

The Balanced Scales: Theme and Variations on a Past, Present, Future Spread

By Joy Vernon

May 9, 2010

“You are the only one who can control all the elements and bring peace to our world.”

Many tarot readers will immediately see the Magician in this quote from the trailer for M. Night Shyamalan’s new movie. The thought of building a story from tarot elements triggered, like the assorted ideas presented in almost any movie based on mythological or metaphysical principles, my old desire to pick up my screenwriting again. And that triggered my ever-present doubts as to my ability to ever accomplish such a goal as writing a screenplay.

Earlier that day a friend and I were having coffee together. She told me how she had realized that a current problem in her life stemmed from an old childhood wound—this perspective was helping her both to understand her present situation and to heal the past situation.

As I sat in the dark theater and contemplated how to heal my own future, I considered the fact that the present is the equilibrium point between healing the past and creating the future—like the fulcrum of the beam on a set of scales, in which our wounds balance our desires.

What struck me as interesting about this perspective was the idea of opposition—that working in the present to achieve my goals is actually imbalanced. The present is a pivot point around which both past and future spin; and if I want a certain future, my firm footing arises from the present, but my leverage comes from the past.

“There are reasons each of us are born. We have to find those reasons.”

My racing thoughts on how I could use tarot to help me find the leverage to achieve my goals were bookended between these two quotes in the trailer for *The Last Airbender*. When I got home from the theater, I set to work designing a series of spreads.

Certainly the idea of Justice and her scales comes to mind when thinking about this kind of equilibrium, but more relevant to me is the idea of Temperance. Temperance corresponds to the 25th path on the kabbalistic Tree of Life and to the Hebrew letter samech, which means “prop,” “support,” or “tent peg.” The 25th path extends from the 9th sphere Yesod, the moon, to the 6th sphere Tiphareth, the sun. The first sphere, Kether, the *primum mobile*, or divine first mover, is shown as the image of a crown in the setting sun at the end of the long path leading into the distance in the background of the card. The implication is that as we rise out of the illusion of the lunar subconscious into the bright reason of the solar identification of self, we will eventually find the path to the understanding of the Divine.

Tarot readers often wonder at the placement of this beneficent card in the midst of some of the best freak-out cards in the deck. Nestled between the Hanged Man and Death on one side and the Devil and the Tower on the other, Temperance teaches us something very valuable about darkness on a spiritual path. Just as a tree reaches up towards heaven as far as its roots extend down into the earth, so by embarking on the descent through the nocturnal cards of the Tarot, we

reach down into ourselves and create a firmer foundation and greater capacity for growth. The deeper we are willing to sink, the higher we can climb, just as the tent peg hammered into the ground supports through oppositional tension the upward force of the tent. By learning to traverse successfully the dark realms of the subconscious, we increase our ability to climb to the heights in our yearning for the Divine. In Jungian terms we confront and integrate the shadow.

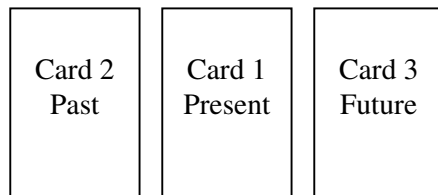
Based on this idea of balancing the darkness of past pain against the brightness of future victory in the tension point of the present, I developed a very simple and very versatile three-card spread.

The basic spread looks at what needs to be healed in the past, what the present situation is, and what can be accomplished in the future once the past is healed. But I realized that, like my friend and myself, we each have different ways of approaching this. Some of us more strongly feel the need to heal a past issue, some are trying to understand the problems that plague us in the present, and some are looking for a place to start creating the aspirations of our future. So, keeping these individual variations in mind, I developed three different spreads.

The Balanced Scales Spreads

Variation 1

The first spread starts with the present situation. This is designed for those with immediate problems, or who don't have a clear idea of where in the past this situation stems from or how it can evolve into a desirable future.



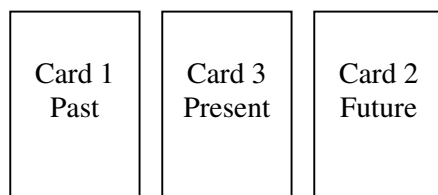
Card 1. Why am I in this present situation?

Card 2. What healing issue has this situation arisen from?

Card 3. What future accomplishment is this present situation the foundation of?

Variation 2

The second variation starts with the past wound. This version is most helpful for those who are working on healing a specific past issue, or who are aware of their past wounds but need more help seeing how this pain plays out through their current situation and into the future.



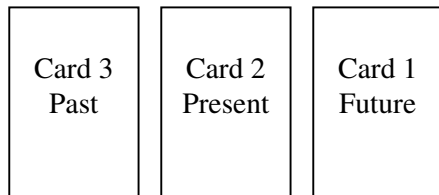
Card 1. What aspect of this past issue am I ready to heal?

Card 2. The depth of pain is equal to the height of accomplishment—what will I be ready to achieve after healing this?

Card 3. What is the greatest strength I can draw upon to heal this past issue?

Variation 3

Our future goals form the basis for the third variation. If you have a specific objective in mind, but have been unable to get started on it or unable to keep the momentum going towards its completion, this spread helps you identify what past wound may be holding you back and what today's task is to achieve the desired outcome.



Card 1. This is what I'm capable of accomplishing.

Card 2. This is the step I can take today to achieve that future accomplishment.

Card 3. This is the past issue that I can heal through the accomplishment of my goal.