

The Cards and the Tree: Learning the Tarot

A Welcome from the Fool's Guild

Welcome to the fourth 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.

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.

This fourth lesson looks at a fast way of learning how to read tarot based on Kabbalah, Pythagorean Numerology and Neo-Platonic Cosmology. The best thing is, you don't have to know anything about these subjects and it's very easy to learn!

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!

As you approach the end of the Courtyard Lessons, which showcase our innovative style and friendly approach, we'd of course encourage you to sign-up for our intermediate and advanced courses which will take your tarot to whole new levels of insight and practice!

In the meantime, over the remaining two 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.

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 Fourth Week is in the Forge!

Now that you've been in the Outer Courtyard for a few weeks, it seems as if something has changed. It's almost as if the first few weeks were merely a test, and now that you have passed, you are moving on to more serious studies. In fact, as you contemplate your previous weeks, you are greeted by a stern-faced professor of the Fool's Guild who summons all students into the Forge.

Whilst the blacksmiths beat out their songs to Vulcan, God of the Forge, you are told that this week you are to learn how to read the whole tarot deck, and how to read any tarot card individually, for any question and in any spread. You will not be required to learn keywords or learn the symbolism of the cards. In fact, you will not even need pictures on the cards in order to interpret their meaning. This will mean you can also read non-picture cards or playing cards.

The Professor says, "Before we begin, please note that I am not suggesting that the Tarot was created with the structure you are about to learn – far from it. However, we do know that later decks, specifically the Rider-Waite-Smith and Harris-Crowley decks, were deeply rooted in this structure, which is Kabbalistic. Both Waite and Crowley were initiates of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn and thoroughly cogent of the system we are about to explore. It is therefore no surprise that the cards of these decks reflect this system, albeit through the lens of the respective artists and designers." He then begins to teach you.

Part the First - Tarot in Ten Minutes

Also described as the $(4 \times 10 = 40) + (4 \times 4 = 16) + (22) = 78$ Method, this approach to learning the tarot turns almost every other method on its head.

Your lecturer says, "Students new to tarot often complain that they have spent months learning key-words from a book, and then found themselves stuck when trying to interpret those words in the context of a particular question. How does one use the first keyword "violence", given to the Devil card in Kaplan's 'little white book' for the 'Tarot of the Witches' when there is no threat or violence in the situation being discussed? This method of learning often leads to some stretches of interpretation that go beyond the card itself."

"Other students have complained that they have read lots of books on the symbolism of the cards, and become entirely overwhelmed by the often contradictory interpretations of those symbols on each card. In the Thoth deck designed by Aleister Crowley and painted by Frieda Harris, there are layers of alchemical, thelemic, occult, astrological, kabbalistic, numerological, geometric, freemasonic, sex-magick, and scientific symbols upon every card.

This method of teaching starts at the bottom and works up, introducing you quickly to the same model that was used by certain deck creators to choose

those images and symbols in the first place. It has the advantage of not tying you to particular key-words or contexts, which then enables a rapid move to confident reading, once you've practiced a few times. If you are already a reader, it may undo some bad teaching of the past!"

"The method simply requires you to learn four elements, have a clear idea in your head of any particularly creative process that you've experienced for yourself, and that you know four types of people. We then graft your personal experience into the matrices of Pythagorean numerology, neo-platonic cosmology and Kabbalah! Don't worry too much about that, it's painless, you won't feel anything, and later on you can learn all you want about those subjects! But for now, here we go!"

Step 1 (4x10)

Imagine a specific creative process that you have personally experienced, anything that comes to mind, say, writing a report, making a dress, shearing a sheep, cooking a meal, anything! The important thing is that it is a process where at first, there's nothing, and then, later, there's something that wasn't there before – in a sense, this is the cosmological basis of Kabbalah taught to you right there.

Now think about the start and the end of that process. What is it like at the beginning; at what exact point does it start? And how do you know when it is complete? How are those two stages related; is it that your ending is almost part of the beginning – a flash of inspiration that gives you the full momentum until it is manifest? When you finish, do you go back to a new beginning?

Let us call the point of starting "1" and the final manifestation "10", and on a scale of 1-10 let us divide the rest of your creative project. The easiest way to do that is to think of the exact half-way stage (this is around "5" on our scale between 1-10, sometimes "6") and consider the attributes of that stage. It's at a stage where we have committed fully to the project, where it would be difficult, but not impossible, to restart without losing too much, and where for the first time, the end is getting closer than the beginning.

Having thought about the 1, 10 and 5 stages, we can easily think about the other stages in a similar manner; take 2 and 9, for example.

The 2-stage of a creative process is after the initial burst of the beginning, when everything is ahead, there is optimism, plans can be made, and few obstacles have been encountered. However, there is little to tell us what decisions are going to work out or not – this is something we'll have to wait until later to discover.

And the 9-stage at the other end of the process is when we're so close to completion, we really can't go back, but the whole process has not come to a

complete stop. It is here that the initial impetus seems far away, and we have to remind ourselves why we started this creative project at all.

If we were to use dress-making as an example, here's the full sequence:

1. I want to make a new dress.
2. I have time to do it, and the energy & resources
3. I have a pattern
4. I can see what I need to do, and get on with it
5. I encounter the difficulties and overcome the constraints
6. The dress starts to look like I want
7. It is now easy, but I have to follow what I've already pinned together
8. I can start to fix everything together now
9. The dress now looks like the pattern, given the changes I made
10. I wear the dress

Now write down your own sequence for the creative task you imagined:

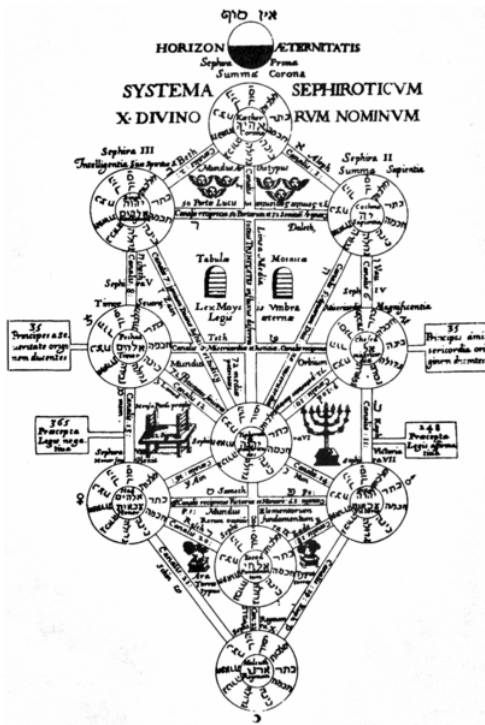
1	
2	
3	
4	
5	
6	
7	
8	
9	
10	

Every situation you imagine will have its own version of these 1-10 phases, but they will be common to any creative process. The stages can be seen as:

- 1 Beginning, creation, spark, seed
- 2 On the way, but uncertain future
- 3 First signs of progress
- 4 Results starting, but early days
- 5 In the middle, meeting challenges
- 6 More results, but shouldn't rest on laurels
- 7 Lots of energy, but keep focused
- 8 Things coming together
- 9 Results appearing, end in sight
- 10 Ending, Completion

This is based on a Kabbalistic model. The most common model of divine creation used in Kabbalah is the Tree of Life diagram. Although it has many variant forms, the one here referred to is that commonly found in western esoteric schools. It has ten stages, referred to as *Sephiroth* (singular, *Sephirah*), which means “numerical emanation”. These emanations of number start at the top and end at the bottom of the Tree of Life, in a sequence of 1-10.

In Kabbalistic terms, our creative project is mapped by the Tree of Life thus:



- | | | |
|----|-----------|-----------------|
| 1 | Kether | Creation |
| 2 | Chochmah | First Swirlings |
| 3 | Binah | First Forming |
| 4 | Chesed | Expansion |
| 5 | Geburah | Contraction |
| 6 | Tiphareth | Balance |
| 7 | Netzach | Cycles |
| 8 | Hod | Focus |
| 9 | Yesod | Foundation |
| 10 | Malkuth | Completion |

We'll look into this later, in the intermediate courses, as we use our Tarot to explore the Tree of Life and Kabbalah much further through the concept of *correspondences*. For now, we can be content that we have experienced a creative process in ten stages, and learnt the nature of those ten stages in our personal life already.

You will have obviously realised by now that we are here also talking about the 1-10 of the Tarot. There are forty minor cards, running from 1-10, in four suits. So we should now move onto the four elements, to give us a matrix of 10 stages multiplied across 4 aspects of experience = 40 cards.

The Aspects of Experience

The four aspects of experience correspond to the four elements – here comes your ancient Greek philosophy now – of Water, Air, Fire and Earth – W.A.F.E. for short. Now you can attribute these to just about anything, as you'll need to if you're going to see anything in the whole Universe as falling into one of only four categories. So, for simplicity, we will learn:

- | | |
|--|-----------|
| • Water corresponds to Wishy-washy or torrential | EMOTIONS |
| • Air, Airy-Fairy or High-minded | INTELLECT |
| • Fire, burning | AMBITIONS |
| • Earth, material | MONEY |

There's a lot more to it than that, and you can rise through several magical grades in arcane orders just by arguing whether a stick is fire or air, if you really want ... but for now, we're wanting to quickly learn Tarot – and the easy way to picture the elements is with the four suits found in the deck:

- COIN for Earth
- CUP for Water
- WAND for Fire
- SWORD for Air

Putting it Together

We can now process our ten stages through these four simple aspects of experience, without even referring to any tarot cards. Then, having learnt this, you'll find it is even easier – not more difficult – to work with the cards, which you'll soon see illustrate what you've now learnt, rather than confuse.

Let's take the FIVE stage – half-way house – in the element of EARTH – which corresponds to the aspect of experience which is MONEY. We would guess this is the half-way point of working with money, which is a point which would be challenging, difficult and hard to know whether to move forwards or go back – there would be yet no return for our investment, we might say.

You'll see that it's a challenging part of the whole process of money, finances, that sort of thing. Now, take a look at the RWS image for this stage in this element. I hope you find it is a fitting picture for what you are feeling about this phase in this world; challenge in money.

If you want to check your understanding, go ahead, for example, here's Sasha Fenton in "SuperTarot"; "the questioner may suffer a financial loss or be over-extended ..." the rest is merely her commentary on the basic meaning of the card you can now discover for the "5 of Pentacles"!

This process can be repeated for any card, very simply. So long as you keep it very simple, for example, looking at the 3 of Wands, you should say “stage 3 of 10 in the world of ambition”. Then see what arises for you. Looking at the Thoth deck card, we see it entitled, “Virtue”, in part, based on the Golden Dawn title, “Lord of Established Strength”. In our system, we know this card is showing us the first signs of progress in ambition, the first pattern coming together. How better then to describe it as “virtue”, or “established strength”?

So, 10 of Wands – last stage in a process of Ambition? Probably means you’ve reached the end of what you aspired to, but there’s a ‘stuckness’ to it that you can’t now change? Look at the RWS picture of the figure struggling with his ten staves, or read Crowley on the 10 of Wands, “it is a Will which has not understood anything beyond its dull purpose ... and will devour itself” – yes, you can start to understand more of Crowley’s enigmatic ‘Book of Thoth’ because you’re now working from the same basic system as Crowley.

OK, that’s forty cards learnt, (don’t make it harder than it is, just remember the basic idea and you can work out the derived interpretation) and you’re already actually half-way to learning the 16 Court Cards (Page of Wands, Knight of Cups, etc.) because you know the elements, and the 16 Court Cards are the four elements multiplied by four levels of Energy.

Growing Up is Hard to Do

What are the four levels of energy? You’ve already learnt about this at the Well! So, other than the letters of YHVH, the Kabbalistic Four Worlds or all sorts of other ideas, you can represent these energies as people – hey, isn’t that what they’ve done already?! You bet it is!

Taking a somewhat stereotypical view of people, age and gender, we associate the four types of court cards with four types of people thus:

Page:	Young Person	Dynamic, Sudden, Changeable
Knight:	Young Adult	Forthright, Self-Determined, Ready
Queen:	Adult Female	Nuturing, Patient, Enduring, Steady
King:	Adult Male	Forceful, Directive, Fixed

So, you have the young go-get-‘em energy of the Page, which is often a flash-in-the-pan, the more aligned energy of the Knight, balanced on his horse, on his way, the receptive, broad enduring energy of the Queen, and the counter-balanced established stable energy of the King. Four grades, if you like, of the same energy, moving through four elements, from nothing to something – let’s see that in practice ...

The Knight of Cups, is emotional energy at its more directed, so as a person it's someone who is very influenced and driven by their imagination (you'll be glad to know Rachel Pollack, in her "78 Degrees of Wisdom" agrees with your reading of this) but suppose it appears in the "foundation" card of a question to do with a new business? What then? Panic? No, of course not, remember the rules – Knight, energy stabilising, Cups, Emotions – sounds like the card here is suggesting that the business should be true to the person's emotional desires, and the better it meets those needs, perhaps even at the expense of immediate financial needs, the stronger the foundation of the business. Make sense? Easy! Always go back to the root rules and you'll find you'll make the rest up from there – that (with a bit of experience and reading other people's made-up bits) is how everyone else does it!

You can read the energy as a person or as a resource that the Querent needs to access within themselves. You can now even read a court card as a change in a situation, or as any other force without being tied to the "it's a blonde woman with blue eyes" syndrome.

The Big Two-Two

Now, that's what, 40 cards plus 16, that's 56 cards learnt ... let's get the remaining 22 learnt, shall we? These are actually the easiest to learn, and as such the ones with even more long-term mystery embedded in them. Without going into complex Kabbalah – these are your "learning" cards, they all have scenes of life from which we learn stuff. In a reading then, they bring a lesson, and the lesson is whatever it shows you on the card! That simple.

So, the dreaded Death card, on the RWS card, brings a lesson that nothing is permanent, everything changes, you can see that in the card – well, I can – but you should learn whatever lesson each major card teaches you – and the simplest way to do that is to look at the card and ask it. Listen for a moment, and if you don't get anything at all, not even a vague feeling, put the card by your bed and wait for a dream to tell you, or even better, an event during the day, a television program, something you hear in passing, you'll actually know it when you get it! These 22 cards speak an archetypal language that by definition is evident as a pattern underneath everything we perceive, so you just have to call them out.

At this point, the professor stops and says, "that's enough for now". Then he smiles and mutters, "let's have a quick quiz shall we?"

Pop Quiz I

Q. Six of Pentacles in the “Concerns” position of a reading about the outcome of a court case?

A. 6 is just after 5, so the stage is some sign of the end in sight, but not everything is fixed yet, it could still change and go back the other way, Pentacles corresponds to the aspect of Money, so the “concern” is not an emotional issue but a financial one – the Querent is concerned they have not yet got to the point where they are assured financial victory, things are not yet balanced in their favour. Looking at the RWS card you’ll get visual confirmation of this – a figure with scales handing out coins to two other figures!

Now, Rachel Pollack calls this card one of the most complicated in the deck, but you’ve just read it from a simple rule, for a proper question in a proper spread!

Not bad going!

Pop Quiz 2

Q. Two of Wands? What does that mean?

A. Just after starting out, so you’ve got to the second step, at least, in Ambitions, plans? You’re right – have a look at the RWS card, see how it shows the figure looking out to sea, holding a globe – kind of suggests that very thing, yes? But the challenge is to move forwards – there’s eight steps left to go in that process!

You can now challenge yourself to review this week and deepen your Dawn Spread from the previous lessons. At this point, there’s obviously so much to practice and even more to learn that it can seem quite overwhelming. However, keep to the simple rules and learn to build up layers slowly, at your own pace.

Use the Forums of the Fool’s Guild Outer Courtyard to ask questions and share your experiences. We’re here to help you learn and develop at the rate that is most suited to you. Although we might come and push you on the odd occasion!

Reaching the Point of Fire

Well done! You have spent a fourth elemental week in the outer courtyard and mastered the basic element of Fire; the reading of tarot! Congratulations and Blessings!



You can now progress – come forth to the flag of fire and take a bow! You are presented with the Ace of Wands; a card signifying the seed of spirit itself, and all that comes of it; vision, quests, inner journies, and self-knowledge. These all may be found in our Art and Science of Tarot.

In this Ace from the Tarot of Dreams, we see the energy of the element of Fire, in nature as both Salamander and Volcano. The Triangle symbolises Fire, pointing upwards and both consuming and transforming. As you learn Tarot, wonder what transformation it may make in your own life! This is the world of Spirit, the last of the elemental Courts.

Onwards! Your final Courtyard lesson awaits!