

Introduction to the Pythagorean Tarot

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Preface

Why a "Pythagorean" tarot? This deck began as a project to embody my interpretations of the tarot, based on traditional iconography, archetypal imagery and Pythagorean numerology, into a deck for my own use. In the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn one was expected to copy one's own tarot deck from a master copy and to color it; however, in only a few contemporary orders, such the Builders of the Adytum (BOTA), are students expected to even color their own decks. Although I enjoy and respect many commercial tarot decks, I believe that at some point each serious student should design his or her own deck embodying their understanding of the Arcana. Indeed, as one's understanding evolves over a lifetime, it's not unreasonable to expect to design and construct several decks. On the basis of these beliefs I started work on the Pythagorean Tarot.

Although the Pythagorean Tarot began as a personal project, I have been encouraged to make it generally available, since its interpretive framework is not the same as many other tarots, and so serious tarotists may find it useful both in itself, and as a starting point for their own designs.

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Pythagorean Numerology

The Pythagorean Tarot is based on Pythagorean numerology, which explains the significance of the numbers. Since the Pythagorean Tarot derives from the Greek cultural milieu, you can think of it as my idea of what a tarot designed by Pythagoras might have been like. However, it also draws from a number of other sources, including Mediterranean mythology, alchemy, Jungian



The Pythagorean Tarot

An Interpretation of the Major and Minor Arcana on Pythagorean and Alchemical Principles

© 1996, John Opsopaus

(Ioannes Apollonius Opsopaus)

Special News!

The Pythagorean Tarot book (480 pages) and 78-card deck set has been published by [Llewellyn](#), ISBN 1-56718-449-9.
See also the [Errata list](#).

Special Announcement: I will be giving a presentation on the Pythagorean Tarot at the [International Tarot Society](#) World Tarot Congress in Chicago, May 10-12, 2002.

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-

Minor Arcana

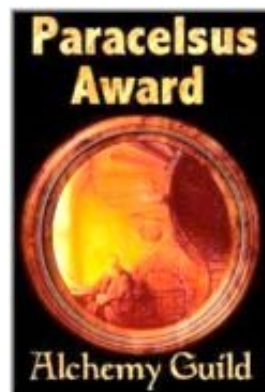
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These Truths revealed by Image and by Word,
these Secrets great and small, which thou hast heard,
keep safe within thy Soul, a planted Seed,
a Garden of Remembrance for thy need.
Protect these Truths on thee in Trust conferred!

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Preface

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Pythagorean Numerology

The Pythagorean Tarot is based on Pythagorean numerology, which explains the significance of the numbers. Since the Pythagorean Tarot derives from the Greek cultural milieu, you can think of it as my idea of what a tarot designed by Pythagoras might have been like. However, it also draws from a number of other sources, including Mediterranean mythology, alchemy, Jungian psychology, other divinatory systems and traditional tarot interpretation. I hope this web of symbolic structures will help to illuminate the mysteries hidden in the tarot. Since the primary organizing principal is Pythagorean numerology, I will begin by discussing the archetypal significance of numbers and their role in divination.

1. [The Numbers as Archetypes](#)
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The Numbers as Archetypes

Jung's elucidation of the archetypes of the collective unconscious is now familiar to many people, and it is apparent that the images of the tarot are archetypal. A number of tarot commentators (e.g. Gad, Nichols; see bibliography) have applied Jungian analysis to traditional tarot decks, and several recent decks (e.g. Wang's *Jungian Tarot*, Guiley & Place's *Alchemical Tarot*) make explicit use of archetypal imagery as described by Jung and his colleagues. The archetypes also underlie the symbolic system of alchemy and mythology, so I have also drawn on these in my interpretations and designs for the Major Arcana (comprising 22 obviously archetypal images). What is less well known, however, is that the numbers themselves are archetypes, and it is the structure of these archetypes that is expressed in Pythagorean numerology, the system of Sephirot in the Qabalah, and the number mysticism of many other cultures. An understanding of these archetypes illuminates the Minor Arcana (comprising four suits, with four court cards and ten pip cards each), as well as shedding additional light on the numerological structure of the Major Arcana. (The best source for understanding the numbers as archetypes is von Franz's

Number and Time; Schimmel's *Mystery of Numbers* is a good source of number symbolism; Fordham's *Introduction to Jung's Psychology* is the most concise, yet accurate introduction to Jung's thought with which I'm familiar.)

The archetypes may be explained as follows. We experience existence in two quite different ways: physically (or materially) and psychically (or mentally). Nevertheless, one reality - which Jung calls the *Unus Mundus* (One World) - underlies both kinds of phenomena. The collective unconscious comprises all those unconscious structures and processes that we share with other people; some of them derive from our human brains, but other, deeper ones, from our biology and even from the laws of physics on which our biology is based. "The lowest collective level of our psyche is simply pure nature" (von Franz 7). The archetypes are active structures in this shared level of the unconscious, which predispose us toward certain patterns of psychic response to given situations, which in turn can manifest in many specific ways. An archetype appears in consciousness as a subjective reality, but because of its origin in the collective unconscious, it represents an objective reality. (von Franz 4-7, 15, 31, 54-5)

Jung became convinced that the most basic archetypes are numerical and that number is the key to the relation between the psychical and physical realms. This is because number is "a constituent of nature, both without and within" (von Franz 13); it "preconsciously orders both psychic thought processes and the manifestations of material reality" (von Franz 53). Jung wrote (von Franz 9), "I have a distinct feeling that number is a key to the mystery, since it is just as much discovered as invented. It is quantity as well as meaning."

Number is both quality and quantity (meaning and measurement). In the historical, conscious development of number, the West has favored the quantitative and abstract structural aspects, which has led to the development of modern science, whereas the East has favored the qualitative and affective (feeling-toned) aspects. That is, the West has emphasized the material pole and the East the mental pole, although both are essential aspects of the *Unus Mundus*. The Pythagoreans, however, viewed numbers as cosmic principles with both material and spiritual aspects. This perspective is the basis of the numerology found in many cultures. (von Franz 39, 215)

When the qualitative aspects are included in our conception of numbers, they become more than simple quantities 1, 2, 3, 4; they acquire an archetypal character as Unity, Opposition, Conjunction, Completion. They are then analogous to more familiar archetypes, such as the Mother, the Wise Old Man, the Maiden, and the Shadow, which are more obviously represented in the Major Arcana.

Divination

If we understand physical and psychical phenomena as two aspects of the underlying *Unus Mundus*, then Jung's idea of synchronicity becomes clearer. A synchronous event can be defined as a meaningful coincidence, that is, a coincidence that has symbolic significance to someone experiencing the event. "By a synchronistic phenomenon Jung understands the coincidence in time of two or more psychic and physical events which are connected, not causally, but by their identical meaning" (von Franz 6n2). The meaning is revealed in an image constellated by an archetype manifesting simultaneously in the physical and psychic realms. Synchronistic phenomena are important because they provide a glimpse of the *Unus Mundus* in its wholeness; the eternal archetypes break through into the world of ordinary time, and inner and outer aspects of experience move in harmony. (von Franz 199, 242-3)

Synchronistic phenomena are usually spontaneous, but in divination we *arrange for a synchronistic event to take place*. This is not a simple mechanical matter, for synchronicity usually requires that an archetype be "activated" in the unconscious, which in turn presupposes an emotion-laden, tension-charged situation. Thus divination is most successful when undertaken for a serious purpose; under these conditions divinatory techniques can "draw archetypal material into the center of the field of observation" (von Franz 223-4).

The method of science may be contrasted with that of divination. In science one makes a conscious "cut" in the world, separating the phenomenon of interest from the rest of existence. In divination, on the other hand, one makes an unconscious "cut," by isolating a qualitative moment in time, which retains the fullness of its participation in both the physical and psychic aspects of all existence. Numerical procedures, such as cutting a tarot deck, rolling dice, or dividing yarrow stalks, are used to determine the *kairos*, the "key moment," for the constellation of a unique synchronous phenomenon. With proper preparation, so that an archetype is already activated by a sufficiently high "charge" of psychic energy, the divinatory act can create a "hole" in the "field of consciousness through which the autonomous dynamism of the collective unconscious can break in" (von Franz 227). (von Franz 44, 199)

By bringing the eternal archetypes into temporal consciousness, the divinatory act creates a "hole in time," the alchemical *Fenestra Aeternitatis* (Window to Eternity). The alchemists also called this hole through which autonomous spirit passes the *Spiraculum Aeternitatis*, or Airhole to Eternity; it corresponds to the smokehole in the top of shamans' tents, through which they ascend to the heavens and return to the mundane world. (von Franz 260-1)

Throughout history there have been many ways of using numbers for divination. For example, the I Ching is a well-known Eastern method of divination, which was studied by Jung and his colleagues, and is now quite popular in the West. In a fundamental sense it is based on numerical archetypes since, as many have observed, the hexagrams (composed of Yin and Yang lines) correspond to binary numbers (composed of 0s and 1s). Similar binary divination systems have been used in the West since ancient times, including geomancy in Europe and Arabia, and the related Ifa divination system in Africa. (In an appendix, [Tarot Divination Without Tarot Cards](#), I describe a similar binary method of selecting Tarot cards.)

Some of the most common numerical divination systems use dice: the combination of pips in the roll, or in some cases their sum, is used to consult a table of "oracles." Such methods were common in the ancient world (many temples had a dice table for consulting the gods) and are still in use today. Divination with dice is especially relevant to tarot, since there is some evidence that when playing cards were introduced into Europe from the Orient in the fourteenth century, methods of dice

divination were transferred to cards. (See the ["Introduction to the Major Arcana"](#) for more on this.)

So much for the theory of divination; see the appendix (["Divinatio"](#)) for practical suggestions (spreads, etc.) on the use of the Pythagorean Tarot for divination, meditation and other purposes, as well as for the use of dice casting and similar methods with the Tarot.

Pythagoreanism

Pythagoras, who was born in Samos (an island of the coast of Asia Minor) and lived in the sixth century BCE, is the fountainhead of most later Greek philosophy, both esoteric and exoteric. Although it is difficult to separate fact from legend, we may say that he believed in metempsychosis (reincarnation) and that numbers are the foundation of the universe. Further, he founded in Kroton (mod. Crotona, Italy) a religious society (open to women as well as men), which taught a way of life devoted to escape from the wheel of reincarnation through knowledge. Their practice included self-examination, vegetarianism, purity and silence, as well as the study of esoteric mathematics and music. He is thought to have written nothing down, but his followers did, and they attributed their works to him. (OCD s.v. Pythagoras)

According to ancient biographies (Diogenes Laertius 8.1-15) - which might not be entirely factual - Pythagoras, when a young man, became an initiate of all mysteries in Greece; he studied with the Phoenicians, learned Egyptian and studied with the priests there, and then went to be initiated into the mysteries on Crete. He claimed that in a previous life he was a son of Hermes, and that his divine father had granted him the gift of keeping his memory from one incarnation to the next. Pythagorean doctrine was kept secret until Philolaus (born c.470 BCE) published three books of it. It has many connections with Orphism, although their exact relation is not clear. (For a scholarly study see Walter Burkert's *Lore and Science in Ancient Pythagoreanism*.)

It is apparent that Socrates (who also wrote nothing) and Plato (c.429-347 BCE) were both Pythagoreans, and, according to Diogenes, Plato bought copies of Philolaus' books for 100 minas (about 100 pounds of silver) as soon as they were available. Certainly some of Plato's dialogues, such as the *Timaeus*, are filled with Pythagorean esoterica.

A Neopythagorean revival began in the first century BCE and continued until it developed into Neoplatonism in the third century CE. It remained the dominant Pagan philosophy until the emperor Justinian ordered the Pagan schools closed in 529 CE. Among its more famous proponents were Numenius, Plotinus, Porphyry, Iamblichus, Proclus and Hypatia. It is from these philosophers that most of the numerology of the Pythagorean Tarot is drawn. (For a comprehensive collection of Pythagorean writings, see Kenneth Guthrie's Pythagorean Sourcebook and Library. Two excellent sources for Neopythagorean numerology are Robin Waterfield's translation of *The Theology of Arithmetic* (attributed to Iamblichus) and Thomas Taylor's *Theoretic Arithmetic*, which is drawn from many sources.) (OCD s.v. Neoplatonism, Neopythagoreanism)

The Neopythagoreanism of second century CE Alexandria was also one of the principal sources of Gnosticism, the group of esoteric religions that flourished in that society, which also gave us the Hermetica (the writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus), the Chaldean Oracles and a number of other esoteric texts. This was also the cultural breeding ground for Plutarch's theosophical writings, Zosimos' alchemical work, and Numenius' Neopythagoreanism (which was, in turn, influenced by Gnosticism). (OCD s.v. Gnosticism)

Later, in the fifteenth century, when Plato and the Hermetica were first translated into Latin, a new efflorescence of Neopythagoreanism nourished the Renaissance at the Platonic Academy of Lorenzo de'Medici. Indeed, Renaissance art is saturated with Pythagorean and Hermetic symbols, and this is the cultural context in which the Tarot was born. A later, seventeenth century, efflorescence merged with the alchemical tradition, influencing philosophers such as Isaac Newton, Thomas Taylor and John Dee, and artists such as Shakespeare, Spenser and Blake, for Hermetic and alchemical themes are apparent in many of their works. (See Edgar Wind's *Pagan Mysteries in the Renaissance* for the influence of Neopythagoreanism and Hermeticism on the Renaissance. The works of Dame Francis Yates, such as *Giordano Bruno and the Hermetic Tradition* and *The Occult Philosophy in the Elizabethan Age*, are a good introduction to seventeenth-century Hermeticism.)

Alchemy

From a modern perspective, one of the weaknesses of Pythagoreanism is its one-sided exaltation of the mind and knowledge and its corresponding denigration of the material world and body. In this respect the alchemical perspective, which sees spirit embodied in matter and matter as a means of purifying and ennobling the spirit, is more balanced. This is expressed in the well-known alchemical maxim, "as above, so below." The masculine knowledge, Logos and spirit - the dry solar consciousness - requires its complement, feminine compassion, Eros and soul - the moist lunar consciousness. (In this respect it has some similarities with Tantric Buddhism.) The wisdom of the alchemical tradition is especially needed in our time.

Alchemy perhaps grew out of the secret lore of the first metallurgists. Their view was that metals were born out of the womb of Mother Earth, and that Nature caused them to develop toward ever greater nobility (manifested in gold); the earliest alchemists viewed their work as cooperating with Nature to hasten this process. Because early alchemists sought their goal through a combination of technology, magic and divine aid, we find in many cultures stories of an early generation of smith-gods and divine metallurgist-magicians (e.g. the Cabiri in Greek myths). Typically, they are also teachers of ecstatic dance and initiators into sacred mysteries of transformation. (See Mircea Eliade's *Forge and Crucible*.)

The doctrine of the four elements (earth, water, air, fire), a central principle of European alchemy, developed out of Greek philosophy. They appear first in the writings of Empedocles (c.493-c.433 BCE), who was a Greek shaman (*iatoromantis* - healer-seer - in Greek). Closely connected is the idea of the opposed qualities (hot/cold, moist/dry) that give the elements their character, which was an outgrowth of Pythagorean speculation. Plato and Aristotle explained the relation of the elements and

the qualities, and refined the theory into the form that it took in all later European alchemy; they also added the fifth element, the Quintessence, which is critical to the alchemical process, since it is the celestial principle that reconciles opposing mundane qualities. (See A. J. Hopkins' *Alchemy: Child of Greek Philosophy*.)

As alchemy developed after the Renaissance, alchemists became increasingly explicit in stating that their goal was not so much the transformation of metals as the transformation of the alchemist; they sought a "higher gold" than the common metal. This view has been confirmed by the well-known investigations of Jung, who has shown that the symbolical literature, emblems and procedures of alchemy are manifestations of the archetypal structure of the process of psychological individuation. Thus the alchemical worldview, which is closely allied with the Neopythagorean, becomes a valuable perspective from which to understand our growth and development as materially embodied spirits. Since at least the time of the Golden Dawn (late 19th cent.), alchemy has been a basis of tarot design, which effectively transcends the dualism of the Neopythagorean tradition. (Aside from Jung's own works, e.g., *Psych. & Alch.*, *Mys. Con.*, *Alch. Stud.*, *Aion*, which are quite readable, there are now numerous selections and explications of his alchemical writings, e.g. von Franz's *Alchemy* and Edward Edinger's books.)

Qabalah

It is certainly suggestive that there are 22 Major Arcana and 22 letters in the Hebrew alphabet, and one of major traditions of esoteric tarot interpretation is based on the Qabalistic interpretations of the Hebrew alphabet and the ten Sephirot. However, it appears that Court de Gebelin (1781) was the first to associate Qabalah and tarot, and so it seems to be a comparatively new tradition. As we will see, there are historically more plausible reasons for there being 22 Major Arcana than the alleged esoteric connection with the Hebrew alphabet. Furthermore, different tarotists have assigned the letters to the trumps in different ways, none of which are likely to be very old, since they do not depend on the oldest order of the trumps. Therefore, I have abandoned assignments to the Hebrew alphabet (which has no special significance from a Pythagorean standpoint) and replaced it by assignments to the Greek letters, which are esoterically significant in Pythagoreanism. Tarotists will have to judge for themselves the success of the new assignments. (Hall 129-30; Kaplan I.15-6)

Another Qabalistic idea, which has been important in esoteric tarot interpretation, is the doctrine of the paths between the Sephirot on the Tree of Life, a symbolically rich structure relating ten divine emanations, connected with the numerology of the numbers 1 through 10. However, historical scholars of the Qabalah, such as Gershom Scholem (Kab. & Sym. 167) have said that the *Sefer Yezirah*, one of the principal Qabalistic texts, was written by a Jewish Neopythagorean (3-6 cent. CE) and that much of the later Qabalistic tradition incorporates a very large dose of Neopythagoreanism; there is even evidence that some of the specialized terms of Qabalah were translated into Hebrew from Greek (Scholem, Kab. 27). Therefore I felt it is less anachronistic, in a Pythagorean Tarot, to go back to the apparent source of these numerological ideas, rather than to try to retranslate the doctrine of the Sephirot back into a Hellenic idiom. Nevertheless, whether Qabalah borrowed from Neopythagoreanism (or vice versa), or both from a common source, or whether they are independent developments is, I think, unimportant from a practical standpoint, for the numbers are archetypes, and therefore, underneath their cultural trappings, they are the same for all humanity.

Finally, we have to consider the Qabalistic use of *gematria*: the esoteric interpretation of Hebrew words by means of the numerical values of their letters. This is not a major part of traditional tarot interpretation, but it is a standard esoteric technique, so I have used it to reinforce the symbolic analyses of the trumps. However, since I have used *isopsephia* ("Greek gematria") rather than the better known gematria based on the Hebrew alphabet, a few words of explanation are necessary. There are several reasons for this.

First, an analysis based on the Greek alphabet is more appropriate to a Pythagorean tarot than one based on the Hebrew alphabet since, presumably, that is the alphabet Pythagoras would have used for isopsephia. Second, there is considerable evidence that the Hebrew practice is later than the Greek and probably derived from it. We'll consider the evidence briefly.

First, the Greek use of their alphabet for numeration goes back at least to the end of the fourth century BCE, whereas use of the Hebrew alphabet for numeration goes no earlier than the end of the second century BCE (Ifrah, chs. 16, 17). Indeed, Fideler (75) argues that the standard spellings of the Greek gods' names were formulated according to isopsephic principles under the influence of the Pythagorean League c. 500 BCE. He further argues (216-9) that many Greek temples, such as the Parthenon (447 BCE) and Apollo's temple at Didyma (300 BCE), were constructed isopsephically. The Greeks may have learned the idea from the Babylonians, who as early as the eighth century BCE constructed buildings according to an isopsephia based on their syllabic writing system.

Second, the only explanation for the word gematria is that it derives from the Greek word *gametria*, which is an alternative spelling for *geometria*, "geometry," but literally, "land surveying" (LSJ s.v. gametria, geometria; OED s.v. gematria). This is suggestive of its use (in Greece, Babylonia and perhaps other places) for laying out temples and other important buildings.

Third, the archaic Greek alphabet had 27 letters; thus it divided naturally into three Enneads (groups of 9), which were assigned to the numbers 1-9, 10-90 and 100-900 in order.

A	B	G	D	E	F	Z	E	Q
I	K	L	M	N	X	O	P	q
R	S	T	U	F	C	Y	W	3

The later alphabet dropped one letter from each group (F q 3), resulting in three Ogdoads (groups of eight), which was also considered to be esoterically significant. However, the three Enneads were retained for writing numbers, which is the basis of isopsephia. In contrast, the Hebrew alphabet had only 22 letters, so there were no numerals for 500, 600, 700, 800 or 900. (The use of the final forms of the letters for these numbers cannot predate their appearance in the Square Hebrew alphabet of

the first or second century BCE; Diringer 135-7.)

How much significance should be attached to isopsephia? We cannot fail to be astonished when we discover that a square around Apollo's temple at Didyma has a perimeter of 1415 Greek feet, and that 1415 is the numerical value of O QEOS APOLLWN (*ho Theos Apollon*, the God Apollo); or that a hexagon inscribed in the same temple has a perimeter of 1061 feet, which is the numerical value of APOLLWN (Fideler 216-7). But should we consider these facts "mere coincidences"? Here Jung's concept of synchronicity is helpful, for we realize that if the coincidence is symbolically meaningful, then it is a synchronistic event bridging the physical and psychic worlds. Therefore, if these isopsephic connections are significant to you, then they are ipso facto meaningful. For this reason the Pythagorean Tarot includes analyses according to the principles of isopsephia.

Back Design

The back design of the Pythagorean Tarot incorporates three important Pythagorean symbols:

- [the Pentagram](#),
- [the Tetractys](#),
- [the Pythagorean Y](#).

The Pentagram

The Pentagram, which is also known as the Triple Triangle (because of the way it's drawn) or the Pentalpha (because it's made of five As), is an ancient protective symbol. It appears in Mesopotamia as early as 3000 BCE and on Greek shields and coins by the fifth century BCE. Pythagoras may have become acquainted with it during his pilgrimages to Babylonia and Egypt (perhaps 554-533 BCE). In any case, the Pythagoreans adopted it as an identifying sign (sumbolon), the Signum Pythagoricum, described by Iamblichus (fl. c. 165-180 CE). According to Lucian (c. 120 CE), they called the pentagram Hugíeia ('UGIEIA), which means "health of mind and body," but more generally soundness, and wholeness; it is also the name of the goddess of health and well-being, Hygeia, the daughter of Asclepius. [Schouten 15-28, LSJ s.v. hugieia. The use of the sign is described in Iamblichus' *Life of Pythagoras* (XXXIII), which may be found in Guthrie (57-122); see p. 114 for the use of the sign.]

UGIEIA is a common inscription on amulets, frequently in the points or angles of a Pentagram, thus: U-G-I-E-I-A. The Latin equivalent S-A-L-V-S (salus, health) is also found on pentagrams, and sometimes both words appear together (one in the points, the other in the angles). (Schouten figs. 25-7, 30, 32-3, 35-7, 39)

According to Lucian, Pythagoreans greet each other by saying Hugíaine (Be sound/healthy!) rather than by the usual greetings Khaire (Rejoice! Be happy!) or Eu prêsse (Do well! Prosper!), for they consider soundness of mind and body to be necessary for happiness, prosperity and all other goods [Lucian, *Pro lapsu inter salutandum* ("On Slips of the Tongue in Greeting"); Schouten 15-7]. This is because "health," for Pythagoreans, means balance: first, a balance of the four elements (fire, water, earth, air) and their qualities (hot, cold, dry, wet), especially as they manifest in the four humours of the human body (yellow bile, phlegm, black bile, blood); second, but more importantly, a harmonious union of body and soul (represented by the fifth element, Aithêr). Thus the Pentagram Hugieia (the Salus Pythagorae) represents the perfect equilibrium of the five elements. Pythagoreans maintain this harmony by a variety of physical, aesthetic, intellectual, intuitive and spiritual exercises (corresponding to Earth, Water, Air, Fire, Aithêr respectively). (Schouten 15-18)

(For the last few hundred years it has been conventional to make the Pentagram with an upward point, symbolizing the subjugation of the body to the mind, but the ancients do not seem to have attached any significance to the orientation of the Pentagram. See [14.Devil](#) for more on the inverted Pentagram.)

We have seen how the Pentagram symbolizes soundness and wholeness in the Microcosm, the individual mind-body. By the Hermetic Principle "As above, so below," it similarly represents in the Macrocosm the harmony between the spiritual and physical worlds. Further, Agrippa (*De Occulta Philosophia*, 1531, II.xxvii) says it symbolizes the harmony between Macrocosm and Microcosm, that is, between the external world and the world within.

For more on the Pentagram as a symbol of balance and the union of opposites, see the [Fives](#) in the Minor Arcana (in Part II) .

The Tetractys

Inside the Pentagram on the card back you will see a triangular arrangement of ten dots; this is the most sacred Pythagorean symbol, the Tetractys (or Tetraktus). Rather than swearing by Pythagoras' name, Pythagoreans use as their most solemn oath (Burkert, L&S 186):

Nay! By him that gave our family the Tetractys,
which holds the Fount and Root of everflowing Nature.

(Ou ma ton hameterai geneai paradonta Tetraktun,
Pagan aenaou Phuseôs Rhizôma t' ekhousan.)

The Tetractys shows how the Decad (10), the number of perfection and of Nature, grows out of the first four numbers, the Monad, Dyad, Triad and Tetrad. As the Neoplatonist philosopher Proclus (c.412-485 CE) says,

- Sacred Number springs
From th'uncorrupted Monad, and proceeds

To the Divine Tetractys, she who breeds
 All; and assigns the proper bounds to all,
 Whom we the pure immortal Decad call.
 [Stanley's 1687 translation (Stanley 512) with modernized spelling]

Pythagoreans also call the Tetractys the "Principle or Beginning of Hugiaia" (Hugiaias Arkhê). [Lucian, *Pro lapsu inter salutandum* ("On Slips of the Tongue in Greeting"); Schouten 17; Burkert, L&S 263-4] I will not say more about the Tetractys here, since it is discussed in connection with trumps I-IV of the [Major Arcana](#), with the numbers Ace to Four of the [Minors](#), and with the [Tetractys Spread](#), as well as in the [More on the Tetractys](#).

The Pythagorean Y

We come now to the Pythagorean Letter Y (Littera Pythagorae Y), which is perhaps less well known nowadays than the other Pythagorean symbols, but has been quite influential in European art, literature and thought. [Panofsky, *Hercules* 64-8, *tafel XXXV*, *frontis.*; Heninger, *Touches* 269-72; Chew 174-81, *figs.* 130-1; Smith 293-302. A first century CE example is discussed by Davidson (*Hadot* 9-11). For additional examples see Guthrie 158; Drucker 165. The Y is also known as the Furca Pythagorica (Pythagorean Fork) and the Ypsilon Cross (Liungmann 108).] Before discussing its meaning, it's necessary to explain that our letter Y was borrowed into the Roman alphabet from the Greek letter Y (upsilon) in order to spell Greek words (Z was imported for the same reason). Upsilon was a Greek addition to the Phoenician alphabet, but based on the Semitic letter waw. Thus the earliest form of upsilon was similar to the Semitic letter: a line sloping steeply upward to the right, with a shorter line or hook going more gradually up to the left from the middle of the longer (something like our y) (Jeffery 24-5, 35). Upsilon became the twenty-second letter of the archaic Greek alphabet (after T), and was the last letter until Phi, Chi, Psi and Omega were added. All this is relevant to the proper interpretation of the Pythagorean Y.

According to a legend, Y was called "the Pythagorean letter" (littera Pythagorica) because he himself had been responsible for adding it to the Greek alphabet (Persius/Conington 61n56; Persius/Gildersleeve 130-1nn56-7; Persius/Koenig 81nn56, 240n56). Aside from being the first letter of Hugiaia (UGIEIA) (*Hadot* 9), it was given a specific meaning, as explained by Isidore of Seville (c.560-636 CE, *Etym.* I.iii.10-16; tr. in Heninger, *Touches* 269):

Pythagoras of Samos was the first to fashion the letter Y into a pattern of human life. The straight portion at the bottom signifies the first, uncertain age, which at that point has been given over to neither vices nor virtues. The bifurcation at the top, however, begins at adolescence. The path to the right is difficult, but it tends toward a blessed life. The path to the left is easier, but it leads to ruin and destruction.

The same idea is expressed in an epigram traditionally (but probably incorrectly) attributed to Virgil:

The Pythagoric Letter two ways spread,
 Shows the two paths in which Man's life is led.
 The right-hand track to sacred Virtue tends,
 Though steep and rough at first, in rest it ends;
 The other broad and smooth, but from its Crown,
 On rocks the Traveler is tumbled down.
 He who to Virtue by harsh toils aspires,
 Subduing pains, worth and renown acquires;
 But who seeks slothful luxury, and flies
 the labor of great acts, dishonor'd dies.

[Stanley tr. (Stanley 565) with modernized spelling and punctuation. Latin text of Maximinus (pseudo-Virgil) in *Anthologia Latina*, 652 Riese; Panofsky, *Hercules* 66-7. Chapman (Bartlett ed., 234-5) has translated it in "Virgil's Epigram of this Letter Y." Petrarch (*Epist.* III.32) and the famous Meistersinger Hans Sachs also paraphrased it (Panofsky, *Her.* 66-7).]

The opposition of "the steep and thorny way to heaven" and "the primrose path of dalliance" (*Hamlet* I.iii.47) is an old theme (it has Sumerian and Norse parallels, West, W&D 229). As Hesiod (fl. 700 BCE) wrote in his *Works & Days* (West, W&D 229):

Whereas to take a hold of Vice, in plenitude,
 is easy, for the way is smooth, and near she dwells;
 yet sweat was placed in front of Virtue by the gods
 undying; and the road to her is long and steep,
 and rough at first; yet when one has attained the peak,
 indeed the way is easy, which was very hard.

[I have used the conventional translations Virtue and Vice for Aretê and Kakotês, although the meanings are closer to excellence, goodness, nobility, merit, success, as opposed to baseness, wickedness, badness, cowardice, failure. Hesiod's intent is more concrete and practical than later, moralistic interpretations (LSJ s.v. aretê, kakotês; West, W&D 229; Tandy & Neale 80, 82).]

Pythagoras was probably the first to use the archaic y to symbolize this "parting of the ways" (Bivium). The right-hand path is straight, and in this sense natural (i.e., in accord with Nature), but it is narrow and ascends steeply. The left-hand path, in contrast, is a deviation from "the straight and narrow," and therefore against Nature. However, it is wider and an easier slope, and therefore a more attractive choice (Persius/Conington 61nn56-7; Persius/Gildersleeve 130-1nn56-7; Persius/Koenig 81nn56, 240n56-7). (We can see this even in our printed Y.)

The same myth of the parting of the ways and the two paths (upward to the right for the virtuous, downward to the left for the wicked) also appears in descriptions of the progress of the soul between incarnations (e.g., Plato's "Myth of Er," Rep. X.614b-621d, and Plutarch's Face in the Moon, 943-4). The good go to the Fields of Elysium, but the wicked to the Pits of Tartarus.

Closely related to the Pythagorean Y, and often associated with it in art, is the myth of "Heracles' Choice," which Xenophon heard from Socrates, who credited Prodicus the Wise with it (Xenophon, Memorabilia II.i.21-33). The gist of the story is this: When the adolescent Heracles (Hercules) was deciding which path to take in life, he was approached by two goddesses, "Vice" (Kakia) and "Virtue" (Aretê), coming along the paths. Lady Vice attempts to entice Heracles to a life of ease, but Lady Virtue encourages him to follow the more difficult path leading to a blessed life with the gods. They are the Kakodaimôn (Evil Spirit), the guide on the Way of Death (Via Mortis) toward misery (dusdaimonia), and the Agathodaimôn (Good Spirit), the guide on the Way of Life (Via Vitae) toward true happiness (eudaimonia). [Good and Evil Spirits, happiness and misery: Stanley 575; Ways of Life and Death: Chew 176.] Heracles chose to follow Lady Virtue. It is perhaps not so well known that in the ancient world (especially among the Stoics), and later in the Renaissance, Heracles was considered a liberator, savior and moral hero (Smith 293; Heninger, Touches 271). The image of "Heracles at the Crossroads" was already common by the third century CE (according to Philostratus, Life of Apollonius of Tyana VI.x, Smith 294). Raphael's Dream of Scipio (1500) is a more recent example. In many tarots (e.g. the Marseilles deck, but not the Pythagorean), the "Lovers" trump shows a young man faced with a choice between the Ladies Vice and Virtue.

We have completed an overview of the exoteric meaning of the Pythagorean Y, and now will consider its esoteric meaning, for the Y originally represented the choice faced by Pythagorean initiates at a certain stage of their initiations. The choice is between the Active Life (Vita Activa) of the ordinary person on the left and the Contemplative Life (Vita Contemplativa) of the initiate on the right. Clearly, from the Pythagorean perspective, the right-hand path is preferable, although more arduous. The choice is between ignorance and enlightenment, between indulgence of the appetites and development of the mind, between worldly and spiritual pursuits, between the quests for earthly success and divine wisdom. [These lives are dramatized by Mephistopheles and Faust in Goethe's drama; Homunculus is the naive, primordial union of opposites (Raphael 156-7).] Thus we may say that the Pythagorean Y represents the power of choice and the commitment to take responsibility for, and conscious control of, your life's purpose and direction (Hall lxvi-lxvii; Drucker 111).

This interpretation of the Pythagorean Y is clearly judgmental and may seem moralistic: the right-hand path is the better; this was part of the message the ancient Pythagoreans offered to their time. Indeed, it is a symbol of Virtue (Chew 177), for it also represents raising the arms in celestial invocation (Koch 6-7). However, as previously discussed (see [Alchemy](#)), Pythagoreanism developed into alchemy, which offers a more balanced approach, better suited to our age, which synthesizes the opposites into a higher unity, rather than suppressing one for the sake of the other. Already in antiquity, but especially in the Renaissance, people began to realize the importance (and difficulty!) of uniting the active and contemplative lives (Smith 300-3). Therefore we see the significance of the modern Y: it represents the union of opposites in a complete life. [Indeed, the forked stick is a symbol of life in many cultures (Hall lxvii), and the Pythagorean Y is associated with the Tree of Life (Chew 178).] Recall that Y (Upsilon) is the initial of UGIEIA (Hugieia), which means soundness and wholeness. In general, the symmetric Y represents the alchemical principle of the differentiation of a primordial unity (the stem) into a consciously discriminated opposition (the arms), which is but a manifestation of the underlying unity. (See [21.World](#) for more on the Y in this sense.)

This brings us to the form of the Y used in the Pythagorean Tarot back design: three equal arms. In addition to the preceding meanings, the Pythagorean Tarot Y symbolizes what Paracelsus called the Tria Prima (Primal Triad), the alchemical union of (philosophical) salt, mercury and sulphur, that is, of body, soul and spirit. [Read 27. Note that Paracelsus reversed sulphur and mercury from the usual correspondences, which are used in the Pythagorean Tarot.] It also represents the meeting of three ways (called Triodos in Greek and Trivium in Latin), a place especially sacred to Hecate, a very important Goddess for Pythagoreans ([Opsopaus, "Anc. Grk. Eso. Doctr. Elem.," part IV](#); Kingsley, APMM chs. 16-19). (For more on the Pythagorean Y, see [21.World](#).)

In summary, the card back design represents the first five Pythagorean numbers. The card back as a whole is the primal unity, the Monad. The two opposed pentacles are the primary duality, the Dyad. The three-armed Pythagorean Y represents the unified Triad. The Tetractys, built as it is on 1, 2, 3, 4, is the elementary Tetrad. Finally the pentagram represents the Pentad, and, together with its surrounding pentagon, it represents the Decad, the Pythagorean number of Perfection. Many other relationships will become apparent if you look for them, but that is enough for now.

Textual Conventions

The Pythagorean Tarot is a creative symbolic synthesis, and is perhaps more akin to poetry (in content, not form) than to scientific or scholarly writing. Nevertheless, I have tried to give citations wherever I have drawn ideas from other authors. In this way you will be able to tell the source of an idea, and make an informed decision in deciding whether or not to agree with it. Many ideas have been synthesized in the Pythagorean Tarot, and specific interpretations may blend ideas of several authors. Therefore citations usually come at the ends of paragraphs, and it may be assumed that the content of the paragraph is drawn from the cited sources. Occasionally the degree of synthesis is sufficiently great that I have placed the citations in a paragraph by themselves, in which case they should be assumed to apply to all the immediately preceding paragraphs without citations. In other cases, in particular when I'm quoting directly, I have placed citations in individual sentences. Where there are no citations, it can be assumed that, as far as I know, the ideas are original, although I have often discovered that I have been thinking down paths already well trod. My purpose is not to claim originality, but simply to point to sources when I am aware of them.

In general, words of the form XVII.Moon or 17.Moon represent trumps in the Major Arcana. They may be numbered by Roman numerals, which tend to exhibit their Pythagorean meanings, or by Hindu-Arabic numerals when I want to stress the arithmetical properties of the number, which are more easily seen in the Hindu-Arabic notation.

I have transliterated all foreign words into the Roman alphabet, except those Greek words subject to isopsephia, for which the exact Greek spelling is required. Long vowels in Greek (eta, omega), Sumerian, Babylonian and Sanskrit are represented by a circumflex accent (e[^], o[^], etc.). The Greek chi has been translated kh to forestall any tendency to pronounce it as English ch; similarly upsilon is written u rather than y (except when the word is already anglicized with the y) and should be pronounced like German u:. In general Greek names are transliterated (approximately) phonetically, unless they are already well known by a conventional English spelling; thus I write 'Circe' rather than 'Kirke[^]', which is more accurate. Occasionally I will use several spellings, for example, 'Circe' for familiarity, but 'Kirke[^]' when discussing the connection to *kirkos*. I have not distinguished the Akkadian and Sumerian emphatic consonants p and t from the usual ones, nor the laryngeal h from the usual h. Determinatives are written in capitals, thus: ILU-shamash. Sanskrit words are spelled more or less phonetically (thus chakra rather than cakra); retroflex consonants are written t., d., n., etc. (and may be pronounced like t, d, n, etc.); n~ is the palatal n. In all these languages I have used the spelling sh for the sound that it normally represents in English, even though scholarly transliterations often represent this sound by an s with a diacritical mark.



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Divination

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Tarot Journal

Before beginning the discussion of divination, I need to mention the importance of keeping a *tarot journal*. This is a journal in which you record all of your readings, including the spread used, the cards that turn up, your analysis and interpretation of the spread, and any followup observations about the accuracy of the reading. You should also record anything that seems relevant about the context of the reading (e.g., your physical or mental state, astrological conditions) as well as any potentially synchronistic events that occur during the divination. If you have additional insights after the reading, you should go back and note them in your journal too. Thus your tarot journal becomes a repository of your experiences in divination, in which you can accumulate discoveries of both general and personal significance. By reviewing your journal periodically you will hone your card-reading skill. The journal is also important in other uses of the Pythagorean Tarot, including meditation and magic.

1. The Nature of Divination

The Practice of Divination

It would be worthwhile to reread "[Divination](#)" in the [Introduction](#) before proceeding, since the theoretical discussion there provides a background for the practical issues discussed here.

From a psychological standpoint, in divination we are trying to arrange for a synchronistic event, a breakthrough of the archetypal world into the everyday world of time and place. Such a breakthrough will be more likely if several psychological preconditions are satisfied. First, the matter of the divination should be important, for a synchronistic event is more likely if there is a high charge of psychic energy, that is, more likely in an emotion-laden, tension-charged situation. Second, one or more archetypes of the collective unconscious should be activated, since in this way a constellated archetype becomes luminous and shines through, glowing with meaning. Thus the archetypal realm may break through into consciousness and physical reality simultaneously. As Albertus Magnus (1193-1290) explained, an *Excessus Affectus* (Excess of Feeling) is a prerequisite to any kind of magic. This intensification can be accomplished by a number of means, including repetition (hence the use of the question as a mantra) and the manipulation of physical objects coordinated with the archetypal realm (hence, the contemplation of the spread as a mandala); a mandala creates an intersection between the eternal and temporal realms. Third, the light of ego consciousness must be turned down, since it subtracts from the luminosity of the archetypes; the discursive ego must be silent, to give the archetypes (as autonomous spirits) an opportunity to speak. Once the breakthrough occurs, synchronistic events of all sort may take place, in the physical environment as well as in the cards. However, the "window to eternity" stays open for only a brief time, after which the ordinary temporal order resumes. (von Franz 157, 185-6, 200, 223, 225-7, 246, 262)

From a religious standpoint, we are in effect requesting an audience with the Gods. We are asking that They give us advice on a problem, reveal Their Will, or give us a glimpse into the future. It should be apparent that we should not present the Gods with trivial or frivolous questions. Further, we should not resort to divination before we have availed ourselves of more mundane means of problem solving. "Hermes will help you to get your wagon unstuck, but only if you push on it," as an old proverb says. So we should have a serious concern to present to the Gods and we should show Them we are sincere in our petition. One way to do this is to conduct the divination as a sacred ritual including prayers, vows and offerings to the Gods. Finally, the supplicant should submit himself to the Will and advice of the Gods.

Accepting the Will of the Gods is not the same, however, as a passive fatalism. A divination reveals Their Will as it is at a given moment of time. The future is not fixed, for Gods may change Their minds, and sometimes a supplicant can convince Them to do so. Also, a supplicant may enlist a God to work in his favor and intercede on his behalf with other Gods. Further, oracles are often conditional: "if you do this, such and such will happen," so the choice remains with us. Even when the Gods' minds are made up and they cannot be swayed, we are free to choose how we will raft the river of fate.

"The Master Speaks But Once"

We consider the advisability of repeating a Tarot reading to test its "reliability." The ancient oracles (and traditional usage of dice oracles etc.) were interpreted as petitions to the Gods for guidance, and were generally accompanied by prayers, vows,

sacrifices etc. Under such conditions the God can easily determine the outcome of a cast without violating the laws of statistical probability, since the cast is a singular event. Impious moderners can imagine "testing" the God, by repeated casts, but as Jung says in his forward to the Wilhelm-Baynes translation of the *I Ching* (p. xxix), "To ask the same question a second time would have been tactless and so I did not do it: 'the master speaks but once.'" Naturally, materialists will consider his attitude unscientific, and so it is - intentionally so. As Jung says, "The heavy-handed pedagogic approach that attempts to fit irrational phenomena into a preconceived rational pattern is anathema to me."

If we doubt the God and test the oracle, we deserve what we will likely get: the results predicted by chance. For to ask the very same question of the Gods a second time, merely for the sake of repetition, and not for greater insight or some other genuine need, is to try the Gods' patience. To perform a divination under "controlled conditions," without proper ritual and mental attitude, is sacrilegious. Is it any wonder that under such circumstances the Gods give misleading answers or no answers at all?

From a psychological standpoint, there is no such thing as repeating a divination, since each reading is unique. At very least the "psychic charge" decreases with repetition, which decreases the likelihood of a synchronistic event. Divination accesses "psychological probability," the expected evolution ("rolling out") of archetypal processes, which is completely different from the statistical probability of the sciences. Divination requires an unconscious "cut," isolating the qualitative character of a moment in its physical and psychic wholeness, whereas science requires a conscious "cut," which isolates a phenomenon from the rest of existence. (von Franz 44, 198-9, 223-4)

Importance of Ritual

I hope the foregoing has made clear the important role that ritual plays in divination. The exact form of the ritual is not so important as the sincerity with which it's conducted, and different magical and religious traditions will have their own methods; the divination ritual that follows has a Hellenic orientation. Some readers will be put off by its complexity. Certainly it is not necessary to include every aspect of it in every reading; the substance of the ritual should be suited to importance of the divination. However, before adopting a very casual approach to divination, I would remind the reader that in ancient times (before "the decline of the oracles"), supplicants would often travel many miles by foot to visit an oracular shrine, where they would make expensive sacrifices and significant vows before requesting an oracle. In deciding how much effort to put into a divination, you should ask yourself, "How badly do I want to know?"

2. Suggested Divination Ritual (Ritus Divinationis)

This divination ritual derives from a number of sources, including ancient divination practices, the theoretical discussions in von Franz' *Number and Time*, and practical suggestions in Gad's *Tarot and Individuation* (349-53), Blofeld's *I Ching* (ch. 4), Renee's *Tarot Spells* (241-4), Knight's *Tarot and Magic* (126-8) and "Book T," the Golden Dawn Tarot manuscripts (Regardie IX.29-31, 33-4, 46-7; Wang 103-108, 126), among others.

i. The Consecration (Consecratio)

The Divination Area (Templum Divinationis)

The divination should be performed in sacred space, which may be permanently consecrated (e.g. a temple or shrine) or established *pro tempore* for the purpose of a divination. Furthermore, the area should be clean and uncluttered, with subdued lighting and free of distractions. Pick a time and place so that the divination will not be interrupted; the presence of others beyond the reader and querent will probably interfere.

Within the sacred area is the *Focus* (Latin, altar hearth), the table upon which the divination is performed. Place on the Focus the following: the Deck in its cover or container, the spread cloth (if used), censer, candles and any other ritual instruments (e.g. wand or athame).

The Deck (Triumphī & Chartae)

The Tarot deck should be consecrated as a tool (see, for example, my [Lesser](#) and [Greater](#) Tool Consecrations); thereafter it should be treated with respect, as would any sacred object (e.g. an athame or wand). It is often valuable to establish a bond with the deck by keeping it with you for at least a full day after consecration. It does not need to be consecrated more than once.

It is traditional to keep a Tarot deck wrapped in black silk, since black is a neutral color and keeps out extraneous influences. Or you may choose to keep it wrapped in some other clean cloth or to house it in a clean, attractive container that is not used for anything else. The point is to treat the deck with respect.

ij. The Preparation (Preparatio)

Formulating the Question (Descriptio Quaestionis)

The first and most important step in the divination is to formulate the question or request. Try to get to the essence of the matter; you are seeking the advice of the Gods, so ask what you really need to know. It is often worthwhile to formulate the problem in consultation with other people who can provide additional perspectives (e.g. the querent may do it in consultation with the reader).

Here are some general guidelines. Avoid either-or questions or questions about a future event at a specific time; the answer to such a question may be accurate but irrelevant. Better questions are "What will be the result of doing ...?" or "How may ... be accomplished?" Often the most useful request is "Comment upon ...," since it invites the God to offer the most relevant advice and doesn't force the response into a particular form. In any case, although formulating the question is important for your own clarification, you must expect the Gods to respond to what you need to know, even if it is not what you asked. Be open to Their gifts.

The question should be brief, so that it can be held in the mind easily; further, it is helpful, though by no means necessary, if it can be expressed metrically (so that it can serve as a sort of mantra). Write the question down so that it can be kept in sight.

Purification (Purificatio)

In preparation for divination it is helpful to fast for seven hours, or at least to abstain from heavy food. You may also want to deprive yourself of sleep the day before; this facilitates entering a liminal state in which your conscious mind is less likely to block the synchronistic event. Immediately before divination, take a lustral bath during which you contemplate the question. (If a bath is infeasible, at least wash your hands.) Don ceremonial robes for the divination itself. Do a preliminary grounding and centering.

iii. The Entry to Sacred Space (Introitus ad Templum)

If you do not have a permanent, consecrated ritual area, then create sacred space by casting a circle in your usual way. When you enter sacred space, leave outside all anger and resentment, love and hate, hope and fear, and all strong emotions, for they will interfere with the divination.

iv. The Opening Prayer (Preces)

Call upon the Gods, make an offering to Them, and pray that They reveal to you what you need to know regarding the question, which you should ask as previously formulated. Visualize the incense carrying your prayer and question up to the Heavens. Here is an example prayer:

We call You, Lord Apollo, Pythian,
the Ruler of the Delphic Oracle,
or by whatever name You would prefer.
Attend us and accept these offerings.
(*pour libation, burn incense, etc.*)
Be kind to us and send us lucid signs;
reveal the Will of Heaven so we may comply.
The problem that we bring to You is this:
(*state the question as formulated*)
Be kind to us, Apollo, Lord of Light.
In wisdom may we live by Your advice.

If a libation of Holy Water is poured, both reader and querent may also drink some of it, from a silver vessel, for inner purification. Continue to hold the question in your mind.

v. The Charging (Potestatem Facere)

First purify the deck. Hold it horizontally in your dominant hand and pass it to the right through the incense smoke while reciting your question. Next empower the deck. Hold it in your left hand (your right, if you are left-handed), and with your dominant hand, possibly holding a magical tool, make an invoking pentagram (top to lower left) over it. Then charge it while saying,

Apollo, Lord of Prophecy, I call!
The Art of Secret Wisdom is Your realm,
and therefore I request You place Your hand
upon these consecrated Cards of Art,
so I may better know the Hidden Truth,
and praise the vision of Your Shining Light.

You should pay careful attention to everything that happens from now on during the reading, not only with the cards but also in the surroundings. You are arranging for a synchronistic event to take place, which may manifest, both physically and psychically, in many ways. In addition to physical phenomena, you should note ideas, images, emotions, etc. that may enter your mind. This is especially true after the Cut, which is intended to trigger the synchronistic event.

vi. The Shuffle (Miscere)

Shuffle the cards in any way that's convenient. While you are shuffling, keep the question clearly in mind, and try to keep your mind clear of everything else. Stop shuffling when it feels right to do so.

Since medieval times it has been considered very significant if a card falls out of the deck during shuffling. "What falls, comes" (*Quod cadit, venit*). Such a card must be interpreted as defining the atmosphere of the entire divination. It should be shuffled back into the deck, and if it appears in the spread it should be considered especially significant. (Hamaker-Zondag, *Tarot as a Way of Life*, p. 105)

vij. The Cut (Secare)

The *moment* of the cut is the most crucial part of the divination, since it is the act that isolates the qualitative instant, which will be explicated in the spread. (In Latin, the *momentum* is simultaneously the featherweight that tips the scales, the impulse, the creative cause, the decisive change, and the instant in time.) Therefore, in preparation for the cut, you should quiet your mind, clear it of all thoughts and desires, and open yourself to a sign from the Gods.

When the moment *feels* right, cut the deck. The cut should be made with the left hand if you are right-handed and with the right if you are left-handed. The cut should be clean and decisive.

If you make a "false cut" (drop one or more cards), then replace them in the deck and reshuffle before cutting again. Another false cut indicates that this is an inauspicious time for divination. (The Golden Dawn manuscripts suggest that an important divination be delayed for at least twelve hours if a false cut occurs.)

viii. The Spread (Ducere)

Before spreading the cards, visualize in your mind the spread you will use, and think about the meaning of locations in the spread. Meditate on the spread as a mandala, that is, as a cosmological map of the archetypal realm. To this end, it is helpful if the Focus is covered with a cloth marked with the spread.

Place the cards face down in the spread in the prescribed order. (They are placed face down to prevent the reader's or querent's mental reaction to earlier cards from influencing the choice of later ones.) Then turn them all face up, again in the prescribed order, before beginning the interpretation. In this way you will be able to see all the relationships among the cards without undue bias from the earlier cards.

ix. The Interpretation (Interpretatio)

Intuition is much more important than analysis for interpreting the cards. This intuition is built in part on prior analysis: study of the commentaries on the cards, meditation on their images and associated myths, and practice reading with the deck. However, the reading is a unique event in time and space, and so your intuition should also be used to incorporate the particulars of the reading into your interpretation (i.e., consider the circumstances of the reading, the people involved, etc.). Typically, some parts of the reading will have meaning only to the individual querent or reader. Don't be "bound by the book" (i.e. my commentaries).

If some aspects of the reading are unclear, it is possible to do a secondary reading. For example, if the problem is at a particular location in the spread, one to three additional cards may be dealt to that location in an attempt to clarify the corresponding aspect. Place them above the spread if the ambiguity is more pervasive. If the entire reading suggests another question or problem, then a complete additional reading can be performed, by addressing the new problem to the God, reshuffling the deck and respreading the cards.

The original spread, its interpretation, and any secondary spreads and their interpretations should all be recorded in writing to facilitate follow-up interpretation or reinterpretation. Some aspects of the reading may become clearer as events unfold.

x. The Closing Prayer (Gratiae)

When your divination is complete, offer thanks to the Gods for Their guidance. Burn incense, pour libation or make other offerings. Here is a typical prayer:

Apollo, gracious Lord of Oracles,
receive these offerings for all Your gifts,
and for the guidance You have granted me.

I gladly give You many heartfelt thanks,
for I am grateful for Your watchful care.

Then rewrap the cards, extinguish the candles, etc., and retire from sacred space.



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