

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

Excerpt:
Document #4:
Particular Advice
For The Technician

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> Objective

Worldwide merciless robber bands, proclaiming fundamentalist faith in Capitalism, are attacking We The People while we search desperately for a safe home on this beleaguered planet. That's a movie in our mind's eyes, projected outward by our words and actions and inward by our expectations.

The heroic mode of life – knowing the world is true, knowing you can help, letting difficulties teach you – can give us work and love and joy but we don't know yet if that strategy can save the world and give us safety. Still, we struggle on against the forces of insanity and death because we must, not because there is some chance of victory.

So goes the desperately heroic story we are playing. And we get plenty of supporting action from our enemies when we play it.

But what if we had more vision? What if we could look into the world and see reality outside current imaginings? What if we could look inside our own projection booth to change the settings? What if we had some piece of strange technology to let us really see each other and ourselves? Could we find more creativity? If we knew each other better could we be more like kin, cooperate solidly in what must be done and thereby simply win?

We must arise in solid confident consensus to overwhelmingly enforce reality's demands. To me, an artist engineer, this sounds like we need some kind of pocket size commonplace hand held tool, some kind of scope and gauge and meter of the human mind and heart and soul. I think Tarot, and especially very beautiful Tarot, will help.

> But Surely This Is Nonsense?

I'm going to tell you a technology story.

Me and this other guy walk in a taco joint near work for lunch – this is on the factory side of a New England town near the wire mill – me with an ulterior motive in my jacket pocket.

It was summer 1999, 16 years ago. This other guy is smart but he's only got a one-week job doing just bulk coding in the wire factory's computer office. We all had the worldwide famous “Y2K” bug that year, which you might recall, and he's helping us with that. Me, I'm the regular software staff at that factory so for the one week he'll be there I am his coworker lead.

Now, all I've said is that I'd show him where to get some Mexican food but actually I have a private project. So after we eat I push the restaurant paper trash aside and pull my prototype out of my jacket pocket, slap it on the table.

A cardboard box: Ordinary cardboard brown but pocket size, a small unmarked box and there it is by itself alone equally between us on the table. He's not talkative anyway, and the poor guy is sad today, maybe depressed, he's feeling preoccupied and grim today for some reason, so he just looks at it for the moment until I begin my prepared remarks.

You see, I have chosen him to be a test subject.

And I said, “This is an art project. I'm an artist. I am asking people to take a look at it so I can watch their reactions.”

That is such a peculiar thing to hear, and seems so harmless,

that every person I asked accepted out of curiosity, as he now did, just a shrug however. Also, I was glad to see even a little light of joy in his face at the opportunity for entertainment.

So now my little recruiting thing's introduction: First I'm sure I told him, “Understand, this has no impact or relation to the job at all whatsoever.” I'm sure I did that.

You understand I'm quoting accurately even now because it was a tried and true routine and because that run of it became one of the most important experiences of my art career.

It went like this: I'd lay down a very flat neutral tone like doing a survey on a street corner and I said: “I am an artist and this is a Chinese fortunetelling cookie kind of art project.”

That's a good line and he actually smiles at the fortune cookie bit and finally commits himself to speaking out loud, but still just gives me “Okay.”

So I continue to the next step, loosening my vocal tone for the important test instructions and the legalistic assurances:

“We have a simple procedure. Inside the box are 26 paper cards with writing on them. I will ask you to think of something, then ask you to open the box and pick any card at all, then read it silently while I watch. The project is at a very crucial early stage and I need to find out how it's doing. I will not ask for any personal information about you or your life whatsoever.”

And my guy – he is a mid-level casual worker approaching middle age with faded office clothes and a low end car in the parking lot outside, at the center of an unhappy day for reasons I will never know and – largely for the entertainment value of it – he has chosen to take my peculiar project seriously.

He did not know how very serious I was about it. In fact, this unmarked box of 26 hand lettered cards was an ambitious daring effort and the latest step in my true life's work.

Example: One card in there has “L is for Lake” lettered boldly at the top. Then in normal print it tells a tiny seed of story, that one day you're walking in some hills, getting footsore and dusty, and you find a beautiful lake. It's quite isolated so of course you strip off and go in, discovering that while you're simply floating there your soul rises to the surface.

Here is a commonplace blue-ruled index card, hundred to a pack from an office supply store, hand lettered, no picture, but is secretly the Ace Of Water card from Tarot. It ends with a small seed of advice, supposed to be simultaneously spiritual and practical advice somehow, then finally repeats “L is for Lake”.

That's only one example of what's in the box and I have no knowledge which this test subject picked, for there are 26 cards in there, A and Z and all the rest, and I will only see the blank backs of the cards in this test setup across a table.

But you've probably got the concept: This is supposed to be an alphabet of human life that an intelligent person could memorize and then throw away the physical cards, thereafter working up some other process for doing readings with no physical impedimenta at all.

It's supposed to be in case you're in a homeless camp or if you're after our modern world has crashed or whatever. That's the concept. And of course human beings in many cultures develop tools of that general type.

Now my good gentleman has nodded that he's ready. In this moment I was here with you explaining that above, he has quickly and carefully thought about it. He has weighed the likely enter-

tainment value inherent in my claim of “art”, has weighed this opportunity to help a stranger brother, has weighed my pledge to leave his privacy and livelihood alone, has weighed whatever thoughts he has on Chinese fortune cookies, and has accepted, so he nodded decisively for me to go ahead.

Now I offer him the exact same suggestion I offered you, on page 1 of Document #1 in this series where it says to choose some issue in your life where you genuinely want good advice or a hint of how to see things usefully and truly, and it tells you get your issue extremely clear and vivid in your mind. I tell him that.

Then I study his face. He is visibly a little cautious, finds some touchy problem in his life he is reluctant to think about so that he winces and frowns, but his eyes show me he is certainly thinking about that thing, and pausing to collect it vividly, and then he says to me, in pain you understand, “Yeah?”

“Now please,” I answer, “if you want to do this, just open the little box and pick out any card and read it. Please read it silently to yourself.”

With his hands trembling enough to see, he opens the box and takes a card out which he holds near himself, in some degree of privacy, to read. He's frowning in intense multi-layered focus.

May we talk technicalities?

After all, this small box is supposedly an information storage and retrieval device. Right? And this design problem is elegant, interesting and useful, is it not? Very elegant perhaps? So how about we dip into the technicalities of the design a little bit? Why don't I just take a minute to list my top 3 design objectives?

Okay? Design Objective #1 might surprise you. It surprised me when I first noticed it during my earlier work. It's this:

Since a questioner is allowed to ask absolutely any question about their life, a well functioning Tarot deck kind of system must contain a good answer to any possible human life question. And that is to say, the information in my device, if it were just sorted out in an appropriate way, could tell every human story.

Of course that sounds impossibly huge but it actually turns out that human life everywhere is uniform enough, and humans are so brilliant, that this Objective #1 is not even very hard.

Okay? Should I get even further in the technical weeds on this? Just for a minute I'll point this out: One essential feature of the data storage in this kind of device is beauty.

It is beautiful poetry in some of these systems. After all, we know that even a single phrase of poetry sometimes opens whole volumes of memory and imaginings in our minds. It's like some censoring part of our mind gets dazzled by the beauty and just lets poetry come in and open every associated door and then we can look in those compartments.

Okay then, there is a traditional practice in our culture you might be familiar with: For example in the U.S. South where I come from, among people who understand the Bible vividly, it is common to ask a question about life, then open a Bible and touch a page to find a wise appropriate answer. So which version of the Bible do they choose? In my experience people always use the King James Version. Its language is far more beautiful than other versions so it's far more evocative in your mind.

(Me too; In the King James I love especially Ecclesiastes and Job; this is fascinating non-Socratic philosophy poetry supposedly originally composed by Solomon and in the King James the thinking power is huge. I hold that entire book in very deep respect.)

But I don't have a box of beautiful poems waiting for us on the

restaurant table. I am a fair poet sometimes but have never yet risen to the Shakespearean level of the King James. No, what I have inside that box – or at least what my design calls for in that box – is beautiful story.

I do know story pretty well. It has been the school and core of my artistic practice. I learned it by years of diligent performance.

We started in 1969, me and story, talking war resistance with fellow U.S. soldiers during an especially terrifying U.S. war, studying oratory tips in the Autobiography of Malcolm X on how to serve an audience in mortal stress like that. That was my first artistic discipline, as to say disciplined art work.

Then we got some polish from the storytelling boom of the 1970's and 80's. I joined a guild and the public came to our guild shows in droves. I got up to treatments of the great British and Greek stuff, had them jumping to their feet with that sometimes. Me and story learned to weave the spell quite beautifully in Pagan rituals too where the magic gets freaking bare naked.

So I have studied story. So for this new project's design – this project which has by now matured into the Alphabeticon Tarot – I chose story as the mode of beauty in which human life wisdom would be coded.

One of those index cards tells that you're hiking in the hills and find a beautiful lake. Another says you're resting after giving birth. Another has you gazing at the stars while pondering life on Earth. Another says you bring a treasure home from a cruel land of giants while another has you bite an apple, taste its delicious juice and see the seeds. You're sitting waiting for a door to open in another.

Do you see that 26 of these could possibly, all together mixed and matched, tell every human story?

And of course, in our taco shop that noon – there with the poor wage slave who has become my good stranger brother gentleman – I am sitting there studying his face in pain and hoping ardently that a card sorted out of that box – or two or three cards if he wants – will offer real guidance by telling a true story of where he is, plus show an available path ahead to a good ending.

But before we slip back into that story – which, as I've already said, was one of the strongest experiences of my art career – before we return to that restaurant lunch, we really must discuss Design Objective #2. Because you are already asking about it.

So let's skip lots and lots of other technical stuff but I am sure you are already wanting to hear about Objective #2. And then later back there we will find the third objective.

Objective #2 is this: When our good friend's fingertips reach in that little box they definitely must find a card that is correct for his question. And of course you're asking me: How?

And my answer is: I do not know. When a human gets into a properly attentive willful and receptive state of mind, and if you're using a system of expression where you understand the language, then a correct card does turn up – or a correct spot on a correct page of a book will attract your eye or other such – or, if you're among the ancient Greeks, when you toss some pebbles on a board they will make a correct geometric pattern – reliably as if in conscious conversation with you. With my own eyes I've seen this happen several thousand times.

I know how it feels – anyone who does this knows how it feels, as you probably know too from mysterious creative moments in your life that were effectively similar – but I cannot explain it.

Alright, the obvious possibilities: This happens either by some

illusion in our thinking, or by some surprising fact about time and space and all of that, or both. Me, I guess it's both. I guess this is a mental trick about memory and imagination, developed in us by evolution, involving quantum physics. Just please don't call this extremely vague hypothesis a "theory".

But I can offer some helpful context to this philosophical dilemma. I can, and this might make you feel better.

From ancient Greece, a fellow named Plato tells us stories about his dearly loved teacher Socrates.

In one, Plato has Socrates telling us a story about the time when he, Socrates, went around to all the best creative artists of his city, asking all of them the same question.

That was Athens in its golden age so they were surely poets and playwrights, maybe actors but maybe not, painters on pottery who were sculptors really too, the other sculptors who carved stone statues, maybe the painters of pictures on walls, and certainly some brilliant architects.

Plato says Socrates says he went around asking all of these highly creative people the same highly annoying question: Where did all of their creative stuff come from?

Well, Socrates says – or Plato says he says – they would all give the same easy answer first. Everyone of them – every one – first said, "Well, it comes from the Gods."

But that's too easy because nobody knows what the Gods are. So then, since Socrates was Socrates, he would press them. He would insist, "But really really really, where does all of the creative stuff come from?"

And every one of them, every one, would answer, "I don't know."

So if you ask me how does that vast creative moment happen when a human hand reaches for a Tarot card and knows which one to pick to tell a story true – and the moments in your life that are equally astonishing – and moments when a hand holds a sculpting chisel or a painting brush and finds the truth – then I feel in good company when I answer, "I don't know." But I certainly do know this and design to count on this: Human beings are brilliant.

Have you watched an artist weaving tapestry? Human life is a weaving together of threads. And we're very good at that.

We human beings are very often quick to drop one thread and pick up a different thread to twine into our life when reality demands it. We're very good at that, but of course to do that we must look beyond our current selves.

To choose new threads of life we need to look outside our fears and shames and pains, our current expectations and beliefs. So we constantly – all through human history all across the world – resort to vision equipment like Tarot.

So we have at last arrived back at our workman's lunch. My stranger friend, if I presume to call him that, sits beyond our restaurant table, and over there his hands and face – with our paper card in his hand like a theater prop – are enacting tight held silent drama. It is a drama that is real and real and real.

What did he ask? I do not know. What answer did the magic I have conjured for him then advise? I do not know.

But I can see thoughts across his face, thoughts reaching through the tiny gestures of his hands, turbulently flowing through him in the wave-like motion done by ocean water rising on a beach, and then of course it breaks:

He throws down that card, face down on the table there, and grabs the little box and reaches in it for another.

What card now? I do not know. But at least my greatest fear

is answered, or seems to be, by his small surprise of recognition, then the smile of waking hope that plays across his face above the pain while he is reading this one, and then the small brief nod of satisfaction.

So I think and hope that at least my life's true work has not flown off to nonsense fantasy.

But then the accusation strikes him that I'm telling lies.

Cruelty arises from his pain; the faith in cruelty, the faith reality entirely is cruel, our universal dark belief all hope, with all its lovely perfumed vanity, is always lies. From his long familiar pain the long familiar poison antidote arises with its universal set hard grinning grimace of the jaw and its squint about the eyes and its brow pressing down.

He throws down that second card, face down too, and now grabs the box again and has them all out – 24 of them are in his hands – and, intent to tear the farce apart, he scans them fast.

Logically, there can't be anything in there to prove the dark faith that my artistic entertainment is a carnival of lies – just think carefully and plot it out; our demonstration is far past any point of that – and yet I know the hodge podge that he's thinking because I've thought it too.

First, when you first see Tarot work, you guess the cards are surely all the same, all the same and all completely vague, every one of them full of gay balloons that all fly perhaps, you guess, above vague warnings that a person must become joy and must become a friend and must become yourself and move your bowels on a proper schedule or else remain the sad unhappy wretch you are, which would, of course, answer any human question and tell any human story if you are a stupid fool.

Then perhaps you guess – after you look and see the cards are not like that at all – that this strong thing invading your brain is from The Devil, or perhaps you don't. And The Devil is real in one sense, very real: He or she or it is a lively character indeed in our instinctive understanding of our lives; for when we go to war we cast our enemies or their commander in that role. But I don't see him doing that, or else I hope I don't.

And indeed, when the anger in him did take words it was the other anger. It was a nobler anger but not completely noble, for he has stepped into a threshold but has not stepped beyond.

First he saw the hunt for wickedness or vanity among the cards is false and gave it up. Then he dropped them on the table, laid his hands on them to keep them still. Suddenly he nailed me with a deeply bitter vivid glance, but bitter with a higher hope for decent pity rising in it.

And behind that complex glance he then declared these words out loud: "You're breaking my world!"

So I see he feels betrayed but not by me. I'm sure I understood his meaning then and understand it now, both from my own thinking now and then and from experiences before and since in years of counseling and teaching.

He felt betrayed by the incessant voices saying constantly that magic cannot happen. For indeed, he has dedicated difficult years and years to work assembling skills for human life in a prison world where a carapace of bone confines the human mind and where the human soul, if one exists at all, is pale and lifeless voiceless shadow. He has sacrificed life to that ideology and from it garnered mainly crippling pain, and now he has discovered utter proof enormous lies are in it.

Yes, he has stepped into a threshold but has not stepped on

through. And so I see my Alphabeticon Tarot in this preliminary form has failed. Design Objective #3: It ought to be a soul guide teacher. I later saw The Moon in it was weak and fixed that.

He has cried, "You're breaking my world!"

In that emergency I cast my eyes into imaginary worlds to find the proper helpful answer.

I do not know it's right, that answer I then offered him, for I have never seen him since that week and scarcely shared more than mere politenesses in the few days that were left that week of our acquaintance. And it did seem harsh, somewhat, to my ears when I said it but perhaps my ears were hearing wrong and I hope I did entirely mean well for him.

I did hear it in a proper noble place when I was sitting there in human conversation after our sparse feast, casting eyes to places that I know. I heard the answer that I gave him from a darkness high and to the left, a place where – in my inborn instinct of astronomy – The Moon appears. And her answers to a wandering soul do necessarily seem harsh sometimes.

For it was this:

I waved a hand dismissingly and – in a tone that I remember as not lordly but rather scorning cowardice in a veteran senior comrade's way – I said this:

"Oh, we all get over that eventually."

So odd it seems, and yet so true.

> A Few Spiritual Technology Poems

Mysterium Tremendum

The tremendous fascinating mystery
which we can easily see
each time we look out at the world
looks back at us too,
and it beholds us
with an infinite number of eyes.

Reawakening

'Twas moonless night. 'Twas early Spring.
'Twas in a sheltered valley pass
amid the highest uplands of the Windy Hills.
And here beneath a starry sky,
so black and cold, so deep and still,
here lay a mirror lake awaiting.
Stars above and stars below,
from depths of sky and lake they shone,
their eerie shadow bathing Earth
and filling all the distant world
with secret song.

A footloose wanderer, a nighttime walker,
the seeker of a strong and noble soul,
leaning on a staff of oaken wood,
stood drunken with the beauty
of this haunted place which welcomed him.
Perhaps he was not here.
Perhaps he lay somewhere
wrapped in his cloak beside a dying fire
and dreaming.

Bright Venus drew him on.
Above the farther hill stood silver Venus,
beacon of the dusk and dawn.
Her light shot to his heart.
She drew his footsteps down
across the grassy slope, across the pebble shore,
until he stopped with boot heels on the Earth

and toes into the water where,
gazing in the mirror depths,
he knelt to pray.

Why do the hearts of men
reach out beyond their ken?
Why does an earthly soul forswear its bonds
to journey forth and there commune with gods?
There are no men and gods.
There is no Earth and Sky.
There is no one but One Forever Singing.

Eyes fluttered open. His own face,
all translucent in the deep and all aglow,
gazed back through dreaming eyes.
No more a mortal man, what was he now?
A shadow in the lake? A shadow in the air?
Or just a song?

This moment fear was gone.
This moment when a seeker gazed
in through him in the deep
his soul was everywhere,
so doubt was washed away

Awaking In A Dream

There are many tales, of course, of Lao Tzu who, according to the legends, wrote The Watercourse Way, a little book of nature poetry upon which other thinkers then built up the lean, beautiful and tough spiritual philosophy of Taoism. Here's one of them.

The story flies us to the early morning of a day when our hero was a bright but sorrowful young man. He was a bureaucratic junior clerk in the palace of a rich and brutal warlord prince. The sparkling morning and the budding springtime garden grounds through which he trod to work belied the torment in the young man's soul. This day's duty was to be an awful deed which no one with an open heart could ever wish.

The garden path led on across a footbridge on a lovely brook and, setting foot onto the rising boards, his paces further slacked. His gaze was beckoned to the sparkling water. On the arch's highest little height the now unconscious footsteps stopped and – mind, heart and soul – he found himself drawn out into the clear deep rippling stream.

This was the moment when a human asks of "there" and "here". As another poet wrote, do I dream the butterfly or does the butterfly dream me? Gazing deep into the world I see only countless things which mirror me, so what are "you" and "I" and what am "I" to do?

But in this young man's mind no riddle of that sort found any weight. The doubtless fundamental knowledge that this clarity exists would henceforth lure and guide his thoughts and steps. The beauty of reality had ravished Lao Tzu and he was struck with lifelong love.

Always Remember

Live, love, dance and you will never be alone.

Teaching We human beings delight in teaching,
gifting to each other information pregnant
with its truth and usefulness and beauty.
This love is essential to our survival.