

CONSIDERATION OF THE SPREAD LANDSCAPE

is coming. The Seeker's objective has been control and the correspondences of the number five apply here as well, though here, with the number ten, those uncertainties, shifts, and the desire for control will soon reach a final conclusion.

Appendix F provides additional tables on numerological associations in the tarot.

The Significance of Suits

Look at the frequency that each suit appears in the spread. A majority of Wands indicates that the Seeker should focus on his or her work, career, and motivations. A majority of Cups indicates a need to focus on emotions and relationships. Swords indicate the intellectual realm, but also warn of destruction or loss. Pentacles indicate material matters and finances.

In general, note the following:

Wands: Motivations. Growth. Energy. Entrepreneurship. Career or work. The element of Fire is pertinent. Reflect on the symbolic representations of the lion in the matter at hand.

Cups: Sensitivity. Emotions. Love. Sentimentality. Interpersonal relationships. The element of Water is pertinent. Reflect on the symbolic representations of the Water Bearer in the matter at hand. A modern interpretation also associates the Cups with fish or the dolphin. Emotions are intensified in the Seeker's situation.

Swords: Intellectualism. Ambition. Destructive forces. Aggression. Ferocity. Loss. Disappointment. The element of Air is pertinent. Reflect on the symbolic representations of the eagle in the matter at hand. There may be trouble and losses ahead.

Pentacles: Material matters. Finances. Wealth. Business. Money. Material gains. Material pleasures. Hard work and industriousness. The element of Earth is pertinent. Reflect on the symbolic representations of the bull in the matter at hand. The Seeker's focus right now is on business, wealth, or material matters.

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FIRE	WATER	AIR	EARTH
<i>When a spread is Fire dominant:</i>	<i>When a spread is Water dominant:</i>	<i>When a spread is Air dominant:</i>	<i>When a spread is Earth dominant:</i>
Highly motivated Strong vitality Strong enthusiasm Adventurous Dynamic energy	Spiritual energy Emotional energy Compassion Intuitive; empathic Genuine; heartfelt	Objective, analytical Knowledge-oriented Rational mind Strong abilities for communication	Practical, pragmatic Hands-on Reliable, stable Stubborn Conservative
<i>When a spread is Fire weak:</i>	<i>When a spread is Water weak:</i>	<i>When a spread is Air weak:</i>	<i>When a spread is Earth weak:</i>
Unmotivated Lack confidence Lack enthusiasm Lack drive and focus Lack leadership	Emotional imbalance Dispassionate Detached Inability to express personal feelings	Lack objectivity Indecisive Irrational Lack of knowledge Inexpressive	Lack foundation Difficulty with concentration Lack common sense Lack security

Also, Fire and Air, or the Wands suit and the Swords suit, are active. They may indicate an extroverted Seeker or a Seeker of strong willpower, determination, and action. Wands and Swords dominating together in a spread indicate a Seeker who displays masculine qualities and who is open, active, and assertive. The key to resolving the Seeker's issues is in the intellectual, physical, and practical planes of the Seeker's consciousness.

Water and Earth, or the Cups suit and the Pentacles suit, are passive. They may indicate an introverted or introspective Seeker, one who needs "a push" before he or she acts. Cups and Pentacles dominating together in a spread indicate a Seeker who displays feminine qualities and who is concealing thoughts, being passive and yielding. The key to resolving the Seeker's issues is in the emotional and spiritual planes of the Seeker's consciousness.

The prevalence of a particular element in a spread will suggest the personality traits of significant influence over the Seeker's situation.

WANDS

Fire
Active

Internal Flux

CUPS

Water
Passive

SWORDS

Air
Active

Internal Flux

PENTACLES

Earth
Passive

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Equal or competitive dominance of both Wands and Cups in one spread may indicate flux within the Seeker. Equal or competitive dominance of both Swords and Pentacles in a spread also could indicate flux. The practitioner should note that such flux is influencing the Seeker's situation. How that flux manifests itself in the Seeker's situation will depend on what the other cards in the spread are. Prevalence of Major Arcana cards could suggest volatile natural forces at play. Prevalence of court cards could suggest that the flux is attributable to the people in the Seeker's life.

Elemental Dignities

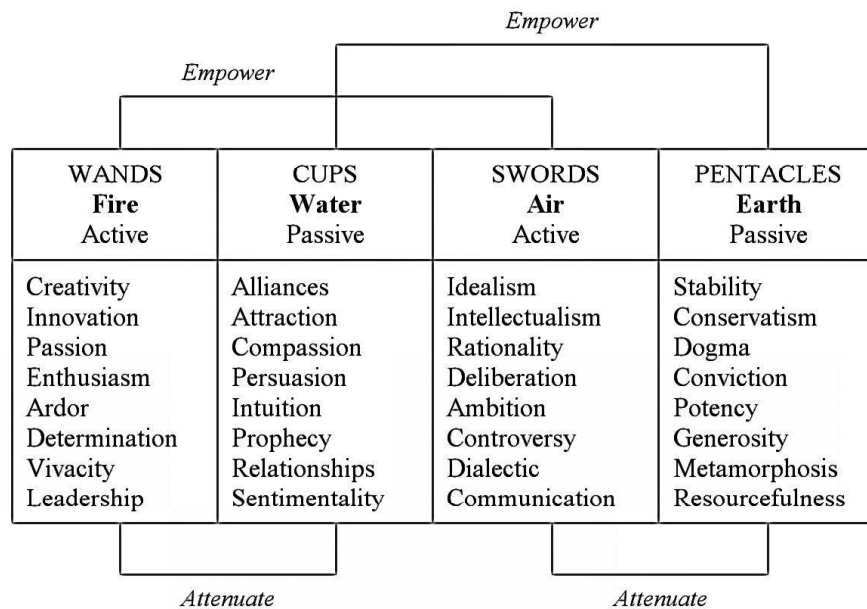
Elemental dignities are the series of complementary, conflicting, and relational energies between the four classical elements⁴ that make up the physical, spiritual, and emotional planes of our existence. "Dignity" as used in this context is defined as external manifestation of the card's innate properties. It is the state of being activated with the full potential of its essence. An "elemental dignity" describes that state with more specificity—it is the external manifestation of a tarot card's innate elemental essence, given that each card is governed innately by one of the four elements, Fire, Water, Air, or Earth, and thus has the potential of fully embodying the traits associated with that element. (Note, however, that the card's energies would further be modified by the numerological correspondence and other factors.)

To deepen an understanding of a spread, look to the elemental dignities at play. Dominance of a particular suit could suggest what element is most relevant to the matter at hand. Applying elemental dignities analysis to a tarot reading helps identify the precise points of imbalances in a Seeker's life or situation. The various energies and traits of a person (or even a situation) per Western theosophy can be categorized as Fire, Water, Air, or Earth, in essence. For harmony in one's life, there should be a balance of the four elements within. When two elements seem to vie for dominance and those elements are also in opposition, there will be flux, uncertainties, a sense of instability and insecurity. When active elements dominate, there may be a lack of peace, and instead, too much competition, battling, conflict, and strife. When passive elements dominate, there may be little progress, a feeling of overwhelm, of being controlled rather than in

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control. As noted in the previous section, the four elements are associated with the four suits of the Minor Arcana. Their relations with one another are the elemental dignities of a spread. Interpreting a tarot reading by the card meanings helps the Seeker understand what is going on; interpreting elemental dignities enhances that understanding by explaining why.

For example, if the majority of cards in a spread are from the suit of Wands, then the Seeker should pay attention to the energies corresponding with the element of Fire. Forces such as creativity, innovation, passion, determination, vivacity, and leadership will be imperative for the Seeker to harness to get over his or her obstacles. Through the ordinary course of a tarot reading, the Seeker can get a sense of what is going on in the matter at hand, but by adding elemental dignities analysis, the practitioner can also convey why the Seeker is being presented with these obstacles.



When only single cards are drawn for a reading, pay closer attention to whether the card is upright or in reverse. An upright card may suggest that the card's corresponding element is strong in or around the Seeker. A reversed card may suggest that the corresponding element is important to

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the Seeker's answer, but that the Seeker is not adequately harnessing those powers at the moment. Thus, the reversal will indicate that the Seeker should command those energies better.

If a card from the suit of Wands is said to be dignified, it means it is fully charged and activated with the energies of its corresponding element, the element of Fire. A dignified Ace of Wands is the Ace of Wands appearing upright in a tarot spread during a reading (as opposed to its nonactivated state in the deck, not in use). When the Ace of Wands appears upright in a tarot reading, it is charged and activated with all the corresponding energies and traits we associate with the Ace of Wands. Thus, it is dignified.

If, say, that Ace of Wands appears in reverse in a tarot spread during a reading (assuming reversals are read), then the reversal itself has changed the energies of that card in some way. The energy of the reversal is interacting in a particular way with the general energy of the Ace of Wands. That reversal is said to (1) weaken the essential state of the Ace of Wands, (2) invert the essential state, (3) negate the essential state, or (4) delay the manifestation of the essential state (the WIND mnemonic from Chapter 15). Which of the four possibilities applies will of course depend on the reading itself, on a case-by-case basis. As a result of that adjustment, the card is now said to be ill-dignified.

The classic theory of elemental dignities taught to tarot practitioners is as follows: The corresponding energies of Fire tend to be attenuated by the energies of Water, in which case a practitioner might note that the dignities of Fire and Water here are weakened. The corresponding energies of Air tend to be attenuated by the energies of Earth. Fire and Air are empowered by each other, however, as are Water and Earth. When Fire and Air appear in equal dominance in a reading, a practitioner might note that the dignities of Fire and Air are strengthened.

WEAKENING ELEMENTAL ENERGIES

Wands (Fire) and Cups (Water) conflict and weaken each other. If both suits seem to compete for dominance in a spread, then there is flux between the energies corresponding with the two suits. The Seeker is urged to proceed with caution, as there is negativity surrounding the matter at hand.

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Likewise, Swords (Air) and Pentacles (Earth) conflict and weaken each other. When these two suits vie for dominance, the meanings of the Sword cards will be in flux with the meanings of the Pentacles. Likewise, the flux indicates the presence of negativity.

STRENGTHENING ELEMENTAL ENERGIES

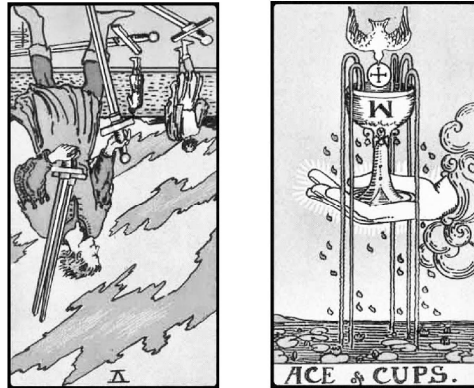
However, when Wands (Fire) and Swords (Air) are equally dominant in a spread, they intensify and help support each other. These energies have a strengthening effect. They also suggest an aggressive, confident Seeker. Cups (Water) and Pentacles (Earth) also intensify and support each other, though they suggest passivity in the Seeker. Equal dominance of Wands and Pentacles has a neutralizing effect. Equal dominance of Swords and Cups also has a neutralizing effect. The primary points to look out for in considering elemental dignities are the cards representing elements in flux (Fire vs. Water, Air vs. Earth).

CASE STUDY: CASSIDY

Perhaps the most direct way to learn and understand elemental dignities is through two-card readings. A Seeker, Cassidy, a woman in her early thirties, feels like her career has hit a plateau. She hasn't been able to figure out how to move on and advance to the next level of her life ambitions.

Cassidy consults the tarot for a two-card reading and the following two cards are drawn: the Five of Swords in reverse and the Ace of Cups. For the purpose of understanding elemental dignities, only the cards' corresponding elements will be analyzed here.

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The Five of Swords in the above reading corresponds to Air. Note that it is also in reverse, suggesting a weakened or dormant state. The Ace of Cups appears to be the stronger card in the pair and corresponds to Water.

Air and Water have a neutralizing effect on each other. There is neither a strengthening nor a weakening effect. What the two cards together show is impotence, or an ineffectual use of the corresponding energies.

The Air reversal may suggest that over the years Cassidy has not adequately developed her ambitions or her communication skills, or exercised her intellectualism in an effective manner for her career. The Water tells her that she needs to look to her social and professional network for relations that can help her secure more stimulating work. That work is likely to be more creative and innovative in nature. The power of persuasion is what Cassidy needs in order to move beyond the current plateau, but that power is neutralized right now by her past as indicated by Air.

CASE STUDY: JOSEPHINE

Josephine has just entered into a new romantic relationship and she wants to know what to expect. Again, for the purpose of understanding elemental dignities, only the corresponding elements of the cards will be examined. The cards drawn are the Page of Cups

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and the Five of Pentacles, or Water and Earth respectively. Water and Earth intensify each other, though they are both passive energies.



Applied to Josephine's inquiry, the attraction between the two individuals will endure for a significant amount of time, as suggested by the Water element, for attraction, coupled with the Earth element, for stability. The consistent passive energy of both cards suggests that the relationship is not going to be one of those crazy, passionate loves with extreme ups and downs. It is a quiet, gentle, but sweet romance. The Page of Cups also indicates the artistic, spiritual strength of this relationship.

Note, however, that the Five of Pentacles suggests that both Josephine and her new love should be encouraged to pay attention to their health, lifestyle, and spending habits to preserve financial stability. There may be trouble ahead, so they should do what they can now to prepare for a coming figurative winter that the two will need to navigate together.

Major Arcana cards also have elemental correspondences, as follows:

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FIRE	WATER	AIR	EARTH
The Emperor Strength Wheel of Fortune Temperance The Tower The Sun	The High Priestess The Chariot The Hanged Man Death The Moon Judgement*	The Fool The Lovers Justice The Star	The Magician The Empress The Hierophant The Hermit The Devil The World

Note: As indicated earlier in the book, Judgement's solar attribution to Pluto has led to two differing elemental attributions for the card. One school of practitioners attribute Pluto with Vulcan, the Roman god of fire, and therefore Key 20: Judgement is associated with Fire. However, another school looks to the astrological association of Pluto as the ruling planet for Scorpio, a water sign, and therefore Key 20: Judgement, to this second school, is associated with Water. When I look at Key 20: Judgement in the Rider-Waite-Smith deck, the intuitive association of the card for me is to Water. Thus, it is my personal approach to associate Judgement with Water, but every practitioner is encouraged to understand both schools and arrive at his or her own practical adoption. Note also that I associate The Magician with Earth, which is a minority view, compared to the majority view of associating the card with Air.

CASE STUDY: TIMOTHY

In the next two-card reading example, Timothy consults the tarot to help him with his considerations in a start-up business he wants to launch. The two cards drawn are Key 19: The Sun and the Seven of Cups. The cards correspond with Fire and Water respectively. These two elements conflict and weaken each other.

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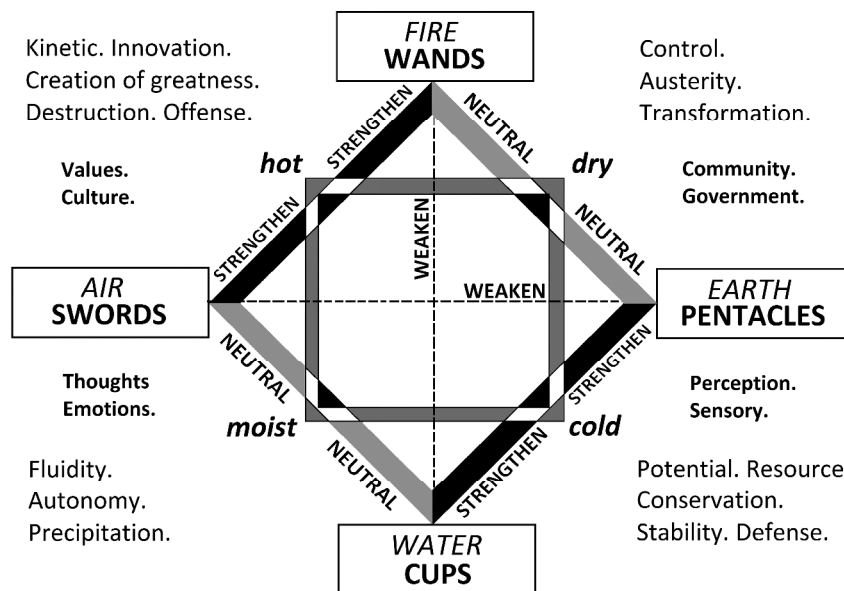
Timothy's new venture looks highly promising, as indicated by The Sun. Its corresponding element of Fire also confirms innovation, enthusiasm, determination for success, and strong leadership. These energies are further reinforced by the appearance of a Major Arcana card, The Sun. However, the energies in the Seven of Cups threaten to weaken Timothy's potential success. Notwithstanding the card meaning of the Seven of Cups, the suit of Cups here indicates Water, which could suggest that some of Timothy's relationships, current allies, or people he perceives as partners could endanger the success of his start-up. Coupled with the meaning of the Seven of Cups, i.e., materialism and temptations, this indicates that Timothy should stay cautious and not be too trusting of those who seem to be his allies right now.

In Timothy's case, an actual reading I performed, his start-up company did become highly successful. He and a partner, a college friend of his, had launched the company together, though Timothy did most of the work. His friend just happened to be a more charismatic and influential individual, who helped with marketing, branding, and public relations for Timothy's company. Timothy thought he could trust his friend, since the two had known each other since their school days. However, that friend ended up selling Timothy's trade secrets to a competitor company. After that happened, Timothy came back to me and said he should have paid greater heed to

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the reading. He hadn't taken the tarot reading seriously enough and, with hindsight, now saw that if he had been more careful and less naive, he could have prevented the leak of his trade secrets.

In a reading, always consider the elemental dignities. They are instrumental in helping us parse through the seemingly chaotic combination of energies that make up a given situation. Elemental dignities help to deconstruct a situation into its foundational building blocks and reorganize it in your mind into complements and conflicts. Doing so helps to identify exactly which category of traits will be most helpful to us in solving our problems and which traits present the greatest obstacles. It also helps the practitioner to understand the underlying philosophical principles in tarot.



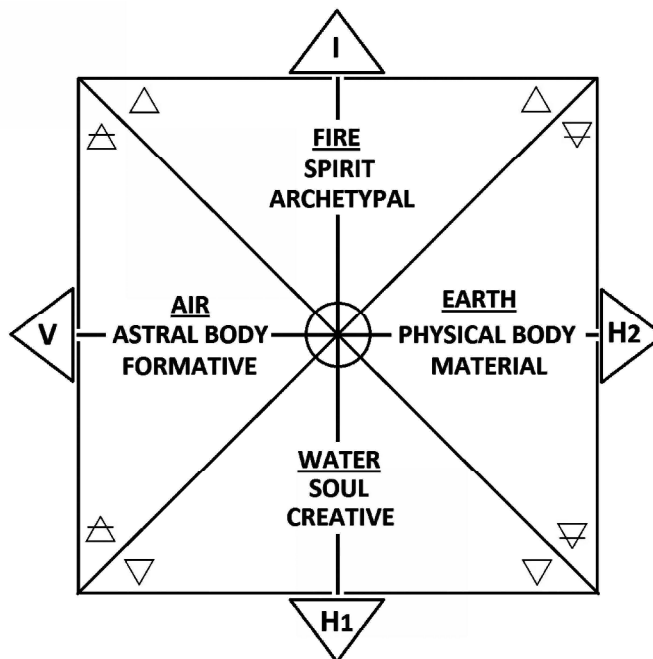
Not only does each Minor Arcana suit and corresponding element possess its independent qualities, but combinations also yield particular qualities that make up the foundation of human life, physical and metaphysical. Air plus Water (or Swords plus Cups) puts the Seeker in a neutral, pensive state of thought and emotion. Fire (Wands) plus Earth (Pentacles) positions a Seeker for community action or government involvement.

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Also, the preceding diagram offers some general insights on the energies that manifest when two elements combine. When Swords and Cups meet in co-dominance, for example, the Seeker may be a free-thinking, free-spirited, progressive individual, likely a poet, writer, or philosopher. When Wands and Pentacles meet, there is thriving activity in the community, and/or government/institutional work.

In addition to understanding elemental dignities through an Aristotelian framework, Paul Foster Case provides metaphysical attributions to the four elements. Golden Dawn-based theosophy holds that every human being has both a physical body and an astral body. The physical body is the body we can see, hear, taste, smell, and touch. The astral body is believed to be the metaphysical body that contains the unconscious. The soul is where karma is accounted for, where the good and the evil of a person are accumulated. Spirit is what enables human beings to be conscious. It is the vitality that animates us.

Case attributed these four principles of existence to the four elements. A diagram adapted from both Case's and Papus's approach⁵ is as follows:



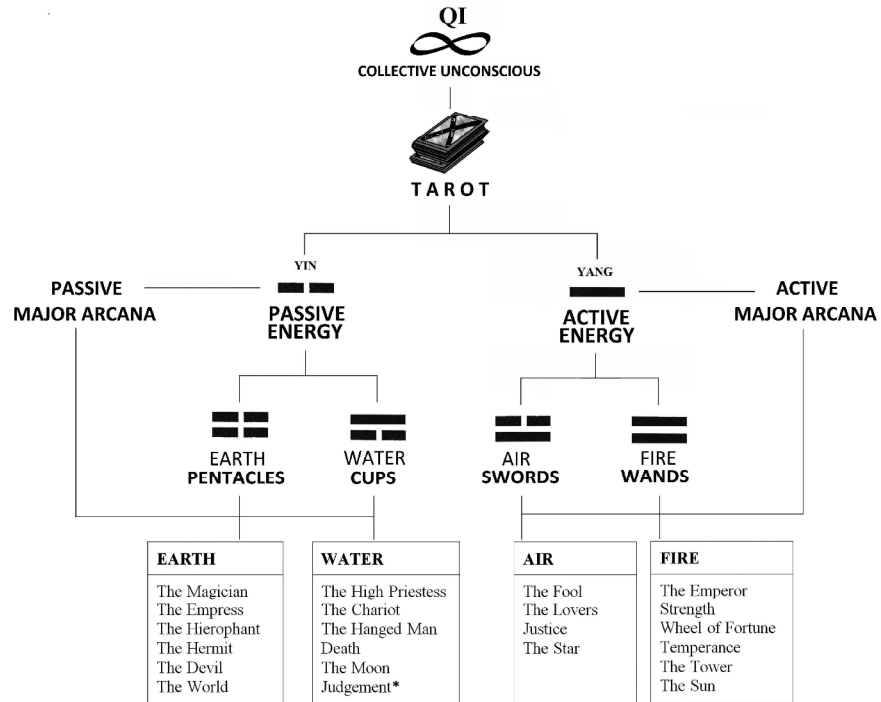
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In practical tarot application, it is not likely that a practitioner will utilize Case's or Papus's metaphysical attributions to the four elements in any significant way. The Aristotelian framework is not only more practical, but more readily understood. Understanding the theoretical origins, however, helps a practitioner to build a stronger foundation in tarot studies.

Analyzing elemental dignities in a tarot reading means that the practitioner will compare the elemental essences of two juxtaposed cards in a spread to determine whether, together, the cards provide a dignified or ill-dignified energy. Dignified energy means the two cards, due to their interaction, strengthen each other's essences. Ill-dignified energy means the two cards, due to their interaction, weaken each other's essences or modify the way that essence manifests in that particular Seeker's situation.

Novice practitioners often overlook elemental dignities in the interpretive method they apply to tarot. Elemental dignities are part of tarot theory. It is the metaphysical chemistry of tarot. Dignities help the serious tarot student to understand how tarot works, to examine the language and the notations of tarot symbology. They are also the most intuitive way for a practitioner to identify patterns in a tarot reading. To understand elemental dignities is to understand the underlying philosophical principle of tarot: tarot is the complete symbolic representation of the universe, the collective unconscious, the cosmic qi, the god principle, or the Akashic records, whichever terminology is preferred pursuant to one's subscribed theosophical beliefs. These symbolic representations of the universe cover the metaphysical ebb and flow of the fundamental energies that form life, life as it exists in the emotional, intellectual, and spiritual manifestations. The tarot cards use archetypes and allegory to express the microscopic context of a Seeker's situation and bridge the Seeker to the collective unconscious, to understand the macroscopic context of Seeker to world.

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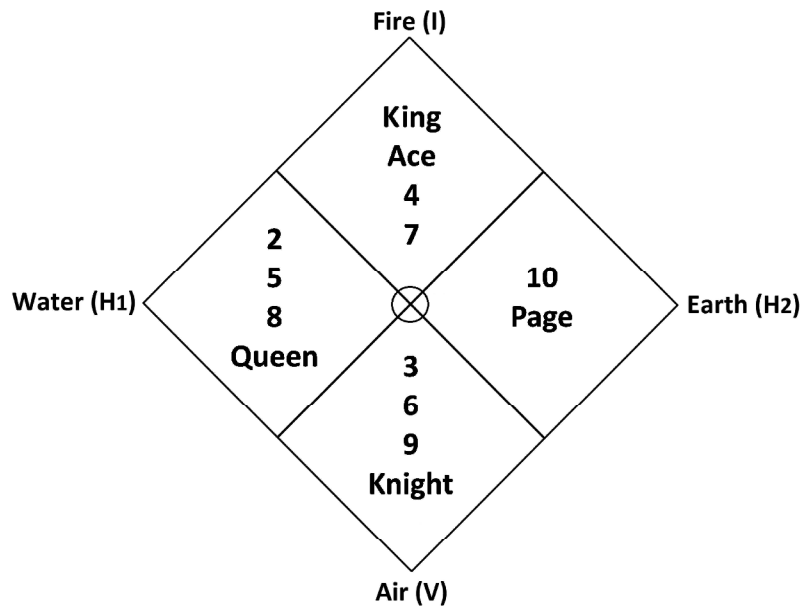
* The Golden Dawn approach is to attribute Key XX with Fire.
The astrological approach is to attribute Key XX with Water.

All matter is interconnected, which is why we experience causation and synchronicity, and understanding how one element relates to another is crucial for understanding how one event or aspect of a Seeker's life relates to another seemingly disparate event or aspect of life. To help a Seeker understand what those energies mean when a spread is drawn, the practitioner must understand the building blocks of tarot, i.e. the building blocks of the universe. Now, how one deconstructs those building blocks, and how those building blocks correspond, are not yet provably known, which is why there are still many differing schools of theoretical esoteric thought. Appendix B provides further reference material for understanding elemental dignities in tarot.

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ELEMENTAL AFFINITIES IN THE MINOR ARCANA

While the four suits of the Minor Arcana correspond to the elements of Fire, Water, Air, and Earth respectively, the cards within the Minor Arcana, i.e., the pips and courts, also possess an elemental affinity.⁶ The elemental *dignity*, or classical element attributed to each suit, was discussed in the previous section. The elemental *affinity* is what a particular card within the suit in the Minor Arcana relates to. It denotes a card's behavioral tendencies and inclinations when appearing in a spread.



By way of example, the elemental dignity of the King of Wands is Fire, because the suit of Wands is attributed to Fire, and the card's elemental affinity would also be Fire, because kings are attributed to Fire. On the other hand, the elemental dignity of the King of Cups would be Water, because the suit of Cups is attributed to Water, but its elemental *affinity* would be Fire, like the King of Wands. All kings possess an elemental *affinity* of Fire. The elemental dignity for the Queen of Swords would be Air, but the card's elemental affinity would be Water, because the queens in tarot all contain Water in their essence, the way all kings contain Fire.

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The elemental dignity governs a card's bearing. It indicates the energetic essence of the card. An elemental dignity of Fire will denote an active essence, one of passion, innovation, and creativity. The elemental affinity goes one step beyond the elemental dignity and characterizes the development of a card into a distinct likeness. Thus, it indicates how a card will behave within its elemental dignity. An elemental affinity of Fire within an elemental dignity of Fire suggests formidable determination and resolve. An elemental affinity of Fire within an elemental dignity of Water (such as an Ace of Cups) suggests passion, vivacity, and active development in the area of life governed by Water, i.e., interpersonal relationships. Understanding elemental affinities will offer the intermediate to advanced practitioner insight into how certain cards will behave.

Appendix B and the tables in B11 will provide further reference and detail to interpreting elemental affinities.

DIRECTIONALITY

Any striking patterns in directionality observed in a tarot spread should be considered. As you practice multiple-card spreads, you will start to notice that in some spreads the majority or even all of the cards seem to be pointing in a particular direction: either the tips of the wands and swords push in one direction or the faces of people depicted in the cards are looking the same way, away from each other as if they were back to back; or they are facing each other, either in cooperation or in a confrontational manner.

The following diagram sets forth the indications when one direction dominates in a spread: