

Introduction

Life speaks to us at every moment, in languages of every description. Happily, I have found it to be fluent in Tarot, and on at least one occasion conversant in Cricket.

I dreamed a cricket was resting in the middle of my unmade bed. I was gathering up the corners of the fitted sheet, undecided whether to trap the visitor in the folds of the fabric and set it free outdoors or, in one swift motion, to squash it. Before I could decide its fate, I woke up. For a few moments I lay in bed reviewing the still-fresh images, disturbed by the indifference with which I had considered killing the harmless creature. As a practiced dream watcher I knew the stark scenario meant *something*, but I preferred not to look at it too closely, convinced it would only make me feel worse at what was already a low point in my life.

Rubbing the sleep and dream from my eyes, I sank my feet into slippers and shuffled toward the bathroom. I had traveled only a few feet on that cold, dark March morning when my downcast gaze fell upon a dead cricket on the hardwood floor. In eight years none had ever appeared in my fourth-floor apartment, not even in summer when the evenings sing with them.

I knew I had been sent a particularly poignant message, one that needed my attention.

I pulled out my Tarot cards, an anticipatory sadness welling up as I shuffled them. I asked the question as directly as I could: "What part of me does the cricket represent?" I turned over a card.

It was the Fool.

INTRODUCTION

Here was the archetype of the Wanderer, the Beginner, the Child; a figure poised at the edge of the abyss, the follower of instinct, taker of great leaps of faith. My heart beat a little faster as I made the connection: What do the Fool and the cricket have in common, if not their impulses to *leap*?

The Fool, like the dead cricket, told me I was killing my own impulses for change through chronically safe, uninspired choices in my life and work. Although at that moment I had no clear idea how or where to leap, gratitude for the message itself, for its eloquence and healing intent, began to stir up the vitality that Fool and cricket conspired to reawaken in me. I resolved that no cricket would ever again have to sacrifice itself for me to get my Fool energy moving again!

There is a guiding force that seeks to draw us into a deeper conversation with Life, communicating with us through the symbolic language of dreams, images, coincidence. Too often this dialogue is drowned out by the monologues looping through our heads and the noise of the technology on which we've made ourselves dependent. Working with the Tarot is an intimate yet powerful way to say to one's inner and outer universe, "I'm listening."

Acting as the voice of our inner wisdom, if not also the voice of the Infinite, the cards tell us what we've been too distracted to hear: the costs and benefits of our choices, powers lost or gained, soul gifts flowering or forgotten, paths too-long-traveled or left unexplored. The Tarot becomes like a friend who knows your heart, the one you trust to tell it like it is without judging; who gives you wise counsel, and helps you feel compassion for yourself even when you've failed to take your leaps.

The Tarot is by no means the sole channel for guidance. We can receive inspired messages just as directly through prayer or meditation, in dreams, in a passage from a novel or a walk through a garden. But the Tarot offers us the advantage of an immediate response.

INTRODUCTION

A deck of the cards and a loving intention for insight are all we need to engage the sacred conversation, and if we choose, to facilitate that conversation for others.

Using the cards for insight, inspiration, and guidance does not require a particular religious belief. It does, however, demand a respect for the symbolic dimension—an appreciation for life's capacity to communicate with us in highly imaginative and unexpected ways. It invites us to deepen our connection to the source of that voice, whether we call it Life, Inner Wisdom, the Universe, the Divine, the Higher Self, or intuition. Ultimately, working with the Tarot nurtures the understanding that, like the cards, we are but physical representations of nonphysical essences and energies. In short, we are spirit.

The Tarot can be a dynamic tool for spiritual development, though the cards themselves have no power to transform us. We evolve in proportion to *the courage of our questions and commitment to act* on the information received. Just as potently, we can use the cards to meditate on the opportunities for soul growth resonating in the Tarot archetypes, using them as catalysts for integrating and maturing their higher qualities within ourselves. With or without divination, the Tarot helps us discover who we are, and who we may become.

"Know thyself" is not a private indulgence; it is a global imperative. Our world is in need of radical awakening and transformation, a process that accelerates as we look honestly at the beliefs and motives that drive our actions, observe how those actions play out on the personal as well as collective levels, and learn to make more loving choices. Until we recognize our creative purpose and power—with or without the aid of the Tarot—we weaken under the limitations of conditioned responses, the manipulations of an anxiety-driven media, the bullying of dogmas, and the mind-numbing complacency of escapist lifestyles.

INTRODUCTION

As we pay more attention to the voice of intuition, the craziness of mass consciousness ceases to dominate the discussion. The True Self is amplified. We enjoy a more vibrant exchange with the richer life humming within and around us. We open to the spirit of things; the poetry in the prose; the message in the circumstance; the holiness of Fools and crickets.

Exercise: Find Your "Inner Tarot Teacher"

It is wisdom to know others; it is enlightenment to know one's self.

—Lao Tzu

Before you begin *Tarot for Life*, why not conduct a simple Tarot reading for yourself? The card that turns up will tell you why you were led to pick up this book—whether you're a Tarot novice, a dabbler, or a pro with a neon "Reader-Advisor" sign lighting up your storefront. Here's what you do:

1. Separate the twenty-two cards of the Major Arcana—the Fool (0) through the World (21)—from the rest of the deck. If you're new to the Tarot, be sure you don't mistake a courtly Page, Knight, Queen, or King for the Major Arcana.

2. Shuffle the cards with the images face down (see "Shuffling the Cards," page 000). As you shuffle, ask this question silently or aloud: *"What aspect of myself is this book inviting me to discover and/or develop as I work with it?"*

3. Randomly pull one card from the cards you've shuffled. For the sake of simplicity and clarity (particularly at this early stage), set the intention that *only the card's upright position applies to you*, even if it's upside down when you draw it.

INTRODUCTION

At this time, resist the temptation to read the possible meanings of the card you drew. Just sit with it for now. Notice how the image makes you feel, and what associations it conjures. If you pulled a card that looks a little harsh or scary, take a breath, and trust that its message for you is unquestionably positive and constructive. There is no force outside of you that seeks to shame or punish you. Tarot study is Self study. *Life* study. And there is always more to discover.