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TAROT

A Modern Approach to Self-Compassion
& Empowered Healing Using the Tarot

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 **sounds true**
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1

In Review

THE HISTORY OF TAROT

Tarot wasn't always used for divination. In fact, it's not quite as ancient or magical of a tool as people might expect. Although we now use the cards as a resource to help aid our self-inquiry and get to know Spirit a bit better, in their original form, they were never intended to be used for healing or fortune-telling purposes at all. While they certainly have evolved to carry a stigma of mysticism and associations with witches and psychics, the history of tarot is much simpler: it originated in the north of Italy around the 1400s as a game¹ . . .

. . . and that's it. Tarot cards were not awe-inspiring, not ominous, they were just a game.

Their story and purpose have obviously grown more complex over time, but their first application was to provide entertainment to nobility. The game they would play using these cards was called *tarocchi*.² Right around the same time that illuminated manuscripts were in vogue, wealthy Italian families would commission beautifully illustrated, often gilded, decks from notable local artists. These decks were called *carte da trionfi*, which is loosely translated as "triumph cards."³ (We'll talk more

about this in the next chapter, but the cards in the Major Arcana are sometimes called “Trump Cards” in reference to this.)

What we now know as the fourteen-card Minor Arcana suits was a collection of “pip cards,” which consisted of ten numbered cards and anywhere between three and six male court cards.⁴ The suits we have now very much echo the ones from back then, although the Pentacles suit was sometimes referred to as the Coins or Disks suit, and the Suit of Wands was sometimes known as the Suit of Batons, Sticks, Staves, or Rods.⁵

Just like our modern decks, the images on the cards represented themes we encounter along our journeys. They are reflective of what we experience in our day-to-day lives, showing triumphs and tribulations common in every community. Visual representation of elements from Jewish, Egyptian, and Christian ideologies, as well as astrology, are prominent throughout the imagery.⁶ Everything from the Torah in The High Priestess card to the twelve stars, representing the zodiac, on The Empress’s crown indicates how many creeds have influenced our modern decks. Although the numbers of some cards are switched in certain decks (Justice and Strength), and others have characters like Popes and Knaves and Lust, their purpose is the same: to reflect the human experience.⁷

Eventually, the variety of themes represented in the cards birthed another game called *tarocchi appropriati*. Players—those noble Italians I mentioned before—would write poems about one another inspired by the themes the cards represented.⁸ I adore this because it’s essentially a version of the channeled writing I’ll ask you to do later in this book. The game was a primitive form of reading for one another.

But it wasn’t until a few hundred years later, around 1800, that *tarocchi* emerged in France as *tarot* as we know it today.⁹ In 1909, British mystic Arthur Edward Waite published a deck with the Rider Company. It was illustrated by Pamela Colman Smith, a female artist from London who identified as an occultist. Pamela was an acquaintance of Waite, as they were both members of the same secret society.¹⁰ Before her interpretations, the Minor Arcana was represented more simply, with one coin on the Ace of Pentacles, two coins on the Two of Pentacles, and so on.

Smith was the first to illustrate the full story of the Minor Arcana with rich colors and expressive characters, and she marked each card with her serpentine signature.¹¹ She modernized the deck, to tell the full story. This version, and its art, remains the most produced and commonly referenced tarot deck to date.¹²

I believe Smith had a natural ability to give these cards such personality and depth. I like to think she channeled this art. The frustrating part is, for a long time she was never given proper credit for her passionate work. There was a time when her name wasn't mentioned in the deck title at all, despite the fact that tarot is a visual practice and one would assume the artist would be praised.¹³ She changed the system altogether, so you'll read Rider-Waite-Smith instead of just Rider-Waite throughout this book in my descriptions and references of this deck. I encourage you to channel your inner Smith and study your cards with a keen eye. You never know what you might find hidden in her illustrations that resonates with you.

So why is this history important to know as you move forward? First, to honor a practice that has evolved and transformed greatly over time, much like you. Second, I hope this understanding of their history helps to demystify them a bit, and leads you to have a healthier relationship with them. I've noticed over my years of reading that people can become reliant on the cards, turning to them in moments of crisis (I'll talk more about what I call "panic pulling" later). They expect their decks to offer solutions to important questions or act as erasers for past difficulties. However, that was never their original intent, and the goal of this book is to appreciate their stories as they mirror your personal experiences.

Whenever you start to feel anxious about a "negative" card showing up in a reading, I hope you're able to offer yourself a reframe. Whatever the cards are bringing you is not law. In fact, the cards are just cards; it's our relationship with them that's sacred, not the pieces of paper themselves. (In fact, I am so unattached to my decks that I actually enjoy burning an occasional card and take pride when one slips out of its deck to be lost in the ether.) The cards are not telling us anything specific; they are merely a vessel through which Spirit can send us messages.

Every reader will have different ways of interpreting them, and at the end of the day, you have free will. *Use it!*

Myth Busting

Once I clear the air after my psychic abilities and relationship with the cards are called into question, people often ask me about how they can establish their own relationship with their deck. I recognize that even though I've become incredibly comfortable with them, and reading is now second nature to me, for someone who is new to this it can feel like opening Pandora's box.

Tarot faces its fair share of stigmas, and any questions you might have about the practice are warranted. When you begin reading cards, you enter uncharted territory. Just like The Fool, an exciting journey awaits you. The fewer expectations or stereotypes you carry into the practice, the more you can choose your own adventure. Go ahead and ask your questions, but do your due diligence first! There are quite a few myths about tarot I've had to debunk along the way, and I'll encourage you to stay just as open-minded and let yourself learn new truths about these cards.

Do the cards hold a “magic” I should fear?

Depending on your experience and history with spirituality, religion, and intuition, tarot might feel like some sort of malevolent “magic.” Society has labeled a lot of feminine practices as wrong, but I promise you that you're not sinning or communing with the devil if you pull tarot cards. In fact, it's quite the opposite. The more you work with them as a healing modality, the more light they hold! Tarot is a powerful practice. If you approach it with love, it will love you right back.

Do I need to be psychic to read tarot?

No. But tarot is one of the best entry points into psychic exploration, if you want it to be. More than anything, it's a way to prompt discussion with yourself. The card themes are so authentic, profound, and challenging that inevitably we access parts of ourselves that are less logical

and more raw when we start pulling. Your intuition can naturally start to come into play without you even knowing because you're having a different inner dialogue, taking yourself out of autopilot to tap into something more sacred.

Will tarot tell me my future?

Like most things in life, the answer is both yes and no. Tarot is all about reading the energy of the present. We can see an energetic forecast in the cards we pull based on what's happening in real time and what we're asking of them. Then, we can make actionable changes, utilize our free will, and intervene with purpose to realign and match ourselves with different destinies.

If you feel in touch with your witchy side, and divination is something you feel intrigued by and consider safe to explore, then please go for it; there is a fortune-telling side of tarot available. But don't feel like you have to predict anything with these cards if it feels forced or unnatural to channel. Know that you can just pull for practice and reflection. Tarot can always stay in the present for you.

Do I need to be gifted my first tarot deck?

No. This is merely a superstition. I do think it's beautiful when anyone gives you a meaningful gift that's meant to be so personal (beats another candle or bottle of wine, right?). However, my favorite decks are the ones I bought myself whenever I felt drawn to them. This practice is meant to be empowering, so if you feel an urge to buy a deck, listen to the call!

Are there good cards and bad cards?

There are cards that are easier to sit with, ones we want to relish in longer, and cards we want to heal ourselves out of immediately. It's just like life! All the experiences we'll ever have are neutral; we're the ones who assign them emotions and choose how we respond to them. It's normal for us to want to lean toward situations or pull away from others.

There is neutrality, shadow, and light in every card. Difficult cards, like The Tower or The Devil, have their silver linings. Cards we view

more positively, like The Sun and Strength, can be taken to the extreme. Living in binary is not fun, and I challenge you to resist the urge to label any of these cards on one end of the spectrum or the other. We don't typically pick up an intuitive practice to live by even more rules, regulations, and expectations, so why bring that stuffiness and formality to the beauty of our connection with tarot? I believe there is no need for such labels in spiritual work.

Does tarot have to be an independent practice?

I recommend prioritizing your private conversations with your tarot deck. It can be a beautiful experience to allow the cards to serve as a conduit between you and Spirit. But humans, particularly women, have gathered together for generations, and there's something special about using this tool as a team as well.

We are community-based beings. We thrive in our ability to share and tell stories together. My healing wouldn't have been possible without my community. This book will help us all recall the fact that tarot used to be a social practice.¹⁴ I've tried my best to detail how you can share the lessons of the cards with others and experience a deeper connection to them yourself. Talk about your learnings and freely share your experience with those you love and those who are curious but hesitant to begin. If you're proud, introduce them to your cards and share your new knowledge!

2

In Parts

THE STRUCTURE OF THE DECK

There is a clear and thoughtful system in tarot, so let's differentiate and define each piece of this tool in parts. By understanding the basic structure of the deck and its system, we can ground ourselves as readers and see how they are not randomly placed, but instead outline a cohesive story. We will first meet our protagonist (The Fool) numbered at zero and follow and transform alongside them for the remaining seventy-seven cards. With so much nuance and detail in each of these individual themes, the outline and structure that tarot follows naturally helps us, as readers, compartmentalize where we can focus our attention and what we might expect along the way.

There are seventy-eight cards (and no fewer).

A traditional tarot deck consists of seventy-eight cards, and no fewer. All seventy-eight cards have been placed intentionally into an organized system to tell a story that builds upon itself in meaning and complexity. I am a firm believer that a standard deck must be seventy-eight cards to pay respect to the traditional meanings and the practice

of reading tarot. There are adaptations with additional cards that have been added by various artists and authors, which is a fun way to show creative liberty and add some supporting themes, but the majority of the decks you will come across hold exactly seventy-eight meanings across the Major Arcana and Minor Arcana.

You might discover a deck you resonate with that has fewer than seventy-eight cards. These decks will likely be oracle cards, affirmation cards, or angel cards, and while they can absolutely be powerful healing tools and inspiring to work with, they shouldn't be compared to traditional tarot decks.

The Major Arcana

The Major Arcana consists of twenty-two cards, starting with The Fool (at 0, or unnumbered) and ending with The World (21). These cards represent the soul's experience and our spiritual growth. They are more archetypal and thematic than the Minor Arcana because they represent the larger universal energy (and adversity) we face throughout our lives. The Major Arcana cards, sometimes referred to as Trump cards, are memorable because they represent powerful chapters in our lives. They bring us messages and indicate periods of change, death, rebirth, and union.

I affectionately label these cards the “heavy hitters” of the tarot deck because their themes are dense in symbolism and intention. The Major Arcana holds monumental weight over our healing experiences, so when you're reading cards from this section of the deck, give them special attention and consider them as anchors to your reading. They are sharing the key lessons and most prominent energy that you have access to at the time you're pulling cards.

The Minor Arcana

The Minor Arcana consists of fifty-six cards across four suits, similar to a deck of playing cards. Each suit carries ten numbered cards (Ace through Ten) plus four court cards.

The Minor Arcana is the larger portion of the deck and represents our day-to-day lifestyle, tasks, relationships, and experiences. It feels more

familiar and perhaps redundant because these are energies we work with frequently, or repeatedly, throughout our life cycle. Diverse in energy, the Minor Arcana offers insight and direction on how to act on, respond to, and integrate the lessons and spiritual growth of the Major Arcana.

Pentacles/Earth: The Pentacles suit relates to anything in the material world. This includes our physical body and health, our home, our finances, and our career. Earth is the element associated with this suit and cycle. It is practical, hardworking, loyal, and patient.

Cups/Water: The Cups suit follows our emotional realm. It relates to our many emotions, all types of relationships, and our subconscious mind. Water is the associated element, which relates to healing, vulnerability, and sensitivity. These cards can also emphasize our intuitive connection and empathy.

Swords/Air: The Swords suit rules our intellect and mind. It connects our thoughts, our communication (verbal and nonverbal), our intelligence, and our logic. Air is the associated element, which makes this energy adaptable, quick-moving, and curious. These cards can also relate to our personal truth, authenticity, and integrity, as they value justice, fairness, and honesty.

Wands/Fire: The Wands suit is connected to our personal power, our passions, and our confidence. It investigates our relationship with and awareness of our purpose, our creative vision, and our primal instincts. Associated with the fire element, it's intense and transformative. This element taps us into our ego and reacts to conflict or inspiration quickly. The Wands suit is the change-making area of the deck, full of magic and individuality.

Court Cards

The court cards make up the final four cards in each Minor Arcana suit. Across the four suits, these court cards create sixteen personality types

and mini “families” within the Tarot. Each court consists of a king, a queen, a knight, and a page.

Court Card Representations

Ourselves: Especially when you’re pulling cards for yourself, court cards are likely referencing some area of your personality that you should lean into, appreciate, and depend on more to overcome whatever conflict or challenges are present. Alternatively, the tarot could be illuminating a space in your personality that could be released or matured, a space for you to evolve.

Some questions you can ask yourself after you pull a court card:

- Does this court card personality sound like how my friends and family would describe me?
- What gifts does this personality have that I also see in myself?
- Does this card reflect a part of my personality I’m proud of?
- Am I sharing these parts of myself confidently?

Other people: Sometimes court cards represent your partner, best friend, toxic co-worker, mother, or sibling. Use your intuitive knowing here and go with your gut! Sometimes you’ll feel confident that the personality represents someone else in your life. The deck could be showing a person you can count on to help you, a relationship dynamic that needs a boundary, or a past lover who is still taking up space in your energetic awareness and needs to be released through more healing. Notice the gifts and strengths as well as the shadows of these personalities. How are their traits matching and supporting you, and how are they hindering your self-connection and balance?

Events and/or news: Although we are typically reading these cards as characters in our story, occasionally they will arrive