

## **Strength**

*“Fortitude.” 8*

A young woman in a white gown leans over a lion; one hand on top of his mouth, the other underneath.

**Associations:** Courage, believing in yourself, doing the ‘right’ thing (even if you don’t want to), integrating your ‘negative’ side into something useful, being at one with your wild side, compassion, kindness, the strength to be kind to yourself.

**Advice:** Now is the time to use courage and gentleness to win the day.

**Warning:** Are you self-sabotaging? (Low self-esteem, fears restricting your choices, addictions, etc.)

**Question:** What is strength?

## **Symbolism:**

- Perhaps most importantly, a **woman** is shown ‘taming’ a male **lion**. She is not holding a weapon and shows no sign of fear. Often the lion represents the animal, wild, desire-driven side of ourselves. The woman is not seeking to kill her wild side, nor to rationalise and understand it. She accepts herself, her strengths, her faults, her wildness, and her desires. Throughout the Tarot we see the message of balance and integration as the way forward. Perhaps the lion can be seen as our ‘weaknesses’; those parts of ourselves (addictions, fears, desires) that interfere with how we would like our life to be lived. The woman’s acceptance and nurturing of her weaknesses is an important life message.

*You can only improve your strengths so much, if at all... Find your weaknesses and work on them. Be grateful for your strengths, but work on your weaknesses.*

(Harry Beckwith)

- Again, we see the **lemniscate**, and this is a person working with strengths and flaws on every level of her being: physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual. This is a journey that we keep travelling until we die; we are never perfectly integrated. Even the strongest of us remains a flawed human being.
- The background is a bright, **sunny** day, and the woman wears garlands of **red roses** (a symbol of manifestation). This is not only a deep spiritual journey, but a journey that will influence day-to-day living, work, family, etc. It will bring practical benefits.
- Notice how ‘in the moment’ the card is; the woman seems completely absorbed in her communication with the lion, trusting herself and her Gods. We are at our strongest when we act with such **focus** and integrity.
- Look at other cards: there is a **sexual** nature to this card, if backed up by the cards around it (e.g. the Ace or Knight of Wands, or The Tower).

#### **In a reading:**

- This is a card of self-esteem, courage to face what you would rather not, and inner strength.
- ‘Passive’ virtues – kindness, empathy, compassion and love – will build a strength that will win the day.

**The negative side to this card:** You will feel weak, or maybe your emotions and passions will be out of balance. Be gentle with yourself; see it as a mistake to learn from.

*‘Be kind to yourself’ is a consistent message from the cards to me, and to so many of my clients. It is all too easy to focus on work, doing the right thing, being busy, meeting the many obligations so many of us have. This is a card of passive strength; finding the time to be kind to yourself – sometimes stopping is the most powerful choice you can make. In our active, 24/7 society, ‘active’ is seen as a virtue and ‘passive’ as a weakness. Tarot reminds us that they are both needed in equal measure.*

#### **The Hermit**

*“Individuation.”*      9

A man stands on top of an icy mountain, holding a light aloft.

**Associations:** Withdrawal from daily life, searching for answers, self-reliance, meditation, teachers and teaching, self-examination, patience, self-reflection, solitude.

**Advice:** Find some quiet time for contemplation.

**Warning:** Are you feeling isolated?

**Question:** If no one is with you, do you know who you are?

**Symbolism:**

- The **hermit** can represent a teacher, in the form of a book, a person, a path, or a deeper connection with yourself. This is someone who has walked a **tough path** to get where he is. Experienced life, overcome adversity, picked himself up when he grew tired and kept going. If you are seeking a teacher to help guide you, find someone with experience rather than certificates. Find the ‘scarred shaman’; someone who has walked a while on a similar path and can understand your situation.
- The hermit stands **alone**. We live in an extrovert-dominated world where fitting in, being a part of something, defines who we are. Our society is caught in ‘participation mystique’: so many long to fit in, to be a part, to identify with something outside of themselves, that it can be hard to be separate and to have an understanding of who we are.

*[Participation mystique] consists in the fact that the subject cannot clearly distinguish himself from the object [or person, group, idea, job].*

(Carl Jung)

- The hermit is journeying towards **individuation**; ‘to become wholly oneself’ when alone is to be complete. To have reached any degree of self-realisation is to become detached from others, separate from the group. The hermit will rejoin society, but as an individual.

- As the **number 9**, the last single-digit number, The Hermit can be seen as the birth of the individual (often something we will experience many times in our life).
- He has his **staff** (his intuition and spirit) to support him, and a **lantern** to shine light on the path, to guide him and others.
- Note the **six-pointed star**; this is the unity of the masculine (upright triangle) and feminine (downward triangle), yin and yang, active and passive, which he has found within himself. He has found his ‘soulmate’ within himself. He is complete.

*I have had a handful of ‘twin flame’ (the idea that another person completes you) requests over the years, and they do make me feel uncomfortable. I do not believe anyone is completed by another soul or individual. To feel complete within ourselves, to be able to meet our own needs (as adults), allows us to create loving and independent relationships. To feel that someone ‘completes’ us is to create a relationship based on need; a co-dependent relationship. I am an old romantic at heart – despite a complicated marriage and finding myself single again, I still believe in the ideal of romantic love. I just don’t think we ever find our missing parts anywhere but within us.*

- I often imagine the hermit has climbed the **mountain** to be able to look at his life with clarity and perspective, judge how he is doing, and decide where to go next. You can gain this perspective from your own wisdom, from friends and guides, from Tarot, and from taking a break from your daily routine. (Especially if paired with the 8 of Cups.)

### **In a reading:**

- A call for a time of introversion or solitude; even if only for a short time. (Unplug your phone, switch off social media, turn off the television and radio...)
- A guide, someone who will help you along life’s journey; or serving as a guide for others yourself.
- Fear of loneliness, or a reminder that it is time to seek the company of others.
- A need for a different perspective, to look at life’s problems from a broader view.

**The negative side to this card:** The Hermit can reflect a Peter Pan complex – if so, it’s time to grow up and face your responsibilities.

*Over the years, like many Tarot readers, I have done a lot of relationship readings. The Hermit and The High Priestess are complicated cards in a relationship reading because they are both to do with feelings of 'aloneness'. The High Priestess often symbolises feeling alone; emotional isolation within a relationship. The Hermit is more likely to reflect needing space within the relationship as a good thing; the peace of solitude that allows you to better enjoy the intimacy of a relationship. It can also indicate a soulful base to the relationship. Depending on your world view, it can indicate past-life connections, or a relationship where both partners need to grow in some way to make it work.*

*I always pay attention to The Hermit in relationship readings – it is not a card that fits with ease in a relationship, so his message needs to be understood to allow the relationship to be at ease.*

## **Wheel of Fortune**

*"Centre." 10*

Perhaps the strangest of all the Major Arcana. A wheel with alchemical symbols and letters inscribed on it. A sphinx sits on top of the wheel, whilst an Anubis rests at the bottom.

**Associations:** Change, seasons, patterns in life, random events and synchronicity, fate, luck, often a change for the better (look to other cards).

**Advice:** Find the still centre within you.

**Warning:** Life is change – adapt and survive!

**Question:** What is fate?

**Symbolism:** (And there is so much symbolism!)

- The four **book-reading figures** in the corners (Matthew, Mark, Luke and John) link this card to The World (21), Christian mythology, the four quarters of the year, and the four elements.

- The **sphinx** with the **sword** reminds us that neither Oedipus, nor Bilbo Baggins, nor you, can escape destiny by using wit. Sometimes we have to work with the cards we have been dealt; do the best we can with what fate has given us. (Oedipus won his mother's hand in marriage by answering the Sphinx's riddle.)
- The **Anubis** and **snake** simply represent the opposing energetic principles that are fundamental to life and portrayed throughout the Tarot. Passive/active, growth/decay, masculine/feminine, hope/fear. Life is a balance, and even fear is needed at times in our life.
- The wheel is split into **three separate wheels**:
  1. The outer wheel has the words 'tora' (Tarot) and a word representing 'God' (Jehovah).
  2. The middle wheel has symbols representing the four elements of the Minor Arcana, or the four directions of the compass.
  3. The inner wheel is divided into eighths, representing the Pagan wheel of the year. Many European Pagans divide the year according to the eight festivals, celebrated as the wheel of the year turns. They are there to help us connect with the rhythm and seasons of the earth.
- Imagine the **wheel** representing your psychology:
  1. The outer rim moves fast and is constantly changing. This is exciting, but if you take these experiences too deeply to heart, they can be overwhelming (a true extrovert learns here).
  2. The middle circle has movement and variety, but fewer extremes and theoretically a slower pace. This is the middle path, of most use to most people, most of the time.
  3. The inner wheel is the axle; a still centre. A true introvert learns here.
  4. Neither introvert nor extrovert is 'better'; they are simply different. As we mature, we should be able to integrate both functions, although most people will still favour one or the other.

**In a reading:**

- ‘This too shall pass’ – as surely as day follows night, seasons change. Good times and bad, all things change.
- Sometimes things that seem random are part of a larger pattern we simply don’t understand. If life is moving too fast, find your still, inner centre.
- Think of the wheel as a map of your psychology. Can you step from the fast-moving outer wheel to the stillness of the centre? Can you maintain the equilibrium of the even-paced middle wheel?
- Do you have an understanding and acceptance of fate?
- At heart, the Wheel of Fortune means change. I presume a change for the better, unless subsequent cards indicate otherwise.

**The negative side to this card:** It usually means you are avoiding change, and need to find ways to allow that change to happen.

*As I myself have faced complex personal challenges, and as I have used Tarot to counsel people in deep shock and trauma, I have come to really appreciate the value of the Wheel of Fortune. In times of shock, we often have two responses, and can flit randomly between the two. It is easy to throw ourselves to the edge of the wheel. Certainly, when my marriage ended, I did; I overworked and did everything in my power to avoid (for a while) accepting the huge event that had happened in my life. I kept busy, long client hours, talking through things with friends without ever quite listening to them or even connecting with my own emotions.*

*Now I am more at the centre of the wheel. I try to find as much time to myself as possible (the main reason why I am finally editing my book), and avoid social contact even though I know it will lift my mood. I need to find my centre point again, that core ‘me’ whom I lost along the way, before I can be more balanced and cope with life fully again.*

*I love the Wheel of Fortune because the only truth in life is that it changes. The good times and the bad times will soon be gone. So roll with it, and make the best of whatever times you find yourself in.*

## **Justice**

“Karma.” 11

A person sits, robed in red, between two grey pillars. We see links to The High Priestess with the curtain hanging between the pillars. There are scales in one hand, and an upright sword in the other.

**Associations:** Fairness, honesty, doing the ‘right thing’, understanding the full consequences of your actions, responsibility, compassion, balance, karma, being in the moment, connecting to your past and future. Can refer to legal issues.

**Advice:** Act with integrity.

**Warning:** Every thought, word and action is returned to you.

**Question:** Do you believe there are universal rules that offer ‘justice’?

**Symbolism:**

- The first thing that strikes me is that Justice appears to me to be a **woman**. (Not reflecting modern or medieval society; until very recently judges were exclusively male in British society.) I think this is to remind us that justice, to be right, cannot be rigid. It must react to the information available, it must have feeling, it must be flexible. It must reflect typically feminine virtues of empathy, compassion and emotion.
- The **sword** balances out the feminine figure. Justice must also cut through lies and illusions; come to a conclusion that is logical and carefully thought through. Swords have two sides. Justice will find against the guilty – even if it is you!
- The two **pillars** and **cloth** (reminding us of The High Priestess) suggest that justice is about more than fairness between people, or the law of the land. You need to decide for yourself if you believe in a universal ‘law’; if there is some form of balance between the good and the bad in life. If someone knowingly and willingly hurts someone else, is there a price to pay? What do you think about the concepts of fate, karma, and free will? (More on that when we get to The World.)
- The **scales** are an interesting image. Take a moment to consider how scales work. Two opposing bowls are connected and always affect each other. We are in a



constant relationship with the universe. Personally, I believe how we act, think and speak will always influence the future we are creating. Life is in ever-changing equilibrium as we move through it, continually adjusting who we are.

*The more I read Tarot, the more time I spend looking at the cards. The image of scales is repeated in the 6 of Pentacles, and on the wall in the 10 of Pentacles. If you do a reading and see the scales more than once, take note, and find the connection between the cards in your reading. Scales to me are about consequences. If I put a weight on one side, it will go down, and the other side will go up by an equal amount. Justice reminds you of the consequences of your actions.*

### **In a reading:**

- Personally, when Justice crops up it often refers to past patterns (karma), and is a reminder not to get caught up in ingrained behavioural patterns, but to try to act with absolute authenticity and integrity, even when the situation is difficult and someone is really ‘pressing your buttons’. There is a sense that you will get what you deserve, so consider the consequences of the consequences and try to act with as much honour as possible (and that does not mean acting as a doormat).
- Justice can refer to ‘the law of the land’ and legal issues as well, depending on the question and position. If it is an important card in a legal reading, especially in an outcome position, it indicates a ‘fair’ or ‘just’ outcome.
- You will get “what you deserve” there is a concept of consequences with this card- which can be good, or bad, depending on the circumstances!

**The negative side to this card:** The Justice card may be an indication that something in your life is not fair, or that consequences might cause an issue for you. As an example, in a reading for a job interview, if Justice was in a negative position, I would check that my client had been honest in their CV and given a true representation of their skills. The card might also suggest a negative reference, either because the client had difficulties in a past job, or perhaps because the person writing the reference is holding a grudge and writing an unfair reference.

I want to end with a thought on karma. It's too easy to think of karma as something we are born with, something we have no control over. Yet how I live today creates my karma for tomorrow. I do not see karma as a punishment from the divine; rather, it works within the laws of life. If I drink a bottle of wine tonight (tempting as it is), then I will wake up with a 'debt' tomorrow in the form of a hangover. If I exercise each day this week, then my health and well-being are likely to benefit in the future. Karma is something we create, it is not an excuse, and not everything is a direct consequence of our actions. I am very cautious about victim-shaming anyone in a difficult situation, especially when it comes to health, and suggesting that situation is a consequence of some action they have or have not taken.

### **The Hanged Man**

*"Surrender." 12*

A man hangs suspended by one foot from a tree. He seems calm, and has a halo around his head.

**Association:** Surrender, looking at things from a different perspective, not rushing, sacrifice. Things not going as fast, or how, you expected, but they work out anyway. Meditation, positive visualisation, shamanism, and occult practices.

**Advice:** Look at life with no expectations or preconceived ideas.

**Warning:** This cannot be rushed.

**Question:** Do you agree?

*A practical occultist knows that there is no difference between the energy that takes form as thought and that which takes form as a diamond.*

(Paul Foster Case)

### **Symbolism:**

- Well, he's **upside down!** At its simplest level, this means looking at things from a different perspective. This might mean making changes to your routine, asking

different people for advice, or simply being more open-minded. There is a sense that it is better to be yourself and be different than to try to fit in.

- **‘Hanging around’** – there will be a period of waiting. Look at the other cards to see if you should embrace this, or if you could make different decisions to speed things up.

*In January 2019 I worked methodically through the ‘year ahead’ readings for my clients. Two cards dominated everyone’s readings; yet neither made sense: The Hanged Man and the 4 of Cups. What I was seeing was the slowing down of life that was to come due to the Covid-19 pandemic.*

- Hanging on a **World Tree** is symbolic of shamanic travel. Odin hung on the World Tree for nine days and nine nights. Celtic shamans visualised a pole representing the World Tree, which they used as a map to take them to different worlds. Both meditation and shamanism involve stilling the ‘monkey mind’ and taking your consciousness to another level: your unconscious, the collective unconscious, or elsewhere (depending upon your belief system).
- At times words don’t make sense to me; they feel clunky and catch my attention. Researching the roots of words can lead to so many possibilities, but I really liked these:

Hanged: suspended + man: (Sanskrit root) to think = suspend thinking (through meditation or journeying).

The Hanged Man suggests we suspend everything we thought we knew about the world and look again with no expectations at all.

- The man is upside down, which technically ensures that he looks at the world from a different perspective (always worth a try!). But also, **his heart is now above his head**, and the **halo** around his head would suggest that his crown chakra is fully open. It’s pausing doing, pausing thinking, connecting with the heart chakra and receiving inspiration through the crown; this could also be described as working with the right brain if that is a better explanation for you. How could this work? Here is a practical example. You’ve lost your car keys. Working from a ‘doing, left-brain

perspective', you look in your pockets, your bag, and the car. You don't find them, and simply keep looking in as many logical places as you can think of. Still no keys. So, you slip into Hanged Man perspective. As you take a bath, sipping a nice cup of tea, your mind calms down; your body stills. Now your right brain takes over and, oddly, you remember hearing a 'clunk' as you walked past the boot rack by the front door. After your bath you go and check, and find your keys in a wellington boot. If you have ever had a 'eureka' moment whilst drifting in and out of a dreamy, relaxed state, that to me is an everyday example of a Hanged Man state.

**In a reading:** You need to decide what level the card is addressing:

- Mundane: things will take a little longer.
- Practical: you need to try a different approach; fresh ideas.
- Spiritual: suspend your thinking and explore your unconscious (or beyond) for inspiration.

**The negative side to this card:** Do you need to slow down; to find a different way? This could also suggest a slowing down that is imposed upon you, not of your choice, as in my clients' readings before the Covid pandemic.

*As the years have passed my connection to Odin has deepened, and so has my connection to this card. Shamanism is about realising that real change happens in the non-physical world; that shamanic journeying, energy work, mindset, and affirmations can totally change your life. What we hold in our mind and our unconscious is the blueprint for how we perceive the world around us. Change that blueprint and the world appears to change around us.*

*Often people are uncomfortable with the concept of sacrifice in this card, but the sacrifice is almost always by choice; a conscious decision to sacrifice something for the benefit it will bring. You might sacrifice your weekly night down the pub to learn a new skill at evening classes, and that skill might take you to a new career. The sacrifice was by choice with an awareness of the end goal. Right now, I am sacrificing a walk in the rain, or watching Lucifer, to finish updating these notes.*

*If The Hierophant is about teaching and wisdom, The High Priestess is about connection to the divine, and The Hermit is about reflection, The Hanged Man is about*

*finding the divine within. All deeply spiritual cards, but finding that spirit through different perspectives.*

## **Death**

*“Change.” 13*

A skeleton in black armour rides a white horse. There is a white rose on his flag.

**Associations:** Change, release, letting go, breaking old habits and patterns, transformation. Cutting yourself free from destructive attitudes, situations and people. Endings with the potential for beginnings.

**Advice:** Accept change with trust and hope that lessons will be learnt and better things will come.

**Warning:** Change is coming; trying to maintain the status quo will only cause pain.

**Question:** Is your life so perfect that some change would not be welcome?

## **Symbolism:**

- For me, one of the most striking and interesting symbols in the Rider–Waite deck is the **white rose**. Anyone with an interest in British history will associate this with the House of York, the Wars of the Roses, and the Plantagenet line. The white rose was the symbol for the House of York – it’s too complicated a story to explore here, but this was a family steeped in death. Mythology relates that the first rose was white, only to be stained red later by the blood of Venus, Aphrodite or Christ, depending on the myth in question. Thus, a white rose is a ‘bloodless’ rose, leading us to the kenning ‘Death makes a man pale’ (i.e. dead). The Rider–Waite Tarot is full of red roses, but the white rose is found only in the Death and The Fool cards. To me, as pure potential, the fool represents our soul; that part of us that is there before and after our physical form.

- The **skeleton** (as well as being a symbol of death) represents death's universal nature. For, under our distinctive skin, hair, body shapes, etc., our skeletons are remarkably similar regardless of race, colour or sex.
- Again, we have the **twin towers** and the image of a **sun** setting (or rising; we cannot know) – for me the message here is clearly that death is not the end of the journey, just a doorway on the way. The idea of a journey is further heightened by the **boat** so clearly seen on the river behind the skeleton.
- Death is riding a **horse**, reminding us that he cannot be outrun.
- Whenever you see **multiple people** in a card, consider how they can represent different parts of you. There is no one complete way of explaining what the figures in the Death card mean, but here is one way:
  - **King with his fallen crown** (The Emperor): accepting that some changes cannot be controlled.
  - **Little child** (The Sun): greeting change with hope and trust.
  - **Older girl** (Strength): even understanding what changes death will bring, she has the inner strength to surrender with grace.
  - **Hierophant**: by connecting with his religious and spiritual side, he welcomes death as the release and transformation it really is. He knows it is simply change, and has no fear.

### **In a reading:**

- It is important to realise that even a welcome change brings with it fears, sadness and worries. We are creatures of habit who enjoy the illusion of control. So often the appearance of the Death card reflects the transition process when we are shedding our old and outworn ways, but still unsure of what will replace them. Death is most often a natural ending to something that we have outgrown: a job that we are bored with, a house that's too small or big for us, a relationship that we know makes us unhappy. I often find that with Death, we knew the ending was coming, even if we resist the change at the last moment.

**The negative side to this card:** Resisting change, preserving the status quo even though it is not serving us.

*In all my years as a Tarot pro I have never once seen an unexpected death in the cards. I have seen that a death in the past is causing pain now, I have seen that someone who is infirm or terminally ill is moving towards death, but not once has the Death card turned up to pronounce an unexpected death. Move the thought of prediction of physical death out of your head, and connect with the process of change, endings, and allowing new beginnings.*

## **Temperance**

*“Balance” 14*

An angel clothed in white stands pouring water from cup to cup. His red wings fill the picture, their edges not visible to us.

**Associations:** Compromise, integrating different parts of your life (especially inner and outer) and your psychology to become whole, serenity, living in the moment.

**Advice:** Try to find compromises.

**Warning:** Check for imbalances in your life.

**Question:** Do you follow Aristotle’s ‘*Meden Agan*’ (nothing in excess)?

## **Symbolism:**

- Firstly, that’s one big **angel**! His (though I feel the gender is undefined) wings will not fit in the picture; his figure is dominant and the main focus of the card. The wings seem fire-like to me, balancing the water in the picture, and appear exceedingly strong.
- This card is all about blending and integrating opposites, hence the **fire** and **water** symbolism. The water imagery is quite clear, but the fire imagery is more symbolic: the sun glyph on the angel’s third eye, the upright triangle on his badge, his wings, and the sun rising (or setting) between the peaks.
- This card is a perfect moment, but we are not meant to linger too long here. The **path** leads us on, to the **blue mountains** of our highest potential. This is an inspiring,

powerful and peaceful card. When you are grounded, yet feel the vibrancy of your spirit, the way becomes clear. Life is magical, and things seem to happen with ease and perfection. It is almost impossible for humans to maintain the integration needed to sustain this state, and after having tasted the enjoyment of it, it is hard to lose it (and can too easily lead to addictions). This fall from grace is clearly illustrated in the next card.

- Now take a close look at the **pouring of the water** from the cups. It is an impossible task when working with the laws of gravity (feel free to try!). The two cups illustrate that the way to a magical life is always to blend opposites; finding the right measure is the secret to success. When you find the right combination (right diet, right partner, right job, accepting the wisdom of your dreams, etc.), life seems effortless. Of course, we are ever-changing beings, and what is 'right' now may not always be so.
- Importantly, the angel has **one foot in the water** (our unconscious) and **one foot on the earth**. To be truly balanced we must ground our hopes and plans, not simply dream them. (Compare with The Star card.)
- And of course, the smith '**tempers**' (makes hard) the steel by heating and then quenching with water. Temperance often appears during times of great difficulty, asking us to keep balance even when our world seems to be falling apart. It always makes me think of Friedrich Nietzsche's words 'What does not kill me makes me stronger.'

#### **In a reading:**

- I find this to be a positive card, suggesting that things are coming together nicely.
- It is time to let go of rigid beliefs, and to blend compromises to find a new, harmonious way forward. Look to find balance in life.

**The negative side to this card:** A suggestion of excess and heading towards addiction or a toxic mix in your life. (Especially where Temperance appears with the King or 7 of Cups, or The Devil.)



*Over the years I have seen the best and the worst of this card. This is the magic of unplanned pleasures: playing games and drinking hot chocolate in the pouring rain in a tent on holiday was not the disappointment I expected it to be; rather, it offered laughter and fun in a way you can never plan for.*

*Temperance is also a regular stalker card for me. I am not balanced; I am often only one step away from addictions and excess. (Not hard drugs, I should add, but often work.) So, for me, Temperance is usually a telling-off from the Tarot; a reminder to get the balance right.*

*I have long wondered about the irises in the picture, and as an aside, blue irises are one of my favourite flowers. In Greek mythology the iris is linked to the rainbow found in the 10 of Cups, which I link to God's promise after the flood – after all, there are many Christian references in this deck. But the iris is also linked with peace, and for me that is an important message: keeping the balance and finding the peace.*