

THE CARTOMANCER

2018: JUSTICE
A YEAR OF DESCENT
& DISCERNMENT

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WELLNESS COUNSELING

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COUNSELING WITH TAROT

—by Toni Gilbert, RN, MA, ATC

Wellness is an active process of becoming aware of and making choices toward a healthy and fulfilling life. Wellness is more than being free from illness; it is a dynamic process of change and growth. "...a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity" (The World Health Organization) and/or "a conscious, self-directed and evolving process of achieving full potential" (The National Wellness Institute).

Wellness of the mind, body and spirit matters because every emotion we feel and every thought we think relates to our wellbeing. Likewise, our wellbeing directly affects our actions and emotions. Furthermore it is important for us to achieve optimal wellness in order to deal with stress and reduce the risk of illness and ensure positive relations with others.

As a wellness counselor, I understand what it takes to achieve optimum states in the mind, body and the spiritual. This knowledge helps me guide my clients to their higher psychological and spiritual potential. Towards this end, I rely upon the archetypes to give me information about the client and their current challenge.

After many years of experience with Tarot cards, I know the archetypes because I have studied their expressions through my own challenges. I realize that I cannot teach something I don't understand and haven't experienced. Therefore, during my assessment, I can tune into the archetypes being expressed through the client's body language, through their voice intonations, the way they dress and my intuitive impressions.

CLIENT ASSESSMENT

During the initial assessment and client history I determine who will be a candidate for Tarot counseling. This decision is intuitively and intellectually based upon the client's physical appearance and my assessment of their ego strength, cognitive abilities and emotional state.

With a background in psychology and psychiatry I identify people who have a weak sense of the self or ego. The potential danger

of any therapy that reaches beyond the ego is that of undoing the ego's defense mechanism and unleashing traumatic memories. This can cause a regression to a more primitive state of development.

Part of my assessment is based upon my observations of the client's choice of clothes. In a nutshell, their prominent archetypal energy is dressing them. For instance, one day a new client came to my office dressed in jeans, white tee shirt with the sleeves rolled up over his biceps. A large sharp animal tooth hung around his neck. On his head he wore a hat like the movie actor John Wayne, a rough and tumble masculine type. Since this man was over sixty, I initially saw this as an attempt to hold onto his fading youthful strength. I suspected that he was compensating for something. As it turned out he was sexually impotent.

When working with Tarot, clients must be able to follow a train of thought and have the capacity for insight. The clients' ability for symbolic thought won't become apparent until counseling begins. This entails making associations between images on the cards and specific events in their lives.

It is easier to counsel people who are capable of symbolic thinking, but not essential. When clients have difficulty thinking symbolically, I explain the metaphors and images at a level they can understand, and then ask them to apply it to their concerns. Difficulty thinking symbolically may be because they are concrete in their thinking; they look outward at the real world while the inner world remains unrecognized. This type of person isn't aware of communication with their inner worlds. To these individuals, the cards look foreign. However, it may be just the kind of exploration therapy they need.



Healing can be greatly aided by beginning a rapport between a person's conscious material worldview and their unconscious symbolic worldview. For instance, a young woman, we'll call Ann, was in a difficult relationship and had just gone through a dark time with many trials. During this session, I didn't use a layout but simply drew cards from the Tarot deck as needed. Ann drew the first card which was the Queen of Pentacles. She didn't relate to the images and so I described the Queen as someone who was strong and capable of making choices based upon what she knew of the world. I also told her, "This queen can do anything she makes up her mind to do and she can do it well." I asked her, "Are you like the woman on the card?"

Ann agreed that she had those traits. The second card was the two of swords and the image on the card showed an image of a blindfolded woman sitting before two paths through a wooded forest. This card image led to a discussion of choices. I told her, "One choice will lead down a dark path, which you have just experienced, or you may select a higher ethical path that leads to a much better outcome." As we continued the discussion, she indicated that she related to the image and spoke of insights on how to proceed with her challenge. Even though her abilities for symbolic thought were not developed, I knew she understood the symbolic message of the card.

COUNSELING WITH THE CARDS

Several minutes are spent in prayer and meditation before I see each client. I close my eyes, find a place of centered calm, and wait. In this meditative state, I access the higher levels of my consciousness. Sometimes imagery or thoughts come, which give me information and inspiration. Sometimes it is simply a restful silence before the session.

When using Tarot cards, assessment of the client's ego is important. The ego's purpose is to keep overpowering and destructive emotions within safe boundaries. The ego needs to

be strong so it can integrate and use the emerging unconscious information. I distinguish between clients with psychological limitations and those individuals of a more normal constitution. Those who have a normal constitution have a healthy ego structure, emotional flexibility, and a somewhat positive self-image. These clients benefit greatly from the symbolic exploration that Tarot provides.

An example of a weak ego is Erma, a client who requested a Tarot reading. During the session I could tell by her facial expressions that she was receiving profound information regarding her question. Instead of telling me about the insights she skirted the issue by talking about superficial aspects of the cards. As far as I could tell, she guarded her fragile ego by denying most of the surfacing messages.

In the therapeutic context, the Tarot spread allows the counselor to aid an individual in bringing repressed unconscious material to consciousness. Because of their education and experience, the counselor will be able to evaluate when and how to aid the individual in this process. A reading could cause a release of emotions which are locked in the unconscious and which might

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overwhelm the weak ego with too much information, too fast. This could cause confusion and a scattering of the client's defenses.

After discussing the client's current challenge, I have the client chose from a variety of decks. Aside from the symbology inherent in Tarot, most of my decks have everyday imagery, quiet scenes, a few shadowy views, and little or no nudity. I offer mild imagery decks so as not to bewilder the client with symbols that distract from the issue at hand.

During the session, I shift my consciousness so that I am an empty vessel, freely associating to the information that comes to me. This shift allows a higher level of consciousness to work through me for the well-being of the client. I trust my intuition and higher psychic faculties. Because the information must come through my ego with its projections, I accept a margin of error. I never insist upon being right and frequently check my perceptions with the client to verify accuracy.

To begin a session, I have the client write their question down on a tablet that I provide for them to take notes. I then ask the questioner to shuffle and cut the cards, in any way that feels right to them. I understand that the body is a temple for the energy of the archetypes and in the chaos of the shuffle, the cards react to the energy of the shuffler's archetype of the moment. As I understand it, when the client shuffles the cards, the energy of the heart chakra with all its archetypal energetic information affects the sequence of the cards. They magically fall in line with a synchronicity that is part of the mystery of the cards. The resulting segmented pictorial layout is a portrait of the client's psychological state or their inner worldview. Because of this, the layout is most affected by the heart chakra energy and emotional issues take precedence over more cognitive or linear types of questions. For instance, the cards may hint at current issues with an ex-boyfriend even though the question asked was whether one should look for another job. I either lay the cards out on the table or hand them to the client one at a time and wait for a response. If they don't respond right away, I might ask, "What's happening in the card?" or "What symbol stands out for you in regard to your question?" In my experience, readings are more effective when clients hold the card and examine it closely. Keeping their question in mind, I refer back to it often during the session, saying, "How does that relate to your question?"

The archetypal images on the cards reflect a truth that is buried in the preconscious and unconscious mind. Through a process of projection, questioners come to see their challenges mirrored by the symbols of the cards.

Many times during a session, I ask, "How does this image make you feel?" Because clients possess the archetypal energy symbolized in the cards, they can connect at an emotional level using projection. I ask them to describe what they see and feel and how it relates to the question.

Like the Rorschach Projective test, relating to the archetypal images on the cards bring forth seeds of information buried in the unconscious mind. I teach clients to understand the symbology of the card and relate it to their feelings and to their life situation. Only when this unconscious symbolic material becomes conscious can they take the appropriate action, which may also be mirrored in the cards.

There is no right way to practice Tarot Counseling. However, it is best to remember that the wellness counselor is not the authority over the client's situation. Rather, you are there to empower the client by letting his or her ideas lead you. Keep in mind that because a Tarot layout reflects the inner profile of the person shuffling, only the questioner can say how the interpretation feels and if it is true. Since there are always multiple levels of meaning in Tarot's archetypal images, the counselor can help the client to integrate those meanings that seem most useful to the issue at hand.

Don't try to predict what will happen in the client's future. This would be fortune telling, filled with presumptions and possible inaccuracies. The counselor may, however, discuss possibilities and opportunities that may affect the future.

The goal of this type of therapeutic session is client self-development and self-healing. In the process, counseling in this way clarifies the nature of the current challenge. Clients should be free to explore only those issues that they feel ready to deal with, at their own pace, for they are the only ones who can bring this awareness into their consciousness. Working with Tarot's images in wellness counseling is a gentle, sacred act and those who endeavor to work with the cards in healing, have learned to set aside the ego and channel a higher wisdom.

References

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POSTCARD TAROT: CREATING A FUN AND PERSONAL DECK

—by S. Johanna Hill

Postcard Tarot: Seven Easy Steps to Creating a Personal Deck from Common Materials

I made my own tarot deck, for under 40 bucks, and you can too! I assure you it's possible - no artistic skill required. I'm certainly not an artist. Also, I have a day job that keeps me comfortable, but I am in no position to commission 78 images full of beauty, meaning, and symbolism. Likely this is true for you, too, but we both still might want a handmade tarot deck that speaks to us. The good news is we can work with the art of others - picking, choosing, and altering until it's just right.

This had not occurred to me until I saw a box of 100 beautiful postcards for sale. It was a revelation. I altered those cards to create a powerful divination tool with my own two hands. My readings with my DIY deck were so spot on it made me wonder if I'd ever use another deck again. I also found my reading skills with other decks improved immensely. I'd stumbled on a great way to learn, and deepen my learning, of the tarot. I've written up my process and I'll walk you through seven easy steps. You'll choose images for each of the cards in the deck, make important choices to prepare your cards for actual use, and build your own Little White Book. Ready to get started?

STEP ONE: ACQUIRE CARD MATERIALS

You need 78 images for a tarot deck – even if only 22 of those images are detailed and the rest are minimally illustrated pips. You need to shuffle this thing, so you need 78 bits of paper that are the same size and are stiff enough. Beyond that, not much else is required. So liberating! So cheap!

I prefer pre-boxed selections of postcards for this (easily ordered online or found at your local stationery store) but you can make a deck out of anything: unlined index cards with hand-inked images; 3 X 5 photos with symbols scratched into the top; 78 pieces of cardstock and colored pencils; playing cards (2 decks) with the



centers covered in White-Out and your own illustrations Sharpie. I'd recommend that you get enough index cards or playing cards or postcards to have a few extras - you will make mistakes.

STEP TWO: ACQUIRE A NOTEBOOK

You'll be making a lot of notes on what symbols, numbers, and associations work for each card. It's best to have one place to keep this information. It doesn't matter what format it is - computer file, spiral notebook, scrapbook - as long as it works for you. If you already keep a tarot journal, you are all set. If not, get one! Your notes can turn into the Little White Book to go with your deck.

STEP THREE: CHOOSE POSTCARDS

This step takes longer than you think it will, and is the most important. I recommend commandeering the dining room table, a