

The Fool's Journey: feeling the Tarot

Divination tool or dangerous game? **Gemma Birss** uncovers the truth about Tarot - and gets acquainted with its archetypes and energy - by mastering the ancient art of reading the cards

As this year is the centenary of the original Rider-Waite Tarot, I decided that it was a good time to truffle out my old deck. My relationship with the Tarot has been a rocky one. It was banned from my childhood home after my mother had a bad experience with it and so I grew up mistrusting the cards. After I left home, I bought my first pack, and fascination quickly turned to dependency.

The Tarot held a mysterious power over me and I battled hard to overcome it, turning my childhood mistrust to fear. Opting for the gentler energy of angel cards, I thrust my Rider-Waites deep into the recesses of my cupboard and forgot about them. Well, not quite forgot. I don't think anyone can forget the Tarot once acquainted and I knew I was just biding my time until it felt right to dig them out again.

Getting reacquainted

It felt right this year, but this time I wanted to learn the cards properly. I sought out the guidance of Tiffany Crosara, a reputed Tarot reader. As well as reading professionally at Mysteries in London's Covent Garden, Tiffany runs Introductory and Diploma Tarot courses in London and Cornwall, online Tarot courses, Reiki courses and Psychic Development workshops. With a wealth of qualifications and experience under her belt, Tiffany has had a lifelong relationship with the Tarot and is startlingly intuitive. For Tiffany, the Tarot is a tool for healing and she is passionate about dispelling any negative myths about the cards.



Clockwise from top: Tiffany introduces Gemma to the cards; Gemma's first reading without a book; and the class's eclectic mix

I opt for Tiffany's introductory Tarot course, aptly named 'The Fool's Journey' after the first card in the Major Arcana. The Fool's Journey is a one-day course, which promises to initiate a profound relationship with the cards. Encouraging you to cast aside any books or other crutches that you might use in your readings, the course guides you to an intimate

understanding of the archetypes, energy and characters of the Tarot. I can't imagine how I could possibly learn the meanings of each of the 78 cards in one day, but I'm willing to give it a go.

I decide to make a mini-break of it and book a weekend in Cornwall. The course is held at Rosemerryn, an exquisite former artist's residence, turned bed and breakfast, tucked away in the lush environs of Lamorna. A number of courses are run there,

which you can attend as a B&B resident or as a day visitor. There is a certain fairy magic that sparkles across the seven acres of Rosemerryn, not to mention the enigmatic Fogou (stone cave) in the gardens. It is an ideal venue to discover, or rediscover, the Tarot.

The Major Arcana

There is an eclectic mix on the course. There are two professional Tarot readers wishing to refresh and develop their skills, one woman who's been guided to the Tarot by a fortune teller, one who is simply interested in exploring the cards, and myself and another who are both suspicious of the cards.

'Every card is neutral,' Tiffany reminds us. This is a theme that is to run throughout the course. Just as every cloud has a silver lining, every seemingly negative card has a positive facet and Tiffany is careful to dissolve any fears.

After Tiffany briefly talks us through her own fascinating journey with the Tarot, and summarizes the impressively extensive history of the cards, it's time to meet the

Major Arcana; the big players of the Tarot deck. The Major Arcana differentiates Tarot cards from regular playing cards, which can also be used as a predictive tool. Regular cards and the Tarot's Minor Arcana can be used to determine the 'how', 'where', 'what' and 'when' of a situation, but the Major Arcana responds to the 'why'. This is the key. The emphasis on this course is to get to know the 22 characters in the Major Arcana, so we can understand the 'why' beneath each reading.

We prepare ourselves for the hour-long guided Fool's Journey meditation that is also available for purchase on CD. Taking on the happy-go-lucky persona of The Fool, which assumes our complete innocence and naivety in the face of the Tarot, we embark upon a mammoth journey of insightful introductions. We encounter each of the Major Arcana characters, experiencing them from The Fool's exuberant perspective. The meditation leads us through each character: the warmth and abundance of The Empress, the painful confusion of The Lovers, solitude

of The Hermit, the harrowing but enlightening lessons of The Devil and The Tower, finally to arrive at a sense of completion with The World.

By the end of the meditation, I feel as if I have experienced an entire lifetime through the eyes of The Fool. It has led me to understand the Tarot as a soul journey, one rich with lessons and growth, pitfalls and achievements. I also have a deeper recognition that, just as in life, nothing is either good or bad in the Tarot. Essentially, it represents the soul's evolution through awakening consciousness to enlightenment.

Armed with this new understanding, we move on to the next exercise; telling stories through the Tarot. We sit quietly with our own Major Arcana cards for a few minutes to integrate the

meditation. We then arrange the cards in a sequence that symbolically represents a personal story from our lives. Once we have done this, a partner deciphers the story using their intuition as a guide.

The Minor Arcana

I am amazed at my ability to interpret my partner's story, all without my trusty Tarot book.

Similarly, my partner cuts through to the core of my story easily, offering some insights that I hadn't previously considered. I learn that it's not so much a case of intellectually reading the cards as feeling through them.

With a firm grasp of the Major Arcana, we break for lunch at 1.30pm. Rosemerryn offers an optional vegetarian lunch, which I fully recommend - the food is reflective of the venue: homely and soulful.

Lunch is a swift half an hour, as we have an army of 56 Minor Arcana cards still to meet before course ends at 5pm. We have our dessert while Tiffany opens the space for the next section of the course: a speed dating session with four minutes to 'chat' to each of the Major Arcana characters through Tiffany. The amount of information you can glean in four minutes is impressive, undoubtedly enhanced by Tiffany's knowledge. The Major Arcana are becoming more like a group of trusty, honest friends rather than the sinister bunch I had previously pigeonholed them as.

"Just as a cloud has a silver lining, every negative card has a positive facet"

For more information on Tiffany's courses and services, visit transcendentaltemple.co.uk

The Fool's Journey CD costs £10 or £8.95 as an MP3 from transcendentaltemple.co.uk/hypno-therapy-mp3s

For course accommodation or a break in Cornwall, visit [Rosemerryn at rosemerrynwood.co.uk](http://Rosemerryn.atrosemerrynwood.co.uk)

The Fool awakes

Tiffany arms us with a key to deciphering the Minor Arcana, dividing the four suits into Thought, Emotion, Action and Manifestation. With astrological and numerological insights, Tiffany outlines the significance of each Minor Arcana card. I know little of astrology and numerology, but with Tiffany's keys and hints, my understanding blooms.

It is time to demonstrate what we have learnt. Each of us selects a couple of cards from the deck for a group reading. My spread is cloudy with doom and gloom: The Devil, The Moon and the Knight of Wands. It is very apparent to me what the spread is referring to, and the other course members offer some fantastic insight into the subconscious tides beneath the situation. If I had received these cards before this course, I would have panicked - this is the dark side of the Tarot that I had always shied away from. But today I take it in my stride as Tiffany and the other course members offer constructive advice on the issue. I see the Tarot for the first time as a tool for healing that offers helpful insight and a platform from which to consider your options.

As an introductory Tarot course, The Fool's Journey does exactly what it says on the box and so much more. It's ignited my respect for the cards and profoundly deepened my understanding of them. I now feel confident to work with them and my fear has been dispelled. Tiffany advises us to develop a relationship with each card, one by one. I start, of course, with The Fool. That night I sleep with the card under my pillow as Tiffany suggests. My dreams are weird and lucid, but strangely reminiscent of The Fool. When I wake, I can see with clarity all the many times in my life that I have indeed been The Fool. ☺



Tiffany awards Gemma her certificate and, below, the certificate and Fool's Journey CD (£10); and Rosemerryn

