

TAROT INTERPRETATION

Lesson Seven

The Tarot Keys for this lesson are 7, 14 and 21. Review the lessons dealing with these Keys and their letters. After the review, consider this parable:

On an uncharted island in the South Seas there grew a tree. Its bark, and fruit were different from those of trees in other lands. Its leaves, like those of the tree of life described in **Revelation**, were for the healing of the nations.

Blown out of their course by storms, occasional voyagers came to the island, found the tree, ate the fruit, and were healed by its leaves. Some sailed from the east, some from the west, others from the south. Each believed himself to be the original discoverer. Each supposed the course he sailed was the only way to the island. Each wrote a record of his journey, described the tree, and proclaimed the healing virtue of its fruit and leaves.

Some there were who believed these tales, but there were more who scoffed. Nobody could form any clear image of the tree because no man can picture anything differing radically from what he himself has experienced.

Believers said: "See, this one left us a sick man, but now he is whole. Nor is it his body only which has been healed. His very heart is changed."

Unbelievers declared: "It is nothing but a change of air. The sea voyage helped his body, and because that is well, his temper is naturally sweeter. Even so, the man is mad. If there be a tree such as he raves about, why did he bring us none of its leaves? Nor even a shred of its bark? Just a wild tale with no evidence whatever to support it!"

The believers, nevertheless, preserved the story, and, in the course of years, added many wondrous fancies of their own imagining. So the tale of the tree passed into the folklore of many peoples.

Then came one whose travels in strange countries gave him opportunity to study the customs and compare the beliefs of many races. He journeyed to the south, to the east, and to the west. Wherever he went, he heard stories of the island and the tree. No two accounts agreed as to details. Some said the island lay to the north, some had it that the seeker must go west, others insisted that the course was to the east. And when it came to describing the tree, human fancy ran wild.

The traveler, however, saw that this disagreement about ways to reach the island really meant nothing. They who lived in the south had to travel north; for dwellers in the east, the island lay to the west; and for those whose homes were in the west, the course was to the east.

On one point all were agreed. On an island was a tree whose leaves were for the healing of every disease, good for sickness of soul as well as for ailments of the flesh.

So our traveler set out to find the island, nor was his search in vain. Carefully comparing the old tales, he calculated roughly its probable location. Then he sailed a circular course round the area he had marked off on his chart, making the circles smaller and smaller. During the long months of his quest he stopped at many an island. Some were fair and had lovely, exotic trees and fruits.

Once or twice he believed he had found what he sought, but when he tested the leaves of these strange trees, he found some which brought forgetfulness and others which induced strange dreams, but none had power to cure the ills of soul and body. Some, indeed, though sweet to the taste, made him ill almost unto death. More than once, too, he had narrow escapes from shipwreck, from being killed by dreadful beasts, and from other perils.

Yet he persevered in his quest, and, at last, his patience was rewarded. Then he learned why no traveler had been able to bring home any tangible evidence of the existence of the magic tree. When its fruit was plucked, it must be eaten at once, for within an hour it began to rot. So with the leaves and bark. They crumbled into nothingness when separated from the tree.

The moment the traveler saw the tree, he knew it and perceived that in all the tales about it there was truth. Whatever had seemed meaningless became intelligible when he saw the tree itself. Yet he knew no man ever would be able to describe the tree so that it might be imaged truly by one who had not seen it. Whoever had not visited the island must belong to one of two classes of persons. Some would believe, more would scoff. None could **know** save those who made the journey.

So the traveler returned to his home and wrote the story of his own search. He illustrated it with maps and charts. He marked the soundings and the ocean currents. He put in the latitude and longitude. Yet the world continued to mock at the story. Some called him a madman. Some said he was a fool. Men of science and other schoolmen, particularly physicians, denounced this "dangerous charlatan." They derided his book, impugned the accuracy of his charts, and even tried to imprison him for obtaining money under false pretenses because he had accepted pay for his writings and lectures.

Nevertheless, some few put his words to the test of actual experiment. In large vessels and in small, they set sail for the island, and because the traveler's directions were clear and true, they found the tree and were healed of all their miseries.

So, in time, there came to be in the world an association of “Knowers of the Tree.” Because their minds and bodies were strong and sound, their lives spread a contagion of health and understanding and love throughout the localities in which they spent their remaining days. Thus the world became brighter and happier for their presence.

As you study this lesson, keep in mind this parable. The tree is what Jesus called “the kingdom of God.” The island is an actual place within the body of man. The fruit and the leaves are states of consciousness, for the Tree is the Tree of Life, the Key to all Things. Eating of the fruit of the tree leads to a state of consciousness beyond thought, a synthesis of all experience in which the sense of separateness is blotted out, and direct knowledge of unity and eternity takes the place of the time-bound multiplicity of ordinary consciousness.

No man who has eaten the fruit of this tree may describe it as it really is. Yet he will understand the meaning of all descriptions of this experience. He will find it in the pages of Sufi poets. He will recognize it in the strange language of alchemists and magicians. He will read it in the writings of Hindu philosophers and Chinese sages. It will speak to him from the simple phrases of that humble American seer, Jacob Beilhart. But for variety of description and expression, he will find it, among all the books in the world, no better put than in those composing the Bible; and of all the words in the Bible, the words of Jesus tell the story best.

He who has eaten of the fruit of the Tree of Life will know how hopeless are all attempts to define this experience. Thus he will be free from slavish adherence to creeds though he will oppose no creed, however crudely expressed, which bears the unmistakable signs of being based on genuine inner experience. For he knows the inadequacy of all endeavors to define the indefinable, the futility of all efforts to limit the limitless.

The consciousness beyond thought is crystal clear, sharply defined, free from the least suspicion of haziness. This very clarity makes it ineffable. We have no words to convey such fullness of meaning. Our common tongue is intended to describe piecemeal experience. How may it express what one has called “being everywhere, and all at once?”

Expect no one, then, to tell you “just what” the consciousness beyond thought is like. St. Paul says it is unlawful to speak of these things. Be content with what you may learn of the way leading to this final liberation. **Then follow the way yourself.**

It is not enough to read travelers’ tales, even if they be most convincing and most scientific. He who would be rid of misery, he who would taste the fullness of joy, must find the island for himself, must himself eat of the leaves and fruit of the magic tree.

Know, then, that the Way is an Art. Consciousness beyond thought is, to be sure, a gift of the Life-power; but we receive this gift through the operation of another benefaction. The Life-power enables us to take “natural conditions” as we find them, and then adapt them to achieve novel results not spontaneously produced by nature.

This ability is pictured by Key 7. Wherever you find the city-symbol in texts of Ageless Wisdom, you find a hint of this human adaptation of natural forces and materials. A city is a collection of houses. It represents development of the consciousness attributed to Beth, the House, and to Key 1.

This “house” consciousness is what we have termed “self-consciousness.” It enables us to put into a new order the conditions of our environment. The chariot in Key 7 is a symbol for the same idea because it is a sort of house on wheels. It is the vehicle which carries us from thought to the consciousness beyond.

By slow processes of evolution, the Life-power brings its vehicles to the point where self-conscious thought may be expressed. By right thinking, man discovers the laws hidden behind the various appearances which constitute his environment. Then, by creative imagination at subconscious levels, combined with inspiration coming from superconsciousness, man learns how to make new combinations. Thus he begins where nature leaves off. Before he can see the glory of the Shekinah he must build a house for it. Thus, we, who follow the ancient craft of the sages, call our work an Art and name ourselves “Builders of the Adytum.”

The chariot in Key 7 is a type of the adytum or shrine of Deity. Its proportions are those of an oblong square, the form of the lodge in Freemasonry. The chariot is more than the lodge, and yet not more. More than the lodge in the sense that the chariot is not merely a Masonic symbol restricted to the meanings given to the lodge in modern Masonic lectures and rituals. Not more, in the sense that all who know what the “lodge” really is, understand it to be the “dwelling-place of the Most High.”

Therefore Cheth is the letter to which Key 7 is related. It is said to represent the Path of Wisdom named “The Intelligence of the House of Influence.” The influence is the influx of that Divine Presence which the Hebrews called *Shekinah*, the cohabiting glory.

During the last fifty years or more, occult literature has teemed with references to the “lodge.” Much has been written about what seems to be an external hierarchy of great beings who rule the earth, the planets, and the sun. Beyond these, we are told, are others, even higher in the scale. As we contemplate this scheme of a great, interlocking system of celestial government, our minds are dazzled by its splendor.

We are always glad to know that members of the B.O.T.A. are learning something about the organization of this great “external” hierarchy. In recent years, much of real importance has transpired concerning it. The special work of the Builders of the Adytum has, indeed, close connection with certain Western representatives of the terrestrial planetary lodge. Yet in these lessons you will find little information about the hierarchy because the work of imparting this information has been entrusted to others.

The aspect of the Great Work with which we are chiefly concerned has to do with what may be denominated the “internal hierarchy.” It is closely related to the doctrine of the microcosm which Jesus plainly and simply declared when he said: “The Kingdom of heaven is within you.” All leaders of the “external hierarchy” dwell within this “internal lodge.”

Every single personality who is actually a member of the macrocosmic hierarchy is also a member of the hierarchy within. Tales of wonder and imagination are told about the Masters. Some are true. Others are utter nonsense. But know this: there is no real Master or adept, no actual member of the macrocosmic hierarchy, who is not with you now and always, even unto the end of the world.

The Masters do not arrive and depart. Neither need you go to them. Because of human dullness and weakness of vision, it is sometimes permitted to appear that great Beings go and come. But Ageless Wisdom tells us over and over again that this is mere illusion. It warns us against falling into the many delusions ignorance fashions from the stuff of this illusion. The macrocosmic lodge, in its entirety, is present always in the microcosm.

In Hebrew Wisdom, the secret knowledge of the higher planes and of the hierarchy is called ***Maaseh Mercavah***, which means literally, “the work of the chariot.” To this the title of Key 7 refers. The word ***maaseh*** signifies labor, a production of art, human conduct, and divine creation. It implies just what, a few paragraphs back, we said about making new combinations.

The Qabalah shows us clearly what is really meant by the “chariot.” For the noun ***mercavah*** is the number 267, and this is the number of **מרכז**, ***merkaz***, which signifies “center.” The “work of the chariot” is the establishment, in human personality, of a living center for the reception of the influence of the power of the lodge.

This work is the **Way**, and the **Way** leads within. Where you are, there is the lodge. You may “travel in foreign countries” without ever leaving your house.

Follow the advice of Lao-tze: “Having emptied yourself, remain where you are.” To empty yourself is to be rid of the delusion of separate existence. Then, no matter where you may be, you may enter the Inner School and pass from grade to grade.

The radio gives us a faulty, mechanical reproduction of a distant voice, but we are so fearfully and wonderfully made that within us we may experience not the voice only, but also the **complete presence** of great Beings whose macrocosmic abodes may be on far-off stars. Before this may occur, however, we must make instruments whereby such contact is established. The materials are at our disposal. We must do the work. Art must complete what nature has begun.

Primarily this is an art of occult speech, for by words body-consciousness is controlled, and through language the patterns of the Temple are communicated to subconsciousness. Thus the work of the chariot begins with the study of words spoken or written by Master Builders who have preceded us.

These we find in sacred books. Self-consciousness must grasp intellectually these statements of the law, and must formulate the plans. This is the beginning of the art of right speech. The highest expression of occult speech is found in special exercises where thought, sound and color are united in "words of power." Hindu occultists call this *mantra yoga*, but the science has been developed in other than Oriental forms.

Its purpose is the modification of every cell of the body, the transmutation of the body-consciousness from the illusive race-thought of separateness into the true reflection of the Inner Light. With this change in consciousness come changes in function and structure.

Nerve centers which in the ordinary man are dormant, are awakened in the body of the advancing practical occultist. Barriers are burned away. Certain formless clusters of cells take on definite form. Bit by bit, the mechanism for contact with the Inner School is built, and as each part is completed, a new realization is experienced. The completion of this work is the transmutation of the corruptible, mortal body into one that is incorruptible. Long before this final consummation, connection is made with the Inner School.

This is what is meant by the angel in Key 14. On his robe is written the name יהוה for he is the One Existence of whom all persons (including angels and devas) are expressions. He is the One of whom it is written: "Except יהוה build the house, they labor in vain that build it" (Psalm 127: 1). When subconsciousness has been turned, like a mirror, away from the illusions of the external world and made to reflect the light of the Life-power, that light is transmitted to every cell of the body and the "house" is built anew.

The fourteenth Key shows plainly that the path of unfoldment begins on the physical plane. Many students do not understand that the path ends on the same plane. Qabalah reveals this when it says that Kether, the Crown, is in Malkuth, the Kingdom, while Malkuth is also in Kether, but, as the sages put it, "after another manner."

Our aim is not to escape from the physical plane. It is to know experimentally that the kingdom is truly embodied in our flesh. Therefore is the Path of Wisdom symbolized by Key 14 called that of Temptation or Trial because it is associated with **verification**, and verification is established by experiment.

Does this mean that we deny the teaching, "Flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God?" On the contrary, we affirm it. The consciousness beyond thought cannot be inherited by flesh and blood because it is achieved by personal effort, and cannot be transmitted from one generation to another. It is an "acquired characteristic," not transmissible by heredity.

Neither is it the outcome of physical evolution. The most evolution can do is to bring man to the stage of unfoldment where he may begin the Great Work. The fact that we cannot enter the kingdom of God by the inheritance of the flesh has nothing whatever to do with the fact that the completion of the Great Work is a physiological transformation. We have to learn that physical expressions of the Life-power are spiritual also. We must know that the separation of the ethereal from the gross is not by any means permanent. When we are perfect, we shall be able to take up our physical bodies and lay them down at **will**. Masters know how to do this.

The more we try to get away from the physical, the more we shrink from it, the more we think of it as being gross and disgusting, the closer are we bound to it. What says LIGHT ON THE PATH? Many have read, but few have understood these words:

“Remember the soiled garment you shrink from touching may have been yours yesterday, may be yours tomorrow. And if you turn with horror from it, when it is flung upon your shoulders, it will cling the more closely to you.”

The golden city of the New Jerusalem, described in the Apocalypse, is represented as coming down from Heaven, and the consummation of the Great Work is there described as a new heaven and a new earth. Where will you put the dividing line between the physical and the higher aspects of Spirit? There are some who claim that the astral plane is wholly evil and that nothing good ever comes from it. Do the propounders of this preposterous nonsense understand what they mean when they talk, as they do, of the omnipresence of Spirit?

It is true that many subtle, relatively “evil” forces reach us from the astral, but they need only to be understood and redirected, just as man, by understanding the lightning, has turned it to all the beneficent uses of electricity. Then these “evil” forces will cease wearing their inimical appearance.

There are astral poisons and poisonous astral entities, just as there are physical toxins and poisonous snakes and spiders. Indiscriminate astral adventuring is foolish. Opening oneself to astral influences through the practice of negative psychism is suicidal insanity. Yet Spirit pervades the astral plane just as certainly as it pervades all other planes, including the physical. All this talk about planes is arbitrary, a mere convenience for the sake of intellectual classification. So many of us are tied up in these arbitrary classifications! We are like Tom Sawyer when he was up in an airship with Huckleberry Finn.

“I reckon we’re over Illinois now,” Huck ventured.

“No, we ain’t,” Tom contradicted. “Illinois is pink. I saw it on the map.”

Now look at Key 21. Throughout this lesson we have stressed the thought that the high consciousness is realized through Art. See how the symbols of this picture tell the same story.

First consider the wreath. It is artificial, a man-made thing. At its top it is fastened with a red ribbon in the form of a horizontal figure 8, and another ribbon like it ties the wreath at the bottom. Both are red to indicate the cyclic motion of Mars force. This 8 symbol is what we see over the heads of the Magician and of the woman in Key 8.

The twenty-two parts of the wreath refer to the twenty-two forces represented by the Hebrew letters and the Tarot Keys. Each part is triple because each one of the twenty-two forces has three aspects. Each force integrates, each holds form in temporary equilibrium, each disintegrates form. The wreath suggests also the operation of the productive power of cosmic imagination, for it is green, the color attributed to Venus. By its shape it is a big zero sign, so that it represents the realization of the vision of the Fool through the operation of the image-making power of the Empress.

The proportions of the wreath, moreover, are 5 units wide by 8 units high. Thus it reminds us of the rectangular sides of the vault described in the Rosicrucian FAMA FRATERNITATIS, and suggests also the spiral generated by the whirling square, as explained in TAROT FUNDAMENTALS, Lesson 46. It might be said in passing that the same spiral is a conspicuous and distinguishing mark of the Ionic Order of architecture which Freemasonry associates with wisdom and with mastery.

The dancing figure at the center seems to be a woman, but tradition says her veil conceals masculine reproductive organs. The consciousness beyond thought transcends sex differentiation. The personal mind, in union with the ONE, is swallowed up, and whoever experiences this consciousness does not think, "I am a man," or, "I am a woman." One does not **think** at all. One simply **knows** the full meaning of I AM.

Here language fails us. We have no words to fit the experience. The Hindus made a brave attempt when they termed this realization "Existence-Knowledge-Bliss Absolute," but this label has no real content of meaning unless we have entered the Light. Key 21, however, sets before us symbols which we shall understand better and better as we unfold more and more of the latent potencies of Spirit.

The dancing figure has her legs crossed like those of the Hanged Man and the Emperor, but whereas the Hanged Man is bound, she is free, and whereas the Emperor is heavily weighted with armor, she is almost nude and dances on air

The letter-name connected with this picture also gives us a clue. It is spelt Tav-Vav, which may be read, "cross-and." The cross of equal rays, or Tav, denotes the perfect union of self-consciousness and subconsciousness in which Subject and Object are perfectly blended

and all their forces held in equilibrium. Of this cross it is written by a commentator on the books of Jacob Boehme:

“There is one character by which God has characterized both Himself and all the creatures, and shown that His presence is in all things. This is the cross in the sphere and mercurial wheel of nature which goes through all the three principles.”

Its vertical line is a symbol of self-consciousness, like the letter “I” in English, for when man’s self-consciousness is at work during his waking hours, he stands upright. The horizontal line signifies the position of sleep, when the body is parallel to the surface of Mother Earth, and subconscious powers are predominant.

Other meanings there are, of course, but this one is a clue to many secrets. To this cross the letter-name Tav adds the Hebrew sign of the conjunction “and” Vav, a symbol of addition and also of progress. The letter Vav, moreover, is the letter of the Hierophant, who, in the consciousness beyond thought, reveals to us the secrets of the cosmic plan. Note well that the numbers of the Tarot Keys corresponding to Tav and Vav add up to 26, the number of יהוה. To enter the consciousness beyond thought is to be one with the Father of Lights, to be a conscious participator in His plan, and to know precisely our own part in the execution of the Great Design.

This freedom **within** the Law is experienced by those who **know**. Seek this first and to you shall be added all things. Many wish for freedom. Many bewail their limitations. Many protest their desire for illumination. Yet not one in ten thousand really seeks, to say nothing of putting this quest before every other consideration.

Like those who were bidden to the feast, most persons make excuses. Those who are truly ready have grasped the truth that nothing else is quite so important as to be a citizen of the Kingdom of the Life-power. Whoever sees that to abandon everything for this quest is to gain infinitely more than the value of anything left behind, sees indeed.

The world may say: “How can he make such sacrifices?” But there is no sacrifice. So long as one prates of paying Karmic debts, one is caught in the delusion of separateness. When one really sees, the whole matter resolves itself into a question of discrimination, of recognition of true values.

The Way to Freedom is open to you. Do you want freedom hard enough to follow the path? Are you merely “interested in occultism,” or have you put liberation above every other consideration? Each must answer these questions for himself. To forsake all is to gain the ALL. The forsaking is only the last illusion. Nothing is really lost when ALL is gained.

If some course appears to be a duty, or to involve a sacrifice, and one is perfectly willing to make that sacrifice, one is farther on the Way to Liberation than he who refuses to give up

anything for the Life of the Spirit. The surrender of self-will is a marked advance for those who are at the stage where they must make it.

Yet, so long as self-will appears to the student to be a **reality**, so that he feels a wrench in giving it up, he has not become one who really knows. If one can interpret one's adversities as being Karmic debts and rejoice that finally they are being paid, that is a step in the right direction, also. Experience shows, however, that those who really do tear the giant weed of self-will out of their hearts, with the accompaniment of awful pain and suffering, are not likely to say much about it. Nor are the persons who are making a brave effort to give up self-will to the Divine Will likely to say much about that, either.

Spurious humility betrays itself to all beholders. Not a few persons compensate for their feeling of inferiority by talking a great deal about how they are paying their Karmic debts. They recall their gaudy sins in great detail, in wondrous recollections of former incarnations. When they speak of guidance they mean, "The Lord hath spoken to **me**, and woe to you if you don't take **my** word for it!"

One sure test of the mental honesty of any person who is forever talking about self-sacrifice and reliance on guidance, is to set him to work at the dull drudgery of learning the preliminary technique of concentration. Depend upon it, he will always find the best possible reason—an "inner leading," usually—for his avoiding some real, hard work. Because learning Tarot, and what goes with it, calls for a good deal of this very kind of plain drudgery, it soon separates the real seekers from the spiritual Pharisees who find occasion to rejoice that they are not as other men.

Turn your face steadfastly toward the ONE and you shall find in THAT full satisfaction for your every need . . . for your spiritual aspirations . . . for your mental requirements . . . for full emotional satisfaction . . . for external physical necessities. The measure is full, pressed down, and running over. There is no niggardliness in the Life-power's provision for us once the channels are open.

Here we but repeat the words of the wise, uttered and written in every age. To their testimony let us add ours. Far from perfection though we be, yet have we tasted the fruit of the magic tree and found it good. May this same knowledge be yours, and may these words of ours encourage you to follow the Path, step by step, until you reach the Palace of Holiness in the Midst, where sits the Creator on His Throne.