

Journey Through Tarot

Chapter 1: The Basics

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WHAT IS JOURNEY THROUGH TAROT?

A friend of mine often tells me about her aunt, who “told the cards.”

A professional reader I know says he doesn’t know much about tarot, but he’s happy to tell you a story about the pictures on the cards.

Journey Through Tarot is about learning to find your unique voice as a teller of tarot.

Many tarot instructors teach tarot in the same way that Classics professors teach Latin. First, you are given a list of vocabulary to memorize. Then you are given a passage from an ancient text to translate. This method of learning foreign languages is highly effective and time-honored. But it’s not the only way to learn an unknown language. Another highly effective way is called cultural immersion. In cultural immersion, you learn the language through everyday conversations and interactions with others who use it and with those who are also just learning it. Your grammar may not be as precise as a student who spends most of the lesson conjugating verbs, but the personal rewards of being able to communicate with another person in a new way is immense.

In Journey through Tarot, you learn the metaphorical language of tarot through cultural immersion. You won’t start by memorizing the meanings of cards, but rather you will use the images on the cards to determine what they mean to you. Nor will you begin by laying out spreads and translating them like a classic text, but rather you will intentionally choose cards that have something to say to you—and use these tarot images to express your thoughts and ideas. In this course, you will learn tarot backwards. You will learn to speak with the cards first. And then when you begin to listen to them, you will see that they have so much more to say than the stuttering of memorized phrases.

There are a number of different ways to read a card. In Journey Through Tarot, these different methods are called guideposts. This book presents seven guideposts that point the way toward understanding the cards. Exercises and examples help you to learn and apply each guidepost.

From the beginning you will be using cards in groups, not singly. The interaction of the cards is at the very foundation of learning to read tarot. It’s the difference between the word “cat” and the phrase “a black cat.” “Cat” as part of the phrase “a black cat” cannot refer to a tabby cat or a calico cat or a Siamese cat, and likewise, by laying down two cards, they must necessarily form a meaning that is different from that of either one alone. But if this method

sounds complicated, the beauty is that it's not. Because the guideposts teach you to use the cards to speak, all you have to do is tell stories with the cards. The stories you tell—the work you do with the cards—is what teaches you tarot. You learn by applying your own experiences, knowledge and understanding to the cards.

So, if this method doesn't rely on the academic memorization of card keywords, does that mean it's intuitive? Many of the students of *Journey Through Tarot* have found that they feel their intuition is strengthened through these exercises. But reading tarot intuitively is not the goal of this course. These techniques teach you to interpret the symbolism of the card, just as an art history student learns to interpret art or an English major learns to interpret a poem. You may start with an intuitive response to the illustration on the card, but this technique teaches you to be aware of where within yourself those intuitions arise from and how you can test and verify them with knowledge you already have. Furthermore, the lessons in this book will introduce a variety of symbol systems, called systems of correspondence, so that your readings can be fine-tuned with new vocabulary from these various dialects. The method offered in this book is not about memorizing meanings, nor is it solely about learning to trust your instinct as to what a card means, but rather it empowers you to confidently tell the stories in the cards by providing simple, easy to follow guideposts that help you analyze the symbols in any card to find that card's unique meaning.

HOW TO GET STARTED ON YOUR JOURNEY

To learn the reading method taught in this book, you'll need a 78-card illustrated tarot deck. Don't worry, it's not something weird, unusual or hard to find. In fact, if you're reading this book, you probably already have one!

WHAT IS A 78-CARD ILLUSTRATED TAROT DECK?

A "78-card tarot deck" means the kind that has at least 78 cards and is called a "tarot" deck, not a deck of only the Major Arcana (22 cards) or an oracle deck or other meditation deck. A traditional tarot deck is divided into the Minor Arcana and the Major Arcana. The 56 cards of the Minor Arcana consist of four suits of Ace through ten and sixteen court cards—four to each suit. The numbered suit cards are called pips. The courts are also sometimes called the courtiers, the Royals, the Royal Family or face cards. The Major Arcana consists of 22 cards, numbered

from 0 to 21. These cards are sometimes called Trumps. They represent the journey of the 0 Card, the Fool, through an initiatory process or epic adventure. The Minor Arcana is often said to represent common, daily situations and activities, whereas the Major Arcana is considered to represent more archetypal influences, issues of major importance, or the hand of fate intervening in the situation.

Sometimes you will find a deck with more than 78 cards that is called a tarot deck, such as a Minchiate deck. This is a type of historical deck that has extra Major Arcana cards, usually cards to represent the zodiac or the seven virtues or other common symbols from the Renaissance. You shouldn't have any problems using this kind of deck because the symbolism is essentially the same as a regular tarot deck. You may need to do some additional research as you study the Major Arcana, but the techniques taught in this book would still apply to the deck—as long as the Minor Arcana is illustrated.

By “illustrated” I mean that the Minor Arcana should have pictures on the cards. Sometimes the old-style, authentic Renaissance-looking decks have what we in the biz call “pips.” Pips are the icons for the suits: the wands, cups, swords, and pentacles (coins). A card with just the pips would look kind of like a modern playing card, with just the designated number of wands or cups, for instance, and maybe some pretty vines, borders or background images, but not any pictures—by which I mean scenes of people in interesting environments, generally interacting with the suit emblems. You want the cards with pictures. I prefer that the pictures incorporate the number of wands, cups, etc into the illustration; for instance, the five of Cups might show a person turned away from the viewer looking at three spilled cups, while two full cups are unseen behind him. However, I have read with some decks that don't incorporate the suit emblems into the pictures, such as *Legend: The Arthurian Tarot* and Nigel Jackson's *Medieval Enchantment Tarot*, which still work with this technique.

Examples of illustrated decks that my students have used in the past include: Rider-Waite-Smith and all its variations, Morgan-Greer, Gilded Tarot, Tarot of Dreams, Haindl Tarot, Druidcraft Tarot, Hanson-Roberts, Victorian Romantic, Initiatory Tarot of the Golden Dawn, Witches Tarot, Robin Wood Tarot, Sacred Rose, Tarot of the Old Path, Motherpeace Tarot, Halloween Tarot, Hello Kitty Tarot, Medieval Scapini Tarot, Cosmic Tarot, and many others. If you don't have a deck yet, please check out the back of this book where I list a number of fantastic mail order sites and other sources for viewing and purchasing decks.

There are certain 78-card illustrated tarot decks that I don't want to recommend to beginning students. These are decks that are too advanced for an inexperienced reader. I define an advanced deck as a deck whose mythology is so unique and integrated so completely into the deck that special research is needed. Examples of advanced decks would be the Thoth Deck, Barbara Walker's deck, William Blake deck, Hermetic deck, and most Golden Dawn decks. If you are already highly knowledgeable about the mythologies or occult tradition represented in the deck, then it would be fine to use. But otherwise, you will be trying to learn the cards and learn the mythology at the same time, which is just extra work for you. Now, simply having the mythology integrated into the deck is fine, in fact desirable, if you know that mythology quite well, for instance: Arthurian, Lord of the Rings, Alice in Wonderland, Hello Kitty, decks about a specific historical period or fantasy world. Your deck does not have to be a Rider-Waite-Smith clone or derivative! If your deck depends on Kabbalah, Astrology, or any mythology that you are not familiar with, please save it until you are more familiar with the cards. On the other hand, decks like Ellen Cannon Reed's Witches Tarot uses Kabbalah, but the deck is not dependent on that knowledge, so a beginning reader would be able to use it just fine. Advanced readers, the techniques taught in this book are an ideal way to familiarize yourself with a new deck!

Students do not need to purchase the bound book that is associated with their deck or any books of tarot card meanings. This technique teaches you to **READ THE CARDS**, not memorize someone else's ideas of what the cards mean.

BUYING A DECK

I want to stress that it is imperative that you be able to see a deck before you purchase it. In the old days, any good bookstore or occult shop would have an open sample of every deck they carried so that you could look at any and all cards. That way if a certain card makes or breaks a deck for you, you can see that particular card. However, with the inundation of new decks, stores are carrying more decks than ever, and since the cost of tarot decks is kept low by maintaining a low mark-up on them, it is not profitable to tie up a lot of capital in display decks and few stores do this anymore. But there are still some out there that do! Go to a good local pagan or metaphysical shop to buy your deck, and make sure to ask if you can open it before you buy it or if they have sample decks for viewing. Often a store might have a few cards out for display if not the whole deck. You can also see sample cards online at many websites, such as

aeclectic.net, which usually have images of about six to eight cards. A fantastic way to see a variety of decks is to find a local tarot group, such as a Meetup group, and have a deck show-and-tell night!

When picking a deck, find one with images that really resonate with you. Huge bonus if you feel that you already understand the cards in the deck. If so, that is the deck for you!

OVERVIEW: THE BASICS

These are my answers to the questions I often get on the first day of class.

Shuffling the cards

Purpose of shuffling. The purpose of shuffling is to randomize the cards. It is also a repetitive action that can focus your attention and, if done while concentrating, can induce a light trance that is a benefit to opening up your psychic abilities. To this end, it is important that you (and the person you are reading for, if applicable) concentrate on the question asked while you are shuffling.

How to shuffle. I always shuffle my deck like you would a normal deck of cards, using a standard riffle shuffle. One old lady who was sitting next to me at a psychic fair I was reading at told me never to shuffle my deck that way. Then the old biddy gave me the evil eye and I immediately bent the corner of one of the cards. I had been shuffling like that for 10 years or more and had never bent a corner before. That said, a safer (and easier with large tarot cards) shuffle might be the overhand shuffle. In the overhand shuffle, you hold the deck in one hand, then using the thumb of the other hand, pull a few cards at a time into your palm, then a few more cards on top of those cards, and so on through the deck, effectively rearranging the order of the cards. An easy and elegant way to shuffle a deck is to alternately deal the cards into a number of piles, seven is a good number, but any number will do, then stack the piles into a deck again. An internet search on “shuffle cards” will turn up sites that clearly describe, often with video, the different types of shuffling. But you don’t need to be a card shark; you just need to get the cards mixed up. To that end, you can put all the cards on the table and move them around like a little kid might do. Whatever works for you. And don’t let those old ladies give you the evil eye!

Randomizing the cards. Some math whiz in one of my classes let us know that riffle shuffling a deck the number of times equal to the square root of the number of cards would randomize the deck. If your mind just fogged over when you read that sentence, let me simply

suggest that you shuffle a tarot deck nine times before doing a reading. To me it's very important to randomize the cards thoroughly before a reading—that way when I get the same cards three times in a row, or all Majors in a spread, or all reversed cards, I know it isn't due to a lazy shuffling style!

Having the querent shuffle. When you're reading for another person, you might like to have this other person—called the querent—either shuffle and/or cut the deck. This helps the querent to be more involved with the reading, and on a practical level removes any possibility of them thinking you're stacking the deck or otherwise trying to pull a fast one on them. When I read for another person, I explain to them that I am randomizing the cards. Then I do the riffle shuffle nine times. Then I hand them the deck and ask them to shuffle (any way that they are comfortable with, usually overhand) while they are concentrating on their question. So that they actually concentrate on the question and not on whether they're doing it right, I often give them a deadline (such as “shuffle three times” or “shuffle till you feel done”).

Used decks

One question people ask is if it's okay to buy a used deck. The most important thing is to trust your instinct when buying a deck. If the deck looks really weird or has a weird vibe, or if it is really shabby or visibly soiled, maybe you don't want it anyway. But there's no reason not to save money and do your part to help the planet by recycling an old deck. I've bought many used decks and have never had any problems with them. The one thing you will want to pay special attention to when buying a used deck is clearing it. See the information on clearing and charging a tarot deck later on in this chapter.

Touching other people's tools

I think the most important rule for dealing with magical tools is always to respect other people's property. In fact, I think that's important as a general life rule. Some people feel that you should never touch someone else's magical tools because it will disrupt the energy. It's true that touching a tool can affect its energy: this is one of the reasons it's nice to let the querents shuffle or cut the deck themselves, to impart some of their energy and intention to the reading. But this doesn't necessarily mean that if someone touches your tool the energy is irreversibly distorted. If you're sensitive enough to tell that the energy's disrupted, you should be skilled enough to do a clearing of the tool. It may be appropriate not to have certain tools out where others have access to them. I share my magic tools, especially my wand, in circle and I've only

noticed one person who actually affected the energy of my wand; I just directed energy through it until it was clear. However, some people, for any of a number of reasons, prefer that you not touch their tarot decks. This can include anyone from beginners up to professional readers who will shuffle and cut the deck themselves when reading for a client. It's just good manners to ask permission before touching or using another person's deck.

Storing the cards

Storing the cards. To decide how you want to store your cards you should know what materials transmit psychic energy and what materials store psychic energy. To greatly simplify this subject, I will give the following generalized rules: Wood, leather, stone and wool are insulating to energy (they don't allow it to flow in most cases). Silk is an excellent transmitter of psychic energy. To a lesser extent, linen and hemp are also good transmitters. The transmission of energy is based on the length of the staple, which means the length of the fiber from which the thread is spun. Silk is one long, continuous thread. Linen and hemp also have a long staple and so are superior to cotton. Many metals, including gold, silver and copper, are good transmitters of psychic energy; other metals like bronze and brass are not as good. So, wrapping your deck in silk will increase the energy, whereas wrapping it in wool or putting it in a wooden box will maintain the energy. A good way to create a high energy charge and retain it is to alternate layers of transmitting and insulating properties. This can be achieved by wrapping your deck in silk and then putting it in a wooden box or woolen pouch. Or wrap your deck in silk, put it in a woolen pouch, then put that in a metal lined wooden box, for more alternating layers.

In addition to the insulation and transmission properties described above, keep in mind that certain substances cause interference with energy. These substances include fabric with a high static charge, which encompasses all synthetic fabrics. Synthetics include polyester, nylon, polar fleece, acrylic, and vinyl (these are all made from petroleum products). Synthetics interfere with energy flow. Synthetics should not to be confused with man-made (also called manufactured) fabrics, which are made from natural fibers that must be processed to make fabric. These include rayon, bamboo and acetate, which are from cellulose fiber. Man-made fabrics are better than synthetics, but not as good as natural fabrics for storing decks. These cellulose fibers are very short (part of the reason they need special processing), so not good transmitters of psychic energy.

Cotton is a natural, plant-based fiber that tends to be neutral with regards to the transmission of psychic energy, but is cheap and readily available. Quilting stores will have an enormous selection of 100% cotton fabrics in beautiful colors and patterns.

It can be easy to confuse types of weave with the fiber content most commonly associated with that weave. For instance, some fabrics are called “linen-look” indicating that they have a linen weave, but are not necessarily made from flax fibers. Likewise, satin is a weave that is shiny on one side. Satin is often made of silk, but you can purchase polyester satins, rayon satins, or cotton sateen. The same is true of velvet: it’s a type of weave that produces a nap that gives it a glossy look. When purchasing fabrics, check the end of the cardboard bolt that the fabric is wrapped around for the label that indicates the fiber content.

Some people are opposed to using any product that comes from an animal, and so won’t use materials such as silk, wool or leather with their decks. Likewise, above and beyond the energetic reason not to use synthetics, consider the ethics of using petroleum-based products. Of course, use your best judgment and personal beliefs to make these important decisions.

Reading cloths. Use the same knowledge to choose a reading cloth as you did to choose fabric for your tarot pouch. I find that a reading cloth is necessary so that you always have a clean surface to put your cards on, even if you have to read on the floor or outside on the ground. You want to select your cloth based on the above properties of storage and transmission of energy. You also may want to take into consideration the color and any patterns on the cloth. See Chapter (***) for more information on the symbolism of colors.

Clearing and charging decks

To clear a deck or any other magical tool is to remove or neutralize the energy that exists in it. To charge a magical tool is to imbue it or fill it with your own energy and with a special purpose or intention. Although you can successfully read with a deck that has not been cleared or charged, if you take the time to do these things you will find that the tool has become much more personalized and powerful since it is sharing your energy. It’s like the difference between a toy you had when you were a kid that just sat on a shelf ignored and one you dragged with you everywhere you went. You want your cards to have the energy of your favorite toy (but maybe not the greasy kid finger residue).

Clearing. The first step in the charging process is to clear or neutralize the existing energy in the deck. If the deck was purchased used, this is a step you will want to pay special

attention to. A new deck out of the box will be fairly neutral in energy, although there might be some static build-up due to the manufacturing process and the plastic packaging materials. A used deck will probably have accumulated some energy that may need to be discharged. Even if you feel that the energy in it is positive, you might choose to zero it out before you impart your own energy to the deck. On the other hand, there may be times when you prefer specifically not to clear a deck. For instance, if the deck has been blessed or was used by a mentor, you might not want to remove that energy but only to add yours to what is already there. Ways to clear a deck include directing energy through it, using salt or saltwater, smudging it with incense that has purification as a property, placing it in sunlight or moonlight, placing it in a wooden box or burying it in the earth.

Another time you might want to clear a deck, even if you've previously cleared and charged it, is if there has been some disruption to its energy. The only time the energy of my cards was disturbed was a time that I used them when I had been drinking. Bad move. This happened shortly after I learned to read the cards, and I can only say I was young and stupid. I did a reading for a friend who had also been drinking, then left the cards where we had used them in a corner of the room. A few days later I walked over to that corner and immediately felt hung over. I had felt fine a moment before and it had been several days since the drinking episode. I walked away, then walked back and felt it again. I realized it was my cards. I took the deck outside and put them on a rock in the sun, fanned out so that at least an edge of every card showed, then left them for a few hours. The cards felt much better after that and I learned my lesson not to drink and read.

Charging. There are many reasons to charge your deck. It provides an opportunity to formally set an intention for the deck. The intention is the specific purpose or goal for that deck. You might set goals around your personal development, such as developing your intuition or doing daily tarot meditations. Maybe the purpose for a deck will be to give the best advice with the most compassion when reading for yourself and others. Perhaps your goals are about learning, such as applying yourself to studying the mythology the deck is based on or researching how astrology is used in the cards. Charging a deck also makes it more personal. By performing the charging ritual, you are establishing a link with your cards. You have made a commitment to the deck and in return it will speak more clearly to you. You might find that it gets to the point faster. You will also find that you reach for it more readily when you need advice, like a good

friend whom you can always call for help. More than just aligning it with your goals and establishing a rapport with it, charging a deck can raise its energy to a more spiritual vibration. By deliberately dedicating the deck to a higher power, you will find that you are able to understand the cards on a more profound level. It is here that the cards can guide you in your highest purpose.

One way to charge something is to direct energy into it, such as holding it in your hands or holding your hands over it. Some people will always carry a new deck with them or sleep with it under their pillows to establish a rapport. To increase the amount of energy or focus a certain wavelength of energy into the deck, you can utilize Reiki or other spiritual and personal symbols in the charging process or direct energy through a crystal or stone with the properties you wish to impart. To increase the concentration of chi, place the deck in or under a pyramid or on an orgone generating grid. Placing a deck in the sunlight or moonlight will fill the deck with those energies as well as clearing away other energies. Also, you can smudge the deck with incense associated with a particular purpose or deity, such as using an incense associated with Mercury, who rules divination.

Why ritual? Why do your clearing and charging in a ritual format? Ritual takes your conscious intention and conveys it to the subconscious. The ritual designed below also allows for your subconscious to communicate back to you what intention it has for the deck. By making this connection on the subconscious level with the deck, you have strengthened your ability to communicate with the deck. The symbol you choose for the subconscious intention will become an important word in your deck's vocabulary. When this symbol comes up in readings, it is like a secret password that opens doors to new levels of meaning. For instance, during the ritual I performed to charge my Druidcraft deck I selected as my subconscious symbol the three-masted ship. I took the symbol from the three of Wands card, which interestingly in this deck shows three planted saplings (rooted in space) on the left while beside them a man looks down a road; the card seems to speak of being unsure how to progress, whether to stay where you have put down roots or follow your wanderlust to new adventures. I chose the ship, a common symbol for the three of Wands, as my unconscious intention, showing how the rooted nature of the wood can become, when in the form of the ship, a way to satisfy that wanderlust.

A subsequent reading regarding a possible new job turned up the two of Pentacles, showing a woman in the foreground juggling the two disks with an apathetic look on her face. In

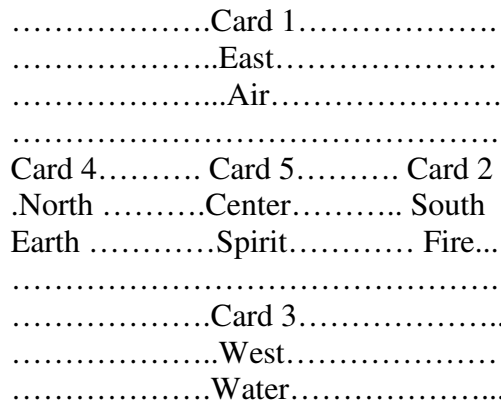
the background was a shipwreck. My attention was repeatedly drawn to the destruction. At first I feared it symbolized that taking the job would wreck my dreams of becoming successful in my chosen vocation: I had been working in performing arts production and arts administration for many years, a career path I was passionate about but which had steadily refused to provide an adequate income. But as I was continuously drawn into the stormy seas in the card, I found that I was not feeling fear, but a brave sense of adventure. I saw the shipwreck as containing buried treasure, and this woman, who only had two cents to rub together, was oblivious to this amazing wealth just under the surface. I realized that taking the job, mundane as it appeared to me, would provide the necessary rootedness in the material world—like the three planted wands—for me to embark on the adventure of discovery that would satisfy the wanderlust in my heart: following my lifelong passion of writing, which I did not have time to pursue when I was engaged in the artistically demanding—and draining—career path. This is not the kind of insight you can gain from reading books or applying memorized meanings to the cards. This is the kind of insight that arises from immersion in the language of the cards, an immersion which, when undertaken intentionally through the medium of ritual, reveals a powerful and eloquent communication tool.

A READING AND CEREMONY FOR CHARGING A TAROT DECK

**Part I
The Reading**

Use this spread and the corresponding ceremony to set your intention for a deck, to purify the deck and to charge it.

1. Write a sentence that describes your conscious intention for the deck:
2. Prepare as you normally would and perform a reading with the spread shown below. You don't have to ask a question, but you will want to concentrate on the intention you wrote above.



3. For each card, write a short sentence that begins with the word "I". Record those sentences here:

Card 1, East:

Card 2, South:

Card 3, West:

Card 4, North:

Card 5, Spirit:

4. Pick a simple symbol based on the fifth card, Spirit. It can be an image from the card or from the sentence you wrote. Make sure your symbol is relevant to you. Draw the symbol on an index card. This is your unconscious intention for the deck.

Part II

The Ceremony

Copy your sentences onto the appropriate lines below. It's OK to modify them slightly to fit the sentence structure.

Read through this whole script and make any changes or additions to the words to best suit your beliefs and intentions.

Set up your altar, light the charcoal in the east and the candle in the south. A chalice of water should be in the west and a dish of salt in the north. You will sit or stand on the west side of the altar facing east. Place the cards from your reading at the corresponding directions on the altar.

When you're ready to go, hold your deck in your hands for a minute or two and focus on your breath to ground and center yourself prior to beginning the ceremony.

Put a pinch of salt into the water and stir it up. Then take your deck and, while holding it, fan it out so that at least an edge of every card is showing. Lightly flick saltwater from your fingertips onto the cards (or hold the deck over the chalice if you are afraid of water damage to your deck; I lightly sprinkle my decks with saltwater and am unable to see any deleterious effect). Say:

I purify this deck by water and earth.

Place some incense on the charcoal. Carefully hold the fanned out cards in the incense smoke. Say:

I purify this deck by air and fire.

Reassemble the cards into a deck and hold it face up in your left hand.

Pick up the Air card from the east side of the altar, touch it to the chalice, then hold it in the incense smoke. Say:

If I choose, (Air phrase)

Now place the card on top of the deck in your left hand. Repeat this process for each of the five cards.

When I succeed, (Fire phrase)

In my dreams, (Water phrase)

I am rich because (Earth phrase)

My soul reveals that (Spirit phrase)

Now all the cards are in the deck in your left hand. Place the deck in the center of the altar. Place the index card on top of the deck and say:

I charge this deck with the symbol of my soul's intent: *(The name of the symbol)*

Direct energy through your wand into the deck (or hold your hands over the deck) and say the following:

With this ceremony I dedicate these cards to the highest good for all. They counsel us in our decisions, they inspire us toward our ambitions, they awaken us to our dreams, they ground us in our abundance. They speak the symbol of our soul and we understand.

(State your conscious intention.)

By *(The name of your spiritual source)*, **this deck is charged with my intention.**

So mote it be. Blessed Be.

This completes the ritual.