



The Tarot School Correspondence Course

Lesson One

Dear Friend,

We could say, without being wrong, that tarot is about numbers; three numbers in particular—22, 10 and 4. It is around these numbers that tarot is organized as a physical deck of cards, and also as a system of thought, both esoteric and exoteric. There are many decks of cards that embody philosophies and points of view, but when they part company from these numbers they part company from tarot. These variants are either wholly different animals or mutations to a greater or lesser degree.

22 is the number of cards in the sequence of the *Major Arcana*, one of the two main divisions of the tarot deck. 4 is the number of suits in the *Minor Arcana*, the other main division of the tarot deck. 10 is the number of numbered cards in each suit, which has in addition 4 *Court Cards*, to make a total of 14 cards in each suit. Thus, with the numbers 10 and 4, a Minor Arcana of 56 cards is created (4 suits of 14 cards each), which, together with the 22 cards of the Major Arcana, makes a deck of 78 cards.

22 is an interesting number. Other than its inclusion in standard numerology systems as one of three master numbers (11, 22, 33), it doesn't seem to connect with our most common symbolic correspondences—the calendar, the elements, astrology, or any standard, everyday philosophy which helps us define and understand the world. Of course, there's the Hebrew alphabet...

To understand the number 22 both quickly and deeply, do this:

Pick a quiet time and a comfortable place to sit. Close your eyes and take three slow breaths. In your mind's eye, see what is in front of you. Let your mental image be as detailed as you feel comfortable making it.

Now let your imagination take over and see what is in front of you *but blocked from sight by the first obstacles to your vision*. Let yourself see further and further in front of you. Let your imagination carry your vision as far in front of you as it will go. Let your vision extend to the end of the universe. Take your time with this exercise. *Be thorough*. When you can see or imagine nothing further, you will have reached your own forward mental boundary.

Next, follow the same procedure behind you. Then to the left and the right. Finally above and below. Do all this in one sitting with your eyes closed. Don't rush. When you have extended your imagination *to its limits* in every direction, draw your attention back to the center, to yourself, and look within. Go as far within yourself as you can, without going in front or behind, to the left or right, above or below.

When all this has been done, take three long, deep breaths and open your eyes.

You have, sitting quietly in your chair, explored your imagination to its boundaries, reached your own limits of conscious awareness. The place where the imaginable meets the unimaginable can be understood and symbolized by an immaterial wall of darkness, one in each direction; front, back, left, right, above and below. These six walls can be seen as the interior faces of a cube that implicitly contains *all that you presently know and can imagine*, and form what is known in esoteric literature as *The Cube of Space*. It can easily be seen that each of us lives at the center of our own cube of space, and that this symbol is a kind of architecture of consciousness.

All very nice, but what does this have to do with tarot and the number 22? Let's make it even more confusing by throwing in the Hebrew alphabet, which has 22 letters *and is crucial to connecting the number 22 with tarot*.

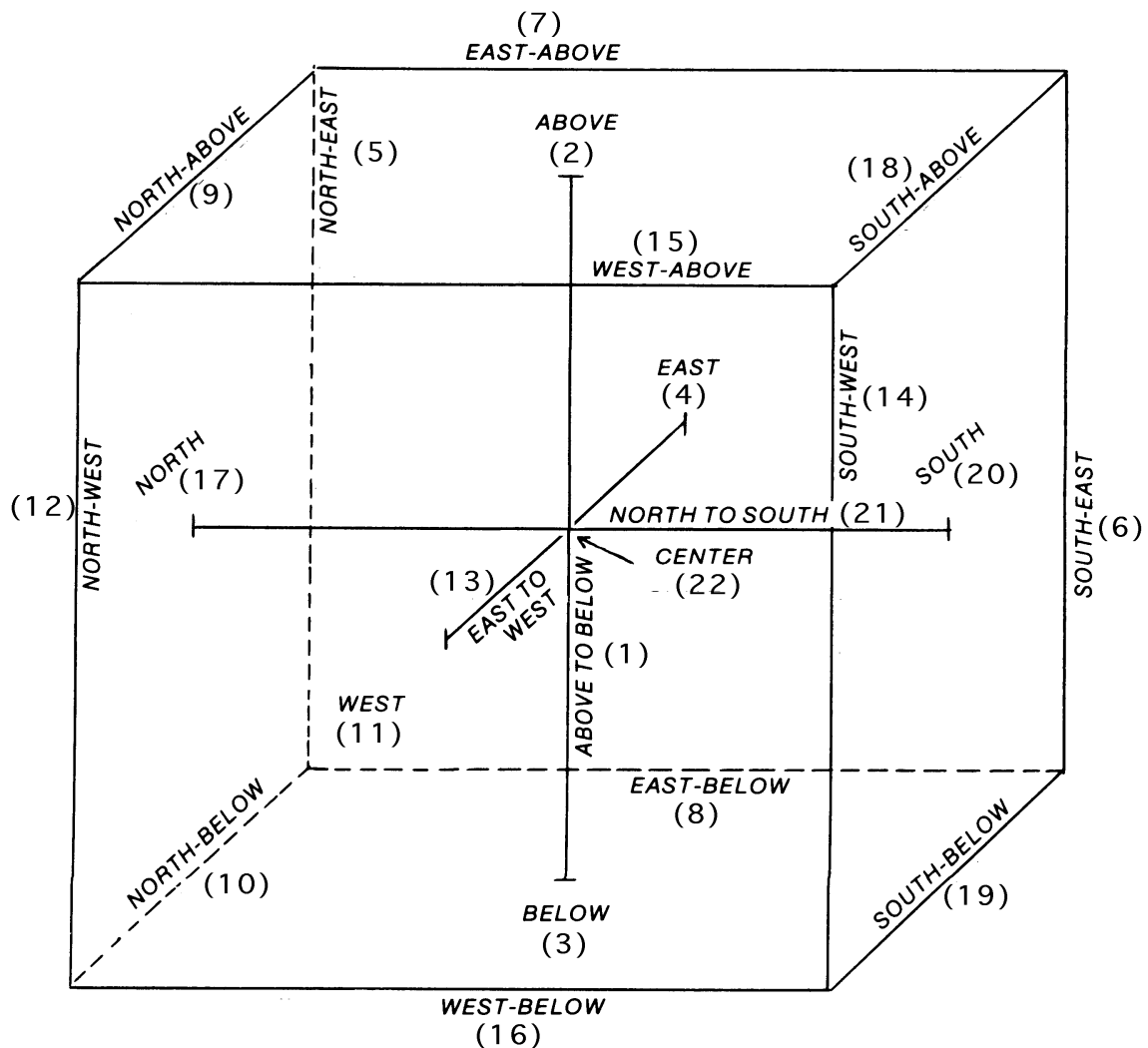
There are three axes of physical space: Front-Back; Left-Right; Up-Down. Each one of these three axes is connected symbolically to a specific Hebrew letter.

Each of these three axes has two arms, or directions, which lead away infinitely to the six boundaries or faces of the cube of space we just experienced. These six directions—Front, Back, Right, Left, Above, Below—plus the Center-point at which they meet (the seat you were sitting in when you discovered this symbolic cube) are each assigned an additional Hebrew letter. The *three* axes plus the *six* directions and the *center* of consciousness add up to 10, with ten corresponding Hebrew letters.

Twelve lines form where the faces of the cube meet (e.g., the line *East–Above* is formed where the East and Above faces meet), and they, too, are given Hebrew letter correspondences.

We now have three axes, six directions and their faces, a center, and twelve connecting lines, which add up to 22 and which together are the component parts of a cube, with each part assigned a corresponding Hebrew letter.

One final step and we are done with the number 22. Each of the *Major Arcana* is also assigned a *corresponding Hebrew letter*, and so, just so, a *corresponding part* of the Cube of Space. Thus, the symbolism of tarot reveals the structure of the Cube, and of consciousness itself.



From the awkwardness of the number 22 we go to the number 10, which is arguably the rock-bottom foundation of our explanation of the physical world. It's the basis of our mathematics, and it is in the language of mathematics that the laws of nature are written. In tarot we will see that 10 is the framework for a metaphysical explanation of existence as well.

It is one of the main tasks of any philosophy, religion or metaphysical system to explain how all that we see came into being. There is the intuition (for some, a self-evident necessity) that before there was *something* there had to be *nothing*. But the gap between primordial nothing and the first something is so subtle that the greatest minds and spirits of the human race have used all their energy and talent to explain how that gap was bridged. Hidden in the pretty complexities of the tarot hierarchies, in the ten numbers of each suit, in fact, is one of the most beautiful of such explanations. For the moment we won't attempt to describe it because it is so breathtakingly vast, though we will return to it later.

To show how integrated and powerful the symbolism of tarot is, we should mention that the 22 cards of the Major Arcana are *pathways* for joining the 10 individual numbers together, in a dance so intricate that it would be intimidating if it wasn't so much fun.

And finally, there is the number 4. Where 10 is the number used by mathematicians to pierce the surface of appearances, 4 describes the magic and spirituality of the world seen directly with the eyes and the heart, without benefit of instruments and analysis. It is the number of directions, of seasons, of times of day and times of life, and of the basic elements known to humanity since the beginning of things. It is the ancient symbol of order and tangible reality.

In tarot, the ten numbers are repeated four times, each repetition in the form of a symbol, *the name and picture of a suit*. Each of these suit symbols bears the weight of one-quarter of the clearly observable universe. The meaning of these symbols we will begin to explore in this very lesson.

4 can also be found in the 4 cards of each suit that are not numbers. These are the Court Cards, images of the types and styles of human personality, and at the same time (you guessed it), a part of the same grand metaphysical system as the Major Arcana, the ten numbers, and the suits.

You may have noticed that not once so far have we named or described a card. We intentionally leave it to you to discover the cards for yourself, if you haven't already. For this course, for the time being, we will use only the Rider-Waite or the Universal Waite deck, for reasons that will become clear in time.

In this lesson we will begin discussing the cards in detail. If you have not already purchased and carefully examined a deck, you will need to do that before you continue.



Tarot is a symbolic language. It can be used to predict the future, to understand human nature, and to describe the processes of spiritual evolution. It does all this with an alphabet of 78 symbols—22 uppercase and 56 lowercase symbolic letters that combine in a vocabulary of meanings, a syntax of spreads and a grammar of techniques.

Though it might surprise some people, tarot is a language that can be written, spoken and thought in as well as read, and that is what saves it from being trivial, the sole province of fortune-tellers.

When we begin to learn a language, we start with the alphabet. This one is bigger than most people are used to, so we will approach it a piece at a time. We will start with the first five cards in the *Suit of Swords*.

Do this:

To begin, sit at a table with a notebook, pen and deck. Extract from the deck (remember to use only a Rider-Waite or Universal Waite deck at this point) the Ace, 2, 3, 4 and 5 of Swords, and put the rest of the deck aside. Place the Ace on the table in front of you face up. On top of the Ace place the 2, then the 3, the 4 and the 5, all face up. Then take this stack of five cards and turn it over so that all the cards are face down. This arrangement of cards in order of rank is called an *Ordered Stack*.

The first card in the hierarchy of any suit is the Ace. As an aspect of design we are all familiar with in ordinary playing cards, the suit design is repeated on the card a number of times equal to the number on the card. In the Ace, the suit symbol is

pictured once. It is large, ornate, and meant to be impressive. It also contains more clearly than any other card in the suit the full set of pictorial references to the symbolic meaning of the suit.

Turn over just the top card, which should be the Ace. Look at it carefully. You will see that it is a very complex image. Examine this image minutely, memorizing every color, line and pictorial detail. Take about a minute to do this and then place it to the side, *face down*.

Then turn over each card in the stack one at a time, repeating all the steps you followed with the Ace.

When you have examined all five cards, memorizing their component details and burning those details as deeply as possible into your memory, pick up your notebook and one at a time, write a clear and complete description of each image. Describe only what you actually see, without any interpretation.

This process is called *Close Examination*, and we will use it each time we introduce new cards. It is a process that has great, if at first unsuspected, value.

The best way to understand these cards is to consider the separate symbols of suit and number. What follows, though partial, bears a lot of thought. Each number carries a host of associations, meanings and attributions within it, that will remain unchanged in every suit. The meanings and attributions of each suit symbol will permeate all the cards of that suit regardless of rank or number. These symbols either already do, or eventually will, evoke from within you their full range of possibilities on sight.

But why do they mean these things? Who says so? The fact that several traditions combine to give us these interpretations suggests only that a great deal of thought and experience has gone into them. The ultimate authority is the validating resonance that echoes within each person who comes in contact with them. If they aren't so for you, they aren't so for you. Still, it is a good idea to be patient. That which is unclear or rejected at any point may reveal itself in time.

In examining the cards individually we will consider meanings, attributions and visual symbolism on more than one level and in more than one tradition. If any aspect of what follows is unclear to you, this is only due to the limitations of your prior knowledge, limitations which will simply dissolve as the Course continues. In the meantime, *allow whatever is unfamiliar to be provocative and intriguing*.

SYMBOLS OF THE SUIT OF SWORDS

All the numbered cards of the tarot Minor Arcana are potent compounds made of one number and one suit, and each part of this compound is a fertile symbol in its own right.

Numbers in tarot are magical rather than mathematical symbols. Mathematical numbers are abstract templates describing the quantities and laws of the natural world we experience through the senses. Magical numbers are ornamental cups filled with hidden meaning, drawn from the well of esoteric associations. Number in tarot is numerology, not formula or function.

There are, of course, several valid systems of numerology, just as there are several systems of meaning for every kind and class of symbol. In this course, we will be working with the number attributions drawn from the Qabalistic Tree of Life. It's a deep, rich, powerful system that's entirely consistent with the symbolism of the rest of the course. Also, it has the benefit of being easy to learn in greater depth through independent reading, which we highly recommend.

The first number, of course, is the number One, the tarot Ace.

The Number One (Ace) – Attributions:

Name: Crown (in Hebrew, *Kether**) — The circular opening through which divine energy pours from out of nothing; the source of everything that is possible and will eventually become; the seal of divine approval and authority for every consequence of the creative act.

**th* is the transliteration for the English hard t, as in Thomas.

Color: White — The color which is not a color but contains all colors.

Quality: Brilliance — The intensity at the core of everything, that cannot be looked upon or opposed. This is the source of the tradition that requires subjects to bow and look down as their king approaches.

Intelligence: Hidden — The secret of the divinity of everything.

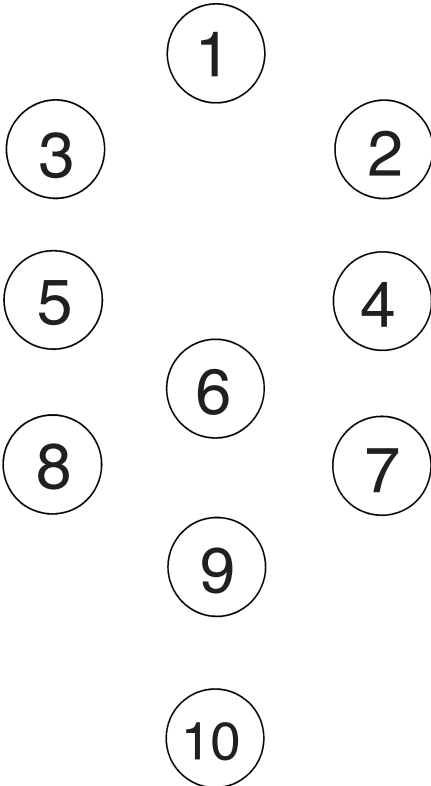
Symbols: Point, Swastika, Seed —

The point is the symbol of existence without measure, both infinite and infinitesimal. The swastika is the magical pinwheel of the swirling of the first energies of creation. The seed is the irreducible minimum from whose potential everything will spring.

Dimension: Soul — Belonging to the continuum of Good and Evil.

Depth: Good — The first of ten depths, which are the ten numbers of the Tree of Life and the Minor Arcana. Each is one end of a dimension with two paired extremities: Good is paired with Evil (1 and 10), Beginning with End (2 and 3), South with North (4 and 5), East with West (6 and 9), and Above with Below (7 and 8). Each depth is a bottomless vessel, receiving divine energy and defining it as a particular quality. The ten numbers reveal five dimensions, one called Soul, the dimension of closeness and distance from divine origins (1–10), one called Year, the dimension of time (2–3), and three called World, the three dimensions of space (4–5, 6–9, and 7–8).

This is where the numbers are located on the Tree of Life:



Location: Center, above the head — place of the crown on the Tree of Life.

The Number One (Ace) – Issues:

- The house lights dim, the curtain goes up, and the play begins
- Pure potential, everything is still possible, everything is promised but unrealized
- The first movement, the essence of change, the breath of life
- An absolute gift, no strings attached
- Before the beginning, a moment so pure and perfect it can't be described, understood or anticipated
- After the end, a moment so complete that it is hidden beyond the possibility of finding. The end is embedded in the beginning — the nine remaining numbers are contained in the One, and lead step by step to our ordinary, everyday experience.

These are some of the attributions and issues of the number One, and they are true for all the Aces regardless of suit.

Suit is the next to the last step in the most crucial symbolic series in all of tarot.

The first step in this series is a four-letter name that is intimately familiar to almost everyone in our culture. In Hebrew, its original language, it is written as four consonants, Y-H-V-H. In English, with the addition of some vowels, this group of four letters has become the biblical Jehovah. In the world of western magic, it is known as the Tetragrammaton, the four-letter divine name understood to be the symbolic root of creation itself. It is also the root of the esoteric language of tarot.

But the letters of the Tetragrammaton are abstract and difficult to grasp by themselves. They become manifest in tarot by degrees. Each letter is said to become and disappear into a world, which has a name and qualities of its own and is a bit less abstract than the divine letter it descended from. Each world then becomes and dissolves into an element, which is a step closer to what we would call reality. And each element in turn becomes and hides within a Tarot suit, where we can describe it

in terms of the manifest world we all know. The suits finally reveal themselves as Aces, becoming at last the tangible symbols we handle and manipulate as a deck of cards.

The first suit we discuss in this course is the Suit of Swords, and its symbol is the Sword itself.

The Symbol of the Sword – Attributions:

World: Formation (in Hebrew, *Yetzirah**) — Where every shape and intention is given logic, system, order and plan; where all is measured, defined and limited; where law and formula are imparted to everything; and where meaning is contained and communicated by language.

* In Hebrew, the accent in any word is either on the last or the next to the last syllable, depending on regional dialect. Here, the accent is on the next to the last syllable.

Element: Air — All that is clear, curious, fresh and abstract.

Direction: East — A ritual rather than a geographical direction; the location in a sacred space where a ritual is begun.

Season: Spring — The ritual season of beginnings.

Time of Day: Dawn — The ritual time of awakening, possessing the qualities of freshness, clarity, and the joy of the rising sun.

Alchemical Qualities: Warm, Moist, Quick, Fine, Transparent, Sharp

Magical Organ: Mind

Psychological Function: Thought

These are some of the attributions for the entire Suit of Swords, and will be true for every card of that suit, regardless of number or rank.

But each Ace in its own suit and indeed, every card in tarot, manifests its own network of attributions as meaningful imagery on a physical card. The first actual card, the first complete, complex image in this course, is the Ace of Swords.

Ace of Swords:

Attributions:

Name: Crown

Element: Air

World: Formation

Season: Spring

Direction: East

Esoteric Title: Root of the Power of Air

Traditional Meanings:

Rule by divine right—the symbol of the Sword is the link between all earthly rulers and the divine kingdom. Ascetic; austere; always capable of anger, cruelty and pride. Always reaches beyond itself for what is higher, grander, better, larger. In love with justice, it is prone to law. In love with excellence, it is afraid of mediocrity. In pursuit of victory, it fears defeat. Prizing nobility and courage, it is given to cruelty and cowardice. Given to stoicism, it inflicts and experiences pain. Abstract clarity; curiosity, skepticism, objective believability; principled but self-righteous; a breath of fresh air.

Communication, decision, solution. Words and numbers, plans and ideas.

Imagery:

Sword: Symbol of the Sword with all its attributions. A single picture that evokes its entire range of attributions, meanings and issues.

Hand coming from Cloud: Symbol of offering or divine gift.

Cloud: Symbol of divine origin, the veil between matter and spirit.

Hand: Expresses the idea of action, power and dominion; the word “manifestation” derives from “manus,” the Latin word for hand. In Qabalah, the right hand is the hand which blesses, the hand of mercy.

Crown: Represents Crown (Kether), the first sephirah or position on the Qabalistic Tree of Life (the number 1), and one of the symbols of Air, which is the element associated with the Suit of Swords.

Nine Jewels in Crown: Represent the remaining nine numbers of the Minor Arcana and the Tree of Life.

Olive and Palm Branches: Represent peace and suffering respectively, as the two edges of the sword.

6 Yods: Represent Beauty (Tiphereth), the sixth sephirah of the Tree of Life (the number 6), which is another association with the element of Air. Also symbolizes the six numbers in the center of the Tree of Life from which the three dimensions of the Cube of Space—symbol of measure, limit and the mind—is created.

Blue & Purple Mountains: The colors of Foundation (Yesod), the ninth sephirah (the number 9), which is also associated with the Element of Air and is the location of the astral plane on the Tree of Life.

Mountains: Symbol of the horizon, the place where Heaven and Earth meet; purity, transcendence and duration.



The Number Two – Attributions:

Name: Wisdom (in Hebrew, *Chochma**) — The depth of a world, an element and a suit containing the entire range of their possibilities, before the limitation of concepts or divisions of any kind.

**Ch* is the English transliteration for the sound of a guttural “h” as in the German *nacht*.

Color: Grey (Mother of Pearl) — The iridescence containing all future manifestations of color.

Astrological Attribution: The entire zodiac.

Quality: Radiance — A luminosity one order of magnitude less than the brilliance of Crown, the number One.

Intelligence: Illuminating — This single word describes the essence of what is found in the depth of Wisdom. It is the function served by the number Two in every suit.

Symbols: Lingam, Line, 12-spoked wheel —

- The lingam is the symbol of primal maleness.
- The line is the the abstract form of pure masculine energy.
- The 12-spoked wheel is the full potential of the zodiac before it is differentiated into signs and houses.

Dimension: Year — The entire continuum of time, extending from beginning to end.

Depth: Beginning — The endless possibilities and manifestations of beginning.

Location: Right Brain — One half of the mind of the primal symbolic human being represented by the Tree of Life.

The Number Two – Issues:

- The first force, the inexhaustible fountain of energy
- Abstract maleness, the Supernal Father, formless Yang
- Enlivening, awakening, initiating, inseminating
- Contains all the forces of every symbol, like the DNA of creation
- Beginning of action, limitless expansion, the first of three levels of the Big Bang, which is said to be the beginning of everything
- The cosmic male orgasm

These are some of the attributions and issues of the number Two, and they are true for all the Twos regardless of suit.

2 OF SWORDS:

Attributions:

Name: Wisdom

Element: Air

World: Formation

Planet: Moon

Sign: Libra

Esoteric Title: Lord of Peace Restored

Traditional Meanings:

Intently listening to the inner silence. The song of the sword, the vibrations of the steel blade—harmony, balance, proportion. Weighty matters, a pair of possibilities, choices. On the verge of decision but undecided. Influenced by the light of the moon (the inner light); the tide of events advances, something must be done. Timing is crucial—await the critical moment. Make peace. Ignore the irrelevant. Calm and stubborn under pressure. The space between two thoughts which is sought in meditation.

Balanced, steady. Stuck, unsure. Unconvinced, unable, unwilling.

Imagery:

Two Swords: Balanced, they represent the sign of Libra. The moon inside the angle of the swords is a reference to the astrological attribution of the Moon in Libra.

Blindfold: Inner vision. Contemplation.

Blue-White Robe: Refers to Key II The High Priestess. Other references to The High Priestess include the **Water** and the **Moon**.

Cubic Grey Stone Bench: The medium (stone) of Manifestation (cube).

Islands: The three parts of the Supernal Triad (the numbers 1, 2 and 3), the unattainable divine realm of the Tree of Life. The island on the horizon symbolizes Kether, the Crown. The island on the right symbolizes Chochma, Wisdom. The island on the left symbolizes Binah, Understanding. The water symbolizes the Abyss, which separates the human from the divine realm, Above from Below. In psychological terms, islands represent the beginning of consciousness extending upward from the waters of the unconscious.



The Number Three – Attributions:

Name: Understanding (in Hebrew, *Binah*) — The potter's wheel that shapes the formless clay of Wisdom.

Color: Black — The ink on the pure white sheet of Wisdom.

Quality: Darkness — The mysteries of the womb; the veil that conceals the limitless light, from behind which emerges every sound and color.

Astrological Attribution: Saturn — Imposes the constraint of time on eternity and space on infinity.

Alchemical Metal: Lead — The most original and least refined material; the barrier to energy; the opposite of transparency; light stops here.

Intelligence: Sanctifying — The principles of faith that contain the experience of light; the source of the gods and goddesses of every pantheon.

Symbols: Yoni, Circle, Cup —

- The yoni is the symbol of primal femaleness.
- The circle is the abstract form of pure feminine energy.
- The cup is the grail, symbol of the sacred womb.

Dimension: Year

Depth: End — The vessel that contains infinity and eternity.

Location: Left Brain — The matrix of organization and discipline.

The Number Three – Issues:

- The first form, the Lamp of Darkness, that carves the dark shapes of the letters and numbers into the limitless light of wisdom. It is the letters and numbers (qualities and quantities) from which the manifest world will ultimately be made.
- Abstract femaleness, the feminine half of creation, Supernal Mother, perfect Yin
- Yielding, receptive, encompassing, defining
- The darkest planetary influence, whose orbit draws the ring around the Hermetic universe
- The beginning of control, of distinctions, and of knowing

These are some of the attributions and issues of the number Three, and they are true for all the Threes regardless of suit.

3 of Swords:

Attributions:

Name: Understanding

Element: Air

World: Formation

Planet: Saturn

Sign: Libra

Esoteric Title: Lord of Sorrow

Traditional Meanings:

The heart envelops the mind, softening bitterness and wounded pride. Alienation, martyrdom and suffering are daggers of attitude, habitual weapons used by the mind to lacerate the heart. All insults are imaginary. Jealousy, hurt feelings, fears of intimacy and abandonment are poisoned blades of thought that cause emotional wounds. The heart is as strong as the need. Pain and sorrow are present but accepted and transcended. The heart teaches the mind.

Complicated relationships—ménage à trois. Reconciliation. Surgery. A storm of tears.

Imagery:

The Heart Pierced by Three Swords: A version of the Christian emblem for the Sacred Heart of Mary, it represents the sorrow of the mother.

The Swords: A reference to Libra, an Air sign.

Clouds and Rain: Refers to the astrological attribution of Saturn. Saturn is also connected with Binah, the Mother (the number 3 on the Tree of Life).



The Number Four – Attributions:

Name: Mercy (in Hebrew, *Chesed*) — also, Love and Greatness.

Color: Blue — The first true color, symbol of the emergence of reality from the abstractness of the Supernal Triad.

Quality: Grace — The fountain of life, source of the continuation of the universe.

Astrological Attribution: Jupiter — Ruler of the gods; benign and expansive force.

Alchemical Metal: Tin — Soft, malleable, the first ingredient in many metallurgical and alchemical compounds, it plays well with others.

Intelligence: Measuring/Cohesive — The coming together of the letters and numbers that were created in the number 3 (Binah). Between the numbers 3 and 4 on the Tree of Life, there exists an uncrossable space called the Abyss, in which the letters and numbers float as pure potential until they come together here and begin to create the world that we know.

Symbols: Pyramid/Square, Crook, Scepter —

- The pyramid/square is both the first three-dimensional solid and the number 4 organized as the 4 corners of the symbolic universe.
- The crook is the shepherd's tool with which he guides and protects his flock, symbol of divine beneficence.
- The scepter is the symbol of divinity as ruler. This establishes the connection between the number 4 and The Emperor (Key #4).

Dimension: World — The continuum of the six directions that make the Cube of Space.

Depth: South — The first direction on the Tree of Life of the three-dimensional universe. South is magickally associated with light and heat, aspects of energy.

Location: Right Shoulder, Arm and Hand — The gift-giver, channel of divine generosity.

The Number Four – Issues:

- The first complex reality — the abstract potential of letters and numbers is organized. Letters become words carrying meaning. Numbers become the laws of nature.
- The second time the world is created — the energy of expansion that comes before the Big Bang that creates the visible universe.
- The masculinity of God the Father, creator of the manifest world, source of the known and the unknown, gatekeeper of the unknowable.
- The ceaseless provider of every kind of gift.
- Unconditional love — no strings attached, love whether you like it or not.

4 of Swords:

Attributions:

Name: Mercy

Element: Air

World: Formation

Planet: Jupiter

Sign: Libra

Esoteric Title: Lord of Rest from Strife

Traditional Meanings:

A spiritual journey, withdrawal into dream, retreat from reality. A long moment of peace and healing. Aglow with unconscious solutions and understanding, the sleeping hero awaits the moment of his awakening. Already elsewhere, the spirit waits to be returned to life, or freed from the body in the finality of death. Consciousness teeters between sanity and psychosis. Hanging in the balance. Rite of initiation — symbol of the death that precedes rebirth.

Impasse, dormancy, letting go. Trance, coma, meditation. Sleeping mind, wakeful spirit.

Imagery:

Three Swords on the Wall: Point to the chakras at the head, throat and heart. In Masonic lore, these were the places that were struck in the legend of the ritual killing of Hiram Abiff, the Master Mason of King Solomon's Temple.

Sword Below: Represents the spine as the pathway of the Kundalini, the energy of awakening, with the direction reversed to show dormancy.

Reclining Knight: Pictures the Esoteric Title, Lord of Rest from Strife. The knight is in the position of a candidate in the Third Degree of the Master Mason lying on the floor of the lodge, ready for ceremonial resurrection.

Knight: The ideal type of higher humanity, characterized by utter devotion to beliefs and undertakings to which his whole life is dedicated. He represents the total rejection of corruption and treachery, symbol of moral refinement and courage.

Stained Glass Window: Shows Christ ministering to a disciple with the word PAX in the halo over his head. This gives the secondary meaning to the card of spiritual peace.



The Number Five – Attributions:

Name: Severity (in Hebrew, *Gevurah*) — also, Awe and Might.

Color: Red — The second source color of the manifest world.

Quality: Storm and Terror — The war against excess, the destruction of the unnecessary.

Astrological Attribution: Mars — God of exigence and war.

Alchemical Metal: Iron — The unbending, unyielding and unforgiving metal.

Intelligence: Radical — Nothing but perfection and the absolutely essential survive.

Symbols: 5-Petaled Red Rose, Spear, Scourge —

- The 5-petaled red rose is a symbol of the beauty of perfection.
- The spear is a symbol of the warrior.
- The scourge is a symbol of punishment and purification.

Dimension: World

Depth: North — This is the forbidding landscape of cold, darkness and contraction.

Location: Left Shoulder, Arm and Hand — Just as the right hand is a symbol of giving, the left hand is a symbol of taking away.

The Number Five – Issues:

- The second complex reality — squeezing the letters and numbers, compressing meaning and law to the absolute core of their power
- The femininity of God the Mother — the labor pains that give birth to all the forms of the world in their perfection
- The teacher, coach and trainer who knows what perfection is and will settle for nothing less
- The terror of failing and the pain of grueling effort

5 of Swords:

Attributions:

Name: Severity

Element: Air

World: Formation

Planet: Venus

Sign: Aquarius

Esoteric Title: Lord of Defeat

Traditional Meanings:

Winning against all odds by spirit alone. No weapon has been wielded nor injury inflicted, but opposition melts before the energy of affirmation. Of many voices within, one becomes dominant. Whatever is found useful is appropriated without apology. To the victor go the spoils, though the loser feels cheated and stolen from. Humiliation is the other face of triumph. Victory is short-lived. Stormy weather.

Resourceful, opportunist, shameless. The opposition routed but lives to fight another day. Beware retaliation—from within and without.

Imagery:

Jagged Clouds and Waves in Water: Symbols of unrest. Graphic references to Aquarius.

Red and Green Clothing: The colors of life and passion, reference to Venus.

Wind-swept Blond Hair: Symbol of intense awareness and a high state of readiness.

Purple Mountains: Symbol of the limits of imagination, reference to Swords.



There are clearly several layers of meaning for each card, or letter in the tarot alphabet, and often many meanings or variations in each layer. Since neither here nor anywhere else will you find an exhaustive list of either layers or meanings, and since no matter how many of these may already be familiar to you there are always more of them, you can happily resign yourself to the role of perpetual student.

But tarot is nothing if not structured. This is the moment in that structure to introduce the uppercase of the tarot alphabet, the Major Arcana as they are called. These are a series of powerful enigmas carefully constructed of number, name and image in a way that is meant to lure students into deep waters. (It could be considered a drawback of this Course that the writers of it *love* deep waters, but we hope that you will enjoy them, too.)

The first step into these waters is an introduction to *The Fool*, first and most enigmatic in the order of the *Trumps*, or Majors. As before, there may well be references to unfamiliar systems and traditions. *Regard these as channel markers into the depths.*

Do this:

Find The Fool in the deck, then set the deck aside. Do a *Close Examination* of The Fool, just as you did for the cards in the Suit of Swords.

When you have finished writing a detailed description, look at the card again. This time, judging solely by the *intent* of the image, get a sense of the meaning, the significance, of The Fool. Write it down. Include what you think it means and any associations it may suggest to you, either positive or negative. Write until you can think of nothing more to say. Do this even if you are already familiar with its meanings. This is called an *Intuitive Interpretation*.

When you have done this, read the description that follows, and then re-read what *you* have written. Compare the two, in writing, and let the comparison be instructive.

0 - THE FOOL

Karmic Interpretation:

The leap, the plunge, the main chance. Spontaneous, fearless, enthusiastic. Going nowhere, needing nothing, footloose and fancy free. Uninhibited, uncomplicated, trusting, experiencing the moment and delighting in its fullness. Without a plan or forethought, heedless and appearing frivolous, welcoming the unexpected. No mother's choice for her child.

Archetypal Interpretation:

Eternal youth, wanderer, vagabond, simpleton. Comprehending nothing, possessing nothing, free to go or to stay. Engine of the carousel, it is the motionless hub of the wheel; egoless, zero, the cosmic egg. Lawless, he antedates the law; uncontainable, he antedates constraint. He has never seen a mirror.

Drop the hesitation between thought and action. Do for the joy of doing without regard for possible rewards. Do not ask permission. Do not seek forgiveness. The past and the future are both too bulky for your small bag. Achieve the immortality of the moment.

Magickal Interpretation:

Attributions:

Name: The Fool — the name given to the highest and most transcendent consciousness by the lowest and most concrete.

Key Number: 0 — the 1st Major Arcana card. Traditionally, The Fool is either 0 or unnumbered, and has no place in the orderly progression of a series of numbers.

Hebrew Letter: Aleph (א) — The letters of the Hebrew alphabet also have meanings and number attributions. The numbering system is part of the original Hebrew, but the meanings derive from Aramaic and other ancient languages as well as Hebrew. In addition, esoteric tradition adds its own interpretations to the various translations. In this tradition, Aleph means Ox and its number is 1. The energy of breath expelled, silent, like the h in hour. It is the incipience of sound; it is the infusion of prana, life-breath, into the mantra which is said to be the source of Creation. It is the beginning of the beginning.

Element: Air — the letter Aleph is one of three Hebrew letters associated with a magickal element. Its association is with the breath. The meaning of Aleph, which is Ox, is a reference to the steadiness and constant labor of the breath.

Planet: Uranus (modern attribution) — The astrological symbol for adventure and the unexpected. Erratic, eccentric and energetic, difficult to predict, it causes major changes on a deep level.

Path #: 11 — Every Major Arcana card is understood to be a path on the Tree of Life. There are 32 such paths. The first ten are the ten numbers of the Minor Arcana, which are known as depths. The remaining 22 paths are the Major Arcana. They are literally the paths that connect the numbers. Each one of the Major Arcana can be understood as the experience of the journey between two numbers or depths.

The Fool is the experience of the journey between 1 (Crown) and 2 (Wisdom). The Fool is the path of 0 and 1, a place of abstraction so high and pure that it is indescribable and all but inconceivable. It is the journey between the first still moment of existence in the Crown and the explosion of that moment in the creative act of Wisdom.

The Fool never leaves this abstract realm, so he never falls or fails, even though the bottomless gulf of creation opens before him. Wherever he goes, the ground rises to meet his feet. His steps create the universe as he walks.

This path is the experience of the journey from the brilliance of the Crown to the radiance of Wisdom.

Intelligence: Scintillating — The first and highest, purest and most abstract aspect of life to enter the process of Manifestation. It is the the sparkle that becomes everything.

Direction on the Cube of Space: Above to Below — Each Hebrew letter which is associated with an element is also associated with one of the three physical dimensions.

Esoteric Title: Spirit of Aether

Imagery:

The yellow background is the Golden Dawn attribution for the Element of Air, the Element assigned to the Fool. The Fool's blouse, hair and the feather in his cap are windblown, referring to the Element of Air.

The white sun with 14 rays is a reference to the position of the Fool on the Tree of Life. The white sun corresponds to #1 (Crown). The path of the Fool is Path #11, which connects Crown to #2, Wisdom. $11+2+1=14$, the number of rays emanating from the sun.

The cliff is made of layers of shale, ranging in color from yellow through red to brown, signifying the many levels of descent from the light of consciousness to concrete manifestation.

The dog is white, which, in tarot, is the color of spirit. Some say it is in the shape of the Hebrew letter Aleph, the letter of the Fool. It represents the protective companionship of the divine spirit.

The staff and white mountains represent the spirit's journey into flesh; the energy of Fire and Water as wood and ice.

Tunic colors: white, red & black are symbols for the alchemical elements of Mercury, Sulphur and Salt, respectively, from which the entire universe is said to be made.

The ten circles emblazoned on the Fool's tunic suggest the ten sephiroth, or numbers, of the Tree of Life, each containing the red eight-spoked wheel that is a Golden Dawn symbol for spirit.

The headdress is a wreath of green leaves plaited in the form of successive lemniscates, symbol of the infinite, living, eternally creative Divine mind.

The red feather is a plume of the hidden fire of Ain Soph Aur, the realm of fiery darkness.

The bag contains everything needed for an endless journey.

The belt at the Fool's waist is made of the seven planets of ancient astrology which correspond to the seven metals of alchemy.

The white rose is a symbol of purified and elevated sexual energy before gender differentiation. The use of the masculine pronoun when referring to The Fool is strictly for convenience.

The Fool's yellow boots and tights show that his feet are guided by divine consciousness so that he need not look down.

Transcendent Interpretation:

The Spirit of God becomes the Fool and descends joyously into His creation. He is, was and will always be the only Actor in the drama He both creates and enacts. If you understand who He is, then you will know who *you* are and you will find sublime peace within.

If you understand Her game, you will realize that you and I do not exist; you will realize that only She exists. Then you will understand that you and I are the same one, that we are not two. The moment this realization takes place you will be fearless and filled with joy, knowing that nothing can be added to you and nothing can be taken from you.

Because we do not have this understanding, the Fool must make his journey and we must dance the fathomless dance of our individual lives.

Once again, we see layer upon layer, meaning upon meaning, maybe more than any sensible person would need. A reasonable question at this point might well be, “What can I do with all that stuff?”

Do this:

Take the six cards you have worked with so far, the Ace through 5 of Swords and The Fool, and shuffle them face down. Using any method of your choice, pick *one* of the cards and turn it over.

Once again, review what you have read about this card. Now let your eyes wander over the image *without paying attention to formal meanings of any kind*. Some detail in the image (e.g. an article of clothing, a creature or an element of design) will eventually catch your attention and hold it.

Take your time. Perhaps more than one thing will pop out at you. But eventually, one detail will hold your attention. That detail will have a message for you. Listen for it. Then write it down.

If you have never done a reading before, this will be your very first one. It is the simplest and yet one of the most difficult of all readings to do.

The next step is to place the six cards you have been working with back in the deck, shuffle the deck thoroughly, and then, after waiting for 24 hours (*it is necessary to wait a full day*), pick a card at random from the full deck and repeat the process of the first reading. Even if you know nothing about the card you have drawn, the details of the image carry meaningful information which you can obtain by using this purely intuitive method.

If you have never done a reading before, you have learned your first spread. We call it *The Voice in the Card*. If you are an old-timer, you will find this spread an inexhaustible mine of information and insight. In either case, congratulations!

Bright blessings,

Ruth Ann & Wald