

## Using Tarot Readings For Personal Growth

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Perhaps you've seen tarot readers at psychic fairs, or advertising in small circulation newspapers. Intrigued, or just wanting to while away an entertaining 15 minutes, you may have even gotten a reading. The reader probably used a common spread such as the Celtic cross, a three-card quick reading, or a spread of the reader's own construction. The deck likely was one of the more popular ones, like the Rider-Waite deck, Aleister Crowley's Thoth deck, or the round Motherpeace deck. Afterwards, you might have walked away mystified, satisfied, disappointed, or feeling any other number of emotions. Meanwhile, your friends may have told you that it's all phony. You might have been told that the reader can say anything, merely telling you what you want to hear, or even filling your mind with the devil's words.

You are certainly not alone in your experience. The fascination with divination or fortune telling is as old as humankind itself. Everyone wants an edge when it comes to knowing the future, what's in store in one's career, or the chances for a new relationship. But is there more to it than that? And how do the cards know? Is this real or is it some sort of storytelling on the part of the reader? Are all readers psychics -- or charlatans?

Tarot readers have a variety of backgrounds and levels of training. Some are completely self-taught. While this may be an adequate way of preparation, a number of readers have learned different systems of interpreting the cards through study with a teacher or a metaphysical organization. Whatever the training, the proof is in the reader. Integrity and insight are the most important criteria in determining a reader's usefulness for you. Also, a reader may have been great for you, but disappointing for someone else. Finding a reader that you can work with is part of the journey of Tarot.

But what of the cards themselves? Do they have any special power, or are they simply pieces of cardboard with interesting pictures on them? Tarot cards in the form that we know today were developed in Renaissance Italy, as a card game. Even so, it was a most unusual deck from the outset. It was undoubtedly influenced by esoteric thought, as it displayed symbols taken from mystery schools. Today, there are many different Tarot decks to choose from, and many people collect them. The designs of some of the decks spring completely from the minds of their creators, while others are careful to incorporate traditional correspondences.

The deck itself is divided into two categories: the Major arcana and the Minor arcana. For the sake of simplicity, they will be referred to here as Majors and Minors, respectively. The Majors are comprised of 22 cards (numbered from 0 to 21) with names like the Fool, the Magician, the High Priestess, etc. They are also referred to by number, prefaced by the word "Key" or "Trump," such as Key 13 (Death) or Trump 21 (the World). The Fool begins the sequence with the number 0 assigned to it.

The Minors are divided into four suits and have come down to us, in a modified fashion, as our modern playing cards. The Minor suits are Wands, Cups, Swords, and Pentacles

(or Disks). These have become the familiar suits of Clubs, Hearts, Spades, and Diamonds, respectively. Each suit of Minors in Tarot has 14 cards in it, instead of 13 as today. The Minors run from Ace to 10, plus four Court cards (Page, Knight, Queen, and King). In our modern playing card deck the Page was omitted, and the Knight became our Jack.

Deep archetypal states are attributed to the Majors. Each card has many associations which are applicable in different circumstances. For instance, the High Priestess (Key 2) is associated with the unconscious, memory, the moon, the color blue, and the sixth (or brow) chakra, among other things. Other cards are associated with zodiacal signs, senses, states of mind, planets, etc. Associations vary a bit by philosophical system, but the basics remain the same. The Majors can be used as objects of meditation to stimulate in oneself the properties signified by the card. In a sense, then, these cards have a power of their own. They readily connect us to specific psychological states and can assist us in our spiritual unfolding. They have been constructed through a process of mystical empiricism to evoke these states within us, connecting us all through the collective unconscious.

In comparison, the Minors are more mundane. They symbolize transient emotional states or physical events. They typically are not used in meditation, but can be. Aside from commonly accepted meanings, each Minor is also associated with a portion of the calendar year, from ten days (in the case of cards numbered 2 through 10), to one month periods (for Knights, Queens, and Kings) to entire seasons (for Aces and Pages). The date assignments can assist in determining timing in response to questions.

The quality of Tarot readings varies widely. The most useful Tarot readings give information that goes to the depth of the question. It does more than tells questioners how their careers are going to develop over the next six months. It tells what will assist in that development, what warning signs to watch for, what forces will be at work, what outside influences will figure into the situations, etc. Such a Tarot reading is not an end; it is a direction. It provides a roadmap, giving questioners options and choice. It also provides a glimpse into the questioner's inner world, charting the motivations and personality variables at work.

Go to any book store with a metaphysical section and you will find that there are many Tarot interpretation books on the market. They tend to give pat meanings for the cards and give the impression that reading the Tarot is like going through a cookbook. Reading these books, it would seem that Tarot reading is a pretty straightforward process. While books like these can give a fledgling reader something to use as an anchor, a cookbook approach doesn't go far enough. The reader needs to develop an actual relationship with the cards, so that they can be effectively interpreted during a reading.

There really is no pat meaning to any Tarot card. However, each card has its own personality, so to speak. The various attributes and meanings given to the cards are an attempt to express this personality. But the shadings of meaning that show themselves in a given reading are a product of the relationship between the cards and the reader. The

cards communicate with the reader through the reader's intuition. A good reading is actually a three-way conversation among the reader, the cards, and the questioner's Higher Self.

Such a reading contributes to the questioner's personal growth, as it provides guidance for a course of action and shows how the questioner's unique personality interacts with the question at hand. This process gives questioners a sense of where they fit into the situation of the question. Even if the reading indicates that there are larger forces involved, questioners can see what lessons they are to learn and how they can best grow through the situation involved in the question.

Tarot readings are also instructive when dealing with emotional issues, such as in therapy. Progress in psychotherapy is always uneven, and sometimes the process plateaus completely. At such times, turning to the Tarot for guidance brings a new perspective to the therapeutic process and can break the stagnation. An appropriate reading casts light on the dynamics of the situation, and the questioner's role in it. Obstructive energies can be highlighted, while indicating the best course of action to take. Tarot does not replace therapy, but it can clarify the process and open new directions for exploration.

In every good Tarot reading, the questioner's Higher Self -- the in-dwelling Divine -- expresses itself through the cards in the person of the reader. This isn't as mysterious as it might sound. The interconnectedness of all humanity makes it possible to reach a level where the three-way conversation mentioned before can take place. A willingness to take part in this conversation, by both the reader and the questioner, influences the depth and usefulness of the reading.

Tarot is a trusted advisor when called upon with a true desire for guidance. Along with the Higher Self's true expression comes an accurate telling of the situation surrounding the question, and a revelation of the qualities that the questioner needs to call upon to navigate the situation. The guidance provided can prove invaluable at a difficult or confusing time. As such, the Tarot is a truly wonderful tool for personal growth.

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