

Instructions for
ALEISTER CROWLEY'S
THOTH
TAROT DECK



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The symbolism, traditional postures, attribution of the Cards, and the planetary, zodiacal, and elemental colours have been given to me by an expert who has studied the Tarot for forty years, and to whom my thanks are due for his courteous co-operation.

Lady Frieda Harris

July 1942

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“The Tarot could be described as God’s Picture Book, or it could be likened to a celestial game of chess, the Trumps being the pieces to be moved according to the law of their own order over a checkered board of the four elements.”

Lady Frieda Harris

ALEISTER CROWLEY'S THOTH TAROT DECK

The Thoth Tarot deck was designed by Aleister Crowley and painted by Lady Frieda Harris. Their original intent was to correct and update the classic, medieval tarot, giving it a more esoteric aspect. The project, however, grew into a restructuring of the traditional pictorial symbolism of the ancient wisdom and was extended for five years between 1938 and 1943.

Aleister Crowley is often described as the most advanced and influential occultist of the twentieth century. His life's work was an attempt to synthesize the diverse teachings of the world's religions by extracting the essential kernel of truth shared by them and developing a system of attaining God-realization, which he called "Scientific Illuminism."

Crowley's ideas on tarot incorporated the latest discoveries in science, mathematics, philosophy, and anthropology. His devotion to tarot began with his initiation into the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, an English Rosicrucian society founded in 1888 that offered a systematic approach to the Western mystery tradition. The tarot played a prominent part in the Order's course of ritual, meditation, and study. Other members' published decks were based on the symbolism rooted in the Tarot of the Golden Dawn. Members were sworn to secrecy regarding the Order's deck, which remained unpublished until 1978, when the deck, painted by Dr. Robert Wang under the guidance of Dr. Israel Regardie, was published by U.S. Games Systems, Inc.

Crowley was born October 12, 1875, and he joined the Golden Dawn in 1898, rising rapidly through the grades of the Order. In April, 1904, in Cairo, Egypt, he received voice transmissions from the Hierarchical Forces, which heralded the Age of Aquarius. Transcribed as *The Book of the Law*, the communication formed the cornerstone of Crowley's teaching. The book also profoundly influenced the imagery of

Crowley's deck, particularly the kabbalistic attributions of the Major Arcana. To each of the twenty-two Major Trumps of the tarot is assigned, by tradition, a Hebrew letter and a path on the Tree of Life, as well as an astrological sign, element, or planet. *The Book of the Law* announced changes in some of the traditional correspondences. These may be studied in more detail in Crowley's *Book of Thoth*.

Aleister Crowley voluminous body of writing, most of which is available in published form, is now appreciated for its depth, scope, and clarity. His work, particularly his tarot deck, was a testament to his genius.

Lady Frieda Harris (*née* Bloxam) was born in 1877 and died in 1962. She was married to Sir Percy Harris, a distinguished member of the British Parliament. Information on her life is scant, but it is clear that she had more to do with the actual design of the Thoth Tarot than has been commonly assumed. She worked from Crowley's rough sketches and verbal descriptions, reading between the lines of the older decks and often repainting the same card multiple times. She considered herself driven by her Holy Guardian Angel to produce the finest possible deck. Crowley attributed his own deep involvement with the creation of a new deck to her tenacity and artistic genius. Because of her, each card is realized as an individual masterpiece.

The deck remained unpublished in their lifetimes. Major Grady L. McMurtry of Crowley's order, *Ordo Templi Orientis*, finally arranged for its photography and publication in 1969.

In order to maintain the integrity of the deck, a border, which had been omitted in the original printing, has been copied from the paintings and is included in this new edition.

Mr. William Breeze helped locate the two essays written by Lady Harris for the 1944 London gallery showings of the paintings. One is based on Crowley's writings. The second was her own personal interpretation of the cards.

THE TAROT AND ITS APPLICATIONS

The tarot is a series of seventy-eight pictorial images based on the teachings of the *kabbalah*, a meditative path to the higher planes of consciousness. The Tree of Life, which forms the outline of the *kabbalah*, summarizes all knowledge in its ten spheres and twenty-two interconnected paths of consciousness. In using the tarot for divination, the reader develops an essential familiarity with the symbols as well as an affinity with the aspects of consciousness that the cards represent. One's psychic perceptions are stimulated and will develop through patient effort, coupled with deeper meditative work and study.

Before beginning any divination, the reader traditionally makes an invocation to the higher forces for greater understanding and higher consciousness through the cards. The Golden Dawn invocation used by Crowley is as follows.

I invoke Thee, IAO, that thou wilt send HRU, the great Angel that is set over the operations of this secret Wisdom, to lay his hand invisibly on these consecrated cards of art, that thereby we may obtain true knowledge of hidden things to the glory of thine ineffable Name. Amen.

Alternatively, one may envision a radiant white light purifying and exalting consciousness.

The 15-card spread presented in this booklet offers a simpler layout than the more popular Celtic Cross spread. The Golden Dawn method of reading does not use reversed meaning, but does consider the relationships and influences between the cards. Since card meanings may be affected by neighboring cards, those resultant meanings are identified here as "influenced."

After the invocation, shuffle the cards thoroughly. Then lay out fifteen cards in the sequence shown in the diagram on the following page.



CARD 1 The querent and the nature of the problem and primary influences. A court card (knight, queen, prince, princess) in this position sometimes refers to a dominant individual or influence in the querent's situation.

CARDS 2 and 3 in conjunction with CARD 1, are the key cards describing the nature of the situation and the personality of the querent.

CARDS 13, 9 and 5, and 4, 8 and 12 in the upper left and right indicate two potentials for the future. They may complement each other, in which case, the cards on the upper left are a development of the cards on the upper right. If they are in conflict, the cards on the upper right may be considered the direction the querent's life will naturally flow unless action is taken to change this course. The cards on the upper left would then be possibilities of alternative action.

CARDS 6, 10 and 14 assist the querent in making whatever decision may be necessary. They indicate the psychological basis and implications of the issue.

CARDS 7, 11 and 15 show forces operating beyond the querent's control—destiny or karma—to which the querent can adapt. In this sense they constitute advice as well.

Princes and queens most often indicate actual men and women connected with the matter. Knights may mean the coming or going of a matter, or arrival or departure, according to the direction in which they face. Princesses may show

ideas, thoughts, or opinions related to the subject. The court cards in general represent psychological states.

After laying out the cards, the first thing to look for is a grouping or majority of cards. Wands indicate great energy; cups, love and emotions; swords relate to intellectual matters; and disks, business affairs. A majority of Trumps indicates higher forces at work. Court cards indicate social events, aces, new beginnings, great energy, and strength.

A card's meaning is strengthened by neighboring cards of the same suit. Cards of opposite nature are weaker. Swords are adverse to disks. Wands oppose cups. Swords are friendly to cups and wands. Wands complement swords and disks. A card falling between two contrary cards is affected by neither.

MAJOR ARCANA CARD MEANINGS

O THE FOOL. In spiritual matters, represents ideas and thoughts, which endeavor to transcend earth. In material matters, reveals folly, eccentricity, even mania. It represents a sudden, unexpected impulse.

I THE MAGUS. Skill. Wisdom. Adroitness. Elasticity. Craft. Cunning. Deceit. Theft. Sometimes esoteric wisdom or power. Messages. Business transactions. Learning or intelligence interfering with the matter in hand.

II THE PRIESTESS. Pure, exalted and gracious influence enters the matter, bringing change, alternation, increase and decrease, fluctuation. Exuberance should be tempered and careful balance maintained.

III THE EMPRESS. Love. Beauty. Happiness. Pleasure. Success. Fruitfulness. Good fortune. Graciousness. Elegance. Gentleness. Influenced: Dissipation. Promiscuity. Idleness. Sensuality.

IV THE EMPEROR. War. Conquest. Victory. Strife. Power. Stability. Originality. Government. Energy. Ambition.

Influenced: Arrogance. Megalomania. Rashness.

V THE HIEROPHANT. Divine wisdom. Inspiration. Stubborn strength. Toil. Endurance. Persistence. Teaching. Help from superiors. Patience. Organization. Peace. Goodness of heart.

VI THE LOVERS. Inspiration. Intuition. Intelligence. Innocence. Attraction. Beauty. Love. Influenced: Self-contradiction. Instability. Indecision. Superficiality. Infatuation.

VII THE CHARIOT. Triumph. Victory. Hope. Obedience. Faithfulness. Health. Success, though sometimes not enduring. Influenced: Abrupt departure from traditional ideas.

VIII ADJUSTMENT. Justice. Balance. Adjustment. Suspension of action pending decision. May refer to lawsuits, trials, marriages, contracts, etc.

IX THE HERMIT. Illumination from within. Divine inspiration. Wisdom. Circumspection. Retirement.

X FORTUNE. Change of fortune, generally good. Destiny.

XI LUST. Courage. Strength. Energy. Use of magical power. Control of the life force. Great love affair.

XII THE HANGED MAN. Redemption through sacrifice. New perspectives. Punishment. Loss. Defeat. Failure. Suffering.

XIII DEATH. Transformation. Change, voluntary or involuntary, perhaps sudden and unexpected. Illusory death. Release through destruction.

XIV ART. Combination of forces. Realization. Action based on accurate calculation. Economy. Management. Success after elaborate maneuvers. Escape.

XV THE DEVIL. Blind impulse. Irresistibly strong. Unscrupulous. Ambition. Temptation. Obsession. Secret plan. Hard work. Endurance. Discontent. Materialism. Fate.

XVI THE TOWER. Quarrel. Combat. Danger. Ruin. Destruction of plans. Ambition. Courage. Sudden death. Escape from prison and all it implies.

XVII THE STAR. Hope. Unexpected help. Clarity of vision. Spiritual insight. Influenced: Dreaminess. Disappointment.

XVIII THE MOON. Illusion. Deception. Bewilderment. Falsehood. Voluntary change. Influenced: Hysteria. Madness.
XIX THE SUN. Glory. Gain. Riches. Triumph. Pleasure. Truth. Shamelessness. Manifestation. Recovery. Arrogance. Vanity.
XX THE AEON. Closure. Resolution. Definitive action.
XXI THE UNIVERSE. Essential questions. Synthesis. Delay. Completion. Opposition. Inertia. Perseverance. Patience. Crystallized thinking.

MINOR ARCANA CARD MEANINGS

~ WANDS ~

KNIGHT OF WANDS. The fiery part of fire. A man of activity, generosity, pride and swiftness. Cruelty, bigotry, petulance.

QUEEN OF WANDS. The watery part of fire. A woman of adaptability, persistent energy, calm authority, powers of attraction, generous but intolerant. Obstinacy, revenge, dominance.

PRINCE OF WANDS. The airy part of fire. A young man, swift and strong, impulsive, violent, just, noble and generous with a sense of humor. Proud, intolerant, cruel, cowardly, and prejudiced.

PRINCESS OF WANDS. The earthy part of fire. An energetic young woman, individualistic, brilliant and daring, expressive in love or anger, enthusiastic. Superficial, theatrical, shallow, cruel, unreliable, faithless.

ACE OF WANDS: The Root of the Powers of Fire. Energy. Strength. Natural Force. Sexual vigor.

TWO OF WANDS: Dominion. Fire in its highest form. Force of energy. Harmony of power and justice. Influence. Boldness. Courage. Fierceness. Restlessness. Turbulence. Obstinacy.

THREE OF WANDS: Virtue. Established strength. Success after struggle. Pride and arrogance. Realization of hope. Conceit.

FOUR OF WANDS: Completion. Perfection. Settlement. Rest. Subtlety. Cleverness. Knowledge brings conclusions. Unreliable outcomes from overzealous action.

Aries and Saturn. The conception suggest the binding conditions of earthly life.

72 EIGHT OF DISKS = Mercury³ in Virgo. *Hod*. The geomantic figure Populus forms the position of the disks which appear as flowers on a great tree protected by the leaves. The possession of the fruits of the earth brings its own responsibility.

73 NINE OF DISKS = Gain. Venus in Virgo. *Yesod*. Six disks stamped with the pictures of the deities of the planets form two equilateral triangles and the remaining three are interlaced in the middle. These with their beams of light show a condition in which chance and management give an increasing good fortune.

74 TEN OF DISKS = Wealth. Mercury in Virgo. *Malkuh*. The disks have now definitely become coins and are arranged on the Tree of Life. They are stamped with different renderings of the signs of Mercury. This mercurial signature is intended to show that though they appear solid, they are, in reality, fugitive.

75 KNIGHT OF DISKS. The knight is being drawn into the soil. He represents the generative property of earth.

76 QUEEN OF DISKS. Every symbol in this picture suggests the fertility and warmth of earth.

77 PRINCE OF DISKS. The prince in a chariot, drives an impetuous bull, he is a symbol of the fruits and seeds of earth.

78 PRINCESS OF DISKS. Here we have an attempt to translate into a picture the spiritual quality of earth, eternally pregnant and containing in its fertility the unwritten cypher of cosmic lore.

3. Astrological symbolism on Eight of Disks actually reads, Sun in Virgo. Card title is "Prudence."