

The Kitchen and the Lecture Hall: Elements & History

A Welcome from the Fool's Guild

Welcome to the first courtyard lesson in the Fool's Guild of Tarot Professionals. As a honorary student of the Guild, you will be receiving each of the five lessons on a weekly basis to ensure that you have a good grounding in the art and science of the tarot. You may then wish to consider our apprentice and journeyer courses – and then go beyond in your studies!

Whether a newcomer to tarot or an experienced practitioner, we hope these lessons cover a complete overview of the best in academic and practical approaches to tarot, and we look forward to your questions in our lively courtyard forum. All our courses are subject to regular review and updating, so please do check regularly for the latest versions.

This first lesson is an overview of the history and context of the tarot, and more importantly a demonstration of our unique teaching approach and innovative methods. It is also intended to be a contemporary and reader-friendly experience, so your feedback is more than appreciated at any stage.

It is hoped that by learning the tarot with us, you will be able to deepen your appreciation of the subject, apply this knowledge to enhance your practice, and widen your experience of learning about life through tarot to positive effect. Our aim is that after this course of five lessons you will be thoroughly informed, extremely enthused, and looking to develop your tarot with innovation and creativity. We look to truly inspire as well as inform!

Over the five weeks ahead, you can ask any general questions in our forum, or if you'd like to speak to an Outer Courtyard Supervisor about these lessons, please contact **enquiries@tarotprofessionals.com**.

It is recommended that you spend one week studying this lesson and reviewing it prior to receiving your next lesson which will automatically be sent to you next week. For the best experience with these lessons, although they are intended for self-study, you should join the forum discussions for the courtyard classes and share your experience whilst benefitting from the experience of others.

The Structure of the Courtyard

These five introductory lessons form the outer courtyard of the Fool's Guild, which you can imagine as a great learning centre of Tarot in the realms of the *mundus imaginalis*; the world of imagination. The Guild has vast libraries, forgotten cellars, grand arches and halls, and towers that reach to the sky.

After a long journey, you now stand in the outer courtyard of the guild buildings, where pages tend to your needs, and offer refreshments whilst making you welcome. You may wish to spend a moment gathering your thoughts and thinking of the journey that has brought you to this place.

There is a large mosaic in the courtyard stone floor, which traces a vast five-pointed pentagram to the five walls of the yard in the distance. You can make out a different pennant fluttering in the breeze at each point of the pentagram, marking out the colours and signs of the elements; fire, water, air and earth. Ahead of you stands the pennant of spirit, but it seems that you must have a pass to enter beyond that point.

You recall that in many esoteric groups, the basic teachings revolve around the four elements:

- Fire
- Earth
- Air
- Water

These are as first described by the Ionian philosopher, **Empedocles** (ca. 450 BC) who called them *roots*. These were also noted by Plato (428/427 BC – 348/347 BC) as being pre-Socratic, and Plato first called them “elements”, in Greek, *stoicheion*, which means literally a “letter of the alphabet”. It is from these four elements, and the fifth, Aether (or spirit) that we derive much of our esoteric cosmology. They can indeed be seen as the basic letters of our occult alphabet. You suspect the Fool's Guild is based on these elements.

You remember that you have brought your own tarot deck, and realise that the elements can be seen immediately in your deck as **corresponding** to the four suits. We will return to the idea of *correspondence* often in our studies ahead, so it is highlighted here in the courtyard as a primary teaching. The elements correspond to the suits as follows:

- | | |
|---------|-------------------------|
| ● Fire | Wands, Rods, Batons |
| ● Earth | Coins, Discs, Pentacles |
| ● Air | Swords, Daggers, Blades |
| ● Water | Cups, Chalices, Dishes |

The Hand of the Four Elements

You see some of your fellows playing a game in the courtyard, which sometimes does resemble a playground of children! You wander across and they tell you they are playing a hand-game taught by the Guild to encourage elemental awareness, and self-capacity. You feel this is something you should learn from the tarot – a sense that you are capable and ready to live according to the lessons of the tarot. They teach you the game and suggest you practice it every day whilst in the courtyard.

The game is played by putting your hand forward, and shaping it into the elemental weapons represented by the tarot suits; the pantacle, the cup, the sword and the wand. You realise that the cards are pictures of basic principles that can be found on many different levels, even in the palm of your hand!

The Hand-Game

Place your hand forwards, arm outstretched in front.

Turn your palm flat and facing upwards, like a plate.
Say "This is my Pantacle, where my life is lived"

Now cup your palm, forming a bowl as if to collect raindrops.
Say "This is my Chalice, where my love is lived"

Now flatten your hand and turn your palm sideways.
Say: "This is my Knife, where my decisions are lived"

Keeping your palm sideways, point one finger ahead and close your others.
Say: "And this is my Wand, where my Will is lived."

Clench your fist and say: "My life is in my hands"

During the five weeks ahead, you may find yourself playing this game each morning before going out to face the challenges of the day, perhaps concentrating on each position and the different energies that they embody.

This game is based on the concept of *Asana* or "positions" in Yoga, which are also states of mind as well as the physical position. The use of gestures or mudras is an important part of eastern traditions, and even the Ninja martial arts have four hand positions for circulating the four elemental forces.

It is given as a game in the first days in the courtyard to encourage all students to use tarot as a means of developing self-determination and self-awareness. It is a practice with relevance to life as well as esoteric teaching.

As you look around the courtyard, you wonder how this work will change you.

Elemental Kitchen Magick

On the second day, you find yourself helping out in the kitchens of the courtyard for your first contribution to the Guild. Hardly a glorious start to your studies, but we all started somewhere and it is essential to feed mouths as hungry from their journeys as minds for learning!

Go into **your** kitchen, then, and take out the following items; a knife, a cup, a plate and a fork (or chopstick). Place them on a table where you can work and play with them over the week ahead. This space is now your **tarot altar**.

If you do not have a permanent space for an altar, consider buying a small piece of cloth which you can lay out to serve as a temporary altar when required. You can then store this cloth somewhere safe when not in use.

The head chef will soon ask you the following questions so that you can show you have mastered the kitchen tools:

- What is their function, and what properties do they possess as individual items?
- What can you do with each of them?
- What tasks are they not suited for?
- Can you put two of them together and make a new opportunity?
- Can you use them for innovative functions (making music, perhaps)?

Consider how we can divide Universe* into just four elements, four functions, and then represent them by these four tools. They each must carry many **attributes** to comprehensively describe anything in Universe!

So what attributes belong to each element? It is a crucial teaching that there is a difference between **attribution** and **correspondence**, so let's here have a think about listing attributes of the elements. The chef gives you a menu to complete in your own time:

Element	Qualities (attributes)	Suit (tarot correspondence)	Related concepts (correspondences)
Fire	heat, red ...	Wands	passion, heart ...
Earth		Pentacles	
Air		Swords	thought ...
Water		Cups	

* I use the term "Universe" rather than "the Universe" to signify that Universe does not have a "the" outside of it from which to refer. It reminds me that it is the whole and all.

The History Lesson in the Outer Lecture Hall

On your second day in the Courtyard, having had a good nights rest, you are called together into a small lecture room, where groups are being given a brief talk on the history of the Fool's Guild, the origins of the building, and safety instructions for the walking tour. You are sat down just in time for a brief lecture on the history of the tarot – and told that there will be questions!

The tarot are commonly seen today as a deck of 78 cards depicting scenes of a symbolic nature. That is, the cards refer to other meanings than those made explicit in the pictures; a picture of the Sun for example may be a symbol of certain ideas, namely innocence, life, confidence, the centre, the self, and other such concepts.



The tarot originated in northern Italy early in the 15th century (1420-1440). The early cards for gaming were hand-painted and extremely popular with those who could afford their creation.

The photograph to the left is of a hand-painted deck from 1720 which belonged to a family in Amsterdam.

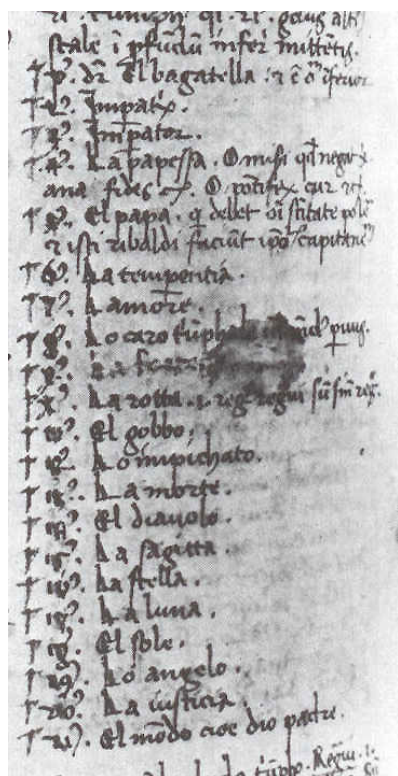
The earliest names for the tarot are Italian. Originally the cards were called *carte da trionfi* (cards of the triumphs) but around 1530 (about 100 years after the origin of the cards), the word *tarocchi* began to be used to distinguish them from a new game of triumphs or trumps then being played with ordinary playing cards.

We will later see some examples of the *triumphs* – the procession of floats common at festivals in Italy at the time – depicted on the cards which bear their name. We will also see some rare Christian tarot; the cards were used to depict virtues, the liberal arts and sciences, and other aspirational notions from their earliest development. In fact, it could be said that they were originally educational or self-development tools, although that could be well-debated.

There is no evidence at all that the tarot were used by gypsies, originated in Egypt nor were used for divination prior to the 1700's, despite popular occult lore that the cards have embodied "ancient teaching" from time immemorial. It was not until a connection was published in 1781, by Comte de Mellet in Court de Gebelin's *Le Monde Primitif*, between the Hebrew letters and the Tarot, that esoteric interest was kindled in the deck.

The earliest list of the 22 cards which have become known as the "Major Arcana" is given in a sermon against their use by a monk writing in Latin around 1450-1470. It is sometimes called the "Steele Sermon" as it belongs to the collection of Robert Steele.

Sermones de Ludo Cum Aliis



Primus dicitur El bagatella (et est omnium inferior): The first is called The bagatella (and is the lowest of all)

2 Imperatrix: Empress

3 Imperator: Emperor

4 La papessa (O miseri quod negat Christiana fides): The Popess (O wretches, she who denies Christian Faith)

5 El papa (O pontifex cur, &c. qui debet omni sanctitate polere, et isti ribaldi faciunt ipsorum capitaneum): The pope : (O Pope why, etc., who must rule with complete holiness, also these criminals make of you their chief)

6 La temperantia: The temperance

7 L'amore: Love

8 Lo caro triumphale (vel mundus parvus): The triumphal chariot : or "the little world"

9 La fortezza: The fortitude

10 La rotta (id est regno, regnavi, sum sine regno): The wheel "i.e. I reign, I reigned, I am without kingdom"

11 El gobbo: The hunchback

12 Lo impichato: The hanged man

13 La morte: The death

14 El diavolo: The devil

15 La sagitta: The arrow

16 La stella: The star

17 La luna: The moon

18 El sole: The sun

19 Lo angelo: The angel

20 La iusticia: The justice

21 El mondo (cioe Dio Padre): The world (i.e. God the Father)

0 El Matto sie nulla (nisi velint): The Fool, thus null (unless they wish)

Steele Manuscript held at the Playing Card Museum at The United States Playing Card Company.

Time for Your Tarot Deck

In the middle of the first week in the courtyard, you start to exchange stories with your fellow students, and find the variety of personal histories, journeys and experience that have led you to this place. The most remarkable thing is the diversity of tarot decks that students have brought with them – it's time to get your deck ready!

You will require a Tarot deck if you don't already have one. I'd go for the "popular" deck designed by A. E. Waite and illustrated by Pamela Colman-Smith, published originally by Rider, although the colours are muted, as was the original colouring. However, there are some new decks which are re-coloured which would also suffice, particularly the "Radiant Deck".or the "Universal Deck" which has modified or softened the style of the images.



You will love the Radiant Deck, I am sure! The artwork of Pamela Colman-Smith is rarely surpassed for tarot images, although some of your fellow students have Kat Black's "Golden Deck" and Cirro Marchetti's "Gilded Tarot" as regular decks, which I recommend when you are ready to compare other decks to the "Rider-Waite" standard.

You are also shown the "Intuitive Tarot" of Cilla Conway and the "Sacred Rose" tarot of Johanna Gargiulo-Sherman. Amongst some of the striking modern decks, you notice the Maroon Deck, which is from Poland and features just the major arcana. People have also invested in limited-edition art-decks as produced by Adam McLean in Glasgow, Scotland.

Crowley's "Thoth" deck is dense but important, particularly as illustrating his philosophy of 'Thelema' (the Greek word for "Will") and the Haindl deck is also quite popular as it includes images from many traditions as well as I-Ching and Rune correspondences! There's an incredible choice ahead of you!

Consecrating Your Cards, Bag or Box

Having spent almost a week in the courtyard, and learning all about the history of the tarot deck and the four elements, comparing your deck with others and doing some elemental kitchen work, you are brought to the Pennant of the Earth and told that you can progress to the next class.

You are then given instructions to make your tarot truly magical by the ritual act of *consecration*. This is a piece of simple ceremony that the Fool's Guild recommends to students if they wish to use tarot to learn magick.

The act of consecration is a ritual act which dedicates your tools to the purpose you have decided upon. By performing the consecration, you set your cards, box or bag, and other paraphernalia, apart from anything else, and thereby make them sacred. It is no coincidence that many words of magical significance derive from meanings of "separation," for example 'temple'. However, before consecrating your cards, there is a preliminary step of purification, an act of cleansing. This removes all unwanted forces and influences, all prior psychological attachments, from the items, prior to their consecration.

In order to perform a consecration, you must first, in effect, consecrate yourself, by preparing a separate place of working in which the ritual takes place. This can be as elaborate as casting a full witchcraft circle, or building a ritual temple, to as simple an act as taking yourself to a favourite quiet outdoor location which feels sacred or special to you.

The five basic steps of a ritual are as follows:

1. Banish
2. Purify
3. Consecrate
4. Invoke
5. Banish

You can go for a full three hour Golden Dawn ritual, if you have enough people wearing Egyptian Headresses (ahem), but don't get me started on how long it takes to prepare a Lotus Wand ... or ... how about ... a kitchen version -

1. Banishing (use your finger to draw a circle clockwise around you, sprinkle inside of circle with salt and water, saying "I banish unwanted influences and make myself a space of working")
2. Purification (using water, sprinkle on bag, saying "I purify this bag, so that all associations and forces are removed from it")
3. Consecration (holding up bag, visualise it strongly as an item charged and radiating protective influences, saying "I now consecrate this bag to the sole purpose of protecting my sacred cards of art")

4. Invocation (Make a statement to a Higher Force to bless the consecrated item, for example, "May the Powers of Light radiate within and without and bless these sacred cards with the power of Truth."). Spend a moment meditating on this blessing.

5. Banishing (sprinkle salt and water within your circle one last time, saying "I banish all residual forces from this space of working," and draw your circle anti-clockwise, saying "I close this place of working")

Any act done with intention is a magical act, so leaving your bag in sunlight (or moonlight) for a day (or night) will also have the desired effect so long as your intention is focused and the ritual activity follows the sequence above. It is no point, for example, consecrating an item without purifying it first. This is like trying to make a vegetarian salad on a work-surface on which the remains of Sunday Roast still resides!

You'll also notice this is a non-denominational (or non-demon-inational?!) ritual - if you want to involve a specific deity, for example, Circe, Athena, Hecate, Thoth, Hermes, etc., then use an appropriate invocation. So, once you have consecrated your object, you can now invoke Thoth, for example, by saying "Thoth, God of Wisdom and the Word, may your Wisdom guide my hand as I use these consecrated cards of art, to obtain true knowledge of hidden things, to the glory of thine ineffable name." Then, do the final banishing after a brief meditation or communion with the invoked deity.

Reaching the Point of Earth

Well done! You have spent a week in the outer courtyard and mastered the basic element of earth; the teaching of the elements and the basic history of the tarot. You have also played the hand-game and performed kitchen magick whilst having a number of tarot decks to research and purchase. You have finally learnt how to consecrate your deck to make it truly magical!



You can now progress – come forth to the flag of earth and take a bow! You are presented with the Ace of Pentacles; a card signifying the seed of new growth, the promise of reward yet to materialise and a gateway to the world.

In this Ace from the Morgan-Greer deck, we see the Rose and the Lilly heralding you forwards. Perhaps you would like to consider those two flowers and their attributes and correspondences?

Onwards! Your next lesson awaits!