

Tarot: An Informal Self-Experiment

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1 Introduction

Tarot is a game of correspondences. Rather than aiming to strictly 'divine' the future, we look for correspondences between the cards laid out before us and the rest of our lives - how this card relates to our past, what this card means in the present, and using that card to divine a new path through life. Tarot can change the way we act, can help us search the depths of our subconscious and memories to help explain the events of the past, and will show us new ways to work with the future, ways that we would never have thought of before without some outside influence, doing so all while being impersonal, keeping our deepest secrets, and never telling a soul about these correspondences.

I got interested in Tarot through various sources. In my exploratory high school years, I had a few friends and a few relationships with some brilliant people with diverse interests, and a few of them showed me different aspects of tarot at different points in my career. Despite having two very scientific and skeptical parents, I developed something of an interest in occult systems such as Tarot and wound up frequenting a bookstore catering to those interests in my home town.

At one point, while purchasing my first deck of my own, I was offered a free reading with my own deck of cards from an established cartomancer at the bookstore. The reading proved to be one of the most powerful experiences in my life up to that point. From then on my interest grew further, leading to many more purchases of decks and books, as well as further research online and in libraries in Tarot as well as other occult systems. To this day, many of my readings still follow the same general plan as that original one so many years ago.

I have not forgotten my heritage, though, and the respect for the more commonly accepted sciences ingrained in me by my parents. I thus decided to embark on a bit of an informal self-experiment, following the guidelines of the scientific method to test how working with the Tarot as a tool to explore deeper within myself might change the way I perceive the world around me, alter the way I act by forcing me to think through situations in a different way. This experiment also acts as a bit of a slice-of-life diary, with each reading providing a view of what's going on in my life at the time - the issues that are concerning me, and all the hopes and fears that have built up to that point.

2 An Informal Self-Experiment

2.1 Questions

- How does tarot work?
- How does learning to work with the tarot affect a person?
- Does mindfully working with the tarot generally lead to a different method of dealing with events in the past?
- Does mindfully working with the tarot generally lead to a different consideration of the future?
- How does working with the tarot affect the way a person deals with events and their position in time?
- How does the conscious application of a defined set of archetypes change the way a person deals with a situation?
- How does the person respond to such questions as these above being applied to them?

What I aim to learn from this experiment is basically what would happen by changing a part of my life. I don't want to see into the future, necessarily. Rather, I would like to become more cognizant of the present, to take the past into account, and to integrate all levels of myself into my day-to-day life: conscious, subconscious, and unconscious. While the questions listed above are the specific ones, the more general overview would be this: if I were to consciously try to change my outlook on life through the use of this tool, what would happen? What would change about me as a person, not just the path my life was taking?

2.2 Observation

We come to the notion that the Tarot works precisely because it makes no sense. The information exists. Our unconscious selves already know it. What we need is a device to act as a bridge to conscious perception. [Pollack, 1997]

The modern Tarot deck is made up of 78 cards - there are 56 minor arcana and 22 major arcana cards. All of these cards represent different archetypes, or general ideas about different aspects of life, humanity, and the self. More than simply divining the future, one may seek out correspondences between situations at hand, in the past, or possibly in the future through these archetypal images, laid out within the framework of the cards and how they relate to each other. One can utilize a 'spread', a pattern in which to lay the cards with each of their positions holding a predetermined meaning so as to deepen the meanings of each card. Just as frequently, however, one may let the cards, the reader, or

the querent determine the positions of those cards, divining meanings for them as the reading progresses.

There are many different views on Tarot. By far, the overwhelming majority of people in today's world put little or no stock in divination of any sort, and would just as soon leave any introspection in the hands of those with 'Ph.D' tacked on the ends of their names. Of those whose opinions do not favor Tarot, there are further divisions: some may have humored a cartomancer and had a reading done for themselves and disliked it for one reason or another, having been scared by it; some may have difficulty thinking of those who deal in such things as actively harmful frauds; and everything in between. On the other side, of course, there are those who see the cards as a window into the future, those who use them strictly for introspection, those who use them for various magical purposes, and, again, everything in between.

This document is hardly meant to be a dissertation on the cards themselves, nor the varied opinions on their meanings or acceptance in the world today. For further information, please look up the information in the bibliography, as others can surely tell those stories far better than I. My aim is only to explore the way that the cards can influence life. When I began college, I saw that those around me weren't focused on growing or changing, and in fact, many had remained the same person that their parents had molded them into years back, simply refusing to change. Not only did that idea of changing who I am in however subtle a fashion appeal to me, I felt that allowing this change instead of stagnation would mean that I was actively working to make myself a better person and doing my best to better the lives of those around me.

2.3 Hypothesis

I feel optimistic about this experiment. I have rarely ever taken an active role in the way my life changes, and I think that by guiding it in this small way, I can improve the way that I deal with what happens to me, improving the integration of new information in order to become a better person as a whole. I also expect that, by being more easily able to comprehend the world around me and the people in it in reference to my own worldview, I will be able to affect those around me in a positive manner, in effect, being a better person for them.

2.4 Procedure

My goal is to do 78 readings of the Tarot with the goal of at least one reading per day. For each reading, I will gather information about the background of the situation, the layout of the cards and the disposition of the deck, and finally, an analysis of the cards and the reading, including the effect that the reading had on me as a person. These readings will be mostly for myself in my day-to-day life, but I will also attempt to read for others as well, recording the way the reading made me feel and any insights that will be applicable in my own life.

When the 78 readings are completed, I will attempt to analyze the information from the collected write-ups of the readings, looking for changes over time in the way I interacted with the world around me and how I felt as a whole. These trends will be described in as much depth as possible in order to explore how the conscious utilization of the Tarot to change my life truly affected me and, hopefully, those around me as well.

3 Experimental Data

Preliminary Introduction

As these readings are very personal in nature, I feel the need to introduce myself before just jumping right into portions of my life, lest they make no sense at all.

I was born Matthew Joseph Scott in January, 1986 to Donna Karr and Ron Scott, two engineers with the minds of scientists. I was raised a skeptic and an atheist. Life was uncomplicated: everything that could be explained, was, and anything that couldn't was set aside as an unknown until it could be explained with no further thoughts on the matter. Of course, when you tell a young child not to do something, that's a very effective way to invite them to do it in secret if possible; I was told not to concern myself with the unexplainable matters of religion, mysticism. Thus it was that I began acquiring my secret stash of information on all of those subjects, beginning with a King James bible given to me by a camp counsellor, working up to a modest library of books dealing with topics ranging from the "big five" religions and reiki to the history and use of drugs. I have already mentioned a little about my introductions to Tarot.

That leads to me today, August 13, 2008: I am a student in the music composition program at Colorado State University in Fort Collins, Colorado. After trying (and failing) to be a biochemist, I've accepted that I make a far better musician and publisher than a scientist, but the need to explain, to experiment, and to experience the world around me remains.

To lend even more specifics to the situation, I was only recently accepted into the composition program after spending nearly four years in music education, finding myself disillusioned with the American public education system. This means that my four years of paid tuition promised by my dad are up, and I must begin paying for my own tuition from my earnings. I work at the campus library as technical support, and I am currently dealing with some problematic homophobia from my boss and coworkers there. On top of that, just a few months ago, I underwent a very difficult breakup with my boyfriend at the time. I "rebounded" onto another friend of mine, but as soon as we started getting close to each other, he had to move down to Denver, Colorado, an hour's drive away.

It was this combination of stressors that lead me to look into creating my own change in life. This jumble of emotions and ideas is what I am right now, and I want see what I can make of that by being more mindful of my life, guiding it where I can, and becoming a better person, using the Tarot as a tool.

3.1 August 13, 2008

The Background

I've been feeling pretty pessimistic lately. Andrew still weighs heavily on my mind, and I'm finding out slowly just how deeply I had entrenched him into my life. I was really pretty torn up when he left me, and everything was made worse when I found out that he did so simply to be with someone he was already nearly dating behind my back. Last night, however, I found out that they were *moving* in together in New York, despite all his plans to *move* out with me in Colorado. Feeling deeply hurt, I stopped watching his journal, and blocked him from communicating directly with me. I had done my best to wish them luck, and now I feel as if I'm just having my nose rubbed in the ruins of our relationship, so I'm breaking off all contact. I'm telling myself that I need to do this in order to get over him and *move* on with the rest of my life, but really, I'm sure it's little more than a passive aggressive way for me to get back at him for telling me he'd keep in touch and then doing this.

All of this seems rather petty in light of my growing feelings for James, and the concerns I have with him now. That he *moved* away from me shortly after we got together certainly isn't helping things. It's not the reasons that he *moved* that bother me, of course, simply that, after my previous relationships, adding that extra element of distance makes me very, very nervous for the future of this one, even if it's only down to denver. I can hardly *move* down to join him until I'm finished with school, too.

Finally, the added financial burden of my own tuition is beginning to worry me a good deal more. I seem to be *stuck* in this ceaseless cycle of sleeping in too late and spending all the money I make on things I don't really need, whereas I really shouldn't let my wants *hinder* my needs. I may want that new rifle, but I need to finish school!

All this pessimism has served to do little more than *block* my creativity. I have written only about 30 measures of real music this summer, as the weight of my emotions keeps *forcing me to stop* before I feel like I've accomplished much.

As may be evident, I'm having a real problem with *movement* and the *inability to move*. I feel stopped up in many ways, as if the world — particularly those close to me — race on by without me. And so I laid out the cards...

The Drawing

With my dark mood, I chose Aleister Crowley's **Thoth**[Crowley and Harris, 1983] deck to do the reading, figuring that the bright and attractive colors of the RWS deck didn't quite match what I was feeling. I wasn't feeling simply down, either, or I might've chosen the Aquarian deck for its dreary, clouded look. I wanted the sharp, geometric shapes and smart color choices of Lady Frieda Harris' cards to fill out my mood.

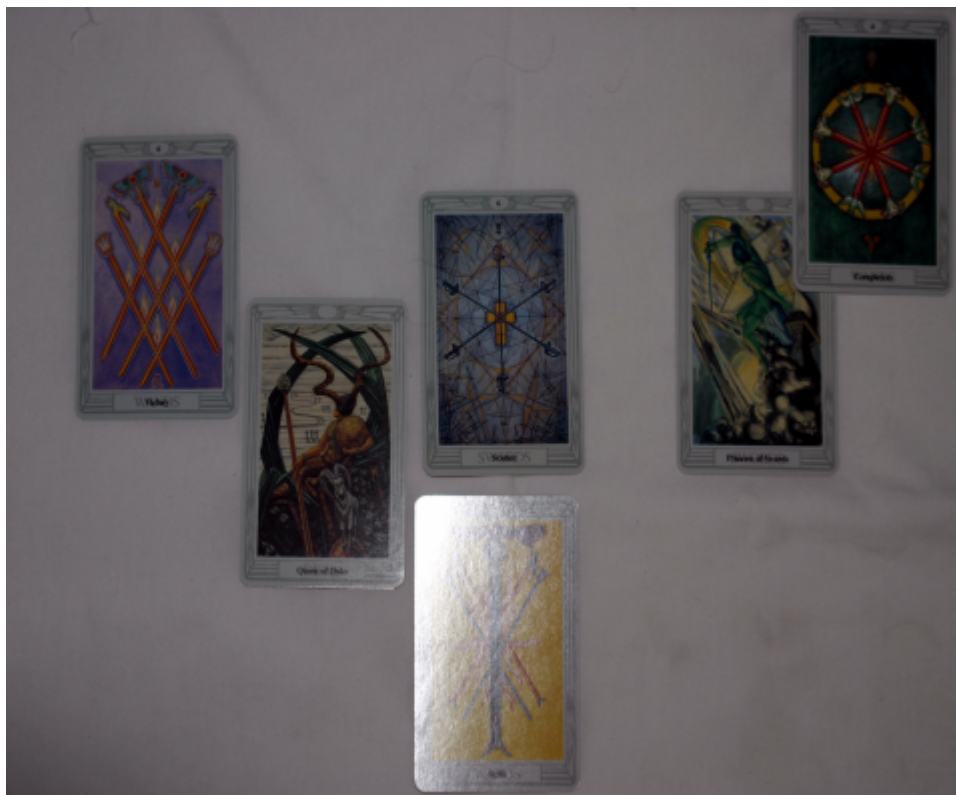
I shuffled and shuffled and shuffled until I finally felt I was ready, and then went through the process of drawing the cards shown to me so long ago. Since my emotions were seemingly holding up my life, looking for resolution, I let

them choose the cards, fanning them between my two hands until I felt that little tug at my subconscious, saying ‘draw that card!’. My intellect continued to take the back seat as my fingers arranged the cards, face down, into the pattern that I thought they would best fit when flipped, and for the most part, they chose well.

The pattern started with a card in the upper left, leftmost of a row of three cards that moved down and to the right. Directly above the last card and in line with the leftmost card was another, and directly to the right of that was a card with another one overlapping the upper-right hand corner.

From left to right, the cards were:

- 6 of Wands, ‘Victory’
- Queen of Disks
- 5 of Wands, ‘Strife’
- Above the previous card, 6 of Swords, ‘Science’
- To the right of the previous card, Princess of Swords
- Overlapping the upper-right hand corner of the previous card, 4 of Wands, ‘Completion’



The Reading

The theme of movement became more and more evident as the cards were flipped over, one by one, starting from the left of the board. Wands is the suit of fire, that which is never still. If nothing else, fire moves downwards and outwards as it consumes, while air, water, and earth can all be relatively motionless.

While the wands start out as a roaring bonfire of problems, the dwindle down toward the Ace to the quiet glow of a candle's flame, and the six is right when things begin to turn towards calm. As was mentioned before, fire moves downwards as it consumes, and, in fact, the first thing that I noticed about this card was that the small flames in the vertices of six crossed wands look as if they're forming an arrow pointing downwards, or else that they're small concerns settling down to the bottom of the container, relaxing. This, I feel, is what I may be going through now. Despite the problems it caused me, the recent break up is starting to become less pertinent, I am learning to deal with James' new distance, and I do see that it is possible for me to pay my tuition.

Taking this as my cue, I turned over the next card to the right and slightly lower than the six, revealing the Queen of disks. Of all of the cards in the Thoth deck, this one is my favorite. Many of the minor arcana cards are little more than pip cards, and most of the court cards of other suits are dynamic, busy images, whereas the Queen of disks sits serenely. Hers is the knowledge of magic of nature, and she sits ensconced in her angular fronds, looking out over a dry valley with a snaking river. This, I think, is the very description of peace in wisdom. She is content in life, but not uncomfortable without, a balance of emotional and intellect that echos through all of the disks. This card shows me what I've wanted to be ever since I saw it, and I feel that I'm starting to settle towards it, getting closer to that ideal.

I turned over the two cards next to it at the same time, as they were in the same vertical plane. This revealed two more cards of movement. The Golden Dawn (the society of which Crowley was a member, and the source of inspiration for this deck) label for the lower card is strife, but not only does the card not give the impression of strife, but the other common interpretation gives a different impression, as well: that of striving. The 5 of wands is a card of battle, but the card of discourse and games, where there is action, even against another person, but purposeful and with rules, not unfair, uncivil acts of strife against another. Its lower indication indicated to me the subconscious or unconscious, showing me how my emotions were striving against each other and against me, but that it was fair, there was a reason, and that it's not strife without rules.

The upper card, the more conscious of the two, is in elemental opposition to the Queen of disks. That is, swords and disks, air and earth, do not mix well, and this alters the meaning of the cards, bringing out the darker side of both the Queen and this, the 6 of swords. It shows that, while the Queen may be comfortable with the idea of that lifeless desert behind her, she remains forever ensconced in the life-filled oasis. To apply the analogy, I may find the idea of that barren desert of completely settled emotions perfectly acceptable, but I'm too caught up in my ways, too blinded by intellect, internalization, and change

to let my emotions settle down — I may internalize a lot of things, but I'm letting that hinder myself as the world changes around me.

The Six of swords itself is another card of movement, but rather than physical movement, this is the movement of an idea or emotion through time, such as the path that mourning takes. Something isn't quite right with the path as it is, though, with the influence of the Queen: the swords are the suit of silence, and that has me stuck. Having to take all of this emotion from the breakup into myself without saying anything is damaging the way I move through my life, hindering that necessary passage of mourning while keeping the emotion smoldering. This shows the need for communication and action — the card being above that subconscious five suggests its more conscious and active role — in order to help these issues resolve themselves.

So what about the last two cards? I turned them over to find the Four of wands covering the corner of the Princess of swords. The Princess of swords, as the earthy side of air, shows the fixation of the volatile, the ideas made real (she even wears the visage of Medusa on her helmet). This, to me, was a strong suggestion that I needed to apply my ideas, to bring them to fruition. All of the cards before me were giving me a path and this was saying that, if I followed that path and brought it to reality, it would be the basis for the card that was above and overlapping the Princess, the Four of wands, labeled 'Completion'.

More than simply the end of a process, this card shows integration. The four wands form a square, their points form an octagon, they are bound in a circle, everything is integrated. This is not saying "Do these things and everything will magically be resolved," this is saying "Everything was, is, and will be interconnected, forever." If I look to change myself, something else connected to me will change; if I move forward in my life, I will move forward with a whole host of opportunities and emotions. I have always been 'complete', whether or not I have a problem, and I'm certainly realistic enough to realize that as soon as these problems are resolved, a new set will have cropped up for me to deal with, but that's okay, they're a *part* of me, and as soon as I can learn to integrate them into myself (perhaps by doing what the cards have suggested), it will be easier for me to accept that.

3.2 August 14, 2008

The Background

Despite yesterday's fairly positive reading, I'm still operating in that pessimistic sort of vein. While less focused on relationships, the question of money is still bothering me quite a bit, and that's leading to me being rather down on myself about other things.

In particular, I'm rather concerned about my ability to focus on one thing for any extended period of time. The most obvious object of this focus is this project itself. I worry that I can't complete even 78 readings for myself and others. This is a perennial problem for me, and I often find myself flitting between interests, whether or not I have completed any projects begun in the previous interestes. For example, recently, I've gone through cooking, brewing, my own small business, programming, guns, and so on.

What's concerning me is that I worked on the problem of being stuck, and I'm afraid that, once I start moving again, I'll fall into old habits and start moving in too many directions at once.

The Drawing

Still feeling in a much brighter mood than the previous day, I chose the **Universal Waite**[Smith et al., 2004] deck - a recoloring of the RWS deck using colored pencils to soften all of the harsh colors in the original block-printed cards. Additionally, I drew a card earlier in the day just to think on and try to focus my thoughts and get in the mood for the day - I drew the Eight of Swords.

The reading was done in a modified version of Rachel Pollack's Work Cycle spread[Pollack, 1997]. Since I was working from her book, which features the RWS deck heavily, the spread felt particularly fitting, and I even deigned to introduce the element of reversed cards. I normally work with elemental dispositions for the rather embarrassing reason of the fact that having the cards facing different ways grates on my nerves. The spread was modified to leave off the 'inner and outer being' cards because I was running a little short on time.

From left to right, the cards were:

- Past Experience: The Star reversed
- Expectations: Nine of Wands reversed
- Work: Knight of Swords reversed
- Work: Nine of Pentacles
- Work: Page of Pentacles reversed
- Outcome: Five of Wands revesred
- Result: Eight of Pentacles reversed



The Reading

The eight of swords shows a man with eight swords stuck in his back and ear as he lies on the beach. There is no blood coming from his body. This image describes the ultimate in over reaction. Where one sword would've sufficed, eight have been used. The lack of blood shows surreality, as in the man may not actually be a man at all, as if eight swords have been driven through a ghost, hallucination, or shadow of an idea on this beach, right at the shore where the conscious meets the subconscious. I think that this card, as my 'card of the day' of sorts, is telling me to relax. I have spent this time working with my stressors — getting away from some, integrating others — and now I'm creating more for myself by overreacting at imaginary things from the depths of my subconscious. With this in mind, I drew my reading for the day, immediately surprised by only one upright card.

The Star, following immediately after The Tower, suggests a time of healing. Not only is the unconscious exposed and beginning to blend with the conscious mind, but unlike The Tower, which describes the same idea, The Star deals more with the calm after the storm — the period spent healing that rent caused by the fall from The Tower. Reversed, we are cut off from that calm, and that fear from our fall turns to insecurity or even arrogance. As it takes its place in my past experience, I see that as an incomplete use of my flitting interests: those things that distract me from stressors in order to help me heal are not being carried out to completion, and instead of healing over, I'm left with scars. This echoes my desire to follow through with this project to completion. This, of all of my projects, is overt self-therapy, as it's no secret that I am using this, in part, to help get over a real "Tower" of a summer.

This moves into my expectations for this Work: the Nine of Wands shows a man ready and wary, keeping his eyes out from enemies, ones that may or may not still be enemies. The card tells of wariness and strenght, but also of seeing fights where there may in fact be none at all. Reversed twists that meaning to seeking a way out of this constant cycle, either from being overwhelmed by the aversions or simply distressed by them. While this is all well and good, it should be noted that sometimes these defenses are built up for a reason, and should

not be dropped lightly. There are cases where such defenses are necessary, and I think I'm focusing too much on these right now. I think that opening myself up through the cards is one case where I will *have* to drop those defenses and seek another way; I consciously know this, and expect that this experiment will help.

The three cards of the Work group show what Pollack describes as "...situations, influences, or attitudes that the person can use or must overcome." In my case, more warnings are present. The Knight of Swords reversed suggests wildly casting about, showing a need to make careful decisions and to be aware of my situation. The Nine of Pentacles is a card of success due to sacrifice; I need to be mindful that this sacrifice really is for the better and not let the fact that I am sacrificing something get in the way — the reward is always greater for the sacrifice. Finally, the Page of Pentacles reversed warns again: without a sense of hard work, all of the focus and grounded-ness of the pentacles is liable to dissipate, leading to what Waite called 'prodigality'.

Taken together as a group these cards paint a picture of what needs to be done. While I know that I am working towards avoiding this casting about ceaselessly for something with which to help myself, I will need the Pentacles' focus and the sacrifice shown in the Nine. To me, I see this as sacrificing time and energy, both of which seem to be increasingly parcelled out in today's world. Free time is always seen as valuable, and it's difficult to give some of mine up to a task that requires such mental exertion and, honestly, leaves me intellectually winded for a period afterwards. I needn't be afraid of this sacrifice, however, as expensing that energy will help me in at least two ways: not only with the therapy inherent in this project; but also as a sort of exercise, building up my intellectual stamina, as it were, getting my mind used to working in these intricate patterns.

Following the Work group of cards is the final combination of Outcome and Result. While Outcome stands for the likely way that things will develop, Result implies a more personal side, showing how the outcome will affect the subject or their reaction to it. For my reading, these cards came out fairly disheartening at first. The Five of Wands reversed suggests rules abandoned in this intellectual battle of mine, leading to nastier combat. I'll clearly have to do more to stick with this interest, lest it fall by the wayside - perhaps things out of the ordinary for me. The Eight of Pentacles reversed on the other hand, shows frustration and lack of fulfillment due to looking strictly for success rather than working for the sake of work. This meaning grated on my nerves until I saw it as just another step in the path: not only is success in the standard sense of strict completion unlikely, but I am almost certain to become frustrated by not really having an ending point to this at all. After all, this is only seventy-eight tarot readings, which is only a little more than a fifth of a year if they are done one a day! I could change so much more, reading every day for the rest of my life, and still never reach an end to this experiment, as there is always more change to be had. This is certainly something I must learn to accept if I am to keep this project and others going strong.

3.3 August 17, 2008

The Background

Last night, I drew another card to ponder for the next day or so and picked the Nine of Swords from the Universal Waite deck [Smith et al., 2004]. This card contains a distressing image of someone buried deep in emotional agony, sitting up in bed while nine swords hang in the air above and behind them. While the card usually stands for that withdrawal into self that comes with such emotional pain, it can also represent, particularly while reversed or ill-dignified, oppression. In fact, Rachel Pollack specifically mentions sexuality as the reason for the oppression, and that brought to mind work.

At my day job, working as technical support in the campus library, my direct supervisor quit late last year and was replaced with someone twice as competent as he was. My old supervisor was very good at keeping the library up and running, and my new supervisor is better, going further by doing things to make the library work even more smoothly. However, while my old supervisor acted fairly immature and made crude jokes ceaselessly, my new supervisor far outstrips him in this category, with every word and action showing the twelve-year-old that he still thinks he is.

While I don't believe that he is actively oppressing me because of my sexuality — I doubt he even knows, and they are pretty clearly jokes, my Indonesian coworker gets his fair share of terrorist jokes — it does lead to a decidedly uncomfortable environment to be working in at times. Perhaps I'm just a sensitive person, but I would enjoy not having this stigma hanging over my workplace. How can I work more effectively with this? Is coming out to my boss the right thing, or should I follow my own suggestion and not let my sexuality interfere with my job, since the former has no place in the latter?

The Drawing

Still using the Universal Waite deck, I decided to make up a spread on the spot. The layout would consist of two piles related to two 'header' cards. One header card would stand for what I saw in my boss and the other would stand for a different view-point on the situation: that of my boss. I would draw two cards at a time, one for each pile, and read the two cards in a general matter to gain perspective on the situation, drawing until I feel that I've got a better idea of what's going on.

- Theme for the reading: Nine of Swords
- My header card: Knight of Cups.
 1. Four of Pentacles
 2. Five of Wands
 3. The Devil
 4. Six of Wands

- The other header card: Knight of Wands.
 1. King of Wands
 2. Four of Swords
 3. Death
 4. Eight of Swords
- Final card: Ace of Wands



The Reading

I initially selected the header card for my boss, since his attitude at work recently has reminded me of little else, what with the way the Knight of Wands rushes into battle, usually without any sort of plan. Recently, my boss has been fixing things 'shotgun style' at work, just replacing parts and hoping they're the right

ones, and that replacing them will fix the issue. I chose my own header card in much the same way, with the Knight of Cups' more reticent nature, particularly as applied to how I feel about dealing with my boss. It wasn't until I got halfway through the spread that I noticed that they were elementally ill-disposed towards one another.

Looking at my boss's header card, the first thing I notice in the picture itself is the flashiness of the uniform. My boss doesn't dress flashy, but he does act in such a way as to draw attention to himself, and I find this particularly apt. In my own card, I first noticed that the Knight doesn't look at anything other than the cup, keeping his fist wrapped tightly around his horse's reigns, even though it looks as if the horse would really rather like a drink of that stream in front of him. For myself, I see this as me focusing a little too hard on this issue, perhaps at the expense of those issues around me. The rest of the reading proceeded more as a dialog.

I drew the first two cards at once and laid them beneath the two header cards: the Four of Pentacles and the King of Wands. The traditional meaning of the King was not, as I found, very applicable. Instead, the card, as being a vertical transmutation of my boss's Knight, very plainly spoke of my desires for my boss to grow up. His homophobic jokes are so...high-school. Not only am I in college, but he is nearing thirty, and it's well past time for him to get on with work and out of this party stage. His card, on the other hand, spoke of defenses. The miser in the Four of Pentacles protects his heart and mind with defensive layers, and even his feet are covered to, perhaps inadvertently, block that symbolic connection with the earth and thus everyone else. This card responded to the King by saying, "I use that humor to cover up and hide problems deeper than this."

The second two cards were drawn. My Four of Swords suggests relaxation, retreating from the while, taking things in stock. I believe that this is me telling my boss to relax, calm down, maybe step back and take in the world from a different point of view rather than rushing forward. Perhaps then he would be easier to reason with, rather than attempting to talk with that joker of a mask he wears. In response, his Five of Wands suggested that there is no real reason to do such a thing. "Life is just a game," it said. "So long as we follow the rules and do our jobs, it doesn't matter."

My exasperation was brought forth in the the next two cards, both Major Arcana. Death, for my card, begged for change and transition. "The game needs to change — you need to change — so that we can both do our jobs more effectively" My boss's card, the Devil, shrugs that off with comfort and complacency. "This may not be my true self, and may just be a mask, but there's no reason to change; you know and I know that neither of us are too enthused about our jobs and they're hardly challenging either of us. Office humor helps keep things sane for both of us, and you know that."

At this point in the reading, I felt like I had a better grasp on the situation. I know my boss really is just joking: whether he is homophobic or not doesn't enter into it much at all, I think — this is just a way to keep himself sane at work. However, it is affecting the way I feel about my job and the way I perform

at work, to a small extent. Rather than joining in conversations at work as I used to, I'm more inclined to just sit and listen, unwilling to participate in the things I disagree with.

The social activist Unitarian in me would like to tell my boss how inappropriate that is in any setting; while I'm hardly 'tough', there are those that aren't as thick-skinned as I am when it comes to this sort of thing, and he should avoid being hurtful towards anyone. Still, I'm wary of opening up in this situation lest it make things strained between my boss and myself, or, worse, that he'll get in trouble with someone higher up than him — as I mentioned before, he really turned the workplace around, productivity-wise. Curious and willing to try, I drew two more cards with the intent of seeing how this dynamic may extend into the future.

The Eight of Swords shows a woman actively oppressed, bound and blindfolded and surrounded by swords. However, her oppressors are nowhere in sight and the swords only block her on one side. This is an oppression that she has come to expect, whether out of cynicism or weakness. If I were to accept my oppression like this card suggests being under my heading, then my boss's card, the Six of Swords, may be in his future: Victory. The man rides crowned on his horse, riding in a victory parade, completely unharmed. He has done nothing and he has won and I have lost, dignity trampled.

Frustrated, I drew one final card, just to look for something more optimistic. The Ace of Wands is just what I needed. The embodiment of the energy of the Wands, happiness and joy as a gift from that inner strength I know we all have. I know what I have to do.

I will have to confront my boss on this matter soon.

3.4 August 18, 2008

The Background

I feel oddly blank. Distressingly so.

The Drawing

Exploring the void with the Universal Waite[Smith et al., 2004].

1. Four of Pentacles.
2. Death
3. Seven of Pentacles
4. Eight of Pentacles
5. Judgement
6. Two of Pentacles
7. The High Priestess
8. The Star
9. Nine of Pentacles
10. Eight of Swords

[No Image]

The Reading

I'm unhappy about feeling as blank as I am. I drew cards aimlessly and interpreted them as they came, letting the meanings come rather than resorting to a book or even caring about what I consciously knew about the cards. No reversals or anything were used. Just one card at a time.

The First Card

The Four of Pentacles strikes me as a smug card. I know that it should be seen as smug on the outside and hurt on the inside, but sometimes, it's so hard to get past the little twist of the man's eyebrows, that little bit of contentment. Or the way he holds the Pentacle on his lap, deliberately casual, with his chin resting on his hand and the other arm in his lap, as if he wants you to notice it. A man hiding behind his money.

The Second Card

Death, more than any other card, reminds me of the passage of time. Nothing can stop that horse. The king couldn't stop it, nor will the cleric, the woman, nor the child. The sun still shines, the river still flows with the boat on it. Death is inevitability.

The Third Card

The Seven of Pentacles is a card of hard-earned rewards, but now I'm noticing the slightly unhappy cast to the farmer's face, as if it wasn't quite as much as he was expecting this year, or if the rewards aren't quite up to his high standards. It is working towards perfection but never quite getting there - doing great things but driving yourself always harder.

The Fourth Card

In the Eight of Pentacles, I see a person doing what they love, having retreated from society or societal norms to do so. It is caring more about your art than those who might appreciate it, and doing so because it is your job, as ordained by the person you are, rather than any authority. Some people work at what they do because that is what they must do.

The Fifth Card

Judgement shows all those nameless, faceless people who follow an idea. They are sheep, and happier for it. It is hard to see this card as bad, though, as one should never underestimate the power of people in groups following an idea. Still, it makes me feel like an outsider.

The Sixth Card

The Two of Pentacles seems almost to be a hallucination at this point. It is the view of work being done by an outsider who doesn't know what is going on. It is a verb, describing the action of an act so esoteric it seems to be magic. Even the ships seem perplexed.

The Seventh Card

The High Priestess is guarding something, but you'll never get to know what. Her face is so composed, so blank and she's so still that not even her expression or body language can give away the landscape behind her, however breathtaking it might be. She still holds the law in her hand, so I'm afraid to ask sometimes.

The Eighth Card

The Star works behind the scenes doing what must be done, even when things fall apart. It is the inner workings of the emotional mind that keeps me going

even when I'm crashing. She is the inner alchemist that churns and toils to keep the juices flowing, as it were, to keep the bellows moving and the fire stoked in my mind and heart.

The Ninth Card

The Nine of Pentacles is distraction. Someone did the work and it's there to appreciate, but only in a vague sense of the word, strolling through the gardens and taking it in, while really you're thinking about who did what with whom last week, or something to appreciate in a picture in the office. And the bird who may recognize any sort of beauty has a hood on, kept from seeing what's really around for the whims of another.

The Tenth Card

The Eight of Swords is martyrdom, being bound to the stake of sorts. It is willingly giving yourself up to those hostile forces around you. Or, and I hate to think about it, it is being too weak and caving in to those whims. Doing what you're told because you haven't the strength to do what you must.

Analysis - after the fact

I had to wait until the next day to finish analyzing the cards — usually, I outline everything and take a day or two to add in the details — as soon as I drew the last card, the blankness of emotion, of intellect, and of Self drove me to bed, leaving me to be enveloped somewhere more comfortable than in front of my computer. As I'm feeling much different today, I shall try to finish this chapter. My aim is to recall last night as best as I can and provide an interpretation based on what I wrote, and then go back through the cards and provide a new interpretation using more traditional definitions.

The ten cards I drew and interpreted briefly last night outline a path. Briefly, smug and content in my comfortable new major with my knowledge and ease of composing, shown in the first card, changes little in the second card. No one cares at work, my music still isn't getting performed, and I feel no closer to graduating. The third card is partly my realization of this and partly that part of me that wishes to excel, needing to work harder; and the fourth card shows me about where I am now: feeling the need to retreat a little in order to do what I like doing, since it sometimes feels as if I've chosen a major that no one sees the use of, least of all my parents.

The next several cards seem much more speculative. Beginning with the Fifth card, the music world of today, particularly in education and popular circles is shown as sheep following a leader, some composer (the sixth card) working their magic and becoming successful by writing the music that sells with good marketing rather than good musicianship. The seventh and eighth cards are likely what I would do when confronted with such an individual. While I work my own 'magic' with my music, I seem more to be incomprehensible, but,

running my own publishing business, I hold the law in my hands. The eight card shows, in particular, my realization of this, of trying to keep alive a portion of my art that no longer serves the function of art, without an audience.

The ninth card shows more of the world around me, of music and art in general falling by the wayside, as it has in the past few years, to background noise. Music that one hears in restaurants and on the radio just because it's there, not for the purposes of enjoyment or enlightenment. The tenth card is my big "I told you so" moment to the world. I left the education system to get away from the way this country seems to embrace that background-noise ideal. I tried to change that with my publishing company and all I did was cause trouble. Take that. Or else the second meaning comes into play and I wind up hurting for money, writing that very music that I despise so much.

Reading strictly from the rather stupid subconscious seemed to be easier when pulling definitions, but stringing together the meanings into a coherent analysis was certainly much more difficult. When I apply the conscious intellect inherent in analysis of the cards, though, the meaning becomes much more evident and easier to string together into a time-line without having to stretch so much. This proves my earlier thoughts, that tarot requires all levels of consciousness in order to be used successfully. As such, many of the meanings I pulled from inside are still accurate in a way: the overall premise of the storyline changes, but the problem remains the same, as that of the weakening world of art.

Whereas I mentioned I was smug and content in my musicianship, a more traditional standpoint shows less about the musicianship than about the musician. I'm creating structure in this world through my art, but also using it to turn inwards and as a protective shell for myself, in the first card. The second card traditionally means changed, and I chose the meaning of inevitability. The two go hand in hand, and perhaps this is a signal of change to come, what with my growing business. Perhaps my structures should be more productive than they are now. The original meaning of the third card is indeed a much happier one than I've chosen, but along the same lines of completion. I think that mine still applies, however, the constant need to excel is not a bad need to have — the work is not yet done, and this is shown in the next card. The work is never done.

Here the reading diverges much more from what I saw in the subconscious drawings. The fifth card shows a call to change from within (or, rather, a call to recognize what change has already happened), and the sixth card represents the balancing act that is life in general. Rather than the outside perspective I saw before, these two cards indicate a rebalancing of my life. While composition will still be very important to me, I think I need to realize that I've found my calling in life more in the publishing of great new works of music.

The High Priestess represents passivity, possibly in excess. I do still believe that music and art are not currently being herded to a very constructive destination by both artists and policy makers in this country, but I think that now is a good time to work against that with my own music and my company to help get the music of others out there in the open. If I hesitate too long, my

work will be ineffectual against this slow drift into mediocrity. The Star as the eighth card, however, does caution a pause to build my resources, to grow into this position without rushing headlong into it. The Star and The Tower often suggest each other, and I see The Tower looming on either side of this card: either from rushing the process or waiting too long, I'm liable to destroy myself.

The final two cards show offer a bit of advice about the way things are running. First of all, the Nine of Pentacles as the ninth card suggests the recognition of rewards. This has multiple meanings in context — I must recognize the greatness of the composers who ask to publish through my company, I must recognize the need for my company, and I must recognize the importance of my customers, for they are literally my financial reward. However, I must be careful of oppression, as shown by the final card. I should avoid blindfolding myself and oppressing myself by painting myself into a corner, as it were, and I must also avoid adding that blindfold to others, both composers and customers. Those other styles of music do have a place in our world, and I've been good so far about sending artists interested in that to other venues more willing to publish their works, but I will need to keep up with that so that I don't discourage them. I will also need to keep an open mind about what I will be able to publish, lest I deprive the world of that music, or the composers of their recognition.

These two readings were particularly helpful to me. I learned the place of each of the levels of consciousness in the Tarot workspace, as well as my limitations in reading from the spot. I hope that my skills as a reader will improve through this experiment, and I also hope that what I learn from my readings will remain applicable in my business throughout my life, as this reading seems to have proved to me just how important this idea is. As a pertinent final note, my card for the day was the Seven of Swords, cautioning leaping into things without a plan. This applies to both the business as discussed above, but also my method of reading. I did enjoy the looseness without a spread, but I should plan to work harder on reading on all levels.

4 Analysis

The analysis of this experiment will be written when all data is collected, in order to more properly answer the questions posed.

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