

# Tarot-Overview of the Fool's Journey through the Major Arcana

## What were the origins of the Tarot

Their exact origin is unknown although there are several possibilities:

(i) China: where playing cards were definitely used before 11 AD.

(ii) India: the 4 suits of the minor arcana representing the 4 castes of Hinduism.

The cups (filled with knowledge) represent the priests or Brahmins, the swords to the warriors, the coins to the merchants & the wands to the serfs.

The Major Arcana has possible Buddhist links where the fool represents the wandering monk whose path of enlightenment parallels the path taken by the Fool through the remaining 21 cards.

(iii) Egypt: The priests preserved the doctrines & secrets in the cards to protect them from the uninitiated. The cards may then have been brought to Europe from the Gypsies.

The Tarot is the equivalent of the Egyptian Book of Thoth. In Egyptian temples the seeker would stand in a room with pictorial images on the walls.

Consultation with the Gods would take place by throwing a loose bundle of rods at random. The rods would fall with varying emphasis towards different pictures of which the priest would interpret.

(iv) Rosicrucian: In the 19th Century a man named Levi stressed the link between the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet & the 22 cards of the Major Arcana. The letters then connected with the 22 paths of the Quabalistic Tree of Life, which illustrates how the world came into being through the 10 divine emanations or spheres (corresponding to the Minor Arcana, Ace to Ten).

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## The Fool

The Fool is the only card of the Major Arcana to exist in the modern playing deck where he is represented by the joker. He is unnumbered & represents all or nothing. He is about to enter the supreme adventure - passing through the gates of experience to achieve divine wisdom. He must therefore pass through the experiences of the other 21 cards.

His multi-coloured clothing represents the muddled desires & impulses within him. The preface symbolises the Fool's ignorance of the trials & pitfalls that await him, yet he is prepared to abandon his old ways & take a leap into the unknown. The bundle he carries represents his past experiences of which he has no immediate need, whilst the high mountain peaks indicate the difficult terrain or lessons that lie ahead of him. The greener valleys show easier times to bestow him on completion of his tasks.

## The Magician

The Magician is the first person that the Fool encounters. He wears white symbolising inner purity & his red robe symbolises purposeful activity (1st Ray). He draws power from above bringing it into manifestation (through the left hand). The 4 suits represents the 4 elements; Wands=fire, Cups=water, Swords=Air, & Pentacles=Earth. He reveals to the Fool potentials & possibilities & lays before him a map of personality in terms of the 4 elements. He acts as the Fool's initiator, & will accompany him unseen along his way (cf. to a spiritual master).

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## The Emperor

The Emperor represents the Fool's earthly father. His armour under his cloak symbolises inner strength, jewels = material wealth & status. The Emperor's task is to teach the Fool the material side of life & to provide guidelines on moral & ethical behaviour. He is seated against a background of stark bare mountains representing the stability of regulation & unyielding power.

The Emperor & Empress therefore represent 2 parents for the Fool & together they show that a balance is needed for his growth. This concept of balance is one that the Fool continually encounters on his journey through the cards.

## The Hierophant

This is the Fool's spiritual father. The pillars representing the duality & balance that needs to be struck between opposites. He holds 2 fingers upwards & 2 curled in the palm of his hand. This symbolises spirit & matter, Gods & men, & the Hierophant acts as the link between the two.

He represents the urge to find spiritual meaning in life & is the energy behind the desire. His teachings are more clear & direct than the High Priestess, whose teachings are more concealed.

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## The Lovers

Love is one of the first trials of youth. Behind the male lies the tree of life, bearing 12 fruits representing the 12 signs of the zodiac, which the fool must pass through (cf. Hercules). Behind the female is the tree of knowledge bearing 5 fruits symbolising the 5 senses. The mountain is half way between the two, which means that each partner has equal distance to travel to obtain harmony with the other. The card teaches that love is not a simple matter of physical attraction, but is also the union of mental (male), emotional<sup>+ intuitive</sup> (female) & spiritual (represented by the angel) levels.

## The Chariot

The white sphynx symbolises mercy whilst the black sphynx symbolises severity. They both pull in different directions & it is the job of the Fool (Charioteer) to keep them under control. From this card the Fool must learn how to steer a middle course through the battleground of his opposing feelings, thoughts & desires. Having experienced the complexities of love, this card brings forth the next trial of youth, namely conflict.

The first stage of the Fools journey is complete. He has received the benefits of his education with his teacher & parents; he has learned lessons in love & war & is now ready to learn the 4 moral lessons namely, Justice, Temperance, Strength & Prudence (The Hermit).

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### Strength

The Fool has gained experience in thought & feeling & he must now develop the capacity to control & use these qualities correctly. The lion symbolises instinctive desires which should be controlled (although not denied). The woman holds careful control over the lion indicating the overcoming of material powers.

### The Hermit

The Hermit symbolises the withdrawal of the Fool from the outside world & into the quiet inner one. He teaches the Fool solitude (one of man's greatest) fears. The hood restricts his vision thus shutting out mundane distractions. His staff symbolises the support he can gain from spiritual books & teachings to stop him straying from the path. The lantern does not light up the whole of his path because if the pilgrim was to see all of the road before him on his journey to enlightenment then his courage may fail when he saw all the difficulties which were to befall him. The snow-capped peaks indicate to the seeker that unity lies behind all duality.

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## The Wheel of Fortune

The Fool now reaches a turning point in his journey. He realises that there is more to life & to himself than the external world as was glimpsed with the Hermit. The corners of the card show the mystical animals of the Bible found in Ezekiel 1:10 & Revelation 4:7, corresponding to the fixed signs of the zodiac. The Bull=Taurus, Lion=Leo, Eagle=Scorpio, Man=Aquarius. They typify the unchanging reality in relation to the ever turning wheel ie the eternal remains the same whatever goes on inside it. Hermes, the Egyptian God holds the wheel & represents the evolution of consciousness from lower to higher. The serpent shows the cosmic energy flowing into form.

In summary, the card represents both stability & change, the external, changing world at the edge of the wheel, & the unchanging true consciousness of man at the hub. Fate moves the circumference of the wheel, the hub enables the rim to change. Taro at the 4 compass points indicates the natural & predestined law of life. Each man is responsible for his destiny & although circumstances are determined, man has ultimate control over how he deals with them.

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## Justice

This is analogous to the zodiac sign of Libra which symbolises balance. Justice teaches the Fool to discriminate, to make dispassionate evaluations & the impersonal decisions that the intellect is concentrated upon at this stage of his journey. It stands for clear thinking & a balanced mind.

## Temperance

The Fool has learned the value of a balanced mind & he must now complement this with a balanced heart. The road leading to the mountains represents the road for the Fool to follow, & the rising sun offers hope in the task of resolving opposites, represented by the twin peaks.

The angel pours the waters of the emotions from the golden cup (symbolising consciousness) into the silver cup (symbolising the unconscious), thus showing the need for a constant flow between the two; water which does not flow stagnates, as do feelings. In summary, Temperance offers to teach the Fool compassion & forgiveness, taking into account the feelings in situations rather than just factual circumstances. The feelings strive for a sense of calm & serenity, the equivalent of what the mind knows as Justice.

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### The Hanged Man

His face suggests enchantment rather than suffering. The card indicates a reversal of the mind than of the body, a reversal of ones thinking but a sacrifice is needed. The inverted triangle formed by his legs represents the descent of spirit into matter.

### Death

And now the Fool must die. Death rides over all regardless of rank or position. A young women turns her head & feels too young to die whilst the small child holds the posy in welcome. This symbolises that the child does not fear change as does the adult. The river of life flows towards death & is analogous to the river Jordan that the Christian soul must cross in order to reach the promised land. The dawn breaking between the 2 pillars symbolises the seed of life is contained within death ie there can be no new life without death. The Hanged Man demonstrates the Fools willingness to surrender his ideals whilst the Death card strips him bare of all his pretentions & lies him naked for his next lesson.



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## The Devil

The 1/2 cube signifies half knowledge ie that of the visible world. The inverted pentagram indicates that mans position in creation is inverted ie in materialism & not in spirit. The chains on the figures are loose showing that much of the Fools bondage is imaginary. The Devil also symbolises his repressed fears which, once removed, can release much positive energy. In this lesson the Fool learns to accept all aspects of his nature ie both the good & the bad.

## The Tower

This symbolises the final shattering of the Fools earthly illusions. The lightening flash represents the descent of spiritual truth shattering false beliefs contained within the walls of the tower. The crown symbolises the crown of materialistic life as it is thrust from power. The lightening path comes from the same source as that which is drawn from above by the magician & that which lights the Hermits lantern.

## The Star

The naked women represents truth unveiled & there is nothing to hide or fear. The 5 streams represent the 5 senses & the pool represents cosmic consciousness. She bridges the two. The 8 pointed star=cosmic energy, 7 pointed stars=solar energy. The Star offers the Fool optimism & hope along his difficult path, as well as inspiration. The bird symbolises the souls ability to rise above earthly consciousness.

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## The Moon

The moon teaches the Fool that there is still much to learn. The hard shell of the crayfish symbolises the innermost fears of the seeker coming to the surface. The pool represents the mindstuff out of which emerges physical manifestation. The shellfish<sup>also</sup> symbolises early conscious unfoldment. The wolf is nature's untamed creation whilst the dog represents the adaptation of life to man. The path ascends ever upward between the Quabalistic pillars. The moon symbolises the upward progress of man, shining light on his path. The drops of light showing spirit coming down into matter.

## The Sun

The Sun represents the Fool's newfound joy & optimism. The child symbolises the child like state that is needed for inner spiritual growth. The banner represents the clothes that have been worn in earlier cards, which have been cast off as their lessons have been learnt.

The wall represents the Fool's past life & experiences from which he rises. The sunflowers are symbolic of the 4 kingdoms of nature; plant, animal, vegetable & mineral which must all turn to man for their final development.

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### Judgement

This is the penultimate stage of the Fool's journey. The cross shows that the way to spiritual ascent is through the union of opposites, the crossing point representing their joining together. The naked figures show that they have thrown off their worldly garments in favour of spirituality. They have undergone a rebirth, they have died in order to save themselves & are now summoned to a new life. This card also marks the completion of the karmic cycle & it is at this stage that the Fool is assessed, with rewards or penalties issued. The angel blows the trumpet sounding the creative word which liberates man from his physical limitations. Thereby the figures overcome death.

### The World

This is the crown of the initiate, given to those which master the 4 guardians & enter the kingdom of God. The figure wears a veil hiding sexual gender, symbolising the transcendence of duality & the at onement with nature. This card implies the stage of cosmic consciousness, the final goal to which all of the other cards have lead.