

Documents  
For The Reader  
Print Friendly Version  
Companion book for all of  
Stone Riley's Tarot decks  
By Stone Riley © 2015

Excerpt:  
Document #1:  
How I Started In Tarot  
And You Can Too

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### > How To Start Reading Tarot

Note: Your experience having serious conversations with people about life's difficulties will be far more useful than any prior Tarot experience. Also: If you're thinking of doing readings for yourself, while you study these suggestions pretend you are both the people mentioned.

If you have an easy reading deck – like Simple Tarot, Spirit Hill, or many others – here's a good method to try first.

Sit at a table with your client (or with yourself). Turn all the cards face up and glance at them quite informally. Pick a few to show, saying each card makes a statement about life and altogether they can tell every story. Say many people over many years developed Tarot as a tool to help us sort out our confusions.

Now ask the client for help doing this: Turn the cards face down and mix them all around. Then, with the cards still facing down, spread them neatly across to left and right.

Ask the client to choose an important aspect of their life situation and bring it into mind, something where they'd like good advice, or a hint of how to see things truthfully and usefully. Say it does not need to be huge, but must be some issue in their life for which they honestly could use a bit of good advice or a wise impartial explanation. You can trust that all discussion which is needed will arise from this.

Suggest that if they want to close their eyes they can and say that when their issue is extremely vivid in their mind, as real and vivid as can be, please reach out and pick a card. When they do so, have them turn the card face up and look. Ask them what it says, in both its picture and its words. Ask if this maybe says something about their issue.

Looking at the card's words and picture yourself, give keen attention to everything the client says. If you need elaboration to take their meaning, courteously ask. If a bit of wisdom comes to mind you feel you ought to say, politely and kindly offer that.

But what inner voices should you give attention when you dare offering a client wisdom? I'm sure at that moment you'd rather not be listening to your prejudices, envies, peevish discontents and petty bickerings, your self-indulgent self-deceits and crippling fears, etc. You want a voice something like your natural, healthy, sane, creative, joyful, free and loving self.

If you are not yet accustomed to the amazing powers of intuition we all have, common property of our human race, first listen to whatever lessons you have learned in life yourself, and maybe to some philosophy of life you like, maybe some school of thought from some wise teacher you admire. But definitely find a voice of love and optimism in those sources.

You will find other sources going forward. With effort you'll learn fast in this work, gaining excellent truths from clients, from the philosophy that's written in the Tarot deck, and from startling revelations about your own life that will appear. You will find the sort of courage that's needed.

So your effort is rewarded: You begin to recognize the voice of reliable intuition. You may come to recognize it by its color, so to speak, or by its musical tone perhaps, or by the direction from

which it enters your mental space, etc. I expect you'll recognize it by its insistence that you give full attention, and the exact precision of things it says when you do.

Of course when I call this a voice, you know it can be non-voice sounds, pictures you are shown, scents, floods of emotion, a memory of your life as an example of what's meant, etc., but on opening your full attention while examining the card's words and picture, you discover a specific meaning you may tell. The card gives a vital a hint.

But you'll also find that many errors teach moderation in your growing confidence: A toothache may distract you. Or you might have two clients there together and say things to one that should be given to the other. Of course telling a prediction can stop it from coming true. It seems the past can be altered too. There might come some startling spirit from the dead. You'll later think of things you should have said. So forth.

But in reading Tarot one hazard is above all else: As with any voice, what you perceive in the voice of intuition will be limited or opened by your beliefs and expectations. And this sad situation equally: You will very often find the client cannot hear what you are saying because there is some fascinating fear or shame that holds their attention riveted instead.

But when your path brings you to this work you'll do it. You will simply do the best you can, with a firm and patient kindly manner resting in the faith this work is good.

Or you might take my word on this: We strive to bring things into consciousness because human consciousness is the decisive governor of human life. Amid the universal dance of infinite creativity, each person's allotment of the universal mind, in subtle complex ways, through its conscious choices makes their body and their fate.

So we use Tarot – like other suchlike implements since human life and mind began – to lead our consciousness in keenly sharp attention step by step bravely into our thoughts so thus our choices can be re-made wiser. Thus reality, in its divine pleasure, sees and loves itself. You, doing this, are thus a priestly guide of souls through an enchanted wood, like, in my youth, I once saw painted on an ancient cup from Greece.

Proceed as needed with more cards, on the same or other issues. Feel free to point out details of an issue to the client, or request clarification from them, even courteously interrupting if you must. Feel free to ask for clarification from the cards as well, then pull a card or two and tell the client what they say. Feel free to pray, but silently.

When otherwise finished, I like to finally ask the deck this question: "Please tell us what else we should know." If you take this practice, pull and read a card or two.

When all seems finished, I customarily express, aloud or silently, gratitude to whatever mind or spirit of this here deck that I imagine, and so I close the deck respectfully.

I finally hold the client's hands, if they allow, and quite sincerely say, "Thank you for your trust," understanding that they teach me, knowing that their trust is holy.

### > Further Study

There are many books, good and bad, about Tarot. Some books might probably be useful to you, but the best teacher is undoubtedly the deck itself.

I suggest this study: Get a Tarot deck with pictures that seem to speak to you, even if they are speaking vaguely. Now, on

the first morning of a week choose some cards, 3 or 4 or more or less, and put them in your pocket. That week, watch for those cards in the world around.

Maybe make a poem and a picture when a card appears. That's how my first deck was created. Or you might discuss the work with friends, which was delightful, or eat and sing and dance, consume intoxicating substances, or keep a diary.

Continue till the world shows every card or till you quit.

### > How I Started In Tarot,

#### My Hope, Purpose & Procedure

I first made the Simple Tarot, my first deck in its first edition, as a way to start my self-taught art career and step decisively into real human life. That is to say, to find the values that I wished to live for and a strategy by which to live.

The project occupied my concentrated effort for one year, early January 1980 to early January 1981. At that time I was emerging from the unremitting concentrated stress of youthful death defying politics around the Vietnam War and arriving in the working poverty of a young family man. By some coincidence, January 1980 was the 10th anniversary of my month in military jail for war resistance work.

The goal I had in mind was to set down what I had learned about life so far in a form that would be a clear starting point for whatever lay ahead, and to learn from that study. I did not want to lose my dead and living and all of the beautiful and dreadful failures and successes, for I was aware that all those things so alive for me then, those things of my true reality, could fade into forgetfulness. Tarot seemed to offer help with this.

By then, by early 1980, I had been reading Tarot for my education in private moments for a while. I was using the Rider Waite and the Aquarian Tarots. The Rider was a fundamental sketch of modern culture, done by a theatrical designer with india ink and flat watercolor 70 years before, whereas the Aquarian was recent, in poster inks in the somber colors and flower shapes that were current reality in my eyes then. So I would read the two decks together for a fuller view of life. As you might expect, that also gave a better view of Tarot reading itself.

For my purposes I felt Tarot's claim to universal human truth held a tantalizing savor. Could I really, as purported by its theorists and more or less confirmed by my limited experience, use the Tarot deck structure as a diagram on which to scribble everything I knew of human life?

And if I could do that, if its structure really could be trusted that far, wouldn't Tarot also definitely help me reach conclusions, fill in the many blanks of my experience, and thus remember much that I would otherwise never even understand? Wouldn't that help a lot in going forward to a worthy life?

I was programming computers by then (my good brother, an engineer, had advised I might do well in that profession) and, surprisingly, insight came to the project through thinking like a coder. In that mode I recognized Tarot as a recording and playback system for human life wisdom. Then, in examining this device, coder thinking quickly offered a convincing list of main design objectives. There were 3.

Objective 1: I should try to make an actual Tarot deck that was actually useful to me. Scribbling my experiences on a set of blank cards, so to speak, following the deck's authentic outline, ought to do that. The deck is supposedly a whole diagram of life so its structure could be a list of questions to ask my memories, checked against real life around me now. I must be very truthful

but the versions of the cards on hand would help as prompts.

Objective 2: If I truly learned about life by creating a Tarot deck from my life, it would be useful for other people also. I'd be adding recent local accent and color, but it would be useful for others because, in learning, I would use Tarot's "coding sheet" to map my life onto human nature. The Tarot structure supposedly has recorded data about our common human life far beyond an individual's share of data. The data is all merged when a reading is done, and merged with the reader's data too.

Objective 3: On studying the matter, I came to think the time was good to do this work. Our culture world was doing major change but there was an ancient simple style of poetry and picture – the style of Zen and Tao and the like which I was already studying – that spoke very clearly to us there on the New Age leading edge.

So I thought cards in that artistic style might be strong clear prompts to imagination for many people, serving as the Rider Waite has in its time, but in our cultural moment and going forward, a version of the deck to be a wise enduring guide for many future people.

Therefore, besides the personal attractions of the project, and its urgent nature to me personally, it seemed perhaps to also be a way of doing useful politics.

You see, Tarot works very well. Tarot, and many other systems like it all across the world through history, reliably give people information that they do not have, often breaking chains of misunderstanding their society has loaded on them.

And it's easy. First you find a divination tool that speaks your language so you understand, some version of Tarot perhaps. Then you go into the proper willful, attentive and receptive frame of mind and ask a question. Then you pick a Tarot card and turn it up (or some such gesture) and give attention. A bit of new accurate information or a good answer or an apt suggestion appears in your mind as if in human conversation with some wise person.

(How does it work? Either by some excellent illusion in our human mental processes or else through some surprising fact about time and space and all of that, or both. I have further guesses but here I'll just say that.)

And you also see, the times were different then than now. Then it seemed that truth itself in any quantity was likely to be revolutionary for the good. The madness then was lies.

In our time now, early December 35 years later, another new report of disgusting despicable crass cruel brutality by our government, all for the insane greed of the ruling class, was just released, one more of many such, and nothing will be done. In these times great heaps of truth pile up and our good revolution consists of any action toward fulfilling truth's demands.

Back then, when I was first considering a project in Tarot, truth itself was missing. I was trying to assess my project's possible value to the world, thinking of it as a lifetime work perhaps, feeling optimistic that it might be widely used, and we were in a time of lies, lies on a very wide and yet pervasively intimate scale, as though lies were the air you breathed. Any fresh breath of truth might help reveal the poison stink.

I'll tell you one particular example of those times. This bit of it infuriated me: I knew my fellow citizens were mostly still in love with our U.S. national propaganda lies.

There was a nonsense question you could ask: "Do you

think America is the greatest country in the world?"

This was nonsense on its face of course. To give a rational reply, a person must assign some kind of "greatness" score to every country in the world, do a sort, then observe America's location in the resulting scale.

But all the Americans I asked, with rare exception, would actually do precisely this: Listen to my question, think for a moment and see the difficulties of the question, decide to abandon thought, often shrug, and answer "Yes, I think America is the greatest country in the world."

They were doing this even after the horrors of the very horrid Vietnam War that were just recently gone by, vast horrors done by our soldiers from the very start of it and repeated constantly with increasing pitch of desperation right to the end, horrors mostly done by public order of our generals in fulfillment of our government's public policies and constantly reported clearly in the daily news; yes it was even then after those long recent years of vast and quite intentional evil, that enormous spasm of pointless insane furious destruction, it was then in 1980 and I was finding most Americans still clung somehow to their cherished lie that our country, unlike most other countries, is noble and does good.

But of course that was only one example of those dire and dark unlighted times. It was a very clear demonstrable example but certainly not the worst thing by far.

For as well it was quite evident by then that the world is dying soon, by atomic war and/or by global warming, unless we drastically revolutionized the way our country was run, unless we instituted real democracy to some significant degree, as many of us cogently proposed. But of course no hope was visible for that in 1980, after we had seen the ruling class power straight through the Civil Rights Movement, tossing corpses left and right, riding their huge undaunted economic system of racist classiest burn and pillage robbery.

You'll understand that this was personal with me. They had made an enemy of me and in that struggle I had found my being.

I had come up as a working class poor so-called "White" boy in an ugly industrial dangerous city of the racist Jim Crow South and also thus as a perfect target of the U.S. Army draft. If by chance I missed the empire's foreign wars then I was meant to spend a life at labor in quite poisonous industrial facilities where constant injury and death were merely "accidents".

But I was independent thinking and smart, always reading news and classics, at least smart and free enough – like more and more of the so-called "White" youth of the South – to see with opening eyes the world which had been built for us.

And this seemed starkly plain to me: I was unavoidably in war against my government, their American Permanent Race War, their Vietnam War, their Big Business Class War (a.k.a. the War Against The Earth), their Atomic Bomb Insane Cold War, all being the same thing and me being fodder for the machine one way or another.

Further, I shall here pass by almost unsaid the murder of a friend in war, and other tragedies observed in that long time, injustices which seemed to be enough true confirmation of my inclination to the struggle. For in several cases my reactions and actions did seem to confirm that I could do some thing, some small thing, of proper use and value in the tests.

So when it did happen, immediately when it was made – when the first copy of the first edition of the Simple Tarot cards

came off my art work table into a pocket size box – and then when immediately this product of my eye and hand and heart found good uses in the genuine little personal paths of the constant struggle for democracy – then it did seem the strategy by which to live my further life, and the values toward which I wished to spend that life, had come clear.

Now, with all the several hundred little bits of good that I have used that deck to do in 35 years, the counseling and the teaching – and maybe 40 handmade copies I have given out as free and whatever good they may have done – for this does seem to be a baseline version of Tarot in our culture, deep and usable by everyone – yet now, on writing this account of the beginning, my big ambition that Simple Tarot would be famous does seem ironic, even embarrassing to my pride, as though I am too wise for silly pride, or to be so wise I must pretend.

Whereas in fact, that ambition at the start now seems too small. Certainly my project needs enlargement – it must be richer and deeper than one deck in one artistic style – but 35 years practicing a variety of arts enlarged my muscularity enough for that. And also our world has changed profoundly, democracy at last publicly awakened, which I think makes it more likely to be helped by Tarot.

Looking back now from this new beginning, the ambition for my first deck's fame did get my effort started, bringing enough real achievements that I could accept the years of challenge as an aspiring Master Student of Tarot.

That first deck made a healing teaching priest of me. It also was a rich and supple root stock for further art work, most of all so far the Spirit Hill Tarot doubling the project now. I even seem to see the whole thing's outline, with its 3rd Tarot to be in artistically new dimensions, tracing a Pythagorean diagram of some prismatic lens.

So yes, my project has lived and grown. It might grow to be a sturdy straw in the brick walls humanity is building. Or is that straining metaphor a fantasy again? Really, can Tarot help our world survive? Or will the human world survive at all?

Our human world – this place we all by our consciousness collectively create – has changed profoundly in my time here. We still have blind greed and fear in plenty – enough to kill us all perhaps – but, speaking of a total balance, I've seen our world's beliefs grow to be far more deeply and richly realistic.

When I was young, entering adult awareness 50 years ago, it was bewildering to see thinkers of every occupation and philosophy exert themselves deciding which precepts of White Supremacy they would accept and which deny. This one amused me: A prominent historian proposed that civilized citizens of any race are mentally advanced beyond uncivilized barbarians of any race and, coincidentally, there are no White uncivilized barbarians. That theory was considered erudite and liberal.

A momentous half century later now, excited news reports give frequent coverage of competing theories about the origin of the human race. These theories differ – by pointing to many different facts we know – but they all propose that all humans have had the same mental equipment for about the last 250,000 years, through all of known history and prehistory too, utterly regardless of "civilization" and of skin color.

As well, historians now thrill to lurid revelations of White Supremacy, trying to understand, with thorough scholarship and gripping real life drama, how all that cruelty happened, mourning

that it did and lionizing the resisters.

And the current rising of our democracy against it is very beautiful. January 2015: Across our country White Supremacist so-called “peace officers” murder hundreds of unarmed citizens per year in a terror campaign supporting their vast neo-slavery prison industry. After an especially disgusting murder, local citizens rose in mass under excellent voluntary discipline, immediately developed a clear bold careful tactical vision that found nationwide public mass support, and they are still up in action months later.

I mean to say, White Supremacy has been excreted from our culture's thinking, although it still can be found lying about in big piles of odorous non-thinking that we step into too much.

I mean to say, ceasing to believe White Supremacy brought tremendous mental liberation in America overall. Just like very many of our non- so-called “White” poets and philosophers had constantly predicted for very many years, when we adjudged our Permanent Race War, our most pervasive longest war, a crime – when we, in our democracy, declared the biggest propaganda lie a lie – then our democracy awoke in many ways.

And I claim that great case as an example for my lesser case: I say that piece of history supports my proposal that Tarot will help our world survive.

And from personal experience I say: Tarot speaks inside your truest self saying that you are a being with the rest, thus declaring The War Against The Earth to be a crime. Tarot helps fill an aching need for proof of our universal companionship, thus it helps establish certainty that human ownership of Earth is only fragile lies.

I say – similar to the history I cite above plus from my own experience – Tarot helps to reassure our love for truth that love for truth can realistically arise in bold actions.

I'm hearing currently from persons such as Klein, Brand, Tippett, Berry, Solnit, Hedges, Roberts, West, Starhawk and McKibbin – echoing the voices in my youth of Ella Baker and Dr. King – that a new mysticism is needed in our politics now. (From some I'm paraphrasing this, others quoting.) It seems a new mysticism is the missing piece of our good revolution.

Example: If a human “owns” a mountain and a valley, our current “law” is such the person may explode the mountain into dust and truck the dust into the valley. This murderous insanity is called “legal” pursuant to Materialist Individualism, an insane and murderous mysticism of radical loneliness (and *raison d'être* of The War Against The Earth) that our rulers, in their murderous insanity, proclaim among us as official doctrine.

Our democracy does not possess a counteracting mysticism. Me advising here as a professional magician: We must create a well formed realistic magical belief giving us realistic confidence that we can say “crime against the Earth is murder” and then reliably make it stick, powerfully conjuring from ourselves potentially decisive truth enforcing force. (Please see below “Proposals For Our Mystic Doctrine”.)

And it seems obvious to me that some commonplace pocket size truth revealing implement would be handy at many moments in that alchemical transformation of our selves.

And later, in the New Age we and our children and their children's children's children thus create – beyond the fiery veil of indecision that we see before us now – then the democratic common use of things like Tarot, etc., would continue to be helpful, as it always has in every human place.

But this is not to say that all is well out there beyond the dark and fiery Veil Of Indecision in that New Age. All is not well there, not even if our democracy does arise in our self transforming truth enforcing bold decisive power very soon, maybe this year 2015, or in the next or next.

Even if we do arise in conscious mystic power very soon, there will be hard and painful work to do – but full of poignant beauty if it's full of love – for our descendants.

The chaos of this Old Age's end has taken hold of Earth already to a great degree, so they ahead of us must first learn to somehow survive in tumult. Then, when survival of the human race is somehow accomplished, they will begin to mourn, for all Earth's dead undoubtedly.

But if we arise very soon – in time to prove conclusively for them the mighty powers of truth and conscious freedom – then amid their sorrow they will also strive, somehow, to heal Her.

### > Proposals For Our Mystic Doctrine

#1: The U.S. Civil Rights Movement heroically succeeded brilliantly at freeing minds, but only made small changes in our government and was quite defeated in changing the economy. So we should know those two tasks are given to us. But we are also given the 3 great lessons of non-violent struggle: 1) Non-violent struggle is the only strategy available to us. 2) It must be daring and disruptive. 3) We persuade others by our own willing sacrifice.

#2: As a reader you will need community. In the midst of action I have seen myself as chaplain to our little army, giving things a chaplain gives: Food and clothing, shelter, the proofs of our humanity shown by fine art, hope when you have no hope, wise counsel conjured by whatever magic is on hand, respect. And in the midst of peace I have told stories. Always I have loved and often known that I was loved. I wish you this.

#3: Do not believe the stories that you hear about your soul. Learn about it by your own experience. I am advising this because my soul surprisingly seems to be made entirely of sympathetic keen attention. (A basic substance of the Universe?) I suspect it may be easy to mistake your soul, for mine arrays itself in rich disguises which I guess it puts on voluntarily for reasons currently beyond my understanding. In short, my soul is a mystery. I simply try to work cooperatively with it.

#4 Don't expect new work to go efficiently at first. This rule may be uncomfortable, especially if beginner's luck took you to wonderful success the first time out. It's likely you haven't got the bits of the work sorted yet onto a rational outline whereas in the first try you assigned wise and agile intuition to be the project leader. Don't despair. Do not despair. Your rational self has excellent abilities and works quite efficiently if given healthy goals and not over-stressed.

#5 Take a healthy walk today. If it is in woods or desert, by a river, brook or sea, with mountains on your skyline or a plain, and if the sky is clear around or pledges rain or threatens storms to toss the trees and waves, or if breezes softly play the contours of your face, take your heart out to it in your hands. Take your questions to it. Take your sorrows to it. Listen to it like its child.

### > To Be Continued

May we continue these discussions in further documents of this series? My vote is yes. And in particular I calculate we need some poetry, two batches of it, next and further toward the end.