducting them into church membership. Although this image is religious, it is really a symbol for initiations of all kinds.

The child is trained in all the practices of his society and becomes part of a particular culture and worldview. He learns to identify with a **group** and discovers a sense of belonging. He enjoys learning the customs of his society and showing how well he can **conform** to them.

The Lovers

Eventually, the Fool faces two new challenges. He experiences the powerful urge for **sexual** union with another person. Before, he was mainly self-centered. Now he feels the balancing tendency, pictured in the Lovers (6), to reach out and become half of a loving partnership. He yearns for **relationship**.

The Fool also needs to decide upon his **own beliefs**. It is well enough to conform while he learns and grows, but at some point, he must determine his own **values** if he is to be true to himself. He must start to question received opinion.

The Chariot

By the time the Fool becomes an adult, he has a strong identity and a certain mastery over himself. Through discipline and **will-power**, he has developed an inner control which allows him to triumph over his environment.

The Chariot (7) represents the vigorous ego that is the Fool's crowning achievement so far. On Card 7, we see a proud, commanding figure riding **victoriously** through his world. He is in **visible control** of himself and all he surveys. For the moment, the Fool's **assertive** success is all he might wish, and he feels a certain self-satisfaction. His is the assured confidence of youth.

Strength

Over time, life presents the Fool with new challenges, some that cause suffering and disillusionment. He has many occasions to draw on the quality of **Strength** (8). He is pressed to develop his courage and resolve and find the heart to keep going despite setbacks.

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The Fool also discovers the quiet attributes of **patience** and **tolerance**. He realizes the willful command of the Chariot must be tempered by kindness and the **softer power** of a loving approach. At times, intense passions surface, just when the Fool thought he had everything, including himself, under control.

Hermit

Sooner or later, the Fool is led to ask himself the age-old question "Why?" He becomes absorbed with the **search** for answers, not from an idle curiosity, but out of a deeply felt need to find out why people live, if only to suffer and die. The Hermit (9) represents the need to find deeper truth.

The Fool begins to **look inward**, trying to understand his feelings and motivations. The sensual world holds less attraction for him, and he seeks moments of **solitude** away from the frantic activity of society. In time he may seek a teacher or **guide** who can give him advice and direction.

Wheel of Fortune

After much soul-searching, the Fool begins to see how everything connects. He has a **vision** of the world's wondrous design; its intricate patterns and cycles. The Wheel of Fortune (10) is a symbol of the mysterious universe whose parts work together in harmony. When the Fool glimpses the beauty and order of the world, if only briefly, he finds some of the answers he is seeking.

Sometimes his experiences seem to be the work of fate. A chance encounter or miraculous occurrence begins the process of change. The Fool may recognize his **destiny** in the sequence of events that led him to this **turning point**. Having been solitary, he feels ready for **movement** and action again. His perspective is wider, and he sees himself within the grander scheme of a universal plan. His sense of purpose is restored.

Justice

The Fool must now decide what this vision means to him personally. He looks back over his life to trace the **cause and effect** relationships that have brought him to this point. He takes **responsibility** for his past actions so he can make amends and ensure a more honest course for the future. The demands of **Justice** (11) must be served so that he can wipe the slate clean.

This is a time of **decision** for the Fool. He is making important choices. Will he remain true to his insights, or will he slip back into an easier, more unaware existence that closes off further growth?

Hanged Man

Undaunted, the Fool pushes on. He is determined to realize his vision, but he finds life is not so easily tamed. Sooner or later, he encounters his personal cross - an experience that seems too difficult to endure. This overwhelming challenge humbles him until he has no choice but to give up and **let go**.

At first, the Fool feels defeated and lost. He believes he has **sacrificed** everything, but from the depths he learns an amazing truth. He finds that when he relinquishes his struggle for control, everything begins to work as it should. By becoming open and vulnerable, the Fool discovers the miraculous support of his Inner Self. He learns to surrender to his experiences, rather than fighting them. He feels a surprising joy and begins to flow with life.

The Fool feels **suspended** in a timeless moment, free of urgency and pressure. In truth, his world has been **turned upside-down**. The Fool is the Hanged Man (12), apparently martyred, but actually serene and at peace.

Death

The Fool now begins to **eliminate** old habits and tired approaches. He cuts out nonessentials because he appreciates the basics of life. He goes through **endings** as he puts the outgrown aspects of his life behind him. The process may seem like dying because it is the death (13) of his familiar self to allow for the growth of a new one. At times this **inexorable change** seems to be crushing the Fool, but eventually he rises up to discover that death is not a permanent state. It is simply a **transition** to a new, more fulfilling way of life.

Temperance

Since embracing the Hermit, the Fool has swung wildly back and forth on an emotional pendulum. Now, he realizes the **balancing** stability of **temperance** (14). He discovers true poise and equilibrium. By experiencing the extremes, he has come to appreciate moderation. The Fool has **combined** all aspects of himself into a centered whole that glows with **health** and well-being. How graceful and soft is the angel on Card 14 compared to the powerful but rigid ruler in the Chariot (Card 7)? [Note] The Fool has come a long way in realizing the harmonious life.

Devil

The Fool has his health, peace of mind and a graceful composure. What more could he need? On everyday terms, not much, but the Fool is courageous and continues to pursue the deepest levels of his being. He soon comes face to face with the Devil (15).

The Devil is not an evil, sinister figure residing outside of us. He is the knot of **ignorance** and **hopelessness** lodged within each of us at some level. The seductive attractions of the **material** bind us so compellingly that we often do not even realize our slavery to them.

We live in a limited range of experience, unaware of the glorious world that is our true heritage. The couple on Card 15 are chained, but acquiescent. They could so easily free themselves, but they do not even apprehend their **bondage**. [Note] They look like the Lovers, but are unaware that their love is circumscribed within a narrow range. The price of this ignorance is an inner core of despair.

Tower

How can the Fool free himself from the Devil? Can he root out his influence? The Fool may only find **release** through the **sudden change** represented by the Tower (16). The Tower is the ego fortress each of us has built around his beautiful inner core. Gray, cold and rock-hard, this fortress seems to protect but is really a prison.

Sometimes only a monumental crisis can generate enough power to smash the walls of the Tower. On Card 16 we see an enlightening bolt striking this building. It has ejected the occupants who seem to be **tumbling** to their deaths. The crown indicates they were once proud rulers; now they are humbled by a force stronger than they.

The Fool may need such a severe shakeup if he is to free himself, but the resulting **revelation** makes the painful experience worthwhile. The dark despair is blasted away in an instant, and the light of truth is free to shine down.

Star

The Fool is suffused with a **serene** calm. The beautiful images on the Star (17) attest to this tranquility. The woman pictured on Card 17 is naked, her soul no longer hidden behind any disguise. Radiant stars shine in a cloudless sky serving as a beacon of **hope** and **inspiration**.

The Fool is blessed with a trust that completely replaces the negative energies of the Devil. His faith in himself and the future is restored. He is filled with joy and his one wish is to share it **generously** with the rest of the world. His heart is open, and his love pours out freely. This peace after the storm is a magical moment for the Fool.

Moon

What effect could spoil this perfect calm? Is there another challenge for the Fool? In fact, it is his bliss that makes him vulnerable to the **illusions** of the Moon (18). The Fool's joy is a feeling state. His positive emotions are not yet subject to mental clarity. In his dreamy condition, the Fool is susceptible to fantasy, distortion and a false picture of the truth.

The Moon stimulates the creative **imagination**. It opens the way for bizarre and beautiful thoughts to bubble up from the unconscious, but deep-seated **fears** and anxieties also arise. These experiences may cause the Fool to feel lost and **bewildered**.

Sun

It is the lucid clarity of the Sun (19) that directs the Fool's imagination. The Sun's illumination shines in all the hidden places. It dispels the clouds of confusion and fear. It **enlightens**, so the Fool both feels *and* understands the goodness of the world.

Now, he enjoys a vibrant energy and enthusiasm. The Star's openness has solidified into an expansive **assurance**. The Fool is the naked babe pictured on Card 19, riding out joyously to face a new day. No challenge is too daunting. The Fool feels a radiant **vitality**. He becomes involved in grand undertakings as he draws to himself everything he needs. He is able to realize his **greatness**.

Judgement

The Fool has been **reborn**. His false, ego-self has been shed, allowing his radiant, true self to manifest. He has discovered that joy, not fear, is at life's center.

The Fool feels **absolved**. He forgives himself and others, knowing that his real self is pure and good. He may regret past mistakes, but he knows they were due to his ignorance of his true nature. He feels cleansed and refreshed, ready to start anew.

It is time for the Fool to make a deeper **Judgement** (20) about his life. His own personal day of reckoning has arrived. Since he now sees himself truly, he can make the necessary decisions about the future. He can choose wisely which values to cherish, and which to discard.

The angel on Card 20 is the Fool's Higher Self **calling** him to rise up and fulfill his promise. He discovers his true vocation - his reason for entering this life. Doubts and hesitations vanish, and he is ready to follow his dream.

World

Opening the Door to the Tarot Work Shop 1

The Fool reenters the World (21), but this time with a more complete understanding. He has **integrated** all the disparate parts of himself and achieved wholeness. He has reached a new level of happiness and **fulfillment**.

The Fool experiences life as full and meaningful. The future is filled with infinite promise. In line with his personal calling, he becomes actively **involved** in the world. He renders service by sharing his unique gifts and talents and finds that he prospers at whatever he attempts. Because he acts from inner certainty, the whole world conspires to see that his efforts are rewarded. His **accomplishments** are many.

So the Fool's Journey was not so foolish after all. Through perseverance and honesty, he reestablished the spontaneous courage that first impelled him on his search for Self, but now he is fully aware of his place in the world. This cycle is over, but, the Fool will never stop growing. Soon he will be ready to begin a new journey that will lead him to ever greater levels of understanding.

What the Card Positions Mean

Remember these three factors inform the interpretation of all Tarot readings:

- The meaning of the card
- The meaning of the position in the spread
- The question of the Querent (the person you're reading for: either yourself or someone else)

In a Tarot spread, you lay out the cards in a configuration. Each card has a meaning based on where it falls. You can know what area of life a card is speaking about by its position. The position also indicates whether the card is speaking to you about the past, present, or future. The position tells you a lot: whether the lesson is one you have mastered or one you need to learn, whether your wish will be granted, or whether something stands in the way.

You can learn more about what a Tarot card means by the cards next to it. When reading a spread, you may initially have two possible interpretations of a card. The cards around it can tell you which interpretation fits. Make notes about both interpretations and consider the nuances of each. Pay attention to the one that feels true or has the most energy. We call that the card interpretation that resonates—like the sound of a bell hanging in the air. This is your intuition talking to you.

If you hit a snag when interpreting a card, you can throw down another card, asking for further elaboration. Make your next question more specific: Is this about me, or is this about my mother/father/sister/brother? Is this about the past, present, or future? Is this about my money or my relationship?

Or you might want to use a new question and another spread. You can always ask a follow-up question.

The Three-Card Spread

In Tarot spreads, the Three-Card spread mirrors the essential spiritual energy of trinities in the universe:

- Father, Son, and Holy Ghost
- Body, mind, and spirit
- Yesterday, today, and tomorrow
- Morning, noon, and night
- Girl, mother, and grandmother
- The heavens, the earth, and you

Draw three cards right now from your Tarot deck. First, consider the possible meanings of each, according to the trinities we've just listed. Don't worry too much about whether you know what the cards mean; feel the cards in relation to each concept. Next consider the underlying message or energy of the three cards together as they move to a point of clarity or completion.

The Three-Card spread is ideal for a daily reading, just to check in with the situation around you. Think of it as a quick fix, a head start, or a cosmic overview.



HOMEWORK

START A TAROT JOURNAL

WORK WITH ONE CARD A DAY RECORDING YOUR VIEW OF THAT ENERGY

DO THREE READINGS AND RECORD THE READINGS

RECORD THE FOLLOWING

QUESTION,, CARDS , YOUR MEANING, OUTCOME