

An all-new approach!

# Tarot

## For Beginners

A Practical Guide to Reading the Cards



BARBARA MOORE



Lisa Novak

## About the Author

Tarot has been a part of Barbara Moore's personal and professional lives for nearly twenty years. Right from the start, tarot intrigued her with its marvelous blending of mythology, psychology, and history, mystery, and magic. She has studied under renowned tarot scholars such as Mary K. Greer and Rachel Pollack, and continues to work with some of the brightest lights in the tarot world. Currently, she consults for both Llewellyn Worldwide and Lo Scarabeo, is one of the founders of the Minnesota Area Tarot Symposium (<http://minnesotatarot.com/>), is an enthusiastic and active member of the Twin Cities Tarot Meetup group, performs readings at a local haunted house, and consults the cards every chance she gets. She teaches tarot locally, nationally, and internationally.

Her website can be found here:

<http://www.practicaltarotreadings.com>

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For Lisa, who has the courage to foster  
greatness by whatever means necessary.

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## Introduction

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Everyone who reads the cards has a memory of the first time they saw a deck. My memory is vague and murky, but this is how I remember it: I was very young, maybe about six or eight years old. My mother took me to visit her great aunt. I don't remember why; we didn't have much to do with my mother's family, who had come to Detroit from Sicily by way of Louisiana. We drove from the suburbs into Detroit, a slightly frightening journey even back then. We went into this dark room heavy with weird vibes and incense, where my aunt sat, cards nearby. There was strange talk that I didn't understand, and cards were shuffled, followed by whispered questions and answers. Although my mother's family was steeped in spiritualism, the occult arts, and eclectic voodoo, except for this one elusive memory, I did not have further contact with the cards for many years.

That next contact, however, sealed the deal. My college roommate and I threw a party, and during the course of that party, she pulled out a deck of cards. She didn't read with them but handed them around for people to look at. For me, it was love at first sight. Although I wasn't quite sure what each card meant or even what exactly one was supposed to do with them, I looked in the tiny paper booklet that came with the deck, shuffled the cards, carefully laid them out, and started reading with them.

After that, I purchased or borrowed every tarot book I could get my hands on and collected different decks. Even though I knew the cards were just pieces of paper with pictures on them, I knew that the pictures (and what they represented) were much more. I knew that through the cards, secrets could be revealed and I could discover entire worlds.

Twenty years later, I am happy to say that I was right. Even better, now I get to show you how to use the cards to unveil mysteries and uncover secrets. I started my tarot journey by jumping right in, which was exhilarating in its own way. But after that initial leap, I was glad to have good books to help me become a more skilled reader. And that's the goal of this book: to help you become a confident reader in the easiest, most efficient way possible—while having some fun too!

How will we do that, you wonder? Here's the plan. First, we'll take a peek into the background of the cards themselves. Where did these cards come from, anyhow? Is their history really shrouded in mystery? Next, we'll look at each card, one by one, and discover their meanings. Doing a tarot reading is a lot like reading a book. Before you can read a novel, you have to master your ABCs, and so it is with tarot: the cards are like your new alphabet.

Learning the cards is the first step, but you don't go right from singing the alphabet song directly to writing *War and Peace*. Being able to make words and create sentences comes next. So before we jump into doing full readings, we'll see how the cards work together to create more complex and precise meanings. Then we'll put it all together, shuffle the cards, lay them out, and see what amazing revelations are revealed.

While it is true that tarot is fun, there is a more serious side, too. You will find that in tarot there are not many hard and fast rules that must be followed; there are always different ways to do almost anything. Many teachers will tell you that it comes down to personal preference if, for example, you

want to read reversed cards or let someone else handle your cards. That is true—up to a point. But really, I think it is more than merely personal preference. The power of the tarot and the truth we find in our readings comes from *somewhere*. Where? Well, the truth is that no one knows for sure, and each reader must decide for herself the answer to that question. And that answer will help you make choices as you develop your personal reading style. Don't worry or stress about this, though. You don't have to know the answer before you start. In most cases, the answer reveals itself to each person as they learn. And sometimes the answer evolves over time and can take your tarot practice into completely new directions.

Are you ready to plumb the mysteries of the universe, divine your future, and understand the secrets of your soul? Yes?

Okay, then. Let's begin what I am sure will be a fabulous journey.

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Tarot cards are really amazing in so many ways. For one, you will be glad to know it is not difficult to understand the basics of the deck and of reading the cards. The process breaks down into very logical parts that build on each other. Go through the steps, and you'll be reading before you know it.

Learning to read the cards has a lot in common with learning to read. First you learn the alphabet, then you put the ABCs together to create words; the words create sentences, and so on. Once you have the basic foundation, you continually add to your vocabulary and become more skillful in adding nuance and precision to your written and spoken communication. You can then take language in any direction and do any number of things with it: write poetry, tell amazing stories, communicate information, sing. Reading the cards follows much the same path. You learn basics. Your cards become your alphabet. Your readings become your essays. Your reading style becomes your novel, poem, or song.

Before going somewhere new, it is usually helpful to look at a map. Once you have an idea of the lay of the land, it is much easier to see how the individual elements work together. This chapter is packed with lots of interesting information that will help you begin creating the map for your journey into the world of tarot. Because so many subjects have their own jargon, let's start with a glossary so we are all speaking the same language. A short history lesson is necessary as well—not so much that you know who did what when, but more so that you understand tarot's fluid nature. And then we'll get to what is for many the main feature of tarot: what makes a reading a reading.

Part of the reason you are reading this book, I hope, is to learn what the cards mean. We can make that process a lot easier by understanding the structure of a deck and breaking it down into smaller, more manageable bits. And, since you are going on a journey, it is wise to keep a record of the experience. Hence, we end this jam-packed chapter with ideas for keeping a journal.

## Glossary

**Arcana:** A secret or mystery.

**Court cards:** The sixteen cards of the Minor Arcana named page, knight, queen, and king.

**Divination:** The act of divining; predicting the future or interpreting messages from the Divine. Traditionally, divination is the act of telling the future. Modern tarotists use the term to mean communication with the Divine.

**Divine:** Not a tarot term but used in this book to mean God, the universe, Great Spirit, Higher Self, higher power, etc.

**Fortunetelling:** Predicting the future.

**Golden Dawn:** A secret magical society that existed in England at the end of the nineteenth and

beginning of the twentieth centuries. Arthur E. Waite (creator of the *Rider-Waite-Smith Tarot*) and Aleister Crowley (creator of the *Thoth Tarot*) were members.

**Major Arcana:** The twenty-two cards in a tarot deck, numbered 0–XXI.

**Minor Arcana:** The fifty-six cards in a tarot deck, divided into four suits and numbered ace through ten, plus the court cards.

**Predictive:** As in a predictive reading—a reading in which the future is foretold.

**Prescriptive:** As in a prescriptive reading—a reading in which the focus is on giving the querent advice.

**Qabalah:** A Western esoteric and mystical tradition drawing on Jewish Kabbalah (Jewish mysticism), astrology, alchemy, and other mystical studies.

**Querent:** In a reading, the querent is the person asking the question. If someone is reading for herself, she is both the reader and the querent.

**Reader:** In a reading, the reader is the person conducting the reading and interpreting the cards.

**Reading:** Using the cards to discover information.

**Situation:** In this book, “the situation” or “this situation” refers to the situation that the reading is about, also known as the question.

**Spread:** The way the cards are laid out in order to be interpreted. Most spreads include specific meanings for each position, but some spreads do not use positional meanings.

**Tarotist:** A tarot reader, scholar, or enthusiast.

## Tarot Fact and Fancy

If you read other tarot books (and I would certainly encourage you to do so), you will find that including a chapter on the history of tarot is practically a requirement. Some people love that aspect of learning tarot; others aren't so interested. And that's fine. It's not necessary to take a history lesson to read tarot. However, having a nodding acquaintance with tarot's story has one benefit—it will help you understand how significantly tarot has changed over the years. This is a particularly important point, because it is too tempting to pretend that the tarot and the meanings of the cards are absolute. There are some people who say, “Oh, that's not what the cards mean” or “That book is wrong.” There are others who say, “We must go back to the writings of so-and-so from the eighteenth century because those are the true meanings.” This brief section will show you how tarot has evolved and continues to evolve, reflecting our ideas of truth and adapting to our beliefs as society and individuals.

Although tarot constantly changes, one thing that has remained constant about the cards is the idea of stories. We humans love stories, and fortunately for us, the history of tarot is full of great ones. For example, tucked away in museums are a few decks that were created in the fifteenth century—miniature works of art dripping with gold leaf. One of these decks was commissioned as a wedding

gift. It is said that some of the figures in the cards resemble the bride and the groom.

Another story is that at one time, it was believed that the cards came from the pyramids in distant and mysterious Egypt, a gift from the Egyptian god Thoth, given to humankind centuries ago but lost to obscurity. Luckily, a few eighteenth-century Europeans “re-discovered” this gift and gave it back to the world.

Some have said that the Gypsies (who were named after but not actually from Egypt) brought tarot cards to Europe, demanding that their palms be crossed with silver. In exchange for the silver, they turned over the cards slowly, spinning tales of both good fortune and woe.

Tarot cards have been condemned as “the devil’s picture book”—although why the devil would picture himself in such an unflattering manner and include an image of the pope and the holy grail is a mystery.

These stories and more have been told about the tarot. If you are interested in reading more, Rachel Pollack compiled a wonderful collection in her book *Forest of Souls*. Whether we think the stories are true or not is beside the point; they are still part of its history, part of its mythology. They are part of why the tarot, after all this time, still holds the power to enchant and inspire us. Stories, fables, fairy tales, myths, jokes, movies ... these are all ways we teach and learn lessons, ways we make sense of the world. And the cards themselves are used to tell stories. We shuffle the cards, lay them down, and read them, just as we would a story. Are the stories we read in the cards any more or any less true than any other stories we tell? Well, perhaps it is that they are *all* true, in their own way—because, really, the stories we tell say more about *us* than they do the actual subject of the story. The lines dividing truth, fact, and history from story, myth, and dream are not always clear.

The story most tarotists currently tell about the history of tarot is based on the available historical evidence—account books, receipts, laws, letters, and existing cards. Using this data, we feel confident in saying that tarot cards showed up in Europe in the fifteenth century. These hand-painted cards were used by noble families to play a card game called *tarrochi*, a trick-taking game similar to bridge. Sadly, there is no evidence suggesting that they were considered magical or used for hiding secret teachings. They were illustrated with images and symbols that would have been familiar to any European of the day, because they incorporated scenes and characters that appeared in stained glass windows all over Europe.

While there is some evidence that tarot and playing cards were used to tell fortunes in the sixteenth century, it wasn’t until the eighteenth century that tarot became fully immersed in the esoteric world. A pastor named Antoine Court de Gébelin was the first that we know of to claim an occult connection with the cards. He associated a card with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and thus the connection between tarot and Qabalah was born. Later, a Parisian seed salesman, Jean-Baptiste Alliette (who wrote under the name Etteilla, which is “Alliette” spelled backwards), created the first deck specifically for divination, but it was quite different from existing tarot decks. In the nineteenth century, secret societies abounded, and through them tarot was connected with all sorts of things, such as alchemy, Qabalah, and astrology. In 1909, Golden Dawn member Arthur E. Waite published through Rider & Company, his deck with images painted by Pamela (Pixie) Colman Smith, now known as the *Rider-Waite* or *Rider-Waite-Smith Tarot* and one of the most important decks ever.

created. In 1943, Aleister Crowley and artist Lady Frieda Harris completed the *Thoth Tarot*, which wasn't published until 1969 and is still popular with readers. However, for whatever reason, the *Rider-Waite-Smith Tarot* (hereafter RWS) has become the standard, particularly in the United States. Most beginners learn with this deck, and a majority of decks published today are based on the RWS tradition even though it was not the first tarot deck ever designed or even the first designed for divination.

In the early twentieth century, tarot was primarily used in two ways. The Gypsy fortunetelling approach was common and gave rise to some popular Hollywood ideas about tarot readers, including proclamations about tall dark strangers, perilous journeys over water, and sudden death. Secret societies used the cards as placeholders for esoteric knowledge and spiritual belief systems. Using the cards in this way has shaped the modern tarot practice of correspondences, which we'll discuss in chapter 2. After the start of World War I, interest in tarot waned.

That waning interest reignited in the 1960s. Eden Gray's books *The Tarot Revealed* and *Mastering the Tarot* became the first about tarot that many novice tarotists read at the time. Gray's work was an amalgamation of Gypsy fortuneteller meanings and secret society practices, and she influenced many of today's most celebrated tarotists. In the 1970s, people who learned from Gray went on to change tarot in ways that affect how readers, students, and authors view tarot even today. And by the mid-1980s, two women published works that are among the most loved tarot books of the last twenty years. Rachel Pollack published *78 Degrees of Wisdom*, two volumes of in-depth study of card meanings, weaving together esotericism, mythology, and psychology. Mary K. Greer published *Tarot for You: A Self*, which teaches how to read the cards for personal insight and psychological transformation.

Although there are still old-school fortunetellers around—and, indeed, they are making a comeback—psychology has become both the lens through which the cards are viewed and the way the cards are used. Like any other lens, it has benefits and downsides. This approach is usually considered more intelligent and less scary than fortunetelling. It leads to self-understanding. It supports the philosophy of free will and shuns that of deterministic fate. It empowers the querent and encourages a proactive approach to life. There are, however, a growing number of readers who believe that providing information about future events does *not* inhibit free will—rather, that it empowers querents to intelligently plan for whatever lies ahead. One of the main downsides of the psychological approach is that after about three decades of psychological expansion, each card has been said to mean so many things that it is overwhelming and almost impossible to definitively say what a card actually means. Also, by assuming the psychological approach is the only correct one, the tarot community is in danger of becoming stagnant, as Rachel Pollack herself observed in *Llewellyn's 2007 Tarot Reader*:

If the psychological method of tarot works so well, why not stay with it? Certainly it has not exhausted its usefulness. And yet, whenever something becomes standard, or accepted without questioning, I begin to get nervous. What are we missing? What have we found? What have we stopped ourselves from finding? And so, I have begun to think that just as modern readers rescued the tarot from fortunetelling a quarter century ago, it might be time to rescue it from its new master, psychology.

From a game to secret occult teachings to Gypsy stereotypes to therapy, tarot has played many

roles. Societies and individuals have looked into the mirror that is tarot, and the reflections have revealed changes in culture and in individuals. Through the years, tarot—sometimes called the “royal road”—followed a path rich with entertainment, mystery, wisdom, and beauty. And each of us who ever shuffle a deck take part in that ongoing journey, both shaping and being shaped by it.

## Readings

I love the way tarot cards feel in my hands as I shuffle them. I love tapping them back into a neat pack after gathering them up. I love the pictures on them. I love that they are practical. How many little fairly inexpensive treasures do you own that not only please the senses but also provide advice and wisdom about your life? And really, for most people, this practical application, which we call “reading the cards” or “doing a reading,” is the most basic reason we are drawn to tarot. Knowing a little bit about what lies ahead and how to face it is something we all value, but the fact that it can come in such a pleasing package is a bonus.

Learning to read the cards is not difficult. The hardest thing, really, is understanding that for every aspect of tarot, there is no absolute right or wrong way to do anything. In this chapter, you’ll learn the basic outline of a reading. In later chapters, you will explore ways to create your own unique reading style and add precision to your work.

A tarot reading is the act of interpreting the cards. Whether you use the cards to predict the future to solve a problem, or to understand yourself better, you accomplish each of those through a doing a reading. All that is needed is a reader, a querent, a question, a spread, and, of course, a deck of tarot cards.

The reader is the person who performs the reading and can be someone who is shuffling a deck for the first time or someone who has studied the tarot for years and years. You can be a reader right this minute, even if you’ve never read before. You don’t believe me? Try this: if you have a deck, shuffle it, ask “What message does the tarot have for me right now?” and pull one card. If you don’t have a deck, flip through this book, stopping randomly at a page with pictures of cards on it. Look at the picture (whether on the card you selected or on the page you stopped at), and tell a story about what you see. Don’t worry about the words on the cards or any strange images or symbols that you don’t recognize. Pretend you are a child who cannot read and is looking at a picture book, making up stories. Turn your story into a message. There: you have just performed your first reading.

If you did the reading described above, you were both the reader and the querent. The querent is the person asking the question. People do read for themselves, although this wasn’t always true (and still isn’t in many parts of Europe). Some people have concerns about objectivity and think that being too close to or involved in a situation will affect the interpretation. Then again, many people think of the tarot as a mirror that reflects our deepest, truest selves back to us, so reading for ourselves is very useful. And, in any event, all readers bring their own judgments and opinions to any reading they do. In tarot reading, as in journalism, perfect objectivity might not be an obtainable state. Objective or not, in a reading there may be just one person who is both reader and querent or there may be two or more people, a reader and at least one querent.

There is a reason for the reading, usually in the form of a question. In the example above, the

question was “What message does the tarot have for me right now?” Most modern readers want the querent to share her question in as much detail as possible. Knowing the question provides the reader another element to use in shaping the interpretation. Other readers ask the querent to think about her question but not verbalize it. Some readers don’t have the querent ask a question at all, believing that the cards themselves will reveal what the querent needs to know, regardless of what she may want to know. So, technically, we don’t need a question to conduct a reading. However, because the reading will provide an answer, there is an assumed question, even if it wasn’t verbalized. Whether a question is asked or not, the querent came to the tarot wanting *something*—looking for answers, searching for guidance, or seeking wisdom.

A spread, or a layout, is the way that the cards are laid out. In the reading above, we used a one-card spread, where the single card drawn provides the answer to the question. This one-card spread can be used for any question. However, most readers prefer using three or more cards. Spreads usually instruct us to lay the cards out in a certain order and to assign a meaning to the position that each card holds.

Here is a simple three-card spread:



1. Past influences
2. Present situation
3. Future outcome

We lay out the cards in numerical order and use the positional meaning to mold the interpretation. Some readers use one or only a few different spreads for all readings. Some people use many kinds of spreads or even make them up on the spot. Other readers lay out the cards in rows or columns but do not assign any meanings to the positions. This is more commonly called “laying out the cards,” as that is what is being done, as opposed to using a spread. In either case, the cards end up on the table to be interpreted.

None of this matters—reader, querent, question, or spread—if we don’t have a deck of tarot cards. There are so many decks available. But before running out and buying one, do some research. Your tarot deck will become your tool, and any good craftsman will tell you that a high-quality tool that feels good in your hands is important. Without that, doing excellent work is much harder. Take some time and make an informed choice, but don’t stress about it too much. If the deck doesn’t work out for you, you can try another one. Look for a deck that is labeled “tarot.” There are other kinds of oracle decks available, but not all oracle decks are tarot decks. Simply put, an oracle deck is any divinatory deck that does not say “tarot” in the title or on the box; beyond that, there are no parameters or characteristics shared among oracle decks. They can have any number of cards, any sort of structure,



(or no structure at all), be based on a theme (such as angels or faeries), or be entirely random. Oracle decks are fine tools, but if you are looking for a deck to use with this book, you'll want to get a tarot deck. Look for a deck that has pictures on all seventy-eight cards. Some will have pictures on about half of the cards, with the other half looking something like playing cards, with just symbols arranged on the card. Decks of this sort are Marseille-style tarot, slightly different from the RWS-style deck we are using for this book. People do read with Marseille decks, but that style isn't best suited for use with this book. Look for a deck that is in the RWS tradition. Most, but not all, modern decks fall in this category. Visit websites that include in-depth reviews of tarot decks. Many of these reviews do include whether or not a deck is RWS-based. See appendix B for deck suggestions and website links. Finally, find a deck that you love to look at and that inspires you.

## Ritual

Rituals, while not a necessary part of doing a reading, do play a supportive role if incorporated. They can also be fun and add a theatrical or mysterious touch that many enjoy. Rituals help us calm down, center, and focus on the task at hand. Performing a ritual or rituals before a reading lets the mind know that it is time to get into reading mode. Getting into reading mode usually means toning down the analytical mind and turning up the intuitive mind. Both ways of thinking are important to reading; however, we spend most of our time in analytical mode. Therefore, before starting a reading, it is beneficial to balance both sides.

Don't be put off by the word "ritual," thinking it means some elaborate, strange, absurd rigmarole. In simplest terms, a ritual is a consistent way of doing things—something as simple and unobtrusive as taking a deep breath and letting it out slowly. On the other hand, if you are drawn to velvet, silk, crystals, and incense, your rituals can be as elaborate as you like. I encourage you to adapt some sort of ritual that is comfortable for you, even if it's just for yourself, especially at first, if you feel a little nervous when doing a reading. Closing your eyes and taking a few deep breaths before beginning a reading is a good way to quiet the mind and calm the nerves. In addition to simply breathing, you can center yourself by pulling your energy inward and calming your mind. Ground yourself by visualizing a connection to the earth, breathing out anxiety and breathing in earth's stable, calming energy. Many readers begin their readings with a prayer or by asking for guidance. If you begin your reading with a prayer, it adds a nice sense of symmetry to end the reading with one as well. Thank the Divine for the guidance provided or ask a blessing upon yourself or your querent.

Since it must be done anyway, shuffling is an easy way to incorporate ritual into a reading. The method of shuffling isn't important; use whatever manner is most comfortable for you. To make it into a ritual, simply use that method every time. Decide how many times (for example, seven times) or for how long you will shuffle (for example, as long as it takes to say a prayer). A fellow tarotist, Barbara Chaitman, uses an interesting method for determining the number of times she will shuffle before a reading. First, she decides the main theme of the reading, and then she matches that theme to one of the Major Arcana cards. For example, if she is doing a relationship reading, she picks VI, the Lovers. If it is about finding inner strength, she picks VIII, Strength. For a reading about moving, she might select VII, the Chariot; for a career, perhaps IV, the Emperor. Then she looks at the number of

that card and shuffles that number of times (in the case of our examples, six, eight, seven, or four times, respectively).

Remember that doing anything—breathing, praying, shuffling, etc.—the same way each time is not required. That is to say, a reading is still a reading with or without ritual. But if you want the benefits of ritual—calmness, centeredness, and a balanced and receptive mind and spirit—then simply doing even just one thing the same way every time is sufficient. That is what makes something a ritual, after all.

In addition to the manner of shuffling, you need to decide whether you, as the reader, will be the only one shuffling or if your querents will also shuffle. This may seem like an odd question, but most readers have specific ideas about energy and its role in a reading. This goes back to that original question from the introduction: Where does the power and truth of the tarot come from? How does the tarot work? Is it an interchange of energy between reader and querent, is it a direct connection between the reader and the Divine, or is it a unique and temporary bond between the reader, the querent, and the Divine—or is it something else entirely? If you believe someone else's energy will dilute or interfere with the reading, then you would probably not be inclined to let anyone else shuffle your cards. If you believe that the other person's energy is an important part of how tarot works, then you will likely ask them to shuffle as well.

Cutting the cards is another way to include ritual. Again, any method will work, as long as it is the same every time. A popular technique is to ask the querent to cut the cards in three piles (using the non-dominant hand) and then pick up the piles in any order and restack them. Some readers do not ask querents to shuffle and may or may not ask them to cut the cards.

Once the cards are shuffled and cut, it is time to deal them out. There are two ways to do this (as well as variations), so you have another choice to play around with, and I would suggest trying both before you decide which to stick with. You may even decide to use both, depending on your mood, the reading, or other factors. Dealing the cards face-down and flipping them over one at a time creates a sense of anticipation and mystery. It makes it easier to focus on one card at a time, instead of peeking ahead to see what card is next. Dealing the cards face-up allows a quick scan of the reading that provides certain information that many find useful at the start of a reading (for more on this, see chapter 3). With some spreads, you may find that dealing some of the cards face-down and some face-up works very well.

Dealing the cards from the top of the deck is not the only way to select which ones go into the spread. Try spreading all the cards on the table like a large fan and letting the querent run a hand over the cards, selecting the number needed for the spread based on which cards feel right. The reader (or the querent) can cut the deck into the same number of piles as positions in the spread; place one pile in each position and turn over the top card.

There are other ways to enhance the reading experience or add a sense of ritual, but this is enough for building our broad overview map. We'll discuss the importance of ritual in more detail in chapter 4, as well as other practices that can add to your tarot reading experience.

As you can see, there are many variables to think about and decisions to make when you begin reading the cards. Many of the choices made will be personal preference—perhaps overhand shuffling

is simply more comfortable for you than riffing, for one. Some of the choices will be based on personal beliefs. For those using the cards to find spiritual guidance, saying a prayer at the beginning and end might be considered essential, not optional. As important as these decisions can be, there is one that is even more fundamental and often a bit more difficult to make: formulating the question.

## Questions

Most of us come to the tarot looking for answers of some sort, and most of us have heard the saying that in order to get the right answer, we have to ask the right question. Asking the question is probably one of the most important aspects of a tarot reading. Right off the bat, the question takes control over the reading by providing the focus of the answer. But the question also does more than that: it is a microcosm of a belief system ... or it should be. Let me show you what I mean.

Let's look at two extreme variations of the same question. What does the question "Will I ever get married?" tell us about the person asking it (besides the obvious assumptions such as they are likely single and that they probably would like to be married)? It also implies that they believe in a predetermined universe where whether or not they will marry has already been decided on some cosmic level. If someone asks, "What can I do to bring love into my life?" we can deduce that they believe they have quite a bit of control over their life. These are, admittedly, extreme versions. I am willing to bet that most of us fall somewhere in the middle.

Being clear on your beliefs helps you to ask questions that reflect what you believe. It will make your readings a more natural fit for your life and an extension of how you operate in the world. Most people these days seem to fall somewhere in the middle of determinism and free will. My favorite way to think about the future and making predictions is to compare it to weather forecasting. By taking into account as many variables as possible and by using certain equations, meteorologists make predictions about weather. Because it is impossible to take into account every variable and to run every possible equation, forecasts are not always 100 percent accurate, and the further out they try to forecast, the less certain the prediction becomes because there is more time for something to happen that can change everything. For me, a tarot reading is very much like a weather forecast. Knowing what is likely to happen helps us be prepared, so that when or if the event occurs, we'll be able to respond in a thoughtful manner.

Although I love the idea of having control over my life and not being a victim of circumstances, I do think that there are things that happen in our lives over which we have little or no control. In the face of these events, we still have the power to react as we choose, and those actions can affect the future. The future is, I think, a fascinating dance between our actions, the actions of others, and the wondrous flow of the universe that blends everything together, creating the reality we experience. That's my view, at least at present. What is important, though, is what constitutes *your* view.

Forming your own questions based on your beliefs will help you find answers using tarot that will be practical for you. While you may (or may not) see the benefit of asking questions in a way that reflects your beliefs, you will certainly want information that will be useful to you. For example, think about the possible answers to your question. Imagine what you will do or how you will feel when you find out the answer. How will it affect your actions or decisions? Why do you want to know? Are you

very sure you *really* want to know, no matter what the answer is? After thinking about your original question in this way, you might just come up with a different question entirely—one that, in the end, is more helpful and satisfying than the one you started with.

If you are going to read for others, there is another aspect you will want to think about. If you are being careful to make sure your questions reflect your beliefs, what about the questions of others? Should you help them rephrase their questions so that they reflect your beliefs too? Is it your duty to help them in the best way that you know how, based on your understanding of the universe? Should you read for whatever question they ask, whether or not you think it is a good one? If you don't believe in determinism, and someone asks if they are going to get a job soon, would you even be able to read for that question? If you enjoy a more predictive tarot reading experience, seeking glimpses of the future and possible treasures or dire warnings hiding around the corner, could you read effectively for practical advice, such as “What can I focus on in my yearly review to ensure my salary request is met?”

The tarot is a mirror, and a tarot reading is a reflection of one's worldview, a glimpse of a belief system. This is true whether the reader and the querent are aware of it or not. However, we may not always be aware of our predispositions and use the tarot in a way that complements them rather than works against them. By applying this practice of using the cards in a way that reflects our personal beliefs, we really can't say we don't believe in tarot cards. The tarot cards are just cards, after all. It's how we use them that matters.

## Structure

Understanding the structure of a tarot deck provides two benefits. The structure is a tool, both for learning the cards and for interpreting a reading. First, by breaking the seventy-eight cards of a tarot deck into smaller parts, it is easier to learn the cards. Learning a few groups that follow a simple system is much less overwhelming than trying to identify seventy-eight random cards. Second, in addition to each card's specific meaning, the numbers and suits of the cards work together to provide additional information in a reading. We'll focus on the basic structure here, as an introduction to the cards, and discuss using the structure as part of the interpretation later in chapter 3.

The seventy-eight cards in a tarot deck are divided into two groups: the Major Arcana and the Minor Arcana. *Arcana* means “secret” or “mystery,” so the Major Arcana are the greater mysteries and the Minor Arcana are the smaller mysteries. Twenty-two of the cards make up the Major Arcana. These cards are numbered 0–XXI and also have names, such as 0, the Fool; VI, the Lovers; and XVI, the Star. Some decks may use arabic numbers for the Major Arcana, but usually roman numerals are favored. Most decks use the same names and numerical order, though some decks do switch VII, Strength and XI, Justice and use VIII, Justice and XI, Strength instead. In addition, some decks change the names of some cards, particularly XIII, Death, to something like XIII, Transformation. But the majority of decks will use Major Arcana names and numbers that are recognizable and comparable to those used in this book. These cards, the Major Arcana, except 0, the Fool, are the trump cards in the game of tarrochi—cards that are able to take tricks and alter the direction of play. They are also trumps in a tarot reading, playing the same role in a reading as they do in the card game. The

represent important events in our lives, often ones that are considered beyond our control and able to change the direction of our lives in new, unexpected, and exciting ways. This is why they are called the greater mysteries.

The Major Arcana cards play another interesting role. For a few decades now, many tarotists consider the Major Arcana a map of the psychological and spiritual journey that all humans experience. Comparable to the Hero's Journey written about by Joseph Campbell, this journey through the tarot cards is called the Fool's Journey. In this journey, 0, the Fool card, travels through all the other Major Arcana until reaching the final card, XXI, the World, where he is said to begin his journey again.

The remaining fifty-six cards are called the Minor Arcana, the smaller mysteries. The cards of the Minor Arcana represent the events of our everyday lives. These cards are divided into four suits, much like a deck of playing cards. The suits are commonly called wands, cups, swords, and pentacles, although sometimes deck designers use alternate names such as rods, chalices, spears, and coins. Each suit has an ace through ten, as well as four court cards, generally called king, queen, knight, and page. These court cards are sometimes renamed using other systems such as father, mother, son, and daughter.

Over the years, each of the four suits has become associated with an elemental energy. The elemental energies are based on the classical Greek idea that the world is made of four basic elements: fire, air, water, and earth. Even though we know the world is made up of many more much smaller elements, tarotists still use this division. Like everything else in tarot, it is a metaphor. This book follows the current trend of using the following associations:

Wands = Fire

Cups = Water

Swords = Air

Pentacles = Earth

Some decks reverse the associations for wands and swords.

Elemental associations are used to represent the realms of life that each suit governs. The suit of wands/fire includes what we would think of as fiery energy—passionate, energetic, inspiring, and dangerous—and governs projects and careers. Cups/water covers emotions, relationships, dreams, intuition, the soul, and the subconscious. Swords/air has long been associated with problems; take a look at the suit of swords and see for yourself. More specifically, though, swords represent logic, thinking, and communication. Faulty thinking or a breakdown in communication certainly can cause problems. Pentacles/earth energy is grounded, stable, and prosperous, and is pertinent to the physical world, finances, resources, and health.

The aces through tens show events that happen in day-to-day life. The court cards, as part of the Minor Arcana, also represent aspects of our everyday lives, although they are not usually read as events but as people. I hesitate to say this, but I must, for you will more than likely hear it somewhere

else anyway: it is generally accepted that the court cards are the most difficult to interpret. There are several reasons why this is true. First, kings, queens, knights, and pages don't really play relevant roles in our lives. Second, the card images usually don't provide much help, because they are usually vague images of someone sitting or standing but not really doing anything. Third, traditionally (and in fortunetelling) they represented people based on gender, age, skin, hair, and eye color. Later, astrological associations were included. Because the traditional appearance system didn't include all possible combinations, the interpretations evolved into a description of personalities and/or occupations. The lists of personality traits and occupations are so very long for each court card that it would take a significant amount of time to go over all the possibilities with a querent and finally identify who the card represents. In addition, many of the traits are shared among several of the court cards. For example, all of the wands cards can be "warm, charismatic, and confident."

This book takes a different approach. Instead of lists of possible personalities or jobs, we will focus on the role that the court card represents. The roles are not that of king, queen, knight, or page in the traditional sense. The current ideas of what the court cards represent—a collection of complex and contradictory characters—are too unwieldy for divination purposes. Now it is time to shrink them back down to a manageable size in a way that makes sense within the context of our modern lives and our usage of the cards. The court cards' core meanings are like cookie cutters that mark a role played by a person involved in the situation. The physical appearance, personality, or occupation doesn't matter as much as what the person has to do with the situation being explored in the reading.

## Journaling

Most tarot books and teachers encourage keeping a journal or a notebook of your tarot studies and practices—and I agree. A journal is a valuable companion on your tarot journeys. There are probably as many kinds of journals and as many ways to use a journal as there are tarotists. Let's take a look at a few of both.

### Types of Journals

#### *Traditional Journal*

A traditional journal is any sort of bound book with blank or lined pages. They come in different sizes and qualities for every taste and every budget. You will likely find one that appeals to you or meets your need for size—or, if you are like me, you will find several and suddenly find yourself with a lovely journal collection. Some people prefer larger pages with plenty of room to write and draw. Some people like to carry their journals around in their purses or bags, so a smaller size is more practical. Journals come with lined pages for those who like to keep things neat and orderly, or unlined pages for those who like more freedom. If you like to write with markers or use paints in your journal, get one with thicker paper. Ballpoint pens and pencils work fine on thinner paper.

#### *Three-Ring Binder*

One downside of a traditional bound journal is that the pages must be kept in order. So if you want to record specific information together, you have to estimate ahead of time and reserve a certain

number of pages or insert extra pages with clips or staples after the fact. With a three-ring binder, you can always add more pages where you want them. You can also, if you want, rearrange the pages, changing the organization to suit your needs if they change over time.

### *Computer*

Many people love the tactile sensation of pen on paper. Some people couldn't care less (perhaps they just have atrocious penmanship). In any case, keeping a journal on your computer makes a lot of sense. You can organize your pages and information just as with a three-ring binder. You can add images and website addresses with ease, and access them just as easily, with a simple click. Perhaps best of all, computer journals are searchable. Imagine, after a few years of tarot study, having several notebooks and searching through them trying to find something that you just know you wrote down eight months ago but cannot remember where. The task of finding it would be much easier in an electronic file.

### *Blog*

Blogs are free and easy. Many people take advantage of this and keep their journal—or one aspect of their journal—as a blog. Probably the biggest benefit of a blog is the opportunity for input and feedback from a community. If you want to put in the effort to create a readership, the comments and insights of others can be interesting, inspiring, and thought provoking. The downside is that they are generally public places. Tarot can be a very personal and private practice, perhaps not best suited for public consumption. However, with areas that are not constricted by the need for privacy, a blog can be a fun way to track your studies. One of the most common blogging practices is the “card a day” (see page 26).

## How to Use Your Journal

There are so many ways to use a journal in conjunction with tarot cards that you could write a book about it. Someone did, actually. If you enjoy journaling and want more ideas, check out Corrin Kenner's *Tarot Journaling*.

### *Record Your Readings*

If you do nothing else with your journal, keep a record of your readings. Note the date, the spread, the deck used, and the question. Write out the interpretation, observations that stood out as particularly important, and things about the reading that confused you. If you have the means and the desire, take a photo of your reading and include it. Every once in a while, go back and review your readings. Use a different color pen and write observations about the reading, your accuracy, how you would interpret it now in hindsight, and what you've learned or realized since then, making sure to include the date of your notes. This is a wonderful way to learn and remember lessons about the cards and your life.

### *Card a Day*

Pulling a card a day is a very popular practice among both beginners and longtime students of tarot. For the beginner, it is a great way to slowly become familiar with the cards. Either pick the cards

order or randomly. Each day, note the card selected, write out its core meaning, and include your thoughts and observations about additional meanings or messages in the card. In addition to using the card-a-day method for learning the cards, you can randomly draw a card each morning as a mini reading for the day. You can ask a specific question each time or just let the card provide good advice for the day. In the evening, record how the mini reading played out in your day. When randomly pulling a card a day, it is interesting to watch for patterns or themes, such as the same card over and over, cards of the same suit, many court cards, etc.

### *Free Writing*

Using the tarot in free writing can work in two ways. First, you can select a card that you want to write about. As with the card-a-day technique, you can go through the cards in order or you can pick one at random. Or you can pick a card that has been on your mind or has been coming up in readings a lot, one that you have trouble understanding or that bothers you, or one that inspires you. After you pick your card, set a timer. If you are new to free writing, start with three minutes; start the timer, then start writing. Don't think about grammar or spelling. Just look at the card and write whatever comes into your mind. If nothing comes to mind, start by writing that, or try describing the card in detail. After your free-writing session, read what you have written, noticing anything that adds to your understanding of the card or piques your interest.

Another way to use free writing with your tarot cards is when you have a question or situation that is troubling you. Think about the situation and pull a card, as if you were going to do a reading. Instead of doing a regular reading, look at the card image while thinking about your question. Ask the character or characters in the card what their advice would be, and just start writing. This technique usually provides two benefits: learning some interesting advice about a problem and gaining some insight about a card. This technique is particularly entertaining if you use court cards. Ask several of the court cards for advice on the same situation and see what varied responses you'll get.

If this were a class instead of a book, this is where we'd take a little break. You've taken in a lot of information in a few short pages. You have a little tarot history under your belt. You know that a reader, a querent, a question, a spread, and a deck are needed in order to perform a reading. You learned the parts that make up a tarot deck. You have some ideas about connecting your worldview with tarot. You have begun sketching out your map. Soon it will be time to start filling in some details on the map of tarot. But first, take that little break. Stretch your legs, pet the dog, get a snack. Once you're properly refreshed, you will begin your Fool's Journey in earnest. Don't forget to bring your journal!

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