

MESSAGES FROM THE ARCHETYPES: Using the Tarot for Healing and Spiritual Growth: A Guidebook for Personal and Professional Use

BY TONI GILBERT AND MARK ROBERT

WALDMAN

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Reviewed by Bonnie Cehovet

The essence of this book is shown on the cover—two standing figures, the male wearing a bright red robe and gold crown, with a glyph of the sun and its emanating rays at his feet, the female wearing a bright blue robe and a silver crown, with a glyph of a full moon emanating its rays at her feet. The position of the woman's hands—right hand palm down, left hand palm up, seem to be holding in air the sphere that rests between the two of them. Two fingers on the right hand of the male figure point up, with the thumb and forefinger of his left hand held together, pointing towards the ground in the “As Above, So Below” position. Behind their heads we see a glyph of whirling energy—the ancient wisdom/knowledge from which these archetypes of spirituality and intuition originated.

Coming from a Tarot background myself, I was very pleased to see Toni Gilbert take the inherent self-actualizing energy of the tool of Tarot and move it into the venue of therapy via the principles of transpersonal psychology. Through the use of case studies, along with fully illustrated descriptions of the 78 cards of the Tarot (using the traditional Rider-Waite deck), Gilbert presents a viable template for personal and professional use.

Toni Gilbert's professional background includes that of Certified Holistic Nurse and Transpersonal Counselor, as well as certified practitioner in Interactive Guided Imagery. She works with dreams and dream symbols, among other things. Her Tarot sessions are focused on being an interactive healing experience—i.e. a wellness counseling session—rather than a one-sided conversation about what clients “should” do, or what “will happen” in their lives. She opens up the field of Tarot, as well as the field of personal counseling.

The story of Toni Gilbert's personal journey brings together the tools of dreamwork, guided imagery, and the Tarot, which are combined with the journeys of her clients as told through their case histories. She shows that adding guided imagery to the tools of Tarot and dreamwork allows the client to move into deeper levels of understanding than the use of Tarot and dreamwork alone (or in combination) allow.

Gilbert refers to the Tarot as one of the oldest known forms of counseling. Although Tarot began as a game (tarocchi, a trick-taking game), the addition of the 22 Major Arcana archetypal cards to the four suits cards moved it into the counseling realm. The imagery of the cards has also evolved over time, in an effort to maintain relevance to the people using them. Before any written alphabets existed, the story of people's lives was carried in the pictures (hieroglyphics) around them, as well as in the oral tradition.

The Tarot acts as a gateway to this ancient knowledge through its symbols and powerful capacity for storytelling.

The Tarot itself is presented through the use of black and white scans (using the traditional Rider- Waite deck), with descriptions of the Major Arcana, Minor Arcana, and Court Cards, and the meaning of the four suits. We see Gilbert's storytelling as she turns the Hero's Journey of the Major Arcana into a personal journey, making use of a female Hero.

One of Gilbert's basic precepts is that to make full use of the Tarot as a counseling tool, we need to be able to see where and how the archetypal energies work in our own lives. I applaud this wholeheartedly! Too many times I have seen information come through in a Tarot reading that the client was going to find difficult to deal with were they not given tools with which to understand it.

One of the case studies (stories) in the book's chapter on archetypal energy and healing presents a very dynamic healing session, in which we can clearly see how different aspects of a client's life are affecting her health. In this session, Gilbert assesses the client's readiness to receive the information from the session and to take some form of action to bring balance into her life.

In discussing how to approach a Tarot reading, Gilbert advises that the archetypes be viewed as inner guides in the client's journey of self-discovery. In this manner, how they function in the client's life can be identified, and some idea of their consequences can be formed before they are used as a counseling tool. Gilbert also points out that archetypal images are all around us—in our dreams, in our fantasies, and in the worlds of art, myth, literature, and religion. Each of us experiences these archetypes from our own perspective. This comes into play when choosing a personal deck, or decks, for reading. The images must draw us to them, and they must be meaningful. The images shown in this book are from the traditional Rider-Waite deck, and the not so traditional Osho Zen and Voyager decks.

In using the Tarot for self-analysis, Gilbert discusses creating a Tarot journal, and different Tarot spreads that can be used to elicit information. Different techniques are used here, such as noting personal reactions to the cards, and where the energy of the card is affecting the student's physical body. There is a strong suggestion concerning using the cards to become an observer in one's own life—i.e. reading the cards from a third-person perspective.

CHOOSING CLIENTS

There are things about the process of reading the Tarot that need to be paid attention to—primarily that the function of the reader is to help their client access their own intuitive awareness, and that in the process of learning the Tarot, you need to search for a mentor who will bring the answers out in you, rather than attempting to “hand” the answers to you.

There is an excellent section on owning what archetypes are being expressed in their body language, clothing, and voice intonation. Different personality types will react in different fashions during a counseling session, and the reader needs to be as aware as they can be of what to expect. The gift here is that a counselor has the chance to identify people that may be difficult for them to work with, giving themselves the opportunity to choose not work with these clients.

Techniques such as grounding and centering are discussed, as well as templates for notetaking (after the counseling session). It is also suggested that the client be given pen and paper, so that they can write down their questions. This helps the client focus on what they want, on what they need to know. Taping the reading for the client is also suggested, which is something that I personally find to be of great benefit.

The basic spread that Gilbert uses for transpersonal counseling is a four-card spread called the Quantum Approach, which deals with the current issue, what the client is conscious of, what they are not conscious of, and what the possibilities are for dealing with the issue. Another approach that Gilbert uses is the Linear Approach, in which the client takes a more active part by consciously choosing which cards that they are drawn to, and which they are not. This is continued until only four or five cards are left, and these cards are then placed in the Quantum Spread format and read.

The stories (case histories) presented in this book allow the reader to see the action of the archetypes in real-life situations, while doing the exercises places the energy firmly in their own lives. In her counseling mode, Gilbert refers to two levels of development: the primitive personality, which operates from the lower levels of archetypal expression, and the refined personality, which operates from the higher levels of archetypal expression.

Messages from the Archetypes acts as a perfect template for the inclusion of the tool of Tarot into healing counseling sessions. The tool of Tarot is presented well, as is the manner in which it can be used to add depth to a counseling session.

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