

HOW TO LEARN AND MASTER THE TAROT
John Gilbert, CTGM



800-372-1524

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PART ONE

HOW TO SELECT THE RIGHT DECK FOR YOU

Selecting the right deck for you has everything to do with why you want to own a tarot deck in the first place and your own personal preferences. It has nothing to do with what other people think is the best deck for you. It may have something to do with your religion if they proscribe a deck for their teachings. It has nothing to do with what your teacher, parent, mentor, friends or spouse tell you is the best tarot deck for you.

Tarot decks have seventy-eight cards. No more. No less. These seventy-eight cards are divided into four suits of fourteen cards each and twenty-two trumps. In traditional tarot decks these four suits consist of the ace through ten plus four court cards. These four suits represent the four elements. The elements are Earth, Water, Air and Fire. The twenty-two trumps represent the fifth element Spirit.

In the traditional tarot deck, the element of Earth is represented by the suit of Pentacles, Coins, Stones, Discs, Circles or some other solid object representing money or material things. The element of Water is usually represented by Cups, Chalice or Caldrons though a river, lake or stream or any type of container may also be used. The Air element is usually represented by swords or another cutting implement like daggers, spears, knives, arrows, or some item associated with air like birds or feathers. Fire is usually represented by Wands, Batons, Staves, Rods, Sticks, Bows or some other blunt weapon or hand-held item.

In non-traditional tarot decks many of these same implements may represent the same or other elements. Or the artist may use entirely different implements. The implement usually represents the element and by looking at the cards you should be able to tell what element is being depicted.

In traditional decks the court cards are the Page, Knight, Queen and King. Pages can be princesses, ladies in waiting, or young girls. They are normally feminine and young. Knights can be Princes, Warriors or young men. They are generally masculine and young. Queens are mature and feminine. Kings are mature and masculine. Both can go by many different titles.

But these are just guidelines and you shouldn't be swayed into making any decision about any tarot deck you want to use on the basis of these guidelines. Don't let the titles of the cards make any difference to you. If there are seventy-eight cards in the deck divided into four suits of fourteen cards each and twenty-two trumps, you can always figure out what card relates to whatever any author is saying.

If there are less than seventy-eight cards in the deck you're thinking about using, you have a problem. One that can't be solved unless you add more cards to the deck. For example, a standard poker deck contains four suits of thirteen cards and two jokers (trumps). By combining two such decks you can make a tarot deck. Here's how:

Use the Aces through Kings of one of the decks. Clubs are Wands. Spades are Swords. Hearts are Cups and Diamonds are Pentacles. Rename the Jacks to Pages or just change the "J" to a fancy-looking "P". Use one Joker for The Fool. Add the Jacks from the second deck but change their name to Knights or change the "J" to a fancy-looking "K". Choose twenty-one cards from the second deck to be numbered I through XXI for the trumps. Seventy-eight cards in all, divided into four suits of fourteen cards each plus twenty-two trumps. That's a tarot deck.

If there are more than seventy-eight cards in the deck you're thinking about using, all you have to do is eliminate the extra cards and you have a tarot deck. You might even exchange cards occasionally by taking certain cards out and replacing them with others.

Some traditional tarot decks are filled with meaningful symbols and you can spend a lot of time learning all about each and every symbol. You start with a basic understanding of each card and add more meaning and deeper knowledge over time. Non-traditional decks may be very beautiful decks or they may be very symbolic.

Here's the First Secret about the tarot: It doesn't matter what suits the deck contains or the names of the cards in the deck. The only thing that matters is if you like the deck.

Let's say you find a modern war deck and the suits are Tanks, Guns, Grenades and Trucks. Just decide which suit you want to represent which element. Let's say the court cards are Generals, Captains, Sergeants and Privates. Just decide which court card you want to stand for each of Pages, Knights, Queens and Kings. Then figure out which other card represents each trump and you have a tarot deck.

Usually it works to assign the immature female court cards to Pages and the mature feminine court cards to Queens. Likewise, it works to assign the immature masculine court cards to Knights and the mature masculine court cards to Kings.

Maybe you decided Tanks are Cups, Trucks are Pentacles, Grenades are Wands and Guns are Swords. Maybe you did it differently. It doesn't matter how you assign the suits to the elements just as long as you have four suits and four elements and it makes sense to you. It doesn't matter what names you give the cards as long as you remember them and they make sense to you.

The First Secret of the tarot says the only thing that matters is if you like the deck. It doesn't matter who likes or dislikes your deck as long as you like it. If you like the deck that's all that matters.

Look at lots of decks. Forget about those you don't like for whatever reason. It doesn't matter why you don't like any particular deck. It doesn't matter why you like some decks. If you like it, you like it and that's all there is to it. Nobody really cares what decks you like or don't like. Nobody that is, except you. If you don't like a particular deck, find another deck.

Feel lots of decks. Forget about those that don't feel good to you for whatever reason. If a deck is too big, too small, too thick, too thin, or it just doesn't feel right, forget about it and investigate another deck. If you like it, buy it; if you don't, don't.

You don't care if every expert in the world recommends a particular deck or not. What matters to you is whether you like the deck or not. What matters to you is if the deck feels right to you or not. What matters to you is if you feel comfortable with the deck or not. What matters to you is if the deck speaks to you or not.

Forget everything else. Choose a tarot deck you like.

PART TWO

HOW TO TREAT YOUR TAROT DECK

Let's look at how several different tarot readers treat their decks. The names have been changed to protect the innocent and the guilty. The situations may have been exaggerated for emphasis.

RITUAL RITA. Ritual Rita has a ritual for everything. She has a daily ritual for every aspect of her life. Getting up is a ritual. So is going to bed. Cooking and eating is a ritual. So is tarot.

Rita keeps her cards wrapped in red silk and hidden in an ornate wooden box on her altar. There are four candles on her altar - red, yellow, green and blue. There's a crystal beside each candle and a magical symbol: pentagram for green, dagger for yellow, wand for red and cup for blue. Everything has its proper place.

When Rita prepares to do a tarot reading she cleanses herself with water, fire, wind and salt. She cleanses her altar and the room, the cards and the silk cloth. She banishes negativity wherever it may be, and invokes the Lord and Lady to help her with her task. She uses one implement after another from her altar, each for its own specific purpose.

Rita takes up the deck, spreads her red silk cloth and places the deck on it. All is in readiness and her ritual continues. She sits and breathes deeply in silent meditation. She takes up the cards and mixes them well. She asks the client to voice a question and she continues silently mixing her deck and pulling cards and placing them on the red silk. When she's pulled the proscribed number of cards, she lays the deck aside and takes up the first card.

She moves the card in a blessing around the table and replaces it and resumes her silent meditation. Finally she speaks and explains the meaning of the card. Similarly she works her way through the rest of the cards she's pulled until she completes the reading. Then she picks up the cards one by one, blesses them and cleanses them and replaces them in the deck which she wraps in the red silk cloth and places the whole in the box on her altar.

Rita concludes the reading and the ritual by blessing the cards, the participants, the implements, the elements, the room and thanks the Lord and Lady for their help. At no time during the reading did anybody except Rita touch her tarot cards. She admonishes everyone not to touch her cards because that would destroy their spiritual purpose.

CLAUDE THE CLOD. Claude keeps his cards on the table, the bed, the floor, wherever he or they might be. He no longer has the box they came in and thinks he threw it away. Most of the time he throws them into his dresser drawer along with his socks and stuff.

Claude's pretty sure all the cards are there and counts them every once in awhile just to make sure. If one or more card's missing, the search is on. He admits to owning three or four "short" decks missing a card or more. But he uses them sometimes anyway. Claude considers the missing cards as unnecessary for that particular reading.

When Claude agrees to do a reading for somebody he first finds his cards and makes pretty sure at least most of them are present. He hands the deck to his client and asks him or her to mix the cards up real well and think of a question. When he thinks everyone's ready, Claude asks the client to divide the deck into three, four or five piles and turn over the top card in each pile. Claude may pick up the piles and move them or he may ask the client to do that or he may just leave them where they are.

Claude reads each card in turn from left to right and asks the client to turn over additional cards whenever he feels the need for further clarification. Throughout the reading, Claude and his client may enjoy a snack of pizza and beer or whatever's handy. Anything that gets on the cards is purely unintentional and may or may not get removed. When he's done, Claude picks up the cards and places them on a table, bookcase, speaker or anyplace handy. The conversation turns to other things.

Rita and Claude are both excellent tarot readers but they approach things entirely differently. Nobody but nobody touches Rita's tarot deck. Anybody including the dog can touch, smell, taste, feel or chew on Claude's cards. Rita treats her cards reverently and keeps them in a special place reserved just for them. Not Claude. His cards are a lot like his dog - bent ears and sometimes slobbery, sometimes smelly and often in need of cleansing or grooming.

Here's the Second Secret about the Tarot: How you treat your cards is entirely up to you and nobody else but you. You can wrap them in silk, cotton, wool, plastic or air. You can store them in cardboard or wooden boxes, cloth bags, dresser drawers or wherever you want to keep them. You can bless or cleanse them with water, salt, air, smoke, or fire. You can treat them as a prized possession or just another object. You can reserve them for yourself or let other people handle them in any way you want. The choices are yours.

In my experience it really doesn't matter how you treat your cards just as long as you're satisfied with the way you treat them. It's probably a mistake to have a whole bunch of rituals around your cards you don't enjoy doing. It's probably also a mistake to treat your cards roughly if you don't want to do that either. But there's nothing wrong in treating them like tools of the trade because that's what they are. Tarot cards are tools for you to use for whatever purposes you decide.

FRIENDLY FRAN. Everybody is Fran's friend. So is everything. She never met a dog, cat, snake, spider or person she didn't like. She loves her tarot decks and treats them like the friends they really are. Fran doesn't have any special rituals and she doesn't have any specific religion. But she approaches everything in her life as an extension of her own spirituality. She treats everything and everyone just exactly as she would like to be treated.

You can touch her cards as long as you do it nicely. She touches her cards reverently and thanks them for the messages they bring. She treats them as friends and she expects you to do the same. She treats herself as a friend and you the same way.

It really doesn't matter how you treat your cards. You can cut them, burn them, soak them, tarnish them or bleach them and they'll still try to do the job for you. You can throw them around and abuse them and they'll never complain. But maybe, just maybe, the way you treat your cards is a reflection of the way you treat yourself and others. Maybe, just maybe, you can improve the way you treat yourself and others by improving the way you treat all things including your tarot cards.

What matters is that you treat your cards the way you want to treat them. If you want to mimic Claude the Clod, then by all means do so. Don't do it that way because somebody else told you to do it that way, but do it that way because that's your conscious choice. If you want to imitate Ritual Rita, do so. Many really good tarot readers use the ritualistic approach to handling their tarot talent and cards.

So make a decision as to how you're going to treat your tarot cards and do it. Don't do it my way or anybody else's way. Do it your way. If later you change your mind, that's fine just as long as you make that decision for yourself.

PART THREE

HOW TO SELECT THE RIGHT TAROT BOOK FOR YOU

Most of the time when you decide what tarot deck you want to use for yourself that decision also includes a book or at least a booklet about that particular deck. At least that'll get you started. But even then you'll probably want to find another book about how to read the tarot cards.

There's something you need to know about books in general and tarot books specifically. All books express the opinion of the author and no author has all the answers. Specifically, no author knows what's the best way for you to learn how to read tarot cards. In fact, nobody knows that except you. You're the only person who'll ever know what's best for you in all things and that includes how you learn to read tarot cards.

Authors write about things they know and they explain things in the way they understand them. They tell you their opinions based on who and what they are. Everything they say is biased by their own thoughts, their concerns, their way of seeing and understanding life, their way of seeing and understanding tarot cards. Authors tell you how they did it, how they see it, how it makes sense to them.

You probably see things a little differently. You're a different person, you grew up differently in different circumstances. You learned about life and yourself differently. The way the author did it may not be the best way for you to do it. Things that make a lot of sense to the author may baffle you. Things you know and understand may confuse and bemuse the author. We're all different. We see life differently, we learn differently, we communicate differently, we feel things differently and we understand things differently.

The tarot book that tells you everything you need to know about tarot has yet to be written and will probably never be written unless you write it for yourself. But that doesn't mean you can't learn anything from books, because you can. You can learn a lot from books if you approach them with the idea that this is one author's opinion. It doesn't even need to be a book. It can be a booklet. This booklet is just one man's opinion. It may be based on half a century of reading tarot cards but it's still just my opinion. Please keep this in mind.

Tarot books are like maps drawn by people living in total darkness. The person who drew the map can probably figure it out a whole lot better than anybody else. The rest of us have to work at it to discover the truths the author discovered. We may find the drawing inaccurate but still arrive at our destination. We may follow an entirely different path. Or we may find part of the map useful while the rest of it is not.

If you approach this booklet, and every book you read, in this manner, you'll learn a great deal about yourself and maybe a little bit about the topic at hand. That's my suggestion to you, to approach every book as one person's opinion. Question everything the author says and find your own truth within yourself and your own life's experiences. Do not try to mimic the author or try to relive the author's life. Be yourself and live your life.

The best tarot book for you to read next is the book you want to read. This book probably uses the same cards you've decided to use. The author may have a different approach you'd like to learn more about. The pictures may appeal to you. Perhaps you read a few lines and were impressed. Whatever the reason, the best tarot book for you to read next is the one you want to read. If you don't have any particular book in mind, find one. Look through a number of tarot books. Read a few lines here and there about specific things that interest you. If you like what the author says, read the book. If you aren't impressed or if you don't like what the author says, let somebody else read it. You don't have time to read everything so read only those things you really want to read.

If you can't find any book about the tarot deck you've chosen, it doesn't matter. At least for now it doesn't matter. You can take anything any author says about any card and fit it into your own system. You don't have to adopt their whole system. Take what you like and forget the rest. Write down the good things in your journal so you can refer to them again and again.

Yes, write it down in your journal.

Educators tell us we learn more easily when we read things than when we hear them. But we learn even better when we write it down. There's a bonus to writing things down - we remember things easier when we write them down and refer to our notes from time to time. So if you really want to learn how to read the tarot, write down the important things and review these notes on a regular basis.

So how do you select the right book for you? You choose the book you want to read next. You choose the best book of all the books you look at. Then you write some notes in your journal while you're reading that book. That's how you choose the best tarot book for you.

PART FOUR

HOW TO DETERMINE THE BEST APPROACH FOR YOU

There are several different ways of learning and using tarot cards. You can use tarot cards for spiritual growth through meditating on the cards and their symbols or divining for yourself. You can use them for rituals designed to help you improve yourself or to help others when they ask for your help. You can use them for divination to assist yourself and others.

If you want to use tarot cards to advance your spiritual growth through meditation the first thing you need to learn is how to meditate. There are several good books on the subject and teachers can usually be found most anywhere in the country even in rural America. Once you know how to meditate you need to decide how to use the tarot cards in your meditation. The most common method is to visualize yourself entering the card itself, seeing and talking to the things in the card. Write notes as you progress into your meditation for review later.

Another method of meditating with a tarot card is visualize yourself becoming the main figure in the card or the card itself. You can turn this into a meditative drama or dance. You could write a poem or short story. Or you could write a description of how you did it so others might follow your lead.

In rituals, tarot cards can be used to evoke energies or bring these energies into you. The cards can be used as implements during the ritual or prepared as implements to store energy for future use. The cards can be turned into amulets or charms to assist you or another. They can also be used for magick. But, please remember the magician's warning: "White Magick helps both the magician and the object of the magick while Black Magick harms mostly the magician."

The most common use for tarot cards is divination, using the cards to discover more about our selves and to help our clients. The diviner may choose from many different approaches to using the cards. In "Introduction to Tarot" a correspondence course offered by the American Tarot Association, the student is exposed to five basic approaches and asked to choose a system or combination of systems that appeals to the student.

The Esoteric System is best described as reading lots of books, talking with lots of tarot readers and writing down lots of meanings for each and every card. The student then takes the cards one at a time and selects the best key word, phrase or concept for each card for him or her. This system works best for people who are good at matching words, phrases or concepts to the pictures in the tarot cards of the chosen deck. It also works well for those gifted people who memorize things easily.

The Mystical System is simpler to explain but more difficult to pin down. It's based on the principle we're all here to help each other walk a spiritual path for our mutual growth and development. The cards in the Major Arcana describe our spiritual journey and we use that as the basis for defining all the cards in the deck.

Here's the Third Secret about the Tarot: It doesn't matter what key words, phrases or concepts you assign to each card as long as you remember which key words, phrases or concepts go with each card. That's right. There's no perfect interpretation for each and every tarot card. Different authors see the cards differently. So can you. If you need validation for this, you have my permission to do it your way.

What you see in the card and how that affects you is different than exactly what any other person sees in the same card and how it affects them. Only by knowing your entire life's history could any person have even the slightest idea of how and what the cards mean to you. Only by feeling exactly the way you feel, thinking exactly the way you think, knowing exactly what you know, remembering exactly what you remember, seeing things exactly the way you see them, and hearing things exactly as you hear them could anybody even begin to understand any single tarot card the way you understand it.

That's the real beauty of tarot. Each of us develops our own system because of who and what we are and have been. We are unique and what we see in the cards is unique. We all have similarities and we all have differences. So we see some things in the cards that are similar to what another person may see. But we also see differences. So do they.

Here's my theory about how the tarot works: First we define each card to have a specific meaning by assigning a key word, phrase or concept to each card. Secondly, through regular practice we teach our subconscious mind the meanings we've assigned to each card. Third, our subconscious mind remembers what we tell it because it always remembers everything we tell it. Fourth, when our subconscious mind wants to tell us something it will always choose the best card to explain what it wants to tell us. Fifth, now all we have to do is remember the meaning of that card.

The cards always tell me the truth. Always. They never lie. There are times my mind wants to believe something else. And, there are times when my eyes are blind to the truth. But my subconscious mind always knows the truth and always tells me the truth in the cards it selects. The error is not with the Universe, not with my client, and not with the cards. The error is always with my interpretation of the cards chosen for me by my subconscious mind.

The Elemental System uses the four elements and the four suits to simplify the process of remembering the meanings of the cards by assigning key words, phrases or concepts to each element. This system appeals most to Pagans and other people who have a good understanding of the four gross elements and Spirit. The problem is to figure out what the numbers mean.

The Numerological System uses number theory to assign a key word, phrase or concept to each number. This system appeals most to people more apt to approach life through reason and logic rather than feelings. The problem is to figure out what the suits mean.

The Astrological System appeals to astrologers and those who understand the planets and their interactions. This system assigns the planets and signs to each of the cards or ranks of cards and interprets each card in this light. The problem is to figure out what the planets mean.

These five systems are taught in the American Tarot Association correspondence course titled "Introduction to Tarot." They're also explained in a set of four audiotapes of the same name covering the same material.

Students are encouraged to use any one system or any combination of systems that works for them. The Elemental, Numerological and Astrological systems all have strengths and weaknesses yet they blend well together if one can reconcile the contradictions. The Mystical and Esoteric approaches can be used together or with any of the other systems. But again the students need to make the final decisions about the meaning of each and every card for them.

Often, students will find contradictory meanings for the same card using different systems or even using the same system by different authors. This is to be expected because we all see and experience tarot and life differently. Do not be discouraged by these apparent inaccuracies. Rather accept that we are different people with different ideas about the same thing. Then choose the best key word, phrase or concept for each tarot card that works for you.

Find an approach that works for you. Define each card with a key word, phrase or concept that works for you. Make it easy for you to learn and remember your key words, phrases or concepts. Memorize your chosen key words, phrases or concepts. That's the process. Once you have good definitions for your cards and can remember them, the rest is easy.

PART FIVE

HOW TO MAKE YOUR OWN STUDY CARDS

You may find study cards useful in learning the key words, phrases or concepts you've chosen for your tarot deck. The following instructions are intended to assist you in deciding how to make and use your own study cards. Some students like to use study cards like flash cards looking at one side of the card and repeating for memory the contents of the other side. Others use them just like a tarot deck doing readings for themselves and others. How you construct and use your study cards is up to you. Here's my suggestion:

Obtain paper or card stock which can be used to construct your study cards. We suggest you use either two by three or three by five inch index cards though any size paper or card stock may be used. Card stock is usually a little superior to paper because of the thickness of the material. Or, use thin pieces of cardboard.

It doesn't matter if the cards have lines on one or both sides. This is a matter of personal choice and availability of materials. Most students prefer card stock with lines on one side and no lines on the other. The plane side is used for the design of the card and the lined side for notes.

2) Decide what suits you will use for your cards. While ATA uses the conventional pentacles, cups, swords and wands notation for the suits, you are free to choose whatever notation you desire. Most students use the same suits as their favorite tarot deck. Decide what suits you want to use.

Select a design you wish to use for your suits. One simple design is to use a circle for pentacles, a tall vertical cross for swords, a upward-pointing crescent on top of a vertical stick for cups and a plain vertical line for wands. Another is to use a five pointed star in a circle for pentacles, a simple cup, sword or wand for cups, swords, and wands. Select any design of your choice. Just make certain you will be able to tell which is which. It also helps to be able to tell when your study card is in the upright position and when it is in the reversed position.

3) Decide what court cards you will use. While ATA uses Pages, Knights, Queens and Kings for the eleventh through the fourteenth card of each suit, there are other possibilities. If you decide to use these court cards, a simple notation which can be used to represent them is P, N, Q, and K in that order. Decide what you want to call your court cards and what symbols you wish to use for them.

4) Number ten cards from one (1 or A) through ten (10) for each of the four suits you have chosen. Place the notation you have chosen for each suit on one set of ten cards. This will require a total of forty cards (ten for each of four suits). If you have card stock or paper which is blank on one side, use this side for numbering your forty pip cards. You may also place any design you desire on this side of the card. You may draw a design or paste a design of your choice on your study cards.

5) Number four cards for each of the four suits with the notation you have chosen for your court cards. You will have four cards of each suit with one card of each suit for each rank of court card according to the names you have chosen. This will require sixteen cards (four each for each suit). Draw or place any design on this side of the card as you desire.

6) Decide what major arcana or trump cards you are going to use and what names you are going to attribute to them. There are differences of opinion as to what names and numbers should be used for which cards and you are free to use whatever names and numbering you desire.

The ATA uses the convention of numbering the trumps from zero through twenty-one using Roman Numerals in the following order: 0 The Fool, I Magician, II High Priestess, III Empress, IV Emperor, V Hierophant, VI Lovers, VII Chariot, VIII Strength, IX Hermit, X Wheel of Fortune, XI Justice, XII Hanged Man, XIII Death, XIV Temperance, XV Devil, XVI Tower, XVII Star, XVIII Moon, XIX Sun, XX Judgement, XXI World. You are free to choose your own names and numbers for the twenty-two keys of the Tarot.

7) Number and name each of the twenty-two major arcana cards you are going to use. If you decide to use a deck with more or less than twenty-two major arcana cards, this is your choice as well. The only requirement is that you have one study card for each card in the deck of your choice.

8) On the other side of your study cards, write one key word or phrase which explains the meaning of the card being considered. In this manner you will give each of your seventy-eight study cards a key word or phrase which will help you understand the meaning of that particular card.

Later, in the Intermediate Tarot Course, you will be asked to place a meaning for the same card when it is viewed in the reverse position. For this reason alone, you may want to keep the key word or phrase placed near the top of the back of your study card. This is why we earlier instructed you to design your cards in such a manner that you will be able to determine if the card is "upright" or "reversed."

You may also use a saying on the reverse side which will assist you in learning the meaning of each particular card. Affirmations work very well for this purpose. Something like: "Day by day in every way I..." and complete the phrase.

For example, if the key words you selected for wands were 1) new growth, 2) achievement, 3) established strength, and 4) perfected work, your affirmations might be: 1) Day by day in every way my life is filled with new growth. 2) Day by day in every way I achieve more and more. 3) Day by day in every way I become stronger and stronger. or 4) Day by day in every way my work is becoming perfected.

9) Use your study cards as flash cards to memorize the meanings of the Tarot cards and to complete your assignments in the Course you are currently taking.

10) If you need help deciding what key words or phrases you want to assign to each of your study cards, ask your volunteer mentor for assistance.

The hard part is deciding what key word, phrase or concept you want to use for each card. Once you have these down, finishing your study cards and using them is quite enjoyable. Be prepared to throw away some study cards and replace them as you change your mind about the meaning of that particular card. The object is to have key words, phrases or concepts that you find easy to remember for each card.

One of the things you might like to do with your study cards is to illustrate them with symbols that help you remember your key words phrases or concepts. What these symbols are is entirely up to you, but you might want to consider using symbols similar to those appearing on the tarot deck of your choice.

Study cards work best if you have a journal with one page set aside for each card. Here you can write important ideas about each card and expand your knowledge of the cards. This is a good place to keep track of the things you are learning about each card as you progress in your studies.

PART SIX

CHOOSING AND WORKING WITH A MENTOR

The American Tarot Association believes the best way for students to learn anything is to find an expert willing to be their mentor. Learning tarot under the guidance of a tarot mentor has proven to be the most effective way for students to learn to read the tarot in my experience. The trick is for you to use your mentor to help you.

My way is probably the best way for me, but it may not work for you. Your way is absolutely the best way for you, but it may be a disaster for me. A good mentor helps you learn how to do it your way, the way that works best for you. Finding a good mentor is easy if you know where to look. One good place is the ATA where we have over a hundred dedicated mentors willing to work with you. All you need is one.

Look for a mentor who knows and understands tarot, one who could teach you a few things. Ask that person some tarot questions and expect answers. If you don't understand something, ask. Otherwise you may never know the answer. Learning is a process where the more questions you ask the more you learn.

Once you find a mentor, ask him or her for reviews of your work. Ask for his or her opinion. You don't improve if you don't know what to improve and asking for reviews of your work is one way to discover what you still need to learn. Feedback from an expert is one of our best way of evaluating our work. Practice really does work but it works better if you're learning as you practice. A mentor can help you do that.

Always look for new and better ways of doing things for yourself. The more you try to copy somebody else the more difficult it will be for you to learn to read the tarot. The more you develop it for yourself the easier it's going to be for you. So what you need to do is take the best other people have to offer and change it to work for you.

Do not imitate your mentor because you'll always be a copy and not the original. Be true to yourself, be who and what you are (a unique person with a unique purpose) and grow into the person you want to be. By imitating others you become less than you are. By improving yourself you become all you can be.

Use a mentor to help you do the things you want to do. Learn to find mentors for every facet of your life. Learn what you want from them, and grow into the person you want to be. Someday you'll be a mentor yourself. My hope is you become a great mentor.

The truth is we seek people to be our mentor because they know more than we do about something. Eventually other people will seek us out because we know more than they do about something. We all have the potential to become a mentor for somebody. We all have the right to find a good mentor for us. Find at least one, that's my suggestion.

TEN THINGS GOOD MENTORS NEVER DO:

1. Good mentors never tell you what to do
 - What books to read
 - What decks to use
 - What spreads to use
 - What things to study
 - What to learn
 - What not to learn
2. Good mentors never tell you when to do anything
 - When to do readings
 - When to contact them
 - When to study
 - When to meditate
3. Good mentors never tell you how to do anything
 - How to do tarot readings
 - How to interpret the cards
 - How to treat your cards
 - How to prepare for doing a reading
4. Good mentors never tell you where to do anything
 - Where to do your readings
 - Where you buy or sell anything
 - Where you study or work
5. Good mentors never tell you who
 - Who you can work with
 - Who your associates should be
 - Who your clients should be
6. Good mentors never tell you why
 - Why you should do something
 - Why you're not a good reader
 - Why you don't know what you're doing
7. Good mentors never tell you which
 - Which cards to use
 - Which way to use your cards
 - Which spreads to use
 - Which books to read
 - Which things to do
 - Which things not to do

8. Good mentors never interfere with your life

Not your time
Not your family
Not your love life
Not your job
Not your hopes and aspirations
Not your fears and concerns
Not with any part of your life

9. Good mentors never demand anything of you

Not your time
Not your energy
Not your money
Not your devotion
Not your admiration
Not anything

10. Good mentors never judge you or put you down

Not for any reason
Not ever

TEN THINGS GOOD MENTORS ALWAYS DO:

1. Good mentors listen to you and read what you write
2. Good mentors accept you for who and what you are
3. Good mentors walk their own talk
4. Good mentors make themselves available to you
5. Good mentors encourage you to do things your way
6. Good mentors describe what they do and how they do things
7. Good mentors explain how others do these same things
8. Good mentors praise you for the things you do well
9. Good mentors question you about the things you do poorly
10. Good mentors answer your questions honestly and openly

Mentors are advisors and their duty is to advise and recommend or suggest but never to mandate and require compliance with their personal desires. Mentors accept the duty of helping others to become better Tarot Readers and Masters so they, in their turn, may do the same. These, then, are the guidelines the ATA suggests mentors use in performing this duty:

1. It's the responsibility of the student to contact you with their questions and comments. If your students don't take the time to contact you, please don't waste your time trying to contact them. At worst you'll appear arrogant and at best you'll probably appear pushy. Either way your intervention is unwanted right now. Your students will contact you when they want to contact you with their questions and comments.
2. When students contact you they expect a prompt response to their concerns and questions. If you are unable to comply with their requests in a timely manner please contact ATA headquarters for assistance. Don't panic. There are several of us willing and able to assist you and your student however we can.
3. Always listen to what your students say. Repeat your understanding of their thoughts back to them so they may reflect that this is indeed what they intended to communicate. It is important to understand what they are really saying. There are many methods for accomplishing this and our suggestion is to listen and reflect back to them what you heard them say or understood them to say.
4. Use your personal experience and meditations as a guide to help you suggest things they may want to explore. We all learn differently and we all have different likes and dislikes. We are called upon to use our experience and knowledge to help another person learn what they want so desperately to learn. Doing a short tarot reading for advice may help you help your student.
5. Generally encourage students to follow their own intuition rather than any proscribed methods that are uncomfortable for them. As students move through the material they'll have many questions and they'll solicit your feelings and your knowledge and your understanding. Please be open and honest with them.

Mentors are not teachers but they help you learn. They help you learn by helping you evaluate yourself, your readings and your progress. They help you learn by sharing their experiences and the experiences of others while encouraging you to learn tarot your way. Mentors are there for you to the best of their ability.

PART SEVEN USING SIMPLE TAROT SPREADS

After nearly half a century of reading tarot cards and teaching others how to read them, it seems to me those students who learn the tarot basics well always become good tarot readers. Those who don't learn the basics seem to never become good tarot readers. There's nothing more basic to tarot than the one card spread. Keep in mind this is my opinion. It may be based on years and years of experience but it's still just my opinion.

Here's the Fourth Secret about the Tarot: To become a good tarot reader you must master one-card tarot readings. The best tarot readers are those who really understand one-card readings. The best tarot masters are masters of the one card reading. In my experience there's no better way for me to identify good and poor tarot readers than to have them do a one card tarot reading for me. The poor readers always want to use more cards because they don't know what the first card is telling them.

The American Tarot Association teaches several different ways of doing one card readings in our Introduction to Tarot course. The two you'll find most useful are probably the Elemental Spreads and the Seven Rays of Discernment (seven basic questions) Spreads.

Elemental Spreads require you to form a basic concept for each of the five elements. For example:

Earth:	financial questions and problems
Water:	relationship questions and problems
Fire:	job questions and problems
Spirit:	spiritual questions and problems
Air:	all other kinds of questions and problems

Please do not believe these are the only basic concepts you can use for defining the elements in the tarot deck of your choice. Far from it. There are hundreds of different definitions you can use. Be creative using your own knowledge and background. Find out what other people do before you decide how you want to define the key words, phrases and concepts for the five elements in your tarot studies and readings.

The process is to take the client's question and phrase it to fit one of these formats. Then use whatever process you decide to use to select the card that answers the question. Use your key word, phrase or concept for this card and explain this answer to yourself and your client. That's all these is to it.

The Seven Rays Spreads require you to formulate each question to start with one of the seven basic questions. For example:

What?	What can I do?
Who?	Who can help me?
When?	When will this or that happen?
Where?	Where is this thing?
Why?	Why is this happening?
Which?	Which solution is best?
How?	How can I do that?

The process is to take the client's question and phrase it into one of these basic formats. Use whatever process you decide to use to select the card that answers the question. Use your key word, phrase or concept for this card and explain this answer to yourself and your client. That's all these is to it.

In other words, the process is the same for an Elemental Spread or Seven Rays Spread. In actuality, the process is the same for any spread you use.

Here's the Fifth Secret about the Tarot: Rephrasing your client's question into a format you can answer is the most important part of your reading. Clients love to ask questions for which you can never have a good answer. All "Should . . ." questions are of this kind. The truth is none of us knows what another person "should" do. The truth is no matter what we say the other person should do, we're wrong. We're often wrong even when we're right.

So by fitting each question into one of the suggested forms you have a format that will give the client a useful answer to their question. When a client asks: "Should I. . ." start thinking in terms of "What can the client do?" or "What's the best thing for the client to do?" Start thinking in terms of the form you've decided to use be it Elemental or Seven Rays.

There are other formats that can be used. Numerology and Astrology each lend themselves to forms that limit the scope of a question and help the client obtain good answers to their questions and problems. You can use any format you want to use. My suggestion is to try several and pick a few that work for you.

The "Introduction to Tarot" correspondence course of the American Tarot Association assists you in identifying a key word, phrase or concept for each of the seventy-eight tarot cards in your deck. This is done in three sections 1) Pip Cards, 2) Court Cards, and 3) Major Arcana. The fourth section of this course is designed to help you learn and develop several one, two and three card spreads that work for you.

PART EIGHT

EXPANDING YOUR TAROT VOCABULARY

Once you know at least one key word, phrase or concept for each of the seventy-eight tarot cards and can do simple one, two and three card readings you reach the first plateau of a tarot reader. Some people never progress beyond this point except to add more cards to the spreads they use. In my opinion this is the Apprentice level of tarot reading

But tarot cards are capable of much more than this. So are tarot readers. There's no need to remain on this plateau using a limited number of key words, phrases or concepts for each and every tarot card.

You can expand your tarot vocabulary by adding another key word, phrase or concept for each card. Once finished with this monumental task you'll have doubled your tarot vocabulary. It's not easy but some tarot readers do exactly that. Some even add two or three more meanings for each card and triple, quadruple or more than quadruple their tarot vocabulary.

The problem with this approach is in knowing when to use any particular key word or phrases for any particular card. Some readers do it intuitively. But then the problem's knowing whether your intuition or your imagination is really at work. It's also easy to start reasoning it out and lose the true meaning of the spread before you.

Another solution is to use inverted or reversed cards. This can be done in dozens of different ways. One interesting method is to give a different definition to the suits when cards of that suit are inverted. For example, let's say Pentacles mean money and financial matters. That's their upright meaning. When inverted, Pentacles could mean material things. Thus the Ace of Pentacles could be read to mean the client is going to obtain a new source of income while the inverted Ace might mean the client is going to acquire some new material thing like a car, house or new clothes.

The same approach can be used for the other suits. Swords could mean ideas upright and verbal warfare or abuse when inverted. Cups could be relationships but inverted mean feeling sorry for one's self. Wands could be intuitive insights when upright and careers when inverted. There are any number of possible meanings you can attach to upright and inverted suits and thus double your tarot vocabulary.

Reversed cards can also be used to alter the meaning of the card itself rather than the suit. Here are some of the more popular ways of handling reversals:

Same meaning. Some people use the same meaning for any card in the upright or inverted position. This is sometimes called the Lazy Man's Reversals.

Opposite meaning. Whatever the card means in its upright position, it means the exact opposite in the reversed position. For example the Ace of Cups might mean a new relationship is coming while the reversed Ace means your client isn't entering any new relationships soon.

Delays. Any inverted card is interpreted the same except that whatever it is won't happen now or when you expect it to happen. There will be unexpected delays and things will really be slowed down.

Problems. The inverted card says there are problems with whatever the upright card would have said. For example, if the Ten of Wands is a "heavy burden," then the inverted Ten of Wands says the client is having a problem carrying this heavy burden.

Difficulties. The inverted card indicates the client will have difficulties doing whatever the upright card is interpreted to be. If the Five of Pentacles is "financial difficulty," then the client has a problem with this financial problem. It's more than just a financial problem, it's become an emotional or mental problem as well.

You don't have to use inverted cards. If you don't want to use them, don't. Inverted cards or reversals are an option, not a requirement. Another way to expand your tarot vocabulary is to use what are called "Dignities."

There are many different kinds of dignities and reversals discussed in the "Intermediate Tarot" correspondence course offered to members of the American Tarot Association. Here are a few ways of looking at dignities:

ELEMENTAL - Wands and Swords help each other and soften any negativity. So do Cups and Pentacles. But any other combination hardens the energy and increases negativity.

ASTROLOGICAL - The Sun, Mercury, Venus, Jupiter and Neptune all help each other. So do the Moon, Mars, Saturn, Uranus and Pluto. The cards associated with these planet groups improves the message of the cards. But any other combination darkens and inhibits this message.

NUMEROLOGICAL - Even numbers help other even numbers. Odd numbers help other odd numbers. But a combination of odd and even causes harm to each other. Pages and Queens are considered even while Knights and Kings are odd. All cards with numbers higher than nine are reduced to a single digit number by adding the digits together. Twenty-One, for example, is three because $(2+1=3)$ and Fifteen is six because $(1+5=6)$.

MYSTICAL - Look at the energy in the cards to see if this energy is compatible or not, helpful or not and interpret the cards accordingly.

ESOTERIC - Look at the cards to see their interaction. Are they looking toward each other or pointed toward each other? If yes, this is positive. If not, well, that's negative.

There are other ways of looking at dignities but they're more complex and better serve more advanced students. But if none of the suggested methods of using reversals or dignities appeals to you, you may want to consider building your own system.

To do this, you need to find something you can map to the tarot cards on a one-to-one basis. Numerology and Astrology work well and several authors show you how to do this. The Tree of Life, Tree of Yggdrasil, Seven Worlds and several other occult or esoteric sciences have been used by various authors to map tarot cards to their system. The I Ching and Ma Jong tiles have been used. Some people match the Nordic Runes to their tarot cards. Use any system you want to use and then develop your own system of dignities.

Sounds like a lot of work but if you already know another esoteric system it's really quite easy to build your own tarot system based on that particular form.

So, there you have it, four different ways with lots of variations for expanding your own tarot vocabulary:

1. Multiple key words, phrases or concepts for each card
2. Reversals or Inverted Cards
3. Dignities
4. Your own system

PART NINE

USING INTERMEDIATE TAROT SPREADS

Intermediate tarot spreads includes four, five, six and seven card spreads. These spreads are used in the American Tarot Association "Intermediate Tarot" correspondence course.

There are five elements of Earth, Water, Air, Fire and Spirit so this lends itself to spreads of one to five cards. This can be expanded to up to ten cards by using two cards for one or more elements. For example, a six card elemental spread used for a relationship question might include two Water cards, one for him and one for her. A seventh card could be used for both of them together as a pair.

The Seven Rays spread which includes seven basic questions lends itself easily to one to seven card spreads. By asking two or more questions starting with the same Ray the reader can expand this even further. For a relationship question the clients might ask Who, What, When, How or even Why, Which or Where. One or more cards can be drawn for each question and given any positional names the reader wants to use.

Time is introduced into a reading by using Past, Present and Future spreads. Or, one might ask one of the Seven Rays-type of questions and use this time spread. For example, the client asks something about "What's the best thing for me to do to find a girl friend?" By using a "What" spread the reader can look at Past behavior, Present behavior and the expected Future if the client continues to act in this manner. A Change card can be introduced and one or more Outcome cards as well.

Astrological spreads using one or more of the twelve houses can be used for tarot spreads of up to twelve cards. This can be expanded to larger spreads by using more than one card for as many houses as the reader desires. The reader may choose to use opposite houses or houses of the same triplicity when using less than twelve cards.

Tarot readers are encouraged to try several different tarot spreads designed by several different authors. If the spread is less than four cards, the reader is encouraged to expand the spread by adding additional cards and giving them an appropriate title and meaning. If the spread is larger than seven cards, the reader is encouraged to eliminate one or more positions in the subject spread.

It can get as complicated as the reader wants it to become. The American Tarot Association teaches you how to make your own spreads in our Intermediate Tarot correspondence course and tapes.

PART TEN

SHARING WHAT YOU KNOW ABOUT TAROT

They say the best way to learn anything is to teach it. By sharing what you know you reinforce that knowledge and expand it. By practicing what you know you begin to understand that knowledge at deeper and deeper levels. Sharing your knowledge with others is one way of practicing what you already know. It's also a good way to build upon your knowledge and become better at whatever it is you do.

The American Tarot Association Prison Service Project is one way you can share your knowledge and practice doing tarot readings with a pen pal. This project matches incarcerated persons and outsiders who agree to become pen pals with each other. They help each other learn tarot by sharing what they know and doing readings for each other. Contact ATA Headquarters for more information about this project.

The "Intermediate Tarot" correspondence course contains a section on mentoring. Mentoring is best described by first explaining what it isn't. Mentoring is not lecturing where the teacher tells the student what the student needs to know. Mentoring isn't facilitating where the teacher helps the student learn through an interactive process. Mentoring is doing the things you do, sharing that information with others who ask you questions about what you do. Mentoring is being there for the student to help the student learn what he or she wants to learn.

Lecturing tells the student what to learn. Facilitating is a process where the teacher and student agree about what the student will learn. Mentoring is a process where the student learns what the student wants to learn the way the student wants to learn it. In lecturing, the teacher is in control. In facilitating, the teacher and student share control. In mentoring, the student is in control of his or her learning.

One way to teach a class is to spend the first hour listening to an ATA tape covering the topic being discussed. Following the taped lecture, the student decides what he or she wants to learn and how he or she wants to learn it. The teacher then facilitates this learning.

Another way is to do a workshop and share many different ways of doing whatever is related to the topic of the workshop. During the workshop each student learns what he or she wants to learn and the teacher is available to answer his or her questions.

Of course, the most common way of teaching tarot is the lecture method where the teacher tells the student what to learn. It is not that the ATA opposes this form of instruction, it's that we believe mentoring will enable the student to become a better tarot reader in both the short and long run.

The ATA supports you in forming a local network of friends who do readings for each other in person, over the telephone or on the Internet. The Intermediate and Advanced Tarot Courses available from the ATA will give you more information about doing this.

If you're ready to start mentoring beginning tarot students there are several places which need your assistance: 1) The ATA, 2) The Free Tarot Network, and 3) The Free Reading Network. For more information, contact ATA headquarters.

PART ELEVEN THE TAROT CERTIFICATION PROCESS

You may wish to become certified. There are three organizations which offer certification at this time. The American Tarot Association encourages you to contact each of them and choose the one best suited to you goals and abilities. We list them here in alphabetical order.

American Board for Tarot Certification (ABTC)

P.O. Box 6304
Woodbridge VA 22192

Email: questions@americanboardfortarotcertification.org
Web: americanboardfortarotcertification.org

Canadian Tarot Network (CTN)

P.O. Box 51175 Beddington RPO
Calgary, Alberta T3K 3V9

Phone: 1-866-478-8808 (toll free) or 1-403-730-4805
Hours: 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. MT

Email: info@tarotcanada.com
Web: tarotcanada.com

Tarot Certification Board of America (TCBA)

P.O. Box 6935
Albany NY 12206-0935

Phone: 1-800-872-0556 Fax: 1-775-249-6513

Email: info@tarotcertification.org
Web: tarotcertification.org

PART TWELVE IMPROVING YOUR TAROT SKILLS

Tarot readers seem to reach a second plateau somewhere along about now. Some of them become professional tarot readers and never aspire to being tarot experts. A few master the art of consulting and become better tarot readers than your average run-of-the-mill professional. A few learn how to communicate their knowledge of tarot through the written word. Yet, this is exactly what separates the professionals from the experts.

The American Tarot Association offers correspondence courses, audiotapes and other learning experiences for tarot readers of all levels:

1. For beginners learning how to read the upright cards the ATA offers "Introduction to Tarot."
2. For intermediate students learning how to use reversals, dignities or some similar vocabulary-expanding procedure the ATA offers "Intermediate Tarot."
3. For advanced students learning how to become a professional reader, teacher, consultant or expert the ATA offers "Advanced Tarot."
4. For experts we offer you the chance to become a mentor or presenter at one or more annual conferences and conventions sponsored by the ATA.

All ATA members are invited to participate in one or more of our Internet discussion groups. Any person holding the rank of Certified Tarot Reader, or who qualifies to hold this rank, is invited to join the Free Reading Network and give free three card readings to the public under the supervision of a tarot expert.

Any person who qualifies for the rank of CATR is invited to join the Free Tarot Network and work under the supervision of a tarot expert by giving free one card tarot readings to the public.

All ATA members are invited to participate in the Prison Service Project. Members receive the award winning ATA Newsletter which is published quarterly. Student members may request the services of a mentor. Anybody may subscribe to our free Internet newsletter to be found at

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/TarotReflections/>.

GUARANTEE All ATA correspondence courses and audiotapes are unconditionally guaranteed. You must be satisfied or your money will be cheerfully refunded.

INTRODUCTION TO TAROT COURSE

TAROT 101 - PIP CARDS The student will learn key words, phrases or concepts for the forty pip cards

TAROT 102 - COURT CARDS The student will learn key words, phrases or concepts for the sixteen court cards

TAROT 103 - MAJOR ARCANA The student will learn key words, phrases or concepts for the twenty-two cards of the Major Arcana

TAROT 104 - BEGINNING TAROT SPREADS The student will learn how to use and devise his or her own one, two and three card spreads

INTERMEDIATE TAROT COURSE

TAROT 201 - REVERSALS AND DIGNITIES The student will learn key words, phrases or concepts for handling reversals or dignities

TAROT 202 - MENTORING TECHNIQUES The student will learn how to mentor other students

TAROT 203 - INTERMEDIATE TAROT SPREADS The student will learn how to use and devise his or her own four card and larger spreads

TAROT 204 - BUILDING A TAROT BUSINESS The student will learn the basics in starting his or her own business doing tarot readings in person, over the telephone, by mail and email and teaching the tarot to others.

ADVANCED TAROT COURSE

TAROT 301 - TAROT WRITING TECHNIQUES The student will learn how to write and publish a useable Code of Ethics, reviews of both Tarot books and decks, short informative articles, Tarot rituals and Tarot meditations.

TAROT 302 - ADVANCED TAROT TECHNIQUES The student will learn advanced reading techniques and techniques for matching the tarot cards to the Tree of Life, Numerology, Astrology, and other esoteric systems.

TAROT 303 - TAROT CONSULTING TECHNIQUES The student will learn how to use the Tarot as a tool for counseling others and helping clients resolve a crisis in their lives.

TAROT 304 - TAROT TEACHING TECHNIQUES The student will learn how to teach beginning, intermediate and advanced tarot courses using the ATA techniques and how to set up a business teaching tarot to others.

ATA CORRESPONDENCE COURSES AND AUDIO TAPES

The American Tarot Association offers the following correspondence courses and audio tapes for its members:

- 1) Introduction to Tarot
- 2) Intermediate Tarot
- 3) Advanced Tarot

Members are assigned a Tarot Mentor to assist them with their studies. The courses are self-paced. Each student advances at his or her own pace. All correspondence courses and audio tapes come with a set of assignments to help the student learn and master the material. Completed assignments are sent to the student's Tarot Mentor for evaluation. These courses are more fully described on the inside back cover and elsewhere in this booklet.

COSTS

The cost of each of these three correspondence courses is \$15 for each book. Each set of four audio tapes is \$40.00 for members. Both the audio tapes and the correspondence courses cover the same material. Both the audio tapes and the correspondence courses come with a set of optional assignments which may be completed and turned in to a mentor for grading.

Membership in the American Tarot Association currently costs \$30.00 per year for regular mail delivery of our Quarterly or \$20.00 per year for internet delivery of our Quarterly.

BENEFITS

- . Reduced prices for seminars, conferences and conventions
- . Low priced audio tapes and course books
- . Free award-winning ATA Quarterly
- . Tarot Mentor to assist you with your studies
- . Internet Discussion Lists for all ATA students
- . Prison Service Projects

ATA INTERNET SERVICES

ata-tarot.com
freetarot.net
freereading.net

Plus plenty of discussion lists to serve you.