

## The Art and Magic of Tarot Counseling

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Throughout history many people have explored the energy of consciousness and attempted to map and diagram it for others. Sigmund Freud, for example, identified various levels of the human consciousness: the id, ego, super conscious, preconscious and the unconscious. Both he and Carl Jung thought that the mind's consciousness contained levels of information about who we are personally and collectively and that we could access this information through logical thinking and intuitive insights.

When working with Tarot cards, the images we see tap into the energetic archetypal levels of consciousness within us. The questioner first views the image on the card allowing his or her memories to rise to consciousness. I encourage them to free associate. When the person has no more to say, I offer an intuitive interpretation of the card. This interpretation also taps into a place in their consciousness where they know the truth of a situation. When this happens insights burst forth in a wellspring of answers for the questioner. The following case study is an example of how to use Tarot cards with guided imagery to facilitate change that led to healing.

### The Case of Melissa

Twenty-eight-year-old Melissa sought wellness counseling due to two physical ailments: chronic constipation and vaginal irritation. She was scheduled to see a traditional physician and decided to make an appointment with me to explore her body's wisdom. Her life was in constant flux. Melissa worked odd jobs, traveling around the state and abroad. She had a partner but it was a sexual paring, each going their separate ways after a once-a-week get-together.

Because of the location of her symptoms we discussed her body issues as they related to the first two Chakras. The first Chakra has to do with sex and other survival of the species issues. The second Chakra deals with reproduction, but also contains stored information about the culture and the family of origin. At the physical level I taught her about how depression can slow the bowels causing constipation.

We then turned to the Tarot cards. Melissa chose the Voyager Tarot deck. The faces of the cards in this deck have photographic collages depicting modern life. Clients easily identify with the symbolism. She asked the question, “What do I need to know to help me with my health issues?”

The second card, of a four card spread, was entitled “Empress,” evoked a strong emotional reaction. “She is spiritually evolved and in tune with all of nature,” Melissa said with awe. The card’s image was of a golden woman standing proudly in a field of flowers, a snow-topped volcano appeared in the background and a beautiful waterfall was at her side. An image of the earth with its swirling weather patterns was behind her and a multi pedaled flower fanned out around her head like a large dramatic crown. To finish the spiritual scene a white dove of peace flew above it all.

I knew Melissa’s consciousness was tapping into, and feeling, the archetypal energy of the Empress. I asked Melissa to describe where in her body she was feeling the feminine energy. She thought for a moment then, with a sweeping gesture of her hand, she indicated her heart and lower abdomen saying “I feel the Empress’s energy at my heart Chakra and then all the way down my body.”

Melissa’s reaction to the Empress archetype included the area of her body that was symptomatic. I thought Melissa would benefit by exploring this image at a deeper

level of consciousness. The spontaneous imagery or visualization found at the preconscious level of the self can uncover insights and wisdom beyond the knowing of the conscious ego. I discussed this with her and she agreed to use a visualization technique to explore the Empress archetype. I had her close her eyes, and then led her through a brief relaxation phase. Next, I asked her to allow an image of the Empress to form in her imagination. After a brief pause, Melissa reported she saw the Empress in a quiet forest meadow.

With her eyes still closed, Melissa described the Empress as dressed in a flowing white gown and different from the image on the card. She then internally dialogued with the Empress. The image said, “I am the Empress, the feminine spirit of nature, animals and humankind. I am here to assist you in your healing.”

Next, I told Melissa to become the Empress, in her imagination. After a brief quiet meditation in which Melissa embodied the archetype, I asked her to describe her experience. Her affect and voice softened as she talked about ways to live in harmony and “making every step sacred in honor of the earth and all its inhabitants.”

As the imagery session came to a close, the Empress told Melissa that she would be available to her anytime she needed advice or support. Melissa needed only to close her eyes with the intention of contacting her and she would be there. When she felt done, I asked her to return to waking consciousness where upon we continued the discussion about how to walk life’s path with the integrity and grace of the Empress.

The third card, entitled “Lovers” is the archetype of relationships. She looked at this card for what seemed like a long time. “What’s happening for you?” I asked. She said, “There are two people in an embrace on the card.” Her voice began to

trail away as she mentioned some other aspects in a rather superficial way. I then asked her if she wanted to visualize this card too. She issued a sharp “no!” With this response I decided whatever messages she was getting from this card was very personal and she wasn’t ready to discuss them with me. I respected this and gave her space by talking about the card’s interpretation. I told her “The symbol of the lovers represents different kinds of love and the choices love calls upon us to make. The Empress makes choices based upon integrity and is true to herself and honest in her relationships.”

I intuitively put forth a hunch, I said, “Maybe the Empress is calling upon you to *make every step a sacred step* in your relationships too.” Melissa closed her eyes, let out a long sigh and said, “That is just what I needed to hear.”

We didn’t discuss Melissa’s love life. Instead we focused on the wisdom she needed to begin making better choices for herself. I took this receptive time to suggest, “Maybe you wouldn’t have vaginal problems if you align your heart and your actions in your relationships,” She softly looked me in the eye and nodded yes.

The fourth card was entitled “Guardian and Woman of Crystals.” The card shows a woman surrounded by multi faceted crystals, with one on her forehead. This is the archetype of intuitive and intellectual mastery. This card prompted a discussion around getting out of the head or intellect and listening to the body’s wisdom. In my assessment, she was so bombarded with parental, cultural, and commercial values that her ability to “look within for answers” was limited.

Lastly, I began to teach Melissa how to notice valuable innate intuitive impulses and translate them through the equally valuable intellect.

As you can see, when the questioner looks at the cards it is like looking into a mirror. In the card-mirror, symbols cause thoughts and feelings to bubble up from the preconscious and unconscious mind. With the guidance of a trained Tarot counselor, the archetypal energy of the symbols leads the questioner to deep insights necessary for self-development and self-acceptance.

In my experience of Tarot, something happens beyond our everyday awareness to affect the performance of the cards. As in the example of Melissa, the thinking and feeling states of the client synchronistically affect the order of the cards as they are shuffled and placed into a predetermined formation. The layout of the images reflected the psychological profile of Melissa's question.

Synchronicity, which can be viewed as part of our conscious energy structure, manifests itself in the form of seemingly coincidental occurrences, which symbolically connect our psyches to the events that are happening in the world. Because this does not make logical sense, synchronicity is often experienced as a miracle, serendipity or pure chance.

Synchronistic events disrupt our everyday notions of reality, thus giving us a larger sense of the world in which we live. Indeed, such experiences---which the mystics write about-- suggest that there is a direct interaction between the material world and our feelings, behaviors and thoughts. Working with Tarot, dreams and guided imagery often brings us closer to this mystical realm of experience, one that always enriches the healing potential within.

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