The First Step into Tarot

Understand All 78 Cards, with a Practice Path for Self-Study



MASSIMO MANCA
AND CHRISTINE FRACICCA

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Foreword

This book is for people who want to learn tarot and do not know where to start. Maybe you were given a deck and do not know what to do with it. Maybe you saw a reading and wondered how anyone gets anything out of it. Or you started one or two books already and got stuck at the third card, because every page held nothing but keywords.

Here, every one of the 78 cards has its own chapter of four pages. On the first you see the card, on the next two you get to know it, and the fourth page is yours: it is left blank so you can write down what you noticed. We left it empty on purpose. Anyone who learns tarot remembers most of what they have put into words themselves.

One thing up front. Tarot is not learned in a few weeks. Anyone who wants to read cards with confidence practises for years, and how long that takes depends on how often you sit down with the cards. This book is the first step. It explains what you can see on the cards and how the meanings come about, instead of making you memorise lists. When you have worked through it, you can look at any of the 78 cards and say something about it. Real confidence only comes from laying cards yourself.

What tarot is can be said honestly in a few sentences. It is a set of picture cards that came into being in northern Italy in the middle of the 15th century as a card game. It has been used as a tool for thinking about questions only since the late 18th century. The cards do not predict the future. They show patterns, possibilities and tendencies and make you look more closely. The decision is yours. Anyone who expects medical, legal or financial advice from a reading will be disappointed, and that is how it should be.

The cards in this book were made for this book: the images were generated digitally from our own descriptions and then designed by me. They follow the traditional imagery but are drawn in a style of their own. If you work with a different deck later, you will recognise the motifs. You do not need a deck to work with the book. A print-ready template to cut out is available for free download. The web address is on the last page; you need a computer for it.

Where tarot readers disagree, we say so and do not quietly decide for one side.

Massimo Manca

How to work with this book

THE ORDER

It is best to begin with the Major Arcana, the 22 cards with the big themes, from The Fool to The World. The Minor Arcana follow, suit by suit: Wands, Cups, Swords, Pentacles. You can also jump around. Every chapter works on its own, and if today only Death or the Three of Cups interests you, open it.

THE RHYTHM

Plan about twenty minutes per card: five for the picture and the text, ten for the exercise, five for your notes. One card a day is a pleasant pace. If a day is missed, you carry on the next. There is no exam, and nobody is keeping count.

HOW THE FOUR PAGES ARE BUILT

1. *The picture.* Look at the card for a minute before you read anything. Remember what you notice first.
2. *First text page.* One sentence on the core of the card, then what can be seen, what the details can mean and what the card stands for.
3. *Second text page.* How the card looks in light and in shadow, what it can mean in everyday life (love, work, yourself), how it works next to other cards, a few keywords, an exercise and three questions for you.
4. *Notes.* Lines for your own thoughts. One sentence is enough.

WHAT YOU NEED

The book, a pen and, if possible, the cards. If you already have a tarot deck you can use it alongside. It looks different from ours, but names and numbers are the same.

WHAT YOU DO NOT HAVE TO DO

You do not have to memorise keywords. They are a memory aid, nothing more. You do not have to believe in tarot, and you do not have to have an insight every day. On some days nothing happens, and that is fine.

THE NOTES

When you have been through all the cards, you own a book with your own observations on every fourth page. That is worth more than any list of meanings, because it shows you how you respond to the cards.

The tarot deck at a glance

A complete tarot deck has 78 cards in two groups.

The Major Arcana consists of 22 cards with names and numbers, from The Fool (0) to The World (XXI). They show the big themes of life: beginning and end, love and loss, power and renunciation, insight and change. They are often read as a path that the Fool walks. He starts out carefree, meets teachers and has to make decisions, experiences upheaval and hope and arrives at the World in the end. That is an interpretation, not a law of nature, but it helps to put the cards in order.

The Minor Arcana consists of 56 cards in four suits. Each suit has cards from Ace to Ten and four court cards: Page, Knight, Queen and King. The Minor Arcana show the matters of everyday life.

In the tradition, the four suits each have an area of life and an element. This is a convention that has become established, not a rule.

- **Wands:** drive, will, energy. Element fire.
- **Cups:** feelings, relationships, intuition. Element water.
- **Swords:** mind, language, decision. Element air.
- **Pentacles:** body, work, money, security. Element earth. (Also called Coins or Discs.)

Drawing the daily card

The simplest and best exercise for the start is the daily card: one card a day, drawn in the morning, looked at again in the evening.

1. **Shuffle.** Take the cards and shuffle until it feels right. There is no rule for this. At the beginning the 22 cards of the Major Arcana are enough, later you take all 78.
2. **Ask a question.** An open question works best: What needs my attention today? Which attitude helps me? Questions that can be answered with yes or no give little.
3. **Draw.** Draw one card, put it in front of you and look at it. Write down what you see and how you feel about it before you look in the book.
4. **Look it up.** Then read the chapter, but only the core in one sentence and the keywords. Keep the rest for the evening.
5. **Look back in the evening.** Ask yourself where something met you today that fits the card. It does not have to be anything big.

QUESTIONS YOU HAD BETTER LEAVE

Questions about the thoughts or intentions of others ("Does he love me?"). Questions about health, money or a court case ("Will I win?"). Questions where you already know the answer and are only looking for confirmation. The cards can help you see your own situation. They cannot give information about other people or about medical, legal and financial matters.

REVERSED CARDS

Some people also read cards when they lie upside down. That is an option, not an obligation. Every card in this book includes a note on how to read the reversed position. To start, leave it out: lay all cards upright and learn the basic meanings first.


0
THE FOOL

0

The Fool

A beginning where you do not yet know where the road leads, and you set off anyway.

THE PICTURE

A young person stands at the edge of a cliff, a bundle over one shoulder, a white flower in the hand. A small white dog jumps beside them. The sun is shining, snow-capped mountains lie in the background. They look up and not at the ground in front of their feet.

DETAILS OF THE PICTURE

The bundle holds what you take along: very little. In the traditional reading it stands for the experience you bring without knowing it yet. The white flower is usually read as a sign of innocence, of openness without ulterior motives. The dog accompanies and warns at the same time. Some authors read it as the instinct that wants to keep the Fool from falling. The abyss is no threat as long as the Fool keeps his goal in view, but it remains an abyss. Both belong to the card.

MEANING

The Fool carries the number zero. He stands before the first card and is therefore both beginning and end of the series. He stands for trust, openness and the readiness to do something for the first time. He does not say it will turn out well. He says that the step is due. Whoever draws him often stands at a threshold where not everything can be clarified in advance.

LIGHT AND SHADOW

In the light he shows courage without safety net, curiosity and an unclouded view. He reminds you that some things can only be learned by doing them.

In the shadow he stands for recklessness and thoughtlessness. Anyone who does not look at the ground can stumble. Then the card is a warning: you act rashly, or you do not listen to the people who want to tell you something.

Reversed (upside down) he is often read as hesitation, a missed opportunity or blind recklessness. Which reading fits is shown by the context of the spread.

IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Love: A new encounter without fixed expectations. In a long relationship the invitation to be playful with each other again.

Work: A new start, an idea that is not yet worked out. Good for the first step, not yet for the contract.

Yourself: You may begin before you know everything. But ask yourself honestly whether you hear the dog.

IN A SPREAD

The Fool at the start of a three-card spread shows a situation that is only just beginning. Next to Death or The Tower he suggests that a new beginning arises from an ending or a break. Next to The Emperor or Justice he warns to look at the rules and consequences despite all enthusiasm. As the last card of a spread he shows a tendency that is still open.

KEYWORDS

Beginning, trust, lightness, risk, carelessness.

EXERCISE

Do something for the first time today, even if it is small: take a different route, start a conversation, try something you have been putting off. Afterwards note in two sentences how it felt.

THREE QUESTIONS FOR YOU

1. What do I want to begin and put off because I am not ready?
2. Where am I already too cautious?
3. Where would a quick look at the ground be good?

The Wands

The Wands stand for fire, drive and energy. They are about what you want and where you are heading: ideas, projects, passion, ambition. On the cards you see wands, often with fresh leaves growing from them. They are alive, not a tool you put away.

The story of the Wands begins with a spark and ends with a burden. In between lie planning, first results, celebration, quarrel, victory, defence, speed and exhaustion. When a Wands card speaks to you, ask yourself: What am I burning for right now? Where do I give my energy, and where is it being taken from me?

In a reading, many Wands often point to an upheaval or a new start. Many Swords next to them mean rather quarrel, many Cups feeling, many Pentacles everyday life and work.


1
ACE OF WANDS

WANDS

The Ace of Wands

A spark that is nothing yet but the possibility of beginning something.

THE PICTURE

A hand reaches out of a cloud holding a wand on which fresh green leaves sprout. Below lies a wide landscape with hills, a river and, in the distance, a castle. Single leaves fall from the wand.

DETAILS OF THE PICTURE

The hand from the cloud appears in all four Aces. It is usually read as something being offered that you did not make yourself: an opportunity, an idea, an impulse. The wand is alive, it sprouts leaves, so it is no dead branch. The falling leaves are often read as seed being scattered. The castle in the distance stands for a goal that is still far away. What matters is that the wand is only being held out. You have to grasp it yourself.

MEANING

The Ace of Wands stands for the start of an undertaking and for the energy that goes with it. It is the feeling that something wants to get going before you have a plan. It reveals nothing about success. The beginning is possible, and the drive is there.

LIGHT AND SHADOW

In the light it shows enthusiasm, courage to begin, pleasure in doing and an idea that carries.

In the shadow it shows a spark that fizzles out. Whoever only collects ideas and starts nothing has many wands in hand and none of them in the ground. Then the question is whether you want to seize the opportunity at all.

Reversed (upside down) it is often read as a delayed start, lack of enthusiasm or an idea that is not yet ripe.

IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Love: A feeling that flares up anew, or the courage to take the first step. In a partnership the wish to do something together that nobody has tried yet.

Work: An idea, a project, a job that offers itself. Good for the start, not yet proof that it will last.

Yourself: You feel drive. What matters is where you steer it.

IN A SPREAD

The Ace of Wands at the start of a three-card spread shows a beginning that comes from your own strength. Next to the Magician it strengthens the thought that everything lies ready. Next to the Tower or Death it can mean that new drive arises after an ending. Next to Swords it asks whether the plan is already in place.

KEYWORDS

Beginning, spark, drive, idea, courage.

EXERCISE

Choose three things you have wanted to begin for a long time and note them down. Pick one and take the smallest possible step towards it within the next ten minutes. It can be a single sentence or a phone call.

THREE QUESTIONS FOR YOU

1. Which idea have I been carrying around for weeks?
2. What keeps me from really grasping the wand?
3. What does the smallest possible first step look like?