

Eight Useful Tarot Spreads

For Times of Resistance & Change



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Disclaimer

Tarot is not a substitute for medicine, psychiatry, therapy, social work, trained counseling, or professional advice. If you are ill, grieving, or in distress, please seek help from an appropriate doctor or counsellor.

For entertainment purposes only. Magic not guaranteed.

Free Will & Responsibility

By birthright, you inherit great creative powers, free will, and all the responsibility that accompanies these gifts. At your best, you are a mature, sensitive, and sensible being. You, and you alone, are fully responsible for your own actions, reactions, and decisions.

Our lives play out in the intersection between choice, fate/contract, and chaos. This world is flexible, touchable, and constantly changing. Nothing is set in stone, and even if it were, stone is an unruly thing. Tarot cards can help you clarify your thoughts and generate ideas, but they cannot make decisions for you or tell you what to do. They may predict, but they don't make things happen. They don't seal your fate. These are good things.

Introduction

We have work to do. The year is 2017. The worst of all isms (fascism, nationalism, racism, sexism, and myriad other phobias and bigotries) are trending globally. The worst of our collective histories and tendencies have come out of the woodwork, into the open, and they're partying like it's goddamn track and field day.

Resistance is trending too.

As a white, North American child in the late '80s and '90s, I encountered the word resistance in exactly three contexts:

- 1 lower-case brands of resistance, synonymous with procrastination and minor tension
- 2 occasional mentions of movements elsewhere, removed by geography or history, and
- 3 dystopian fiction.

Naively, capital R Resistance wasn't something I associated with my own culture and stomping grounds, beyond daydreams of storybook sci-fi and fantasy worlds plunking down in my own backyard. Now The Resistance is a household phrase, capital R and all. Of course, I was privileged and sheltered in many ways as a child. In many ways, I still am. Millions of Americans from marginalized groups have been resisting for decades in ways that others haven't duly considered. Somehow those struggles don't

get the coverage they deserve in most of our history classes and textbooks. It's well past time for all of this to change.

Times is hard and getting harder. Everyone who knows better than the terrible isms has an unshakeable civic duty to resist them to the full extent of our abilities, with the understanding that we all work with different abilities, skills, and challenges. There are many paths to explore within resistance, and many different tasks to undertake.

This work is wonderful and worthwhile, but it's not easy. It can be draining, frightening, and embarrassing. It requires uncomfortable levels of self-examination and accountability. It's nuanced AF. It threatens burnout and demands moments of rest. It begs for patience, dedication, and loving-kindness, extended in many directions, including inward. It can't be accomplished overnight, and it can't be accomplished alone.

My sincere hope is that this little book, and the tarot spreads within it, may serve as one of the many tools in your kit to help keep you going on your path in resistance. I recognize that this is a small offering, and it means nothing without follow-through in both soul-searching and action. I wrote these spreads selfishly, to help keep myself on track, and as prompts to keep learning, to do more, and to do better. Now I'm feeding them to the screaming void that is the internet, in the hopes that maybe others will find them handy too.

Why turn to tarot in resistance? How is it relevant to this kind of work? If, as the disclaimer states, tarot is no substitute for medicine, therapy, or professional counseling, why do so many readers and seekers turn to it as a supplement to other methods of healing? What is tarot for, to the lay-reader? What does it do best?

Tarot has many uses, and you may draw on one or many within your practice. On a practical level, it can spark ideas, aid brainstorming sessions, and prompt creative works. On a personal level, particularly as a journaling tool, it can encourage introspection, provide solace, and help us better know our own hearts and minds. On a psychic or occult level, it connects us to our intuitions, and helps us divine information we can't otherwise access immediately and consciously. It may even serve as a mediumistic tool in connecting to guides or other spirits. Viewed as a sacred text in a religious context, or a book of symbol and philosophy in a secular context, tarot guides us in our search for wisdom, gives enduring advice, and encourages empathy, reflection, and good habits.

Tarot is first and foremost an art form. It lays out a combination of pictures, symbols, text, and story before us, and we interpret these with our own creative powers, through the filters of our own interests, experiences, and biases. It's as wise and imperfect as we are, and we get out what we put into it. And yet, in its beauty, richness of symbol, and archetypal material, it can take those willing on illuminating and surprising journeys.

Art, like science, philosophy, psychology, history, myth, and religion, is a method of exploring this world. It's one of the best ways to investigate how the inner landscape interacts with the outer world—the human condition, and the you-specific-condition. Art gives physical form to ephemeral thoughts, feelings, and dreams. Once these are concrete, tangible to the body's senses, we view them afresh and explore them in greater detail.

Kurt Vonnegut wrote, “If you want to really hurt your parents, and you don't have the nerve to be gay, the least you can do is go into the arts. I'm not kidding. The arts are not a way to make a living. They are a very human way of making life more bearable. Practicing an art, no matter how well or badly, is a way to make your soul grow, for heaven's sake.” (Happily, some of us have the nerve to be artsy and gay.)

Nothing comforts quite like expression and creation. Nothing whispers of possibility, nothing contrasts the way things are with the way things could be, quite like story. Difficult or overwhelming truths are made gentler and more palatable with beauty. Humans are architects and story-eaters. Just as our bodies demand food and rest, our spirits require art and story to thrive.

For too long in the West, many appointed as stewards and shepherds of the human spirit, in religion and academia, have failed and harmed the most vulnerable among us. Some of us are blessed with the support, camaraderie, and guidance of wonderful, uplifting religious communities.

Some of us have been rejected, abused by, or cast out of our religious communities, through no fault of our own. Some of us have simply never found organized religions that spoke to us in deep, meaningful, or credible ways. For a tool that's enjoyed such a negative, spooky, and woolly reputation in the mainstream, tarot is surprisingly compatible with different schools of thought and religious practices, including agnosticism, atheism, and absence of structured spiritual ethos. Its imagery is syncretic, drawing (and unfortunately appropriating at times) from many religions, mythologies, cultures, and times. It asks each of us to see ourselves reflected in the faces of many archetypes. Its relative accessibility and dependance on individual interpretation makes it a flexible, friendly guide to spiritual misfits and dissidents.

In its youth, tarot was a shiny, **elitist trinket**—a richly detailed, specially commissioned, gilded card game for the Catholic, Milanese nobility of the Renaissance, **likely used for gambling**. How perfect that time dropped this treasure in the hands of vagabonds, magicians, artists, performers, tricksters, and shape-shifters on the fringes of society. In asking us to recognize the emblems of all social strata within each of ourselves, tarot perpetually subverts the authorities that birthed it. It calls kings fools, paupers emperors, ladies knights, and men queens, and so it has long masked a pilot flame of queer, radical spirit, burning unseen long before the overtly common and richly queer tarot renaissance we're witnessing and co-creating today.

Art, diversity, critical thought, radical notions, truth, facts, medicine, education, and more are under attack today. In this rapidly changing climate, the abilities to stoke your creative fires, to connect to your own intuition, to give yourself good counsel, to examine your own actions, and to have difficult conversations with yourself, go beyond parlor games, and tea and sympathy. These are powerful weapons, and tools for survival.

As an artist, an aesthete, and a spiritual seeker, I wake up and fall asleep enamored with this world, its brilliant potential, and its stunning variety of landscapes, cultures, and creatures. As a queer, spoonie, low-income person in the U.S., I wake up and fall asleep uncertain and frightened. My tarot practice, as always, helps me navigate my fears and keep on making. I hope it may help you, too.

In times governed by mad kings, violent mobs, petty tyrants, corporate overlords, oligarchs, and despicable buffoons, we broke and tired citizens, we scrappy-folks and scrapers-by, we tricksters, magicians, priestesses, artists, hermits, and fools, we have work to do.

Keep waking. Keep working.

Acknowledgements (Of My Limitations)

I'm not an activist. I admire activists, but that's not where my experience and expertise lie. I live a bit like a hermit in this season of my life, for reasons I won't bore you with. (Though a twelfth-house stellium in Cancer and my first Saturn return might have something to do with it.) For now, all I have to offer is art and words, but I believe collective challenges call each one of us to contribute what and where we can, in accordance with our talents, abilities, and needs. I have a talent for writing tarot spreads. It's a small and it's odd, but at the end of the day a skill's a skill. However, I'm partially out of my element, so I've very likely made some mistakes and omissions here. If I've accidentally written anything hurtful, disrespectful, or inaccurate, I apologize, and I thank you for your patience. If you have the time and energy to **drop me a line**, I'd be very grateful for your feedback. One of the benefits of releasing this book as a webpage is that I can add updates and corrections as needed. This may be a work in progress.

I must also acknowledge how much the works of other artists, activists, and scholars have inspired this project and shaped my thoughts on social justice and resistance. My gratitude goes out to them. I've included a media list at the end of this collection for outside references and further reading, listening, and viewing from people who know their stuff.

How To Use This Book

Skimmers take note: I ramble on about each spread, but the core of what you need to know is all in the diagrams and the numbered run-downs immediately after.

Organization

Each individual spread page is organized in six sections:

- 1 Illustrated Spread Diagram: a visual layout and brief description of the spread, with brushed-ink illustrations and fancy lettering.
- 2 Description: each card in a nutshell.
- 3 Notes: detailed notes on the spread's application towards resistance work, and tips for interpreting your readings.
- 4 Elements: notes on the elemental correspondences behind the spread's imagery for those reading in conjunction with astrology, ritual, magic or visual meditation.
- 5 Simple Diagram: minimal, digital diagram of the card layout. Easy to read. Not so fancy.
- 6 Variations: technical options for tailoring the spread to your personal reading style. Exercises for deeper readings. Notes on adapting the spread to

focus on different areas of life, including creativity, career, and relationships.¹

Spread Layout

I write most of my spreads around some kind of visual image, so you'll notice that not all card placements go in linear order. I've arranged them in the way that makes the most intuitive sense to me, viewing the entire spread like a picture. I think like an illustrator, but others think differently, and some may find these layouts confusing. All my spreads work just as well laid out by numerical order. For instance, the same spread could be read with the illustrative layout shown in Exhibit A or the linear layout shown in Exhibit B:

¹ We can explore all kinds of relationships through the tarot cards, romantic or platonic. When doing relationship readings for yourself, I recommend keeping the focus on your side of the relationship, and that place where your and the other party's energies meet. Asking tarot cards to speak for another person can get dicey, especially when that other person isn't at the table with you to clarify and interpret their own position.

Exhibit A

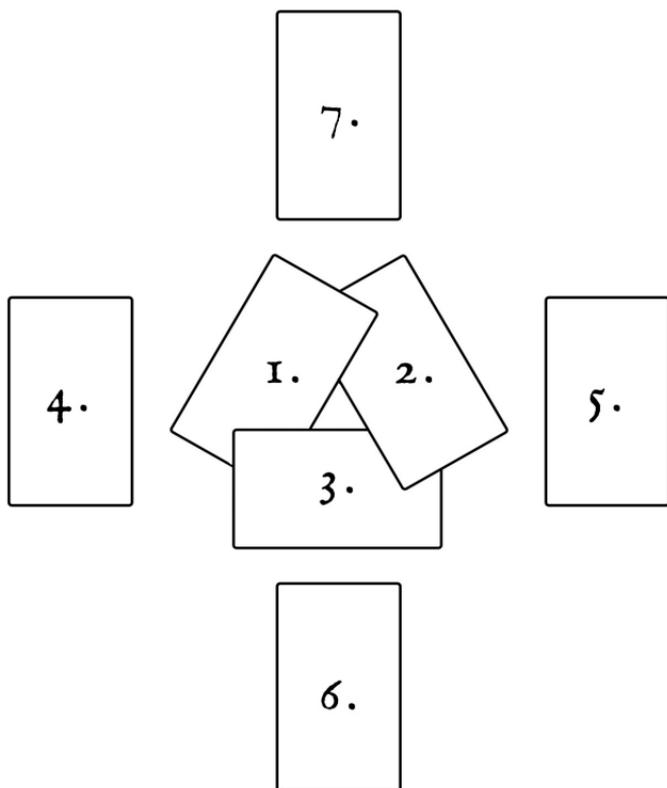
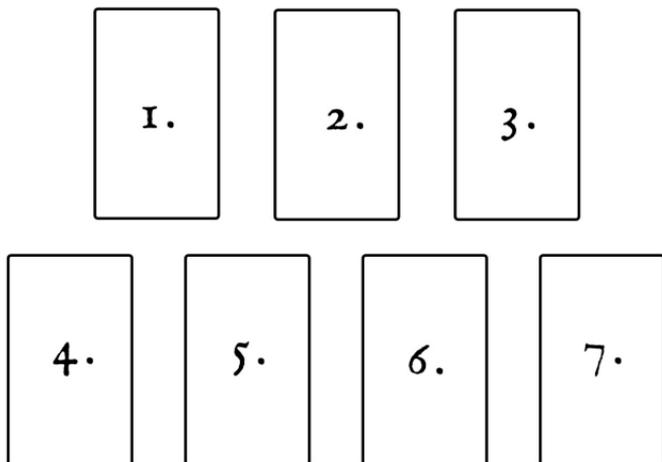


Exhibit B



Adaptations

Each tarot spread in this collection has many potential applications beyond resistance work. I've included notes on alternate uses under the variations section of each spread page. As a collection, these exercises suit activism and self-care in times of difficulty and rapid change. I hope they'll remain useful in more tranquil times as well. Many apply very well to creative projects. I've used several of these spreads in my personal journals for years.

Tarot is a flexible craft. There are many valid ways to approach the cards, and many ways to interpret any given tarot spread. You are welcome to adapt these spreads as you like to suit your own needs and practices. You may even wish to write your own spreads on the same themes.

Although I've included notes to clarify each spread, I can't anticipate all questions. If you find anything troublesome or unclear, consider it an invitation to make the spread your own. Consult your intuition, and choose how you'd like to phrase your questions and interpret your answers. Your own voice matters.

Client Work

While most of my tarot writings keep the solo reader foremost in mind, and I assume many of my readers will be using these spreads at home for themselves, I recognize that some of you read and write tarot professionally. You are welcome to use these spreads with clients at your own discretion. I take no responsibility for the quality or content of others' tarot readings, whether for self, friends, or clients. I hope and trust that you will use them with kindness and integrity. I appreciate attribution and a link back if you reference these spreads in your own writings. Please consider making a donation if using these spreads for paid work. You can donate through [Paypal](#), or you can support my work by shopping at my [Etsy store](#).

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In plain English, this book is for sharing but not for resale. Do feel free to post links and share these tarot spreads with folks who might like them. Don't sell them or use them as promotional materials for your own work, website, or brand. Do feel free to print the spread diagrams for your own personal use, or to share with friends or discussion groups. Do not be selling those print-outs!

Doom and Gloom

I won't be covering Tarot 101 or delving into individual card meanings in this book. (There is some good 101 material elsewhere [on the blog](#).) However, since some of you may be new to tarot, and many folks come to this field with minds full of myths and misconceptions, it's important to spare a few words for the scary cards.

Because this book deals with the climate of our times and lends itself towards shadow work, it does discuss heavy matters. These spreads are likely to draw some of the more challenging and frightening cards in the deck. I've seen Death, The Tower, and plenty of swords throughout the readings I've drawn with them, myself, and rightly so. Please know that my intentions are rooted in pragmatic realism, even idealism. I wish to face things as they are, so that we can better create lasting, beneficial changes. I'm not here to breathily forecast doom and gloom on y'all à la Professor Trelawney. Please sharpen your skepticism around anyone who is.

Tarot speaks to us through art and story, allegory, encoded symbol, and metaphor. It speaks of our thoughts, feelings, desires, and inner landscapes as much as our physical situations. Tarot can be sharp and pointed, blunt and snarky, witty, funny, and to the point, but it's not usually literal, at least not in a strict sense. Death in tarot

speaks of change and metamorphosis. The Devil speaks of oppression and materialism, and so on.

If, for example, you pull the cards Death and the Knight of Swords together, depending on the placement and context, it could mean “your relationship with a Gemini friend is going through some major changes.” It could even mean “your Gemini friend is driving you up a tree—don’t kill them.” It doesn’t mean “your Gemini friend is going to die,” and it extra doesn’t mean “a knight is going to kill you with a sword, avoid Renaissance fairs.”

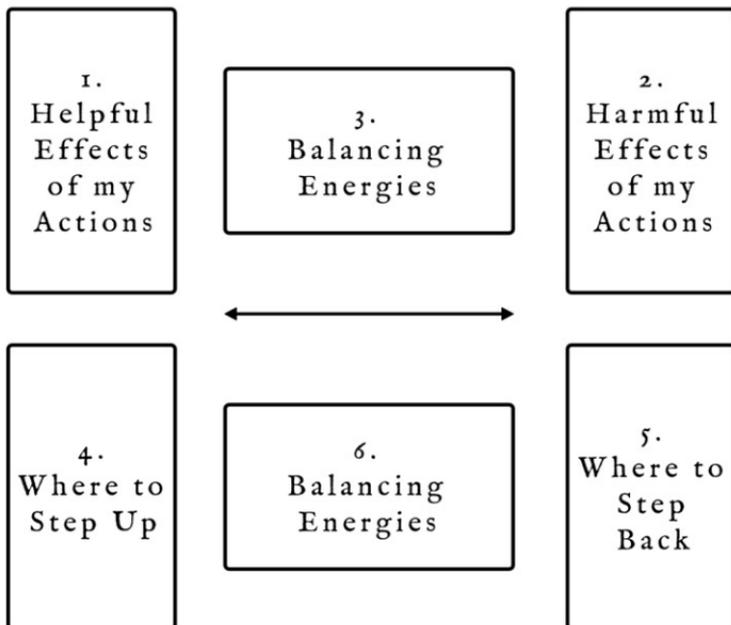
The Death card does not portend physical death. The Devil does not conjure Satan. (At least not without some serious effort on your part!) The Fool does not send in literal clowns and jesters. Deep breaths.

If your reading gets too intense or triggering, it’s fine to stop. Or you may prefer to pace yourself, taking it one card at a time in your journal over a span of days.

It’s okay to take tarot with a grain of salt. It’s okay to stop if and when it feels like it’s not working. It’s okay to stop when it is working, but you’re getting thoughts and answers that are too stressful to dwell on right now. Trust your gut and honor your needs. You matter.

Balancing Action Tarot Spread

for balancing action and inaction



- 1 **Helpful Effects of My Actions:** How are my actions helpful and productive?
- 2 **Harmful Effects of My Actions:** How are my actions hurtful or counter-productive?
- 3 **Balancing Energies:** Energies/strategies to balance these consequences.

- 4 **Where to Step Up:** Where and how can I do more?
- 5 **Where to Step Back:** Where should I step back or take a break?
- 6 **Balancing Energies:** Energies/strategies to balance action and rest.

NOTES

How to best keep balance between action and inaction, productivity and rest? We have at least two distinct applications for this line of questioning in the context of resistance work.

This first goal is to stay active and engaged without burning out. We can't make ourselves too comfortable and veer into laziness or timidity when there's so much work to be done. However, it's just as important to rest and pace ourselves so that we don't get sick or burn out, losing the ability or heart to play our respective parts.

The second goal is to choose our battles wisely, while keeping our egos and blindspots in check. No single person has the perspective, talents, knowledge, time, or strength to jump on the front-lines of every battle. Taking on the wrong tasks at the wrong time can cause more harm than good to one's self, one's community, and the given cause. There are places for each of us to raise our voices (step up), and places where the best we can do is take a seat and listen respectfully to others' leadership and experiences (step back).

Acing any balancing act requires constant correction as we teeter to either side of our center. Balance is an ongoing process, impossible to get perfectly right. We improve with practice, intention, and reflection, but even with competence and the ultimate goal of mastery, it's best not to expect perfection. If you find yourself veering too far in one direction—hiding in your comfy bubble, or else breathing so much fire you become a hazard—remember you're only human. To engage at all is to err at least a little. Become aware of where you're at, and re-center. Take responsibility for any missteps, then correct yourself and keep going.

The balancing cards should offer some insight here. Pay attention to which direction the balancing cards point. Read these horizontal cards as upright, and look at how the energy flows between the two cards on either side. This may have something to tell you about the direction you need to move in to get back on track.

ELEMENTS

The dominant elements behind this spread are fire and air. It's all about blending the right amounts of action, will, and passion on the one hand, with clear thought, rational analysis, and insight on the other. Fire (action) needs the right amount of oxygen (thought/intention) to burn. With too little air, it smothers out; with too much, it blows out, or worse, spreads uncontrollably. Attach great passion, courage, and will to the wrong contagious ethos and nations burn. Conversely, air (thought/intention)

with too little fire (action) is unbearably cold. With too much fire, air is poisonous to breathe. Either way, it can't support life and growth.

VARIATIONS

- **Sideways Reversals:** Rather than reading an energy flow into the balancing cards' positions, you may designate them as upright or reversed. For example, if the top of the card faces to your right, interpret the card as upright. If the top faces left, interpret it as reversed. (That orientation is intuitive to me, as I'm right-handed and grew up reading left-to-right, but it's fine if it makes more sense to you the other way around. Tailor the spread to your own preferences.)

- **Balancing Intentions:** To be just, we must keep our actions and intentions aligned, ensuring that both serve wise and good things. Check your intentions as well as your actions. Everywhere it says action above, simply substitute the word intention:

- 1 **Helpful Effects of My Intentions:** How are my motives helpful and productive?
- 2 **Harmful Effects of My Intentions:** How are my motives hurtful or counter-productive?
- 3 **Balancing Energies:** Energies/strategies to balance these consequences.
- 4 **Where to Step Up:** Where are my motives most pure and affective? What thought patterns are worth supporting and developing further?

- 5 **Where to Step Back:** Where do I most need to correct my thinking? Where might I have a blind spot, a chip on my shoulder, and ego run amok, or a stale or inaccurate belief?
- 6 **Balancing Energies:** Energies/strategies to balance beneficial vs. troublesome intentions.

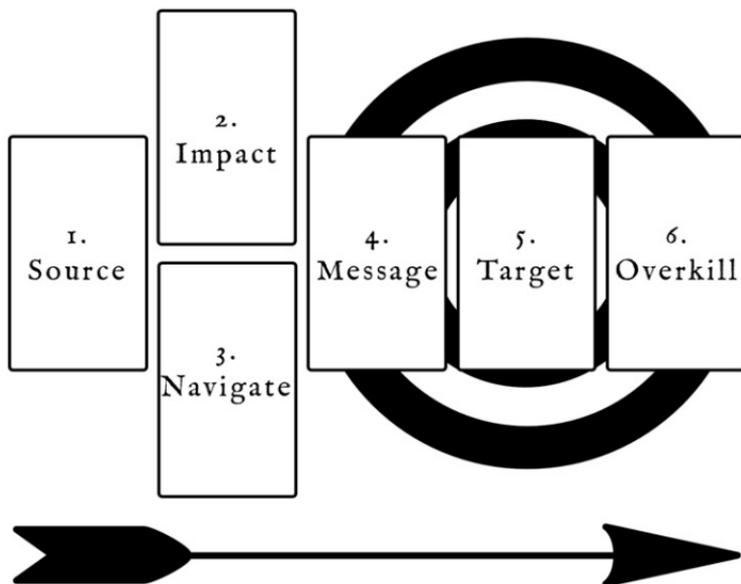
Try two side-by-side readings, one of your actions, and one of your intentions to see how well they align.

- **Creativity:** Edit and polish your creative projects without overworking them or crushing their spirit. Each card's exact phrasing will vary depending on your medium and the stage of your process. For example, if your medium is unforgiving like ink painting, and you fear overworking a composition near completion, you might phrase the cards' questions like so: Which of my actions improved the piece? Which of my actions detracted from it? In what ways can I keep working? Where do I need to step back? If, on the other hand your medium is infinitely flexible like writing, and you haven't yet begun editing, you might phrase things a little differently: What are some helpful ways to approach my editing process? What methods might be harmful or fail to serve the project? What area of this project needs the most editing? What parts should I leave alone or touch minimally? These are just examples. There are many itty-bitty ways to tweak this spread towards editing, and of course, not all projects will call for tarot help. Trust your eye and your taste!

- **Career:** Our culture values productivity disproportionately over character, wisdom, and quality of life. This is a great spread to use when struggling with workaholism, work/life balance, and prioritizing between day work and labors of love.
- **Relationships:** **Emotional labor is a thing.** Check your balance between the investment, action, and emotional labor you pour into your relationships, and the self-care, solo time, and breathing space you need to keep yourself happy and healthy.

Emotional Arrow Tarot Spread

for listening to challenging emotions



- 1 **Source:** What prompted this emotion? What lies at the root of it?
- 2 **Impact:** How is this emotion affecting me now? How is it riding me?
- 3 **Navigation:** How can I better harness, navigate, and channel this emotion?
- 4 **Message:** What is this emotion trying to tell me?

- 5 **Target:** Best outcome/goal of working constructively with this emotion.
- 6 **Overkill:** How does this emotion mislead me? How might it take me too far?

NOTES

Every emotion is an arrow. They can wound. They can guide by pointing where to follow or avoid. This spread is built around two core notions: first, that all emotions have some function, purpose, or encoded message; and second, that by listening to our challenging emotions from a place of neutrality, non-judgement, and openness, we can release them faster.

This work is easier said than done. How do we approach our most difficult emotions with neutrality? I don't recommend attempting this spread in the grip of the feeling in question. Some of my favorite techniques for coming back to a neutral state include:

- meditation
- rest or sleep
- distraction through good fiction—books or television
- creative work—drawing or writing it out
- actively listening to music that matches my emotion, then listening to something a shade less intense than my emotion, then listening to something soothing and calm
- singing or playing music in a similar progression
- venting in a diary or, with consent, to a friend (a good complain can work wonders)
- exercising

- being out in nature, especially near natural, running water or very old trees
- spending time with animals
- taking a shower or a bath
- energetically cleansing my space with candles or incense

There are more ways than this to relax, and I'm sure you have some of your own. Do your best to get into a peaceful, reflective headspace before prodding questions that call for a level head. The cards can reflect our fears and mirror our feelings back to us when we try to read from a highly charged state, and this can get confusing, even disturbing without the right perspective. They can also deliver tough love and give answers we don't want to hear. Only ask a question when you're willing and able to process thoughts about it with honesty and an open mind.

ELEMENTS

The elements air and water shape this spread, challenging us to constructively balance mind and emotion. We need to bring feeling to rational analysis without getting muggy, sticky, or soggy. We need to bring insight and awareness to our feistiest emotions without boiling over.

VARIATIONS

- **Setting Intention:** Specify an emotion you'd like to work with before drawing your cards. Several different methods should work to set your intention:

A) Hold the target feeling in mind as you shuffle your cards. This method is affective but tricky, because you want to stay in a state of calm neutrality. Only do this if you can recall your emotion clearly without getting pulled too deeply back into it.

B) State the emotion and the purpose of your reading out loud before you shuffle and draw your cards. This is the easiest and most direct method, but some people feel silly speaking out loud while reading for themselves.

C) Choose a signifier card that most closely matches your emotion, or a cross of two cards if your emotion is complex, and place this at the upper center of your reading space before you shuffle and draw your cards.

D) Write out your question and target emotion in your tarot journal before shuffling and drawing the cards.

Diagram your spread and journal your interpretations.

• **Open Ended:** Draw this spread without setting a specific intention or emotion, and simply see what comes up. You may need to draw a clarifying card after to ascertain the focus. This method is not for the faint of heart. The cards can cut right to something you don't want to look at. On the other hand, this method can prompt insights on feelings you would never think to ask about. This method may be helpful when experiencing mixed feelings or difficulty describing your current emotions.

- **Recognizing Challenging Emotions:** Emotions we code as negative and undesirable are certainly difficult, but love, infatuation, excitement, eagerness, nostalgia, and all manner of longings can be as challenging as sadness, anger, and fear. For various reasons, some may find emotions like joy, happiness, contentment, and hope challenging. This spread works for a wide range of emotions, positive, negative, complex, and mixed.
- **Creativity:** Try this spread when you suspect a tricky emotion of blocking inspiration or interfering with your creative process. This could include unpleasant feelings like fear, anxiety, self-criticism, imposter syndrome, embarrassment, or even boredom. It could also include more desirable emotions taken too far, like blind optimism or enthusiasm for one part of the process above others.
- **Career:** Reflect and generate perspective when strong emotions are triggered by events or dynamics in the workplace. Question how strong emotions might help, serve, and guide you in your career or your calling.
- **Relationships:** Meditate on how strong emotions affect your relationships, how they express through your relationship dynamics, and how you can better harness or channel them to become a stronger friend, relative, colleague, or partner.

Toolkit Tarot Spread

for assessing and cultivating strengths

TOP SHELF: TASKS		
1. To Fix	2. To Break	3. To Measure

MIDDLE SHELF: TOOLS		
4. A Talent	5. A Resource	6. A Skill

BOTTOM SHELF: BURIED TREASURE		
7. What's Hidden	8. How to Unlock It	9. Where to Apply It

TOP SHELF: TASKS

- 1 **To Fix:** Something to mend.
- 2 **To Break:** Something to dismantle, dissect, or leave behind.
- 3 **To Measure:** What needs assessment?

MIDDLE SHELF: TOOLS

- 1 **A Talent:** A talent to exercise.
- 2 **A Resource:** A resource to draw on.
- 3 **A Skill:** A skill to apply.

BOTTOM SHELF: BURIED TREASURE

- 1 **What's Hidden:** A latent talent or forgotten skill to develop.
- 2 **How to Unlock It:** Strategies to access, develop, or rekindle this ability.
- 3 **Where to Apply It:** A potential project or path. Where might this ability take me?

NOTES

With so much work needed to craft a better world, everyone must contribute where and how we can. That means honestly assessing our resources and skills with the longterm goals of producing meaningful work and making valuable contributions to causes larger than ourselves. Our efforts don't have to be precious or grandiose to be valuable and meaningful. Our efforts do, however, have to align with our personal values and abilities to be productive and sustainable over time.

Let's take this spread one shelf at a time. The top shelf in our toolkit holds tasks. Direct these task cards either inward or outward in the context of resistance work. Looking inward, Card One represents a personal quality to heal or improve to become stronger and more capable. Card Two represents a habit to break or pattern to let go of to improve your work. Card Three represents a trait that requires more reflection and attention as you move forwards. Looking outward, Card One represents a problem to help solve or repair. Card Two represent a toxic pattern to help dissect and release, or a knot to help untangle. Card Three represents a pattern or problem to become aware of, examine, or research without immediate action.

Our middle shelf holds tools. These are your personal strengths and assets to draw on as you approach collective work—the unique combination of talents, resources, and skills that you bring to the table.

Here a talent is something you have a natural aptitude for, such that you can develop faster in that area than others might with same amount of time and concentration. Talents are driven at least partly by passion and interest. The things you're drawn to and curious about matter with Card Four. Examine talent not to compare yourself to others in a competitive sense, or to elevate one person above another, but to gain insight on the best ways that you can contribute. What is the wisest way to spend your time and energy towards drawing out your best?

A resource is something outside yourself that you have access to use in your work and to share with others. When we think of resources, we often think of material goods like money, food, supplies, land, and space. These may well count among your own strongest resources. Resources can also represent intangibles like time, wisdom, energy, education, information, and ties to community.

A skill is a learned ability you've developed, relevant to your efforts. While both talents and skills require practice to hone, skills broadly tend to be more practical. A talent is something you practice because you love it or you have an aptitude for it, whether or not it's helpful or necessary to pursue. (While a drive to pursue a passion may feel urgent on the level of the heart, it's seldom a matter of food-and-shelter survival.) A skill is something you practice because it's useful, whether or not you're wired towards it. A skill may be glamorous and artistic, like design, and a talent may be dull and mundane, like baking casserole. Either can be enjoyable, and either can feel like hard work. For the purpose of this spread, the difference lies in passion, aptitude, and ability—something you do because you can (talent) vs. practicality, labor, and necessity—something you do because you have to (skill).

Finally, the bottom shelf in our toolkit holds buried treasure—uncounted resources and forgotten or latent talents you may not be aware of. Card Seven shows something hidden to be developed, which may come of use in your work. This could be a talent, a resource, or a

skill. Card Eight advises strategies to uncover, unlock, or nurture the quality revealed in Card Seven. Card Nine covers the potential applications for this quality. Where in life, or to what projects might this resource be applied? Where might this talent take you if fostered?

Because this last shelf deals with both occluded, unconscious material and future potential, it may become confusing or difficult to accurately interpret. We're asking to look at qualities we don't yet recognize in waking life, so please don't be surprised or disappointed if you have trouble recognizing a hidden talent or resource reflected in the cards. If the cards you draw here make no sense to you, it may be because they are showing you something you don't know yet. Please resist the urge to draw more cards, and simply sit on what you've got for now. Journal your results and first impressions, then set the reading aside. Sleep on it, meditate on it, give it time, and come back to it another week with fresh eyes. Unlocking hidden potential usually takes time, and the first steps may come in whispers and fragments. That's all part of the process.

ELEMENTS

The element earth governs this spread. Tool boxes are shrines of treasures, equipment, work, and craft. Rummaging through them, we figure out what we have and need to get things done in this material world. Air marks a strong secondary presence as we bring assessment, measurement, logic, and analysis to our resources. We take inventory and draft plans. The

dynamic then is of air serving earth and earth strengthening itself, as the atmosphere cradles and protects the ground, delivering the water and chemicals needed to the right places for land to remain fertile and thrive.

VARIATIONS

The toolkit spread has broad applications. It can examine any area in life where you might cultivate talents and resources to make improvements. That's a lot of ground to cover!

- **One Shelf At a Time:** This spread is really three in one. Think of it like an actual toolbox. You can pull out one shelf at a time and do a focused, three-card reading on either tasks to undertake, tools to draw on, or hidden talents to develop. You can even do a single-card draw of any one tool in this box whenever you need.
- **Accentuate the Negative:** I've focused on positive resources and abilities in this spread, but in choosing our battles, it can be just as important to inventory weaknesses. Add a card to each shelf to represent weaknesses and foils. In the top shelf of tasks, draw an extra card to examine which tasks or fights to avoid for now. In the middle shelf of tools, draw an extra card to face an area of weakness or natural aversion. In the bottom shelf of buried treasure, draw an extra card to ask where not to apply the new abilities you develop.

These negatives can change over time. Areas of weakness can become areas of great strength, but that process doesn't happen overnight. Examining weaknesses through tarot can invite tough love, so avoid this variation on days when you're feeling overwhelmed or vulnerable. Save it for when you're feeling honest with yourself, and grounded enough in your strengths to own your foibles with accountability and a sense of humor.

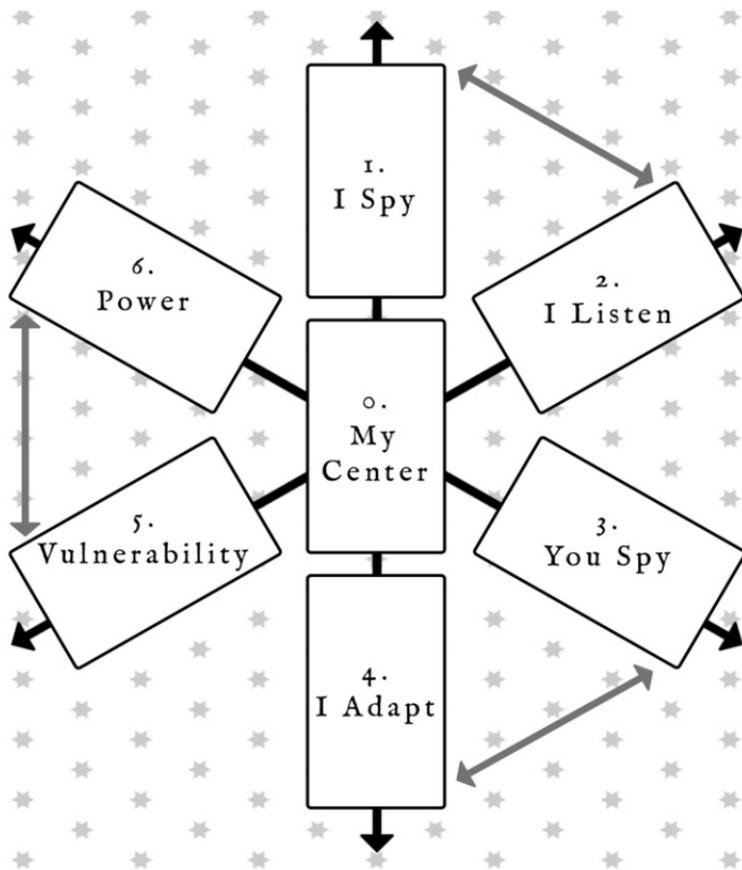
- **Creativity:** Brainstorm on editing and shaping your projects with the tasks shelf. Assess which talents or media to apply to a given project with the tools shelf. Explore new media and hidden or back-burnered talents through the treasure shelf. You can develop personal codes in your tarot journal to get very specific. For instance, a graphic designer working in mixed media might assign cups (water) as paint and ink, pentacles (earth) as pencils and chalk pastels, wands (fire) as light-based media like photography and digital effects, and swords (air) as cut paper. There are infinite ways to assign detailed, personal meanings to tarot symbols. Tailor your codes to your own media and needs, and record them in your journal before your reading to set your intentions.
- **Career:** Examine what is and isn't working well on your current career trajectory with the tasks shelf. Check which resources and skills can help most with current projects and upcoming changes with the tools shelf. Consult the treasure shelf to search out and develop growth potential in your current field, or perhaps discover a new field to explore. This spread should be a

good trick for overcoming writer's block on resumés, business plans, and elevator pitches. The tools shelf can help you brainstorm, articulate, and own your biggest strengths when it's time to market them.

- Relationships: Use the tasks shelf to meditate on snags, conflicts, and dynamics in your relationships that call for some TLC. What patterns can you mend and what habits can you break to become a better partner, parent, colleague, friend, or lover? What patterns need assessment before they grow into problems? Use the tools shelf to count and bolster all the good things you're bringing to the table. Use the treasure shelf to uncover potential areas of talent and growth that may help you deepen and strengthen your relationships.

Snowflake Tarot Spread

for weaponizing perceived weaknesses



- 0 **My Center:** How is the weather in my core?
- 1 **I Spy:** A pet weakness. Something I perceive within myself as troublesome or flawed.
- 2 **I Listen:** What does it have to tell me? What is the hidden strength in it?
- 3 **You Spy:** A trait others see as one of my weaknesses.
- 4 **I Adapt:** How can I best adapt and turn this into a strength? Is it truly a weakness at all?
- 5 **Vulnerability:** The nature/expression of my softness and vulnerability.
- 6 **Power:** The nature/expression of my fortitude and personal power.

NOTES

First up: (cause nothing goes without saying now that we're all post-truth) when I write about "weaponizing perceived weaknesses," I'm writing metaphorically, about weapons of heart, mind, communication, and dissent. This tarot spread is not a call to violence. (I hope I'm correct in saying that no tarot spread is a call to violence, but it's a big, weird world with a big, weird internet.) I don't judge those who use violence in self-defense, but I believe it should be a last resort. Nonviolent resistance and civil disobedience get **better results** with **less harm done** than violent attacks that can be used to justify campaigns of vilification, state violence, and terror

against all opposition, violent or peaceful, regardless of justice.

So what cause do we have to metaphorically weaponize our perceived weaknesses? What does that even mean?

We all have areas of strength and weakness, but perceptions around these are easily distorted. Great strengths like sensitivity, empathy, tenderness, kindness, and honesty are reviled as weaknesses and devalued by those who see strength as incompatible with tenderness, intelligence and reason as incompatible with emotion, and power as synonymous with brutality and greed. In an ongoing war against the divine/empowered feminine, powerful players in Western societies have alternately vilified and trivialized traits deemed feminine for millennia and counting. Variances in identity and worldview, and the many qualities that make us unique, are mocked, degraded, and dismissed by those strongly attached to their own identities, who may see their race, religion, gender, or orientation as superior to others, or may feel threatened by changes to their status quo. Valid observations and critiques about the treatment of marginalized groups go ignored or condemned by those unwilling to acknowledge difference and privilege. Dissidents, protestors demanding the change, accommodation, and respect they need and deserve, the young, and the uppity, are ridiculed and written off as “special snowflakes” by those who don’t feel like being contradicted or challenged. With prejudice, systemic oppression, and the terrible isms woven so tightly into the

fabric of our culture, it's easy to internalize the judgements we hear from others and dismiss or distrust our own emotions, perspectives, and identities.

This spread is not for dodging responsibility for our flaws or enabling fragility. Most character traits envelop both strength and weakness, and we're on the hook to account for both. The goal here is to bring some balance back to those qualities viewed through a disproportionately negative filter. To that end, Cards One and Two examine areas where we feel weak by our own accounting, and how to make improvements. Cards Three and Four examine areas where others call us weak, and how we might turn these traits back to our advantage. Cards Five and Six shed light on the interplay between our personal senses of power and vulnerability.

The central card, numbered Zero because it stands out of order, asks "what's the weather like in my core?" Though the phrase "my core" sounds very intimate, try not to take the messages here too personally. Think of this as representing the baseline you're operating from at the moment, rather than a lasting reflection of your deep, inner being. Peeking at your most shiniest immortal soul is tempting, but not helpful here. That part of you is too big and transcendent to stand in proportion with the rest of the questions we're asking. It's more useful to see how outer circumstances interact with your interior, and what passing moods and themes impact you deeply at this time. This inquiry can go deep, but it isn't permanent and it isn't you, at least not the whole of you. If you're dealing

with particularly challenging circumstances, you may draw a challenging card in this position, and that's appropriate. For instance, if you have a lot of change and upheaval going on around you, the Tower might reflect your inner weather, indicating that you're feeling shaken to your core. However, this doesn't mean that you, personally, are a walking disaster at your core. If you've been running on fumes with a lot of draining circumstances around you, the Four of Swords might reflect the weather in your core, indicating fatigue down to your bones and a need to rest before you get sick. That doesn't mean that you're sick, tired and static in your personality or your soul.

Mind how each outer card relates back to that central Zero Card. If each card were a person engaged in a conversation, what would the outer folks say to the meteorologist in the middle?

We always have a choice whether to accept or reject the criticism we receive. Although this spread was inspired by ridiculous, destructive criticism and name-calling that we need to break free of, I expect this spread to operate ambiguously in practice. Some perceptions of weakness are accurate, and constructive criticism can be immensely valuable. Pay careful attention to the context of Cards Three and Four, and how they relate to Cards Zero through Two. Pay attention to the feelings they provoke. Do the cards' themes prompt embarrassment because they feel true or frustration because you know better? The reading's context, your emotional impulses, and your

intuition should help you figure out whether you'd best embrace or oppose this criticism. Your response might be complex. With discernment, you can develop approaches that both entertain constructive criticism and deflect destructive noise.

ELEMENTS

This is a water spread. It has all the many feelings.

The classical elements correspond to states of matter. Earth represents solids, water represents liquids, air represents gasses, and fire represents plasmas. However, when we set aside the academics and consider the elements as we interact with them, they hit us close to home. We recall the mud beneath our feet, the water, wine, or milk in our cups, the sound of rain, the wind howling at night, the air we breathe, campfires, candles, and the scents of smoke and spices. From this immediate viewpoint, we can consider water in each state of matter we encounter: solid, liquid, or gas; hot, cold, or tepid.

Frozen water lies at the heart of this spread. Ice. Water, represented in the suit of cups, symbolizes emotion, intuition, and subtle perceptions. Imagining these qualities as frozen solid may be unpleasant, conjuring rigidity, frigidity, inaccessibility, aloofness, even cruelty—the harsh chill and death of winter. Yet ice's solidity is impermanent, the sense of stasis it evokes illusory. Ice changes, moves, expands, melts, drifts, travels, cracks, heals, and supports entire ecosystems of life. Thinking of

watery qualities like emotion and intuition as crystalline yields an entirely different set of associations: beauty, impermanence, fragility, preciousness, geometry, refraction, and reflection. This polar contradiction (pun intended) between multiple interpretations of the same thing is a key part of the symbolism behind this spread.

VARIATIONS

- **Creativity:** Turn this into a spread for navigating critiques. In Cards One and Two, critique your own work and process, brainstorm improvements to make, and think about what hidden strengths may lie within your rough patches. In Cards Three and Four, process the external criticism you receive. What criticisms weigh on you most heavily? Are they constructive or destructive? Objective or subjective? Delivered in a spirit of mutual support or competitive backlash? Will it serve your project best to embrace a particular critique and adapt your work? Or is it best to stick to your guns and strengthen what you did before? In Cards Five and Six, meditate on how you express vulnerability and power through your work, and through the critiquing/editing process. Remember that delivering and accepting constructive criticism graciously are skills unto themselves, and take practice.

- **Career:** Prepare for that most tired of interview questions, “what is your biggest weakness?” Cue the humble bragging and media spin. Job interviews may feel like baloney-and-a-half, but there’s genuine merit in

weighing both sides of any given trait when evaluating and advocating for your work. In Cards One and Two, perform a self-assessment of your work and career trajectory. In Cards Three and Four, consider problems others have raised with your work, how you might improve, and any areas where you need to reject or parry critiques to stand by your values. Be discerning about when to compromise. In Cards Five and Six, check where your vulnerabilities and strengths are most visible and impactful on your work.

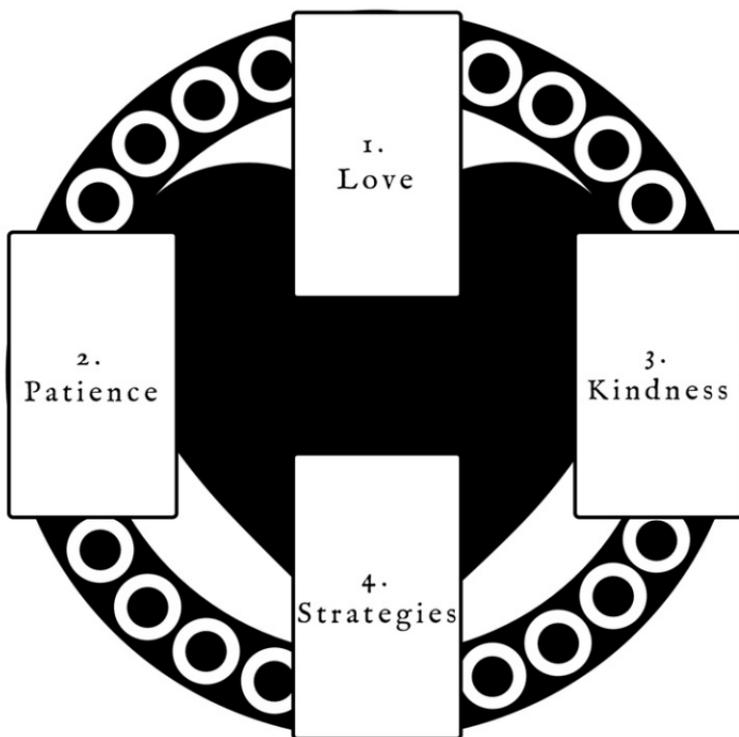
- **Relationships:** Explore power dynamics in a relationship, bearing in mind that the cards can't speak for other people absent from the reading. In Cards One and Two, check in on a personal insecurity that impacts your relationship, and what you can do about it. In Cards Three and Four, examine a way you feel criticized by your partner. This may be something you feel subtly although it's never been stated, or it may be something your partner has complained about vocally and directly. Is this something you can and should address? Do you need to compromise and do better in this area? Is it something you need to stand by or celebrate about yourself? Is there a strength lurking within a quirk or foible? In Cards Five and Six, look at how your vulnerability and power are expressing within and acting upon your relationship. Is the dynamic healthy or does it need some adjustment?

This line of questioning can get tricky and loaded. Keep an eye on the lines between power and control, criticism and abuse. While tarot makes for a great agony aunt in the

hands of a reader with good sense, it can only do so much, especially when things get heavy. Sometimes tarot, tea, and sympathy get the job done. Other times may call for a therapist, a sit-down with your partner to get their side of the story, input from friends or family you love and trust, a good lawyer, or even an exit strategy.

Self Love Tarot Spread

for fostering self love and care



- 1 **Love:** Something to love about myself.
- 2 **Patience:** Where can I be more patient with myself?

- 3 **Kindness:** Where can I be kinder to myself?
- 4 **Strategies:** Strategies to draw on in forging a better relationship with myself.

NOTES

Here's another spread with two distinct applications in resistance work: self-love and self-care.

Paying attention to everything that's happening nationally and globally can leave us feeling drained and heart-broken. It brings awareness to some of the darkest aspects of humanity, our history, and our own hearts and minds. Many of us find ourselves confronting unpleasant and unwanted patterns and impulses within ourselves, our families, and our communities, such as prejudice, internalized oppression, violence, and rage. It's absolutely necessary that we confront these things honestly, while working to dismantle and heal them. This may not be easy, nice, or fun. It requires courage and prioritizing truth and healing over comfort. It also requires the balancing practices of love, patience, and kindness.

We need to acknowledge and take responsibility for the worst within ourselves. We can't reduce the harm we do if we're too afraid to see it. But we can't dwell here full-time either, or we risk wallowing and despair. We must also visit the best within ourselves and others. There, we can ground ourselves in a sense of all that is good and right about us, so we can grow that goodness and heal. We can direct love and patience inward, so we know what it feels

like, so we can expand it outward, and ultimately so we have something to keep fighting for. We can periodically refresh our faith in humanity and in ourselves so that we know—not just hope or suppose—that we can do better. Self-love lays a foundation for that faith.

Care is a key component of love, and invaluable in trying times. With stress-levels running high and so much work to tackle, it's necessary to maintain self-care and steady pacing to avoid burnout, fatigue, and despair.

The questions in this spread shift slightly when drawn specifically for self-care:

- 1 **Love:** How can I best express love for myself through practical action?
- 2 **Patience:** How can I be more patient with myself? What can I tackle more slowly or put on the back-burner to work at a healthy, sustainable pace?
- 3 **Kindness:** How can I be kinder to myself? What is something nice I can do for myself or give to myself?
- 4 **Strategies:** Strategies to draw on in creating or maintaining a good balance between my care for others and my care for myself.

Self-care takes many forms. Marketplace gurus love selling us (especially the femmes among us) self-care through mani-pedis, glitter bath-bombs, and cashmere sweaters, but true care runs deeper than feeding our

closets. How do we feed our bodies, minds, and souls? At any given time, we've all got a handful of The Big Questions burning holes through our spirits. You can't patch those kinda holes with spa dates and unicorn frappes. Don't get me wrong, it's fine to enjoy nice things, and unicorns are swell. No shame. By all means, frappe away if that's your thing, just don't let the spa or the shopping mall become the poppy field that seduces you off your Yellow Brick Road.

On a practical, mundane level, self-care can look humble and basic: taking a shower, taking a walk, pausing work to tidy up your space, cooking yourself a good meal, turning off your phone while you eat dinner, and getting enough sleep. Shop therapy can be nice and fun, but sometimes we need permission to take a nap or read a book more than we need new stuff. On a deeper, spiritual level, self-care might look like maintaining a religious or meditative practice, journaling through what ails you, extending yourself forgiveness, or making art—voicing your pain and healing, celebrating your joy, and expressing your truth.

It's not easy for everyone to find the time and resources to prioritize these activities. These might not be daily practices for all of us, especially for those working in high-pressure jobs, working multiple jobs, and/or taking care of family. Let's acknowledge for a minute what the marketers seldom do—that those who most need care often have the least time or money to spend on it, and those who spend the least on occasional luxuries get

shamed the most for indulging. That's backwards. We don't always receive the love and care we deserve, but we do all deserve love and care. It's okay to take time and spend resources on yourself when you can. Loving yourself and giving yourself what you need is not a selfish indulgence, especially when it keeps you going and allows you to give and do more for others.

And if you already do have all the time and money in the world for rest, relaxation, and luxuries, caring for your spirit might include doing more loving and altruistic things for others. Inner and outer care are not mutually exclusive. They pair very well.

ELEMENTS

This spread combines emotional, intuitive, soothing water, and passionate, creative, inspired fire. Think of the burning, bleeding heart, riled with compassion and radiating fierce love. Think of a kettle of something warming and wonderful steaming over a hearth or campfire. There's our sweet spot in balancing these two elements: warming our hearts to our selves with energy and cheer, and extending good feelings within and without.

Watch out for too much of a good thing with elemental imbalances. A lot of fire beneath a little water steams up fast. While steam can be channeled to heat a home or power an engine, it can also burn as bad as an open flame. Symbolically, that might look like passion, anger, or zeal

whipping your emotions into a frenzy, cutting off your intuitive stream to the point that you make bad decisions and cause harm. In the context of self-love, this could represent taking your own side to the exclusion of all other viewpoints, grasping at love for yourself through hate or rejection of others, selfishness, or narcissism. Conversely, apply a little heat to a lot of water, and you get a stagnant pool with all kinds of funky slime beasties brewing in it. This pattern plays out when self-care techniques are abused as pacifiers and masks, used to avoid challenging personal work, and to feel good while dodging responsibilities and meaningful action.

VARIATIONS

- **Think Globally:** We live in a richly flawed world-in-progress, we are a richly flawed species-in-progress, and there come happenings that test our faith in humanity, and deliver us a bone-deep ambivalence about moving through this world. Use this spread to ask for strategies to stay loving towards humanity in the face of dreadful nonsense, to practice patience and civility with those people who operate from a base of dreadful nonsense, and to bolster the best of your own humanity when you can't with our nonsense species today.

Please note: I consider those philosophies that claim everybody has to love everybody else, because light-and-love or whatever, to be nonsense. Ditto for the notion that individuals owe particular other individuals love,

patience, respect, forgiveness, time, labor, or anything else, cause we're all one universal being. The plane where that one-lovey-being-ness thing is true, if it is true, ain't the plane we're deciding on through this work. We live here and now, in separate bodies, and we're here to do here things now.

This exercise isn't about denying your truth, forcing feelings that aren't there and don't have to be, or slapping a happy face on heinous circumstances. It sure as Hell isn't about loving your way into complicity, suspending censure for those perpetuating heinous muckery. It's about seeking and practicing techniques to become stronger, gentler, more compassionate, and more courageous in the face of whatever shakes your faith in humanity. It's about finding ways to remember the good and loving parts of humanity when large chunks of it spew stupendous dirt-waddery. It's also 100% optional, and it's fine if it's not your cup of honey-lemon-ginger. Sometimes we need license to be grumpy at our collective selves, and thank God/s/ess/es, the Void, Lady Nature, evolution, or whoever else you thank, for the company of dogs and cats and trees.

- **Creativity:** Projects can be like babies, and sometimes they need coddling, especially when they're acting stubborn. Are your muses crapping out on you, or are you forgetting to show up, ask nicely, and listen? Ask how to exercise love, patience, and kindness with a given project, as though it's a living wee thing you're nurturing into maturity. Ask how to be more loving and caring with

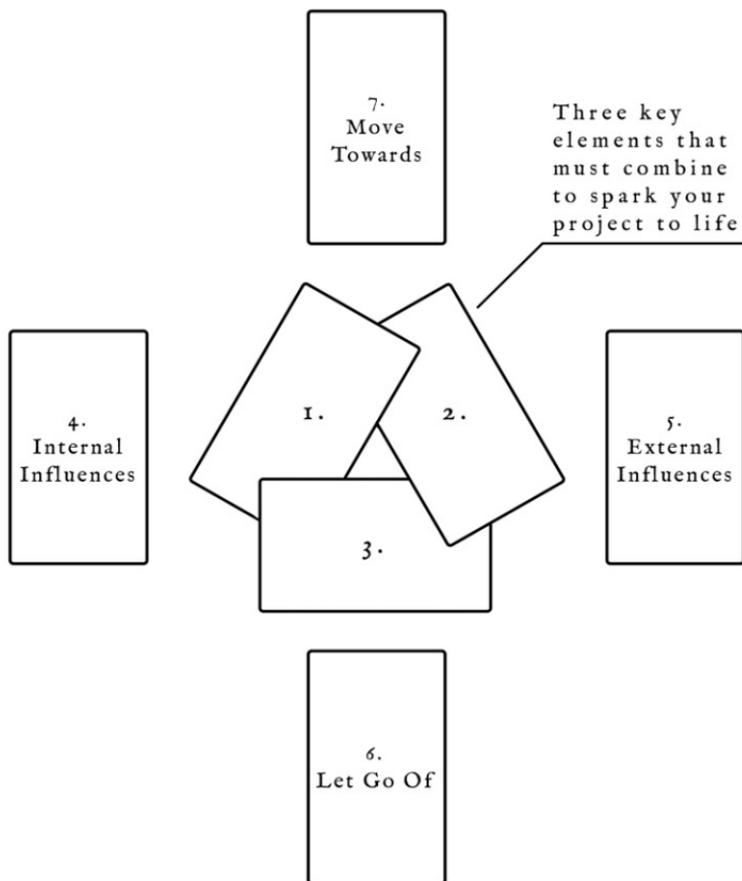
yourself when your tortured-artist streak monopolizes your inner monologue, or the ghosts of critics past and future start hounding you down.

- **Career:** Love and tenderness, qualities our society deems feminine, mightn't pop first into mind when we think of work and career as we know them in this, the cis-hetero-patriarchy. Feminine traits and labor are still criminally undervalued and under-acknowledged in the paid workforce today. In truth, these qualities are immensely valuable in all areas of life, including office and board-room. Brainstorm ways to strengthen professional projects and relationships with a little TLC by turning this spread towards your work. Boost yourself back up when exhausted from fielding dystopian malarkey at work or in school by turning this spread inwards after clocking out.

- **Relationships:** This is a fantastic spread for relationships. Ask how you can be more loving, patient, and kind towards a friend, relative, colleague, or partner. Look for strategies to improve the relationship in question. If reading with a partner, ask for ways that you can both strengthen and deepen your relationship together through love, patience, kindness, and practical action.

Project Kindling Tarot Spread

for sparking the pilot flame at the heart of a project



- 1 **Spark 1**
- 2 **Spark 2**
- 3 **Spark 3:** Three key elements that must combine to spark my project to life.
- 4 **Internal Influences:** How do my own patterns and approaches affect my project? What do I bring to the table?
- 5 **External Influences:** How do outside patterns and circumstances affect this project? What do others bring to the table?
- 6 **Let Go Of:** Something to resolve or leave behind to serve this project's forward momentum.
- 7 **Move Towards:** Something to aim for or develop as I forge ahead in this project.

NOTES

This spread is one of my favorites. I originally wrote it to tackle creative projects and work questions, and I use it all the time. Its structure is so simple that it applies to different areas of life with minimal alterations. This makes it a strong go-to spread to have in your general repertoire, and quite useful for resistance work.

Direct the spread outward to brainstorm and plan specific projects, like protests, political art pieces, zines, teach-ins, fund-raisers, spiritual gatherings, and so on. Direct the spread inward to reflect broadly on your personal approach to resistance work. What key traits or patterns within yourself can you strengthen and draw on to contribute well? How do outside influences affect your

approach compared to your internal influences and values? What might you leave behind or resolve to do better, and what might you pick up or explore further to grow?

The heart and soul of this spread is a simple triangle. The number three is critical here. Three is dynamic. You need at least three of anything to spin a good story: three brothers, three pigs, three bears; three acts: a beginning, a middle, and an end. Projects are stories. To successfully navigate any project, or realize any idea, we must draw on a number of elements and strategies. No single tool can get a complex job done. A blend of two approaches gives more to work with, but often defaults to a polar or binary dynamic. A combination of three energies, however, can synthesize in all kinds of interesting ways, without giving us too much to handle at a time. That's more fuel for the fire, but not so much that it smothers out. Think of juggling—you need at least three balls to make an act, but keeping anything more in the air requires advanced skill and concentration.

When you draw your center triangle, first consider each card individually. How does each card apply to your project on its own? Minor pips may represent strategies to use, skills to apply, or conditions to turn to your advantage. Majors and court cards often represent energies to channel, archetypes to work with, or aspects of your personality to enhance or lean on. Remember that most court cards (knights, kings, and queens) have astrological associations. If you know astrology, consider

the personality traits and strengths associated with any star signs referenced by courts, and look at where those signs sit in your birth chart, and any planets or points you have there.

Once you have a feel for each individual part of the central trio, consider them as a whole. What do they say to each other? If each of these cards were a living member of a team contracted to realize your project, how would they get along, and how might they delegate different responsibilities? When you look at the cards all at once, do any pictorial, geometric, elemental, or color patterns jump out? These questions can help you glean more information from your reading and add more bullets to your project brainstorm list.

ELEMENTS

Fire and earth guide this spread. The goal is to blend the passion, inspiration, initiatory spark, and forward momentum of fire, with the slow and steady, practical, grounded qualities of Earth that allow our projects to manifest in the material world. The fire is the spark, and the Earth is the fuel. Think of the inner triangle as that fiery, inspirational, motivational half of the equation—the pilot flame or tinder flash in the center of our kindling. The four outer cards represent the earthy, material, practical side of the equation—the logs and the stones or bricks beneath. Together, they should generate the excitement to get us moving, as well as the solid steps needed to sustain a slow burn and see things through.

Project Kindling involves both brainstorming and planning. Brainstorming means generating ideas, and ideas create excitement. Ideas live in the center triangle of fire, and like fire, they're energizing but trickstery. They're not hard to generate once you learn how, and we stir up lots of them in our creative endeavors. The trouble with ideas is most of them are alluring, and most of them are half-baked, if not flat out bad. They're safe to look at, but if you try to grasp them all at once, you'll burn out. The Earth side of the spread helps us shape, contain, and direct all that energy from our ideas, like a hearth below and a chimney around and above. The Influence cards should help us discern which ideas are most viable to execute. The "Let Go Of" and "Move Towards" cards give us shaping strategies for our building and editing processes.

VARIATIONS

- **Quick Draw:** Try a quick draw of the center triangle, without the four outer cards. I do this frequently for projects that are already in the works, kind of like stoking a fire that's already going. Ask, "what does my project need right now?" Interpret the three intersecting archetypes, and use them as a spring-board for a quick brainstorm or bullet list.
- **Triangle Reversals:** While I'm a big fan of reversals in general (more info, more fun), I find it easiest to read all three center cards upright no matter how they fall, as you

might when reading a cross pattern in certain spreads. There's already a degree of complexity in viewing each card simultaneously as an individual and part of a whole. I get enough nuance from the way the three cards interact in a triangle without adding reversals. That said, you can opt to include reversals, and there are two approaches for doing so:

If laying the spread out pictorially, as shown in the diagram above, card three is tilted horizontally. Pick a direction to designate as upright vs. reversed before you draw your cards. The other option is to lay the spread out linearly, as I described in the [intro notes](#) here. In that case, lay cards one through three, representing the central triangle, vertically oriented in a neat row at the top of your reading area. Read them upright or reversed as they fall.

- **Progress Reports:** Projects change as they develop. The strategies and ideas you start with may not be the same you end with, and that's a natural part of any creative process. Repeat this spread at different stages and iterations of your project. Journal your results to track how your tarot readings reflect the ways your project morphs over time.

- **Creativity & Career:** Use this spread as is to map out creative and work projects. Nothing changes significantly when pointed at different project-based areas of life. Focus your mind as specifically or broadly as you like. Ask about individual projects. Check in on your approach to

an artistic medium or career path. Reflect on your story with big concepts, like Artistry and Meaningful Work.

- **Relationships:** What three key elements need to come together for your partnership to thrive? The center triangle may express pre-existing energies you each bring to the table, or it may draw a symbolic picture how your relationship transcends the sum of its parts, and the fresh energies born between you.

If reading alone, Card Four (Internal Influences) will stand for something you bring to the pairing, and Card Five (External Influences) will stand for something your partner brings. In Cards Six and Seven, ask for patterns you can move away from and towards to strengthen your part in the relationship.

If reading together with your partner, decide amongst yourselves who gets to be Card Four or Five. In Cards Six and Seven, and ask for patterns or phases you can move away from and towards to strengthen your relationship together.

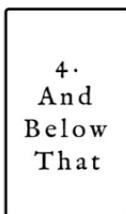
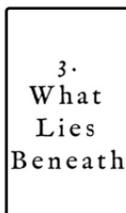
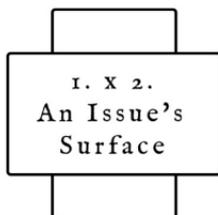
Spreads like this can examine either romantic or platonic relationships, or a particular aspect of a relationship. For example, in platonic relationships you might ask for guidance in keeping in touch with a friend who's moved far away, reconnecting with an estranged relative, or any other question that deals with strengthening and maintaining a bond. What needs to come together to

make it work? What are some areas to watch out for or avoid, and some areas to embrace?

In romantic relationships, you might ask about specific areas like intimacy, chemistry, trust, and adventuring together. Just remember that the cards can't speak for other people, especially when those people are not present, and that there are many ways to interpret each card. You and your partner may find you interpret things very differently if you draw readings together. Always speak to your partner and negotiate before implementing any ideas you generate on your own, especially when those ideas involve things like intimacy, trust, sex, and boundaries.

Root Cellar Tarot Spread

for getting at the root of a thing



1. x 2. **An Issue's Surface**
3. **What Lies Beneath**
4. **And Below That**
5. **And Below That**

NOTES

We can't hope to understand where we are now, nor competently steer where we head next, without understanding where we came from and how we got from there to here. This spread has been in my back-pocket for a long time. It's another one I use generally that I believe has value to resistance and shadow work.

Our problems are not new, they're just loud and ugly, and more people are starting to pay attention to them. The worst things we face now—bigotry, fascism, hatred, brutality, colonialism, war, genocide, greed, the unsustainable

violence we've done to our planet, and the hard consequences of all these things and more—all have deep roots in this country and the world. We can't change our ways and heal, or even damage control, without tracing the roots of our ailments and taking responsibility for our history.

Now tarot is a limited tool. We'll only get so far through this exercise alone. This is an aid, not a substitute for the depth of thought and research we need to understand complex, systemic social, political, and historical patterns. It's not enough, but I do think tarot has value as a guide for social rumination, given its rich archetypal imagery, and given that we each have unique questions and interests within this epically broad field of inquiry. There's so much ground to cover, no one person can think all the thoughts or read all the writings, and no one wants to. By necessity, we specialize within niches, even with hobbies and personal questions. Reading tarot as a prompt can provide a shortcut to the trail of breadcrumbs with your name on it.

Use this spread to reflect on the big questions about philosophy, our patterns, and our collective nature. Let it be a research guide, pointing to areas worth investigating. For instance, the King of Swords might inspire you to look at military history; the reversed Wheel might point you towards the crucial, chaotic tipping points of a particular time period; and the Six of Cups might point you towards your own childhood, or the role that

nostalgia for an ever-re-imagined “good-old-days” plays in our culture.

This spread’s structure is deceptively simple: look at the most visible, current face of an issue, then go digging for what lies beneath it. I chose a cross for the surface of the issue because I assume most patterns worth looking at here are complex enough to be described better by an intersection than a single archetype.

Take your root cards one at a time, and consider how each story bleeds into the next. What kind of transitions do you see between the cards? Major, polar, thesis-antithesis-style shifts? Gradual, overlapping steps along a steady trajectory? Note any numerical or elemental patterns, such as repeating numbers or suits, or ordered patterns like ace-two-three, nine-eight-seven, or two-four-six. Once you’ve considered each root card from top to bottom, and looked for overall patterns, trace your story back up from the deepest root card to the upper surface. Think about the story in your reading playing out over a linear timeline from past to present. Then cut the linearity and think about how all the cards would interact if present and active at once. Assume that all these elements and stories are still in play today, and meditate on each root archetype’s current manifestations.

You can draw as many root cards as you like, but I find that three usually gives me more than enough to chew on in a single sitting. If you choose to keep digging, check your mindset and focus as you go. Tarot can be addictive,

and it's easy to get caught drawing card after card without seriously thinking about them. Make sure you're continuing from a place of genuine inquiry, and not just fidgeting. Mind your body and take a break when you start to get tired or hungry. Most surface patterns run deep, especially by the time they've become Problems. This spread is designed to prompt deep reflection, not to uncover quick solutions, and it may leave you with more questions than you started with. You can always jot down what you draw today, and keep digging on the same questions in future sessions.

ELEMENTS

The element earth dominates this spread, particularly earth's underground side. Our mission is to uncover an archaeology of story, so our goals take on a chthonic flavor. We dig for solid truth and facts, but in the past, beyond and beneath our own terrain, in the dusty and occluded realm of bones, ghosts, artifacts, texts, and memories.

All four elements have something to say within this spread. History is shaped always by the full range of human experience, and thus by all four classical elements: passion/spirit, emotion/subconscious, thought/reason, and body/matter. That said, if I had to choose a secondary element to guide this spread, it would be water. What subtle feelings, and subconscious tugs have shaped and permeated the clay we muck through? What role have emotional drives, desires, and mythologies played in

fossilizing, crystallizing, eroding, moving, and obfuscating the narratives we carry from one time to another about events we can no longer access directly?

These elemental resonances hold whether examining personal memories, or broader, collective histories.

VARIATIONS

- **Surface Cross Variations:** I read the horizontal cards in crosses as upright, but as always, you may designate a direction to indicate reversals. You may also simplify the center cross to a single card. That might be easier for beginning readers, or for questions about broad archetypal patterns adequately represented by a single card.

Draw your surface card(s) at random to gain fresh insights on the issue's current manifestations. Choose your surface card(s) consciously before shuffling and drawing your root cards to set an intended focus for your reading and represent your prior thoughts on the issue you plan to examine.

- **Something Old Something New:** Try drawing this spread with two decks if you have them, one contemporary, and one classic, like the Rider-Waite Smith, or better, a Marseilles, Visconti-Sforza, or other historical reproduction deck. Go for the oldest imagery you have in your deck collection. Tarot has evolved quite a bit over time. First, draw the spread with your

contemporary tarot deck, then pick out those same cards, or their closest counterparts, from your antiquated deck and lay them out in the same arrangement. As you interpret your reading, compare the imagery from the two decks. Which titles have changed and which remain the same? How has the artwork evolved over time? How are old archetypes expressed in current artwork? How have the hierarchies between the cards shifted? Are there current cards that don't have a historical counterpart at all? Trace the roots of the tarot archetypes themselves in Western history and culture. How do the stories of those shifting archetypes color and inform the story told in your reading?

- **Creativity:** Generate history, complexity, and backstory for the characters and worlds of your creative projects. The root cards can stand for motivations, aspects of identity, life events, phases in a character's growth, ancestors in a character's family tree, monarchs in a dynasty, historical events on a world's timeline, and more.

The obvious application here is fiction and fantasy writing, but this exercise can apply to the visual and performing arts and crafts as well. It can be particularly helpful in fine art and illustration to imagine histories, narratives, and complex identities for your subjects and figures. Even if only a fraction of what you imagine makes it into the final image, this process can breathe life into your compositions, inform the symbolism of background details, and lend your subjects a sense of inner mystery that hooks the viewer. The animist painter might go a step

further, including the same level of character building for landscapes, architecture, and animal, vegetable, and mineral subjects as for human figures.

- **Career:** When we think about career, we tend to fixate in a forward direction, but it can be helpful, especially during turning points, to review where we've already been and what we've already accomplished. Let Cards One and Two represent where you're at now and the career questions at the front of your mind. Draw root cards for key moments in your past, which may contain relevant lessons with hindsight.

If young in your current career, root cards may reference lessons and events from school or other areas of life, rather than the workplace. Consider the story your root path tells from the bottom back up, and the transitions between each card. These may tell you something about your trajectory. Optional: draw a final card above your surface cross, representing something to move towards or look into for the near future.

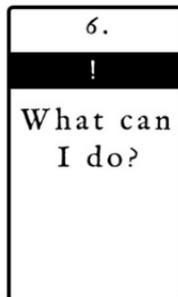
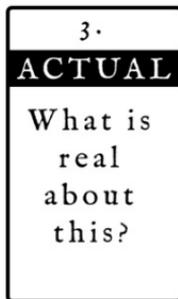
- **Relationships:** Gain insight on the history of a particular relationship, reading the root cards as events, phases, and shifting dynamics between you over time. Gain insight on your relationship history within a certain area of life, like work, family, love, or even housing. (Some of us have very interesting histories with former roommates!) In this case, the root cards should represent events, people, and dynamics from multiple past relationships.

Note how each card interacts with the next in sequence. The cards might fall in order of psychological weight, or relevance to your current situation, rather than chronological order. For instance, you might draw the following: Card Three marks a breakup from ten years ago, with a partner who reminds you of a current love interest; Card Four marks someone you dated for two months last year, but left as soon as they initiated a pattern similar to the one that broke up your relationship from Card Three; Card Five marks your high school sweetheart, to whom you've subconsciously compared every love interest since. The cards may skip across times, personalities, genders, and depths of involvement, but each card has something interesting to say to the next.

Optional: draw a final card above your surface cross, representing something to move towards or look into for the near future. This could be a set of qualities to look for in a new friend, partner, boss, or roommate, a positive dynamic to aim for in your current or next relationship, or a recommended boundary to set to improve your relationship health.

WTF Tarot Spread

for when shit is all fucked up



1. x 2. **What The:** The face of my challenge. The crux of what hounds me.
3. **Actual:** What is real about this?
4. **Fuck:** What is wrong about this?
5. **?:** Where do I need more information?
6. **!:** What can I do?

NOTES

Lastly, a spread for when you can't even. That WTF feeling rears its ugly mug in the crush of overwhelming circumstances, so I designed this spread for processing when it's all a bit much to process.

As I've said before, it's best not to attempt reading tarot when in the direct grip of strong, panicky, or desperate emotions. If circumstances have you riled up past the point where you can think clearly, practice some calming and grounding techniques before sitting down to shuffle and draw. I've listed a few on the [Emotional Arrow Spread](#) page if you need ideas.

Read Cards One and Two together as a cross pattern, representing the most visible or central energies of your challenging situation. I chose a cross of two cards for this position rather than one, because those challenges that inspire overwhelm tend to comprise intersecting patterns and energies. I'd usually want more information in this

position than a single card carries. I've included other notes and options for this central cross under the variations section.

Cards Three and Four ask what is real about this situation? and what is wrong about this situation? When confronting great challenges, especially of the nuanced persuasion, we often suffer confusion in tracing exactly what is going on. We may experience self-doubt or face gas-lighting from those who want to keep us in confusion and out of action. Conversely, we may overreact from stress and strong emotions. These two cards check areas of doubt, confirming and validating patterns that warrant attention and care. There are often many real and salient sides to our challenges. With Card Three, we ask to look at one of these facets, perhaps one that most needs our focus and vigilance at the moment. With Card Four, we ask to look at another facet, one that is particularly unnecessary or unjust, and most needs changing. Don't be afraid to see troubling cards in these positions. This spread is built, after all, for troubling circumstances. Remember that real and wrong do not necessarily mean permanent or insurmountable.

Again, tarot is a limited tool, and it won't give us all the answers in gritty, gory detail to complex situations and problems. There will be gaps in our inquiries that other resources, like research, specialized counsel, or community support may have to fill, and a breadth of truths to our situations that cannot possibly be uncovered in one sitting of anything.

Still, tarot and the intuitive streams it unlocks have their place. In my own experience, validation is one of the cards' greatest gifts. There is something at once uncanny and relieving in seeing my patterns, thoughts, and concerns reflected in graphic precision through the cards' symbols. While I don't always get what I expect or prefer to see, when I approach tarot with serious questions, a solid attention span, and a grounding in good, common sense, it does help me speak to my intuition. I find truth there far more often than further confusion. This truth comes through tough-love and nonsense-checking as often as it comes through validation. There's a place for both, but given the circumstances that necessitate this spread, we need and deserve a space to ask for support in the form of validation.

Card Five shows an area where we need more information. This may point to a topic for further research, or a need to get someone else's side of the story. There are many subtle facets to all things, and many things we cannot see from any one vantage point. Areas where we're likely to overreact or to go off half-cocked can show up here. Put a pause button on whatever patterns Card Five references. They reveal questions you need to ask for better understanding of the big picture, situations to view from a distance, and scenarios to refrain from enacting until you know more.

Card Six asks what can I do? This card may show an area where it is appropriate and constructive to take action, or

it may show strategies you can use and energies you can channel to start making positive changes. Naturally, the exact message here is up to your interpretation. Look to the kind of card that comes up for clues:

Majors: Big-picture archetypes, philosophies, mysteries, and large arenas.

Majors may indicate areas of work to undertake, energies to draw on as you move forward, or concepts to contemplate in order to act better.

Minor Pips: Situations and events.

The numbered minor cards may indicate specific actions to take, or situations to get involved in or help resolve.

Minor Courts: Characters, people, personalities, and star signs.

Minor court cards may indicate character traits and virtues you can draw on for positive action, or types of work to undertake.

Reversals: Areas to avoid, tensions or imbalances to resolve, wrongs to help right.

Whatever's up for doing, have heart, and follow through with exclamatory verve.

ELEMENTS

We're back where we started with fire and air as our foremost elements. In this case, the world is on fire, sparking our fears, passions, and tempers. Calm down with the balancing influences of earth (grounding) and water (soothing, cooling, and emotional regulation) to temper those flames before beginning the air-based work of this spread. Attempting analysis under these conditions without inner cooling and tempering can lead to churning angst and troubled confusion—fanning the flames and spreading them farther than desired. Once in the zone to tarot, the goal is to bring fresh, cool air to chaotic, overwhelming situations through logic, rational analysis, strategy, and insight. Deep breaths.

VARIATIONS

- **“What The” Cross Variations:** When I read these two cards together, I consider the cross as a whole and ask myself what story they tell when the two cards' symbols intersect and meld. However, you could parse the two cards out, using the top, crossing card to represent the most visible aspects of the problem (the face of my challenge), and the base card to represent central or hidden aspects of the problem (the crux of what hounds me).

I read the horizontal cards in crosses as upright, but as always, you may designate a direction to indicate reversals. You may also simplify the center cross to a

single card. That might be easier for beginning readers, or for questions about broad archetypal patterns adequately represented by a single card.

Draw Cards One and Two at random to gain fresh insights on your challenge's visible manifestations. Choose these cards consciously before shuffling and drawing the rest to set an intended focus and represent your prior thoughts on the issue you plan to examine.

- This spread does not change significantly applied to different areas of life. In fact, it's pretty good at bridging multiple areas of life and searching out broad patterns when several things feel shaky all at once. I could see it being quite useful for navigating imploding creative projects, damage control, and the process of scrapping and starting over.

Media List

Influences, Inspirations & Recommendations

I don't consider myself an activist or a scholar, but I like to listen to people who are. While these tarot spreads are my own work, and my opinions are my own, many of the notions they reference did not originate in my own mind.

It would be impossible to give you a complete bibliography. For one thing, I haven't kept track of the many influences that have helped shape my thinking over the years—they must include thousands of articles, stories, and beautiful people speaking truth in person and on social media. They all deserve credit I don't have the memory to provide, but my love and gratitude go out to them. For another thing, I've only seen and read so much myself, and there's so much more quality thought and information out there on these topics than I have on my radar.

Instead, I'll leave you with a list of some of the artists, scholars, thinkers, and card-slingers who've shaped my thoughts on social justice and/or tarot and metaphysics, and whose works I recommend to anyone who has enjoyed this collection of spreads. I've also included some works that might fall outside immediate social justice topics, but which prompt empathy, compassion, and thought. This list is not comprehensive in the slightest, but there's some good stuff on here. If you haven't yet,

check these guys out, and check out who they're reading and listening to. Many of them list bibliographies, recommendations, and resource lists in their books, blogs, podcasts, and other works.

Please note: I am not affiliated with any of these folks, and most of them don't know I exist. My work and opinions may not align with everyone's values on this list, and I do not speak for any of these people. Nor do all of their views reflect my own. It's very likely that some of them do not approve of witchy/woo-woo/tarot/divination spectrum activities. If your name or work is on this list and you'd like me to take it down, **drop me a line** and I will, no hassle.

I may add to this list over time. One of the benefits of releasing this book as a webpage is being able to make updates, revisions, and corrections as needed. If you have recommendations for additions to this resource list, **let me know**. I'll check them out and add anything that's a good fit.

Activists, Scholars, Historians, & Political Theorists

Erica Chenoweth

Silvia Federici (Must Read: **Caliban and the Witch**)

Bell Hooks (Must Read: **All About Love: New Visions**)

Henry Louis Gates Jr.

Masha Gessen

Malcolm Gladwell

Kimberlé Crenshaw (Must Watch: The Urgency of Intersectionality)
Sarah Kendzior
Mia McKenzie - Black Girl Dangerous
Janet Mock
Stella Young (Must Watch: I Am Not Your Inspiration)
Howard Zinn (Must Read: A People's History of the United States)

Artists & Authors

Isabel Allende
Aziz Ansari's Master of None
Hurray For the Riff Raff
Octavia Butler
Paulo Coehlo
Margaret Cho
Kimya Dawson
Anna Deveare-Smith
Ava DuVernay (Must Watch: 13th documentary)
Elisa Goodkind & Lily Mandelbaum (Must Watch: Style Like U What's Underneath project)
Woody Guthrie
Andrea Hairston
JR
Barbara Kingsolver
Tony Kushner
Dylon Marron
Robert Montgomery
Terry Pratchett
Buffy Saint-Marie

Yinka Shonibare
Rebecca Sugar's Steven Universe
Esme Weijun Wang
iO Tillet Wright

Blogs & Websites

Autostraddle
Bitch Media
Everyday Feminism
The Mighty

Podcasts

Fat Feminist Witch
Invisibilia
Radiolab
Radiolab Presents More Perfect
Revisionist History

Take Action

ACLU
5 Calls
NRDC
Planned Parenthood
The Sixty Five
Southern Poverty Law Center
WhiteAccomplices.org

Tarotists, Occultists & Witches

Asali Earthwork - QTPOC Tarot Blog

Mary K. Greer

Beth Maiden - Little Red Tarot

Rachel Pollack

Clementine Morrigan (Must Read: Clementine's article on emotional labor for Guts Magazine)

Layla Saad - Wild Mystic Woman

Siobhan Rene - Siobhan's Mirror

Slow Holler Artist Collective

Benebell Wen

W.I.T.C.H. PDX & Boston

Witchy Queers Directory