

Tarot of Marseilles – psychological and humanistic approach

To find out what we are talking about...

For neophytes, the terms “Tarots”, “Tarots of Marseilles”, “Oracles” may seem quite similar and not clearly differentiate from each other. It is for this reason that it seemed useful to me to clarify things before debating, knowing that what I am going to present here is a commonly accepted definition, but is not necessarily unanimous among authors and practitioners.

“The Oracle” is, historically and according to the dictionary definition: “a person who practices divination”. In Antiquity, the oracle generally “translated” the message of a god, so that it would be intelligible to men. Today, the term generally refers to card games, the use of which, whether divinatory or psychological, consists of drawing a card at random, interpreting it intuitively and reading or not reading a small text related to the card.

Among the oracles, there are more specific ones that are called “Tarots” or “Tarots of Marseilles”. While a “standard” oracle can have a varying number of cards, (the most common have between 40 and 50 cards), the tarot normally conforms to a standard of 78 or 22 cards. Tarot cards fall into two groups. On the one hand, we have the Minor Arcana which represent 4 card suits and are close to our current card games, with however two differences: the denominations “hearts, spades, diamonds, clubs” are replaced by “cups, swords, pentacles and wands” and each series includes an additional figure, the knight. In this way, we have 56 Minor Arcana. The remaining 22 cards are called “Major Arcana”, are numbered from 1 to 21 + the MAT which has no number and are illustrated by symbolic characters or scenes. The 22-card decks contain only the Major Arcana, the others generally contain all 78 cards. Among the tarots, we will distinguish the family of “Tarots of Marseilles”, which, beyond the number of cards, also respect a standard iconography for all the cards. Another family, derived from the Rider-Waite Tarot, has the particularity of also offering illustrated and symbolic scenes for the 56 Minor Arcana.

Some tarot readers will only use the 22 Major Arcana in their draw, others the complete deck and will have chosen their favorite deck: a Tarot of Marseilles, a Marseilles-derived tarot, a Rider-Waite Tarot, or a derivative tarot of the last. To be complete, note that some fortune-tellers also use a deck of 32 standard cards (hearts, diamonds, clubs, spades), ranging from 7 to king and ace.

A bit of history...

If you ask an occultist, he may trace the origin of the tarot to ancient Egypt, India, or Mesopotamia. I will only relay here the version of historians, based on authenticated documents.

Card games, which would later give rise to the Minor Arcana, appeared in Europe around 1350. What is surprising is that we find, at the same time, in France: our classic card games as they exist today, in Spain and Italy: tarot cards as they currently present, in Germany and Switzerland: still other variants. Difficult to say, therefore, if one of the games is at the origin of the others or if all appeared simultaneously with different variations.

The Major Arcana would have appeared, then, in Italy, at the beginning of the Renaissance, between 1425 and 1450. Among the oldest games found, we can mention the Visconti tarot and the so-called Charles VI tarot, both Italian. These are court games used, it seems, for the “distraction of the ladies.” The oldest tarot of Marseilles that has been found is the tarot of Jean Noblet (1659), but historians believe that the first tarots of this type would have appeared around 1500. Of course, certain themes evoked by the tarot cards are prior to its date of appearance: the 4 cardinal virtues are a concept stated by Plato, the “Wheel of Fortune” refers to the Roman goddess Fortuna, “The World” recalls the

representation of Christ surrounded by the 4 evangelists that we find on the tympanums of Romanesque and Gothic churches, but the assembly of these cards, their iconographic representation, would date well from the beginning of the 15th century.

Beyond these considerations on the origin of the tarot, we can note that the first mention of a divinatory use (to foresee the future) dates from 1781 and was made by Antoine Court de Gebelin in his book "The primitive World". You must wait until 1854 with Eliphas Levi and his work "Dogma and Ritual of High Magic" to discover a dimension of occultism, (tarot as a tool of access to hidden knowledge), being interested to the meaning of the symbols, to the numeral continuation of the cards and to their graphical construction. Finally, it was only at the end of the 20th century that the tarot also revealed a humanist or psychological dimension with referent people such as Georges Colleuil or Alessandro Jodorowsky in particular. We can therefore see that all these specific uses of the tarot are quite recent and do not date back to the dawn of time! This is in any case, as I specified above, the point of view of historians. We cannot speak of an evolution of the use of the tarot from clairvoyance, passing through esotericism, to arrive at a psychological dimension, because the three tendencies cohabit today, sometimes with the same practitioner.

My approach: "Psychological and humanist Tarot"

Personally, what comes closest to what I propose today with the tarot is this approach qualified as psychological or humanistic, knowing that each tarologist uses this tool with his own sensitivity and in a way that fully suits him. There are therefore as many ways of reading cards as there are practitioners. What I describe here is my own practice and in no way constitutes a generic definition of this type of use.

What characterizes my approach, then?

First, it seems interesting to me to specify what relationship I cultivate with the tarot and how this "magical" tool fits with my original Cartesian education. I am indeed an engineer and I have in no way denied my rational and analytical origins, contrary to what one might think at first sight. Indeed, I sometimes define myself as a "**tarologist engineer**", partly to provoke the "clash of opposites" and capture attention, but also simply because I recognize myself in this definition.

What is the tarot for me? Before answering this question, I would like to take a little detour through the concept of synchronicity, with which you are familiar. According to Jung's definition, a synchronicity is a "simultaneous occurrence of events, which do not present causal links between them, but whose association makes sense for the person who perceives them." In other words, synchronicity involves two independent events and an observer who gives meaning to the concordance of these events. When you think about it, that is exactly what happens with the tarot: you have two events: a question and a random card draw, and the meaning is given by the person who interprets the draw as well as by the consultant who validates the proposal. We have indeed a synchronicity every time we draw the cards! **I will therefore define the tarot as a tool for generating (or capturing) synchronicities:** thanks to the tarot, we receive information that comes from chance.

From this definition derive different properties that can be found in my practice.

For a critical mind, each synchronicity that manifests around us is like a small miracle. Marie-Louise Von Franz, one of Jung's students wrote about synchronicities: "**It is as if the outside world behaves like an extension of our psyche.**" And this is what we see: a thought, internal to ourselves, and an external event, come into phase as if by magic. In other words, when you work on yourself, you change the synchronicities and, therefore, you act on the outside world! In the approach of the psychological

tarot, each problem will be analyzed with the focus put on the person himself: Do you have a problem with your neighbor? Rather than looking for a way to change the neighbor's attitude, we will look at what annoys you in his behavior. And one will often find that by changing one's point of view on the situation (inside), one will also induce a change in the attitude of the neighbor (outside).

I consider the tarot as a tool allowing a spontaneous outpouring of information: I will speak of the **flash of the messages**. I will therefore not practice any ritual before a session nor spend time "cleaning" myself or "connecting myself". Indeed, when we see synchronicity in everyday life, we accept it as it presents itself, without having made any preparation. I therefore practice very free draws where the attitude of the consultant who draws the cards or the way he arranges them on the table are sometimes even more significant than the content of the cards themselves. In addition to the cards, I will also use whatever is happening around us: if we are in a public place, the noises and words heard around also bring information. So, I do not need a calm and sanitized atmosphere, I could almost say "quite the contrary", but that would be to deny the consultant's need to feel comfortable and confident for a good session.

I present the tarot as **a tool for accessing the unconscious**, which allows us to verbalize, to bring to our consciousness, the meaning of our emotions, our fears, our desires, and the role they play in our daily behavior. It is to facilitate this access to the unconscious that I will favor a rapid, almost instinctive interpretation of the draw, without pushing the analysis too far. If he needs more information, I usually propose the consultant a new draw or an additional oracle card, instead of trying to extract more from the draw already on the table. The risk is indeed great that, if we dig into the meaning of a draw, the mind will regain the upper hand, whereas with the spontaneous interpretation of a new draw, the intuition and the mind will remain on the same level.

Another characteristic of my approach, and of the psychological approach in general, is that **I do not make predictions**. Thus, a question such as "Am I going to meet someone?" for example, is replaced by "Am I ready to meet someone?" And if the answer is yes, we can see: "What do I have to do to meet someone?" By repositioning the question in the here and now, I leave the consultant his free will. If I tell him that it will happen within one month, for example, I remove him the responsibility for his actions. Of course, I can tell him that he will have to do the right thing to make it happen, but then what is the point of announcing this as an effective fact? Working in predictive mode is like, when you are on a national road and you arrive at a roundabout, deciding that you always will go straight. By working on the present, at each roundabout in life, we can decide which direction is the best for us.

Another advantage of the non-predictive approach is that the consultant can check directly if what I am proposing suits him, and if he agrees with my decoding of the situation. If I tell him: "In three weeks a tile will fall on your head", the only thing he can do is wait and check three weeks later if my prediction comes true. If I tell him: "You are afraid that a tile will fall on your head", he can accept or not my assertion and, if it is the case, we can work on this fear and see if it is justified. Once again, **the consultant keeps his free will; he decides, in what I propose him, to take what suits him**.

Psychics sometimes tend to ask their clients to say as little as possible, to show them their ability to "capture the invisible." In the humanistic approach, of course, we can perceive non-verbal information from the consultant, but we will preferably bring the consultation in a collaborative mood. It is for this reason that I like to use, for my practice, the expression **"mechanic of the psyche"**. When you take your car to your mechanic, you tell him if you are coming for maintenance or a breakdown and, in the latter case, you explain to him what seems abnormal in your car. It is the same with the humanistic approach: the more precise the information provided by the consultant, the more relevant the answers to a question will be.

When the consultant asks a question expecting a **“yes or no” type answer**, it is rare that the tarot gives a definitive answer. It is likely that we will discover elements allowing the consultant to choose: if he chooses “yes”, this may require him extra work or a questioning of certain achievements. Is the consultant ready to make these concessions? He can also decide not to change anything, because, for example, the situation gives him financial security that he is not yet ready to let go of. The tarot gives arguments in favor of one choice or the other, but, once again, it is the consultant who decides.

Personally, I avoid any question relating to health, whether physical or mental. It is a personal choice. I position myself neither as a caregiver nor as a healer. I can question the symbolic meaning of a disease, but never advise or prescribe a remedy.

Even if a few cards bother us or are perceived as negative, I will always look for the **positive message** behind them. In this way, even if the tarot describes a problem encountered by the consultant, I can propose him to see this problem from another angle, more positive and we are already in the problem resolution. That is also why tarot can propose at the same time: a therapeutic approach, a clarification of desires and needs, a personal development tool, a search for meaning, a life coaching...

I have also developed two typical sessions that I have called in a highly poetic way: “protocol XV” and “protocol VIII”. The objective of protocol XV is to sort out our values and our beliefs. The idea is that when a defense strategy does not work or no longer works, because it is based on a belief that has become obsolete, we will propose to defend the value in question in another way. This is done by looking for the mission corresponding to the belief, (the behavioral rules associated with it) and by proposing a rereading of this mission, in a way that will further promote a harmonious relationship with others. It is by drawing the tarot cards that one clarifies the mission and the new possible understandings of it.

Protocol VIII, meanwhile, proposes to symbolically cut our psyche into several instances: the inner man, the inner woman, the inner father, the inner mother, the inner child, and the inner stranger. From simple exercises and with the help of tarot cards, we will identify the instances that express themselves excessively and those that express themselves too little. The idea here is to give each instance an equal voice and that the psyche, when it has a decision to make, can consult each part that composes it in an equal way.

My activity:

Beyond consultations and conferences, I also offer group consultations, quite similar to individual consultations, except that we gather around a table a small group of maximum ten people. The magic of synchronicities, (again), makes that a question asked by one person resonates with another person and the consultation thus evolves in a natural way from one participant to the other, in a natural progression where each one, that whether or not asked a question, can get something out of it.

Other workshops more specifically described as “personal development workshops” use the same group dynamics and the spontaneous emergence of important themes through the chance of the cards drawn. Whether it is the “Game of Tao” or the “Game of 4 Toltec Agreements”, we very quickly find ourselves in a situation quite similar to a consultation.

My workshops for learning the Tarot of Marseilles also participates in the same dynamic. It is not possible to draw the tarot for others without having gone to see deep within oneself. It is our sincerity with ourselves, our "inner justice" (in the sense of "correctness", not in the sense of guilt), which will allow us to be effective, constructive, and benevolent with each consultant. Beyond this introspective aspect, the goal of the training is to give everyone a personalized reading grid of the tarot cards: it is important that we put our own words on the cards, corresponding to our feelings, even if this departs

from what is explained in the abundant literature on this subject. If we want the reading of a draw to be spontaneous, it is important that our unconscious "agrees" with the words that we associate with the cards, that our mind does not seek the "right definition" for each of them, but that the overall meaning of the draw appears in a clear and obvious way, without us having to think about it. This is one of the reasons why I suggest **not reading the cards upside down** and always putting them right side up. The operation of "finding the opposite meaning" is a mental operation, which moves away from the spontaneous way in which the unconscious functions.

Most training on the market offers a deductive approach: we analyze the cards; we interpret the symbols, and we deduce the meaning. Personally, I favor **an inductive approach**: through playful and light exercises (intuitive writing, mimes, draws, analysis of dreams and synchronicities, decoding of emotions, spontaneous messages...), we let the meaning of the cards emerge and we select what suits us. Thus, everyone appropriates the cards and associates their own meaning with them. The 22 major arcana can be seen as a model of our psyche. Discovering the emotions and the words that the cards bring up in our psyche is therefore also getting to know ourselves better. Then, bringing out the positive meaning of the cards that we initially considered as negative, is already operating an important transformation inside ourselves.

In conclusion:

The tarot, as a support for clairvoyance, opens the doors to the invisible, as an esoteric companion, those of the knowledge of the mysteries of the world, and as a psychological tool, that of the knowledge of the psyche. Whichever approach we choose (and we can combine them), the tarot will always behave like an empty matrix that we are led to fill and renew as we develop and grow in parallel with the evolution of our knowledge. Therefore, it is always current, independent of fashion or the evolution of customs. No one will ever be able to lock it into a compartmentalized system, reduce it to a single objective or interpretation, and, in this sense, it will always remain a key to access to knowledge without limits.