

BOOK OF FLOATING PAGES

THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF TAROT

Week 1: Orientation

INTRODUCTION

The Tarot is a representation of the Universe, the Divine and all Creation. It is concrete - as well as mysterious and ineffable.

Anybody can work with the Tarot. It is a tool to develop the intuition as well as an interaction with the workings of All-That-Is. The Building Block method provides an easy to follow system by which to understand the workings of the Tarot, and to synthesise the constituent parts into a meaningful whole.

Alchemists and Occultists probably developed the system as a means to record Universal Truths symbolically, thus preventing the abuse of power by the uninitiated.

Tarot card games became an enormously popular form of entertainment Europe as of the 1450s. By the early nineteenth century conflicting theories surrounded the origin and correct use of the cards, which had come to be associated with fortune-telling, gypsies and charlatans. The inexhaustible wisdom expressed in the Tarot was explored and re-systematised by members of esoteric orders such as the Golden Dawn, and practitioners of Magick such as Aleister Crowley and Arthur Edgar Waite. Various forms and interpretations of the Tarot have proliferated since the Tarot's popularisation as a divination system in the 1960's.

The Tarot is perfect in its form and design, since it is a microcosm of the Universe. It integrates the qualities of the Archetypal realm, the Five Elements, Numerology and Astrology into a coherent system. Its correspondences and associations are endless - a reflection of the workings of all Creation.

The Three Arcana: The Parts of The Tarot

The Tarot consists of three distinctive parts:

The Major Arcana ("Greater Mystery") contains 22 Trump cards, which are distinguishable by their rich and evocative images. The Arcana represents life as a journey of Archetypal Initiations into different levels of experience. Archetypes are symbols or personifications of spiritual or psychological truth, like the gods and goddesses of the various pantheons. The Major Arcana is a formula to better understand life, love, growth, and spirituality. It can also provide insight into the alchemical process, hermetic magic, the creative process or any other subject to which intuitive solutions are sought.

The Minor Arcana ("Lesser Mystery") reflects the human experience in the world of matter. It is divided into four suits of ten cards each. In this way, numerological energies are blended with those of the four elements. The suit of Swords represents air; Wands - fire; Cups – water; and, Pentacles symbolise earth.

The Court Cards - Kings, Queens, Knights (Princes) and Pages (Princesses) in each suit - represent personality traits or the people that inhabit our lives. By blending each element with a 'modality' derives astrological correspondences. Modalities render each element as Cardinal, Fixed or Mutable (this is explained in the section on Astrology).

Modern playing cards are a simplification of the Tarot. They have lost much of the profound symbolism of the original, yet reflect some interesting features.

- Four Suits symbolise the elements and seasons in a year
- Thirteen cards in each suit correspond to the lunar months in a year
- Fifty two cards - weeks in a year
- Three hundred and sixty five pips represent the days in a year.

THE BUILDING BLOCKS METHOD

A Tarot building block is a basic unit such as a symbol, number or element. Building blocks - like letters of the alphabet or bricks in a house – are combined to create a new entity. The whole is greater than the mere combination of the individual parts.

The building blocks of the Tarot are as follows:

- Major Arcana - 22 steps in the life journey; archetypes, sequence numbers, astrological correspondences and visual symbols.
- Minor Arcana - 40 cards (14 keywords) consisting of: element, number (numerology) and the artist's interpretation of the image.
- Court Cards - astrological associations created from element, season and modality. (The meanings of astrological signs are also derived from smaller constituent parts – a combination of element, modality, season and ruling planet.)

The combination and synthesis of the building blocks provides the signification of the card. Understanding how the meaning is derived allows a true comprehension of the cards and precludes learning the cards by rote.

There is a common misconception that the meanings of Tarot cards are predetermined and need to be learned according 'to the book'. Standardised meanings have developed as a result of generalisation and an ignorance of the fundamental parts that contribute to the cards' interpretation.

Tarot card interpretation is a creative process that derives from personal life-experience, taste and predisposition. A building block is like the artist's basic material. The artist will create a work according to a unique and individual process. Just as two architects would never combine building materials in the same way when designing a house, the derivation of meanings of the cards is highly individual.

In working with building blocks we are not trying to reduce the Tarot to a facile system, nor do we seek to demystify, simplify or rationalise it. The building blocks are in themselves based in the mystery of all Creation, but are rendered "bite-sized", making it easier to grasp in the beginning than the more complex combinations. In understanding the component parts, we understand the inherent nature of the Tarot. The understanding of the building blocks themselves gives a firm basis upon which to ground the imagination and psychic ability.

HISTORY

The true origins of the Tarot are a mystery. Some historians have claimed that it was handed down from the Egyptians, then transmitted via the gypsies or Bohemians into Medieval Europe.

The appearance of the Tarot in early Renaissance Europe is well recorded, although the Tarot's philosophical basis probably lies in the Mystery Schools of the ancient Egyptians, Greeks and Romans. Around the time of Christ, Gnosticism and many other syncretic mystery teachings taught the universality of all religions. The conversion of the Roman Empire to Christianity under Emperor Constantine in 313 AD saw the suppression of these philosophies, branded 'heretical'.

Initiates of the Mystery Schools must have recorded their understanding of metaphysics as a system of archetypes and elements that eventually became an all-encompassing Book of Wisdom with 'floating pages' (the individual cards of the Tarot). A Christian European – Gnostic to be more precise - veneer was applied to these metaphysical truths during the Middle Ages, since it was the spiritual 'language' current in Western Europe and the Byzantine Empire. It was also at this time that Tarot and alchemical symbolism found a common form of expression (although they stem from the same tradition).

Four suit playing cards first entered Europe in the late 1300s, likely from the Ottoman Empire. These cards had the suits of Batons (wands), Coins (pentacles), Swords, and Cups, as in modern cards.

The first Tarot decks were mentioned between 1440 and 1450 in Milan and North Italy. They were described as being illustrated trump cards (Major Arcana) added to the four-suit pack. These new decks were called "Carte da Trionfi" ('triumph cards', later known as "trumps" in English).

The oldest surviving tarot cards are from the Visconti-Sforza Tarot decks, which were commissioned by Duke Filippo Maria Visconti. Martino da Tortona described them as consisting of:

- A 60-card deck
- 16 cards had images of the Greek gods
- The suits depicted four kinds of birds.

Other early decks with classical motifs include the Sola-Busca and Boiardo-Viti decks of the 1490s. In Florence, the Minchiate deck of 97 cards emerged; it included additional cards with astrological symbols and the four elements.

The Tarot was initially condemned by the Church given its association with gambling. Only in subsequent centuries did it become recognised as a tool of divination.

The “Tarocchi” games of Renaissance Europe were enormously popular. These cards were made accessible to a broader public in the 1700’s with the printing of the Marseilles deck, which established the modern Major Arcana sequence.

By the nineteenth century, the Tarot’s popularity as a game had waned. The cards had come to be associated with fortune-telling, gypsies and charlatans.

The Tarot was explored and re-systematised by members of esoteric orders such as the Golden Dawn and metaphysicians such as Aleister Crowley and Dr Arthur Edward Waite. Various forms and interpretations of the Tarot have proliferated since the Tarot’s popularisation as a metaphysical science in the 1960’s.

The Sola-Busca Tarot

The “Sola Busca Tarot” is the earliest known example of a 78-card Tarot card deck. It was printed from metal plates and hand coloured, probably as early as the 1490s.

This deck is the earliest version in which the trump cards are named and numbered. The trumps loosely follow the rise and fall of the Roman Empire, but also include gods from the Roman pantheon such as Bacchus.

The Minor Arcana is the earliest example of illustrative artwork. Many images from the Rider-Waite cards are clearly borrowed from the Sola-Busca deck (such as the three of swords).

In 1995, Italian scholar Sofia Di Vincenzo, proved that many images of the Sola-Busca deck are related to the alchemical thought of the Renaissance.

The Magenta Cards

Many concepts and card characters are shared between the conventional Tarot and the Mantegna deck. These are, however, neither playing cards, nor Tarot cards used for divination. There are 50 cards, and were most likely used as an educational tool, reflecting the state of the world and areas of education (like “grammar”, rhetoric”, astrology”, etc)

The deck is thought to have been designed in Ferrara around 1470. Baccio Baldini - a Florentine engraver - may be the artist, and not Andrea Mantegna, as was once claimed.

ARCHETYPES

The imagery and power of the Tarot is based in the archetypes, which are Universal Truths expressed in symbolic and condensed form. Archetypes influence the human psyche on varying levels of consciousness and unconsciousness. Depth Psychologist Carl Jung is best known for his research into the influence of the Collective Unconscious (or Archetypal Realm) on human thinking, behaviour, and in dreams. Dream interpretation is an important aspect of Jungian psychotherapy.

Particular universal qualities are observable in archetypes and these can be applied to the human experience. Motherhood is an archetypal role that all humans experience, thus the importance of the Mother takes on mythic proportions.

Archetypal roles have been expressed for millennia in the worship of gods and goddesses, in the telling of stories, and in the initiation of humans into the great Mysteries of life. The gods, goddesses and heroes of all cultures; the saints of Christianity; the sages of the Far East; and, the prophets of the Jews are archetypal representations. Gods are personifications of psychological or spiritual states, making them acceptable to humans where abstract principles would be alienating.

Archetypal roles fundamental to human life are the Maiden, Mother, and Crone; and, Warrior, Father and Sage or Tyrant. They constantly manifest in history, novels, movies and even the scientific interpretation of the animal and plant kingdoms. Traditional cultures have observed that the Earth is our Mother and the Universe a Goddess, for life emerges from the mother's body and she provides nourishment for her offspring. She is a lover to the Sky Father and a goddess to her children. She is strong, yet also tender and the source of bounteous gifts. Her expression varies from culture to culture, but is profound in its spiritual implications. Generally speaking, modern society denies the archetypal importance of the Mother - the mystery of fertilisation and birth can be replaced by medical manipulation and her role has become secondary in importance to earning money.

In modern society, the archetypal realm has become unconscious and unseen. We are, for the most part, spiritually ignorant. Principles and patterns based in Universal Truth have become distorted – we are emotionally immature, ethics are of less importance than assets, families and human relationships are fractured, and people are broken by hurt at the meaninglessness of a seemingly chaotic world. Whereas older cultures have turned to their gods and mythologies for insight and inspiration, modern society looks to public figures and politicians who are human in their limitation, yet archetypal in what is expected of them. Napoleon and the Dalai Lama; Elizabeth I and Marilyn Monroe - to name a few - are humans overshadowed by archetypal projection. The mythic power they channel

intensifies their strength as well as their potential for self-destruction. Marilyn Monroe continues to fascinate people many years after her death since she fulfils the role of “sex goddess” - a modern projection of the Greco-Roman goddess Aphrodite-Venus.

Conscious or not, archetypes are a powerhouse of energy and information. They can be tapped into at will since they are like computer programmes providing a structure for our personal work. The roles we unconsciously choose to play out in our lives result from individual background and conditioning and are magnified by the corresponding archetypal energies. They provide “back-up programmes” thousands of years old, adding collective to individual experience. If, for example, we play the role of the archetypal victim, we willingly dwell in a consciousness level that will perpetuate the experience of being downtrodden. The struggle will be our own as well as that of all the victims of the past, present and future.

The power of the archetypes can be used for our personal growth, fulfilment and joy. When archetypal patterns are made conscious by deliberately seeking them for learning - through the Tarot or otherwise - we empower ourselves and experience profound understanding of our place in the Universe.

SOME METAPHYSICAL PRINCIPLES

Thought creates our experienced reality. Material form follows on from what we believe. The events and people in our lives are the symptoms of our conscious or unconscious expectations.

All matter is made up of light and energy. Physically, humans are beings of light. Our physical flesh consists of denser frequencies of light, while the aura is a more subtle part of the body. Human beings are electro-magnetic in nature. Our thoughts create a resonance that attracts similar frequencies of consciousness.

Belief and the Tarot

We as humans need belief in something to give our lives direction. Belief in a Higher Power - ranging from the Truth to the Divine - takes us beyond our egos. What we give belief to, organises our lives and how we manifest our world.

Belief can and must be cultivated. The task of creating one's own belief system is a lot more challenging and complicated than slotting into an already established belief system. A religious belief system, for example, has been cemented by generations of devotion, suffering, disillusion, bargaining with the gods, achieving results and triumph. Therefore, in the cultural unconscious and conception of life, these beliefs are supported by results.

Ultimately, belief is only as strong as the extent to which your subconscious mind is convinced by something. If you think you will stop smoking, for example, the chances of quitting are small; if you truly believe you will stop, the chances are you will manage. For this reason, powerful epiphanies transform our lives so thoroughly: the new belief is not just an intellectual postulation, it is a powerful "knowing" on a gut level.

One way to develop belief is to follow spiritual practices. Not only is the mind engaged in the ritual, but also the body and unconscious gets involved - and have a "memory" of the experience.

In a Tarot Reading:

- the more you believe in the cards (having built the trust by practice), the more accurate your readings will be.
- If the Querent truly believes in your abilities (and the cards), what you say will have great influence on them consciously and subconsciously.

- the more reports you get that your readings are accurate, the more you will believe in yourself.

Bear in mind that when you give a reading - and the querent really believes in your abilities - that you are “enchanting” the querent.

Magic and Enchantment

Manifestation and magic are the same force of creation. The word “magic” is just... well... more magical. Magic has a spark, a shimmer of pure delight and wonderment.

Magic is creating - conjuring and invoking raw forces, like elements, archetypes, gods, goddesses. It is act of enchanting the world to give it a new character, more or less according to our will.

The Tarot is magical. It is a mystery: we do not know where it came from, or even how it really works. That is the mystery that makes it magical.

The Tarot has a concrete aspect (the cards/symbols themselves), as well as an ineffable dimension (the universe that the cards represent).

The cards create a “Book of Floating Pages”, which can be put together in different ways to create new and unique narratives. Like letters in an alphabet, creating an infinite number of words and meanings.

As symbols, the cards represent forces. The card itself is not the force (just as the word “tree” is not the tree itself), but the means to CALL the power of the archetype it represents.

Consulting an oracle is a magical experience, since it reveals mysterious knowledge. This is a passive or received aspect of the Tarot.

Even more magical, is the active aspect of the Tarot, which involves calling or placing an archetypal energy in your life. This is done by:

- Imagining something you would like - feeling and desiring it with force and conviction...
- working with the card - in physical form, by seeing and touching it...
- placing your trust in the archetype’s power (and thus letting it help you create your desires)...
- then starting to construct the energy through action in the world.

These are the basics of pure magic, creation and manifestation.

The Conscious and the Unconscious

The Tarot is a means to make the unconscious more conscious. This is life's basic purpose. We become conscious when we realise we can choose how our existence is to be.

In a reading, the Tarot cards reflect the unconscious mind. They are a powerful tool for counselling and an effective means of looking into the querent's subjective experience. When we survey anybody's future - using the cards or any other system - we read *currently held* projections. Our futures are created according to patterns set in the past through trauma or conditioning; through positive or negative expectation; or the belief that destiny cannot change and therefore life will always be a particular way. Influences such as astrology, genetic make-up, and environment – all apparently *pre-determined* – are only *potentialities* or *trends*.

Destiny and Fate

A completely accurate prediction is impossible to make, since each individual has the freewill to choose how he or she utilises the information given. The Tarot is a means of identifying unconscious factors. The reading enables the querent to take conscious action within a specific context.

The Tarot reading is not an end in itself. The story it tells is not absolute. An individual's 'fortune' is not set in stone, since it can always be altered. Fortune-telling is disempowering to the individual, as fatalistic readings imply that the Tarot reader has special powers with which to see "Tablets of Fate" of the Client's destiny.

The Tarot reader is only as good as the belief the client places in him or her. When the individual chooses to abdicate power to the diviner, over-identification with the given prophecy occurs. The querent's belief then manifests the prediction.

READINGS

Synchronicity - How the Tarot Works?

When the querent rearranges the Tarot physically, he or she obtains a reading. The Diviner reads according to his or her own subjective experience. Irrespective of what method is used to obtain the reading, synchronicity will ensure that it is a direct reflection of the querent's unconscious mind.

When something is 'synchronous', it is simultaneous. When synchronicity occurs, seemingly unrelated events line up in order to create miracles – a right-place-right-time situation occurs or a desire manifests instantaneously. Synchronicity is also called 'co-incidence', which in contemporary usage implies a random fluke rather than different aspects of the same event.

Synchronicity works in alignment with the principle of Macrocosm-reflecting-Microcosm - "As Above, So Below". This suggests that in every given moment small events reflect the bigger picture. Since we create our realities through mind, our worlds are an arrangement of thoughts-made-concrete.

Divination and the Tarot

The Tarot is a microcosm of the Universe. It is also a system of divination, which seeks to bring self-knowledge and insight into the querent's life. A reading is an interaction between the reader and the client or 'querent'. The system in which the querent places his or her faith will ultimately be the one that gives most success.

The Tarot is one of many systems of divination. Others include the I Ching, astrology, the Ogham Alphabet and the Runes. Techniques like the reading of tealeaves, dice and the fall of bones are also commonly used for prediction and gaining self-knowledge. Our personal realities – the people and events in our lives - can also be read symbolically (like any other system), although it is often simpler to gain knowledge from a summarised or microcosmic reading.

Tools of divination include cards, objects, or events, which are used to examine the situation at hand. When organised into a system, this creates an 'alphabet' with which the Diviner can work. An alphabet is a structure from which individual letters are taken to make up words that have individual and specific meanings. Similarly, the Tarot employs cards (like letters) to make up a reading (the words).

A Tarot reading represents an issue *in microcosm*. In other words, the reading provides a summary (microcosm) of the querent's life and circumstances

(macrocosm). As an insight into the querent's life-situation, it is a symbolic representation.

Clairvoyancy

All humans are clairvoyant, although at different levels of realising and employing this ability. Clairvoyancy is the ability to 'clearly see' the subtleties of an individual's experience.

Clairvoyant ability does not guarantee ethical integrity, just as the possession of a university degree does not guarantee professional competence.

The Tarot is a system that can be used to develop clairvoyant ability. The images and symbolism on the cards stimulate the intuition and provide an anchor upon which to base the flow of psychic information.

Every reader sees life through a unique filter. Since all experience is subjective, personal bias and projection may impair the clarity of the reading. In some clairvoyants, the filter is more clouded than in others. If the Diviner's reality is based in duality and 'doom-and-gloom', the reading will reflect this.

We always have the power of freewill to accept or reject the teachings of a master or guru, and especially the reading of a clairvoyant or Tarot reader. Never trust anybody who tries to convert you to his or her "way". Another person's version of relativity is not your own and should be accepted with caution. Ask yourself: "What is the reader's basic perspective on life?" and "Does this perspective agree with my own?" Another person's baggage could distort your own uniqueness and cause you to waste time and energy trying to conform to an alien vision. What works for one will not necessarily work for another.

The querent needs to be discerning as to who is consulted for a reading, since the message the cards carry may be so clouded by the bias of the reader and thus the accuracy is lost. The legitimate reader can distance him/herself from judgements and preconceptions, and convey the information impassively.

Tarot and Healing

Since the Tarot reflects unconscious issues in a physical way, a reading can be very emotional for the querent. It often brings about a great healing release. The true purpose of a Tarot reading is to align the conscious with the unconscious experience. The evocative symbols of the Tarot magnify this integration process.

The archetypes and cards can be used to assist the self-healing process. They are not only useful in facilitating intuitive insight into a situation. Tarot imagery can

be used to enhance meditation/visualisation, or the appropriate archetype can be invoked to assist in a given life-situation.

Reading for Yourself

It is possible to read the Tarot for oneself. The superstitious beliefs claiming that this brings bad luck are incorrect.

In reading for oneself, discipline and clarity are needed, especially when examining the issues relating to important personal decisions. All too often people ask a barrage of questions in the hope of achieving the answers they desire, and as a result do not integrate the information. The Tarot will reflect any confusion, creating even further frustration.

I find reading for myself difficult, as my involvement in my own life is highly subjective. It is difficult to ascertain for oneself at which level the card should be read. I have found choosing one card in answer to a question to be the most successful way of getting the information I need. This makes it easier to meditate on the card and arrive at intuitive solutions. In this way the positive and negative potential of the cards can be considered clearly.

EXERCISE 1: CHOOSE YOUR DECK

The Tarot consists of symbolic information in the form of images, archetypes, numbers and elements.

Most modern decks are based on the imagery of the Rider-Waite deck.

Speciality decks that emphasise certain themes or metaphysical approaches proliferate. This adds richness to the Tarot system and makes it possible to work with a deck that appeals to personal predisposition.

The artist's interpretation of the cards is an important factor to consider. Each deck has a slightly different approach or emphasis. The image or understanding that the artist has in mind when designing the card influences its meaning. For example: the Crowley Thoth deck associates the Ten of Swords with the keyword of 'Ruin', while the Greenwood Tarot gives the same card the keyword of 'Instruction' – totally different approaches to the same numerological and elemental manifestation.

Choose a deck that 'speaks' to you visually. It is important to have an emotional connection with your cards. The interplay of visual images and colours are fundamental to reading the Tarot, since they stimulate creativity and intuition. The richer a card is in symbolism, the easier it is to interact with.

Symbols in the card will tend to 'jump out' at you when they are relevant. The same card need never be read in a similar way, as the visual interactions of cards in combination will trigger new information. Read the cards according to the deck you have in front of you, regardless of what you know from other decks. The images that come to mind in the moment are the important ones.

EXERCISE 2: THE TAROT JOURNAL

A very effective way of learning personal meanings for the cards is by choosing a card every morning. Visualise the archetype and ask it the necessary questions about your day (before or after you have experienced it). Record this information and observe the events of the day. The chosen archetype will affect you throughout the day.

Before going to bed, assess how the card has influenced you. Record the events of the day in your journal.

If, for example, you draw the Empress, you may expect to experience abundance, creativity and sensuality. If you attract opposite experiences, be aware of the unconscious blockages to this archetype, which may be sabotaging your life.

Perhaps you need assistance in terms of abundance? Consciously choose to work with the Empress energy for a day, week or month. Place the card in a prominent place where you will be reminded of its assistance.

If you chose “Death”, “The Devil” or “The Tower” - or any other “negative” card - do not worry. See how you can use the Tarot as a means of handling issues in your day more effectively. If you draw “The Devil”, look at the ways in which you play victim, and be certain that you always make decisions in an empowered way. Observe how other people or situations control you.

You may also want to create a Tarot Notebook. Designate one page for each card. Record the visualisations relating to this card. Enter the meanings that you resonate with - be these your own or those obtained from books.