

Learn Tarot Card by Card

A Video Lecture Series

Part II: The Twos

In the previous video lecture, we covered the tarot Aces. Please note however that the series title, Learn the Tarot Card by Card has been changed. A tarot colleague of mine has a tarot card meanings project “Tarot Card by Card,” and she expressed her upset about me calling this series by a similar name, since she’s claiming ownership over “Tarot Card by Card.” Although “Learn the Tarot Card by Card” is so generic it’s not actually distinct enough for brand confusion, I’m the type who wants my tarot colleagues to be happy, because that’s just the type of person I am, so from now on, let’s call this series “Tarot Card Meanings with Benebell.”

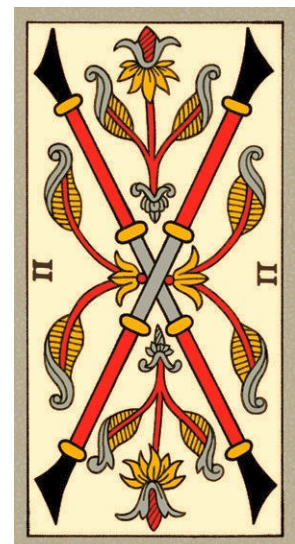
In this video series, card by card you will learn the meanings and attributions for the Marseille tarot deck system, the Rider-Waite-Smith, Crowley’s Thoth Tarot, and my deck, the SKT, or Spirit Keeper’s Tarot. All videos are closed captioned for accessibility. We start with the Minor Arcana and this is Video #2 in the course lecture series on the Tarot Twos.

The numerology of two means these keys are about balance and cooperation, the alchemy of integration. Here, note that the Wands in the Marseille deck are the straight rods while the Swords are curved in the Mamluk and Ottoman tradition of the scimitar sword. Also note any similarities in imagery across the different deck styles and what’s slightly different. In the Two of Wands, for instance, consider how the SKT deck integrates both the RWS and the Thoth. One of the core objectives for this tarot lecture series is for you to acquire reading proficiency in all four deck systems, and to do that, you really want to pay attention to the similarities and the differences among the cards and what those similarities or differences mean to you.

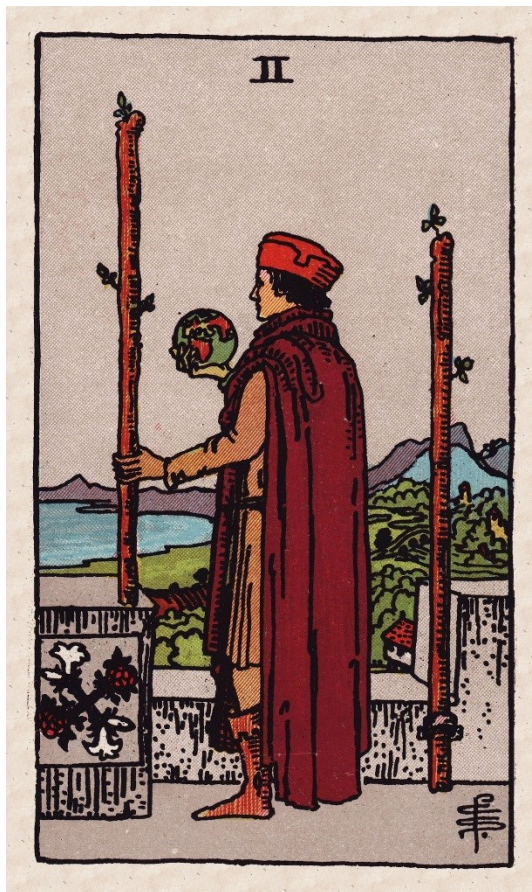
Aces, corresponding with the sephira Keter, are concealed from human comprehension is, essentially, emptiness or void to us, so our experience of the elements actually begins with the Twos, corresponding with the sephira Chokmah, and so the Twos in tarot reveal to us Divine Wisdom. Or so instructs Aleister Crowley in his Book of Thoth circa 1944.

We begin with the Two of Wands. Generally, overall, given the elemental and numerological attributions for this card, the themes are sovereignty and authority. What do you have control over? This is what you can claim ownership of. With the sephira correspondence to Chokmah, here we also see the Twos emblematic of Wisdom. Here, more so than the Aces from the previous video, we are really going to see how different occultists interpret this concept of sovereignty, authority, and control.

In the Tarot de Marseilles, the Two of Bâtons or batons will designate riches, actualizing good fortune, opulence, and the presence of grandeur. It’s a creative project or a professional undertaking, some sort of enterprise already under way that is leading you to magnificence. You, my friend,



are about to dominate. In reverse, this card traditionally means a surprise is coming, something that will astonish you. A reversed Two of Wands suggests that an extraordinary event is going to occur in the near future.



Now let's take a look at how the RWS deck interprets the themes of dominion and sovereignty. Waite tells us this is a tall man overlooking sea and shores, holding a globe in the right hand. He also wants us to notice the Rose and Lily Cross to the left. The rose symbolizes the Mother of God, but also beauty, secrecy, and religious passion. The lily symbolizes wisdom and peace. If you're working with the Spirit Keeper's Tarot deck, please remember those symbolic references, as I draw upon them frequently throughout my illustrations.

Waite describes the Two of Wands as having all the privilege, all the fortunes and magnificence, and yet still suffering, still physically suffering, whether it be from disease, discontent, or melancholy. Here is someone who has a lot, but feels like he doesn't have anything worthwhile at all. In modern times, we might read the Two of Wands as someone preparing to venture beyond your comfort zone. In my experience as a reader, the Two of Wands often comes up to indicate artistic or scientific achievements, or to strike upon themes of work-life balance.

In reverse, the Two of Wands is about falling short of expectations. Waite notes the Two of Wands reversed might indicate sudden distress. Reversed, this card reveals the fear and anxiety that comes from failing to surpass something or someone you had hoped to be better than. We might also read the reversal as indicating that early efforts in an enterprise were done in vain.

In the Thoth deck, the Two of Wands features a crossed double vajra, which is a symbol of protection. The theme of "dominion" in the Thoth thus makes reference to warding, or drawing boundaries, blocking, guarding, border control, in a manner of speaking...

Crowley talks about animism a great deal and how each key of the tarot is alive with a spirit. The spirit in the Two of Wands is called the Lord of Dominion. In considering the powers of the Lord of Dominion, we look to its astrological correspondence, Mars in Aries. Astrologically, Mars is dignified or empowered in the sign Aries, so there's a lot of strength, power, and influence in this card. Here, we are going to see indications of being highly motivated and being fearless about seizing opportunities. There are also themes of enduring accomplishment.

The Discerning One is my name for the Two of Scepters, because I interpret dominion, sovereignty, and control through the willful exercise of discernment, incorporating Roman Catholic theology. What Waite and Smith placed off to the side, the Rose and Lily cross, I placed

front and center, to emphasize the occult and mystical aspects of the card over its more mundane, fortune-telling, or even psychological indications. I also designed it into the double vajra depicted on the Thoth version of this card.



The Two of Scepters in the Spirit Keeper's Tarot draws upon a few key symbolic references. The ram, or a male sheep, per Biblical symbolism, protects the herd. Drawing upon Chinese zodiac symbology, the ram is a spirit of beneficence, creativity, literary accomplishment, ingenuity, aptitude, and artistry. To me, wisdom, or Chokhmah, is Discernment. To wield dominion and control over creative, fiery forces is Discernment. Mars in Aries... this is a card of great, great power, and to harness, to control that power with wisdom, you absolutely need Discernment. The Two of Scepters is also the card of the Visionary.

Instead of the world or globe in the Rider-Waite Two of Wands, I transformed it into a symbol for the universe as manifested by a Creator God with the four sacred alchemical seeds. The Two of Wands in SKT represents humanity's awakening to the forces of creation and destruction, depicted in that double vajra, which are powers we have control and dominion over. How will the magus wield such formidable powers?

Now on to the Two of Cups. Across the four deck styles, we see a consistent, shared theme of love, devotion, fidelity, and faithfulness. There's even an uncanny similarity and congruency in form and symbolism across the four versions of this card. This is the Minor Arcanum symbolic of the many facets of love and affection that humanity is capable of toward one another.

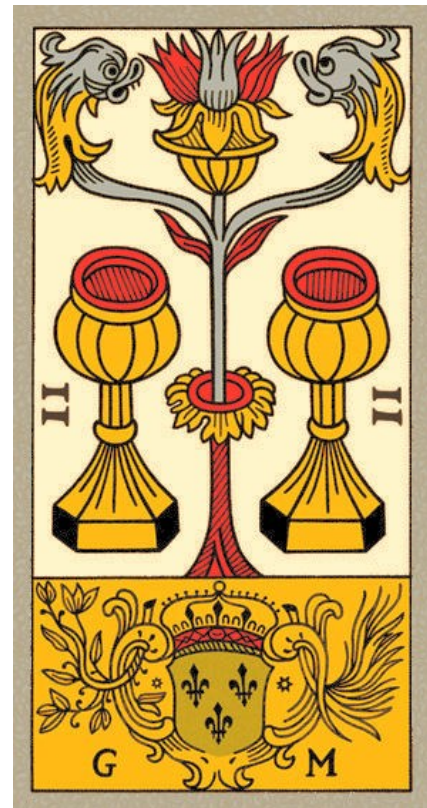
We start again with the Marseilles tradition. The Two of Cups indicates love, emotional attachment, or a close friendship. Here we see sincere affection, likely one to one, between two individuals. This is the card of a healthy, thriving romantic relationship. Shifting subject matter, the Two of Cups can also indicate positive or beneficial religious devotion.

Now in reverse, the Two of Cups inverted may suggest star-crossed desires, where there are obstacles in the way, coming in between two people from being together. This is love or affections that is not being reciprocated, or there is an imbalance of emotional attachment.

In the RWS Two of Cups, a young couple pledges their love and devotion to one another. This is faithfulness in each other. Waite also wants us to pay attention to the Caduceus of Hermes, a sacred symbol from Greco-Egyptian mythology, though it predates even that to reference the Mesopotamian god of the underworld and vegetation, Ningishzida, Lord of the Good Tree. Remember, Waite told us to pay attention to that, and since he likes to hide esoteric knowledge in plain sight, this is our indication that there's more to this card than just romantic love, but let's begin there.

On the surface level, this is the card of love, affinity, friendship, concord, and romance. The Two of Cups can show up to validate compatibility. Harkening to Jungian psychology, this is the union of the anima and animus in our unconscious. This is the card of harmonious collaboration. This is stasis, or equilibrium. If you're taking notes, mark this because we'll circle back to compare it with the Two of Pentacles.

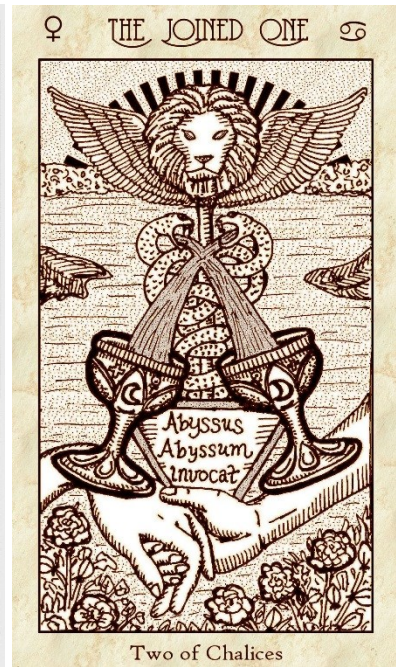
Now for the reversal. Reversed, we might read the Two of Cups as a loss of balance in a relationship. Maybe one side is giving more than the other. The Two of Cups reversed might indicate misunderstandings, or tensions and distrust within a relationship. I call the Two of Cups the frenemies card: allies are acting more like foes.



I don't know if you make this mistake, too, but when I glance too quickly at the Two of Cups in the Thoth deck, I often mistake it for the Three of Cups. Just so we're both clear, here's the Three of Cups. Okay, now that we have that clarified and out of the way, let's continue. The spirit domiciled in the Two of Cups is the Lord of Love. To get an impression of the Lord of Love, think about what it feels like to be in love with love. That's the Two of Cups under Thoth.

This is the card of purity and innocence. When it shows up in a reading, it can indicate a blooming, mutually giving relationship, one that fulfills the heart, two hearts that complete each other.

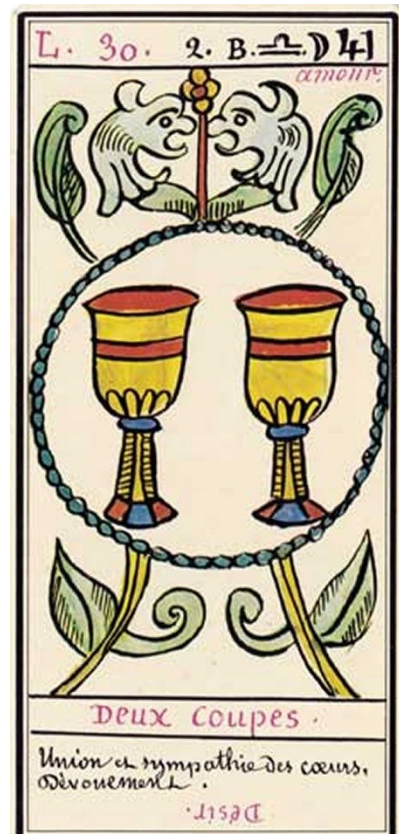
In an esoteric reading of the card, the Two of Cups can indicate spiritual fulfillment. This is the omen of Divine Love, or even brotherly love, universal, unconditional love that persists through all troubles and circumstances. I adopted and integrated this interpretation of love, of agape love, into my own deck design for the Spirit Keeper's Tarot.



In The Joined One, the Two of Chalices prominently features the phrase: *abyssus abyssum invocat*. The depths of me calls out to the depths of you. For me, I wanted to emphasize Spiritual Love, the Love between Humanity and Divinity, which still works in terms of interpreting this card for love and relationships. When you love someone deeply and truly, what exactly is it you are loving? You are loving and you are recognizing, acknowledging the Divine inside that person. The divination moon blocks featured on the two chalices represent a deep longing and desire to connect, to communicate with the Divine, to fill and fulfill ourselves by communion with the Divine. In designing The Joined One, I asked myself: what does it mean to Love? Well, to me, it means to be purified. When you experience true love, you are absolved, atoned, purged—there is a sense of your spirit and heart being cleansed.

Now reversed, the two chalices spill forth the waters into the mouths of the serpents. So, to me, this is quite a positive omen, a nuance of the Two of Chalices theme. For those working with the Spirit Keeper's Tarot, I hope the Two of Chalices reversed reminds you of two Major Arcana keys, The Angel (more commonly known as Temperance) and The Healer (or The Star card). If upright The Joined One is receiving and experiencing Love, in reverse, The Joined One is giving, spilling forth, pouring out Love to fill the needs and longing of another. This is saving someone. This is iconic of the Great Flood of Love and all figurative implications thereof.

Now, when it comes to the Two of Swords, while in all four decks there's some overlap and recurring themes, admittedly, each deck has its own rather distinct approach to the divinatory meaning here. So maybe you'll want to pay attention, because you think

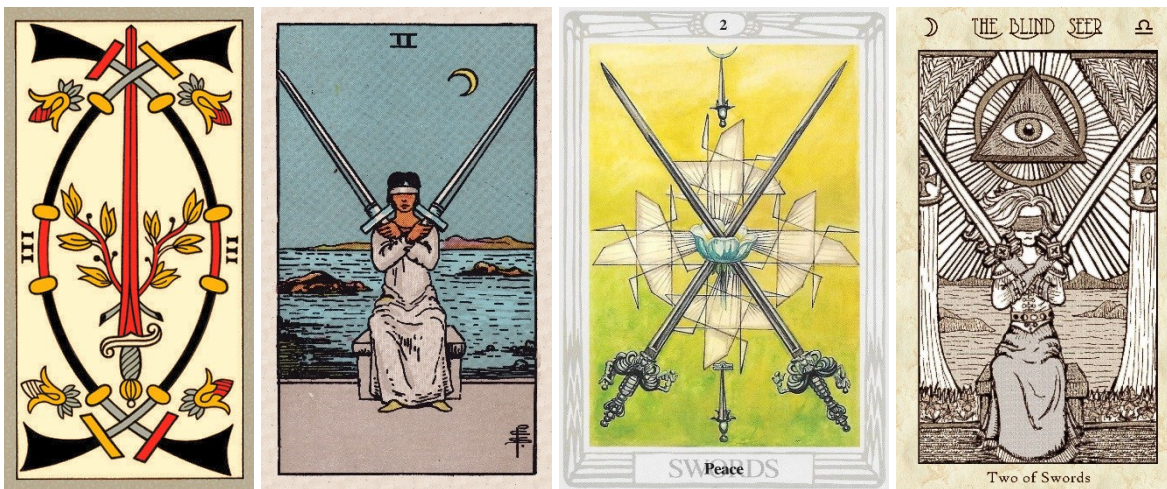


you know what the Two of Swords is all about, and then...mind blown! Or maybe it's just me, I don't know.

The Two of Swords in the Marseilles tradition is about valor, honor, integrity, a firm resolve. You face danger, but you do so with fearlessness and courage. This is about a clash to come, fighting an adversary. The Two of Swords here suggests heroism, someone trying to be a hero. You are choosing to take up arms and be the fighter, the warrior, and advocate or champion for a just cause. You choose to confront and face your battles.

Reversed, the Two of Swords can prognosticate treachery, warn you of a lie, or false friends. This is the avoidance or trying to escape confrontation of a fight you really should be fighting.

Quick tip: When you're working with a Marseille deck where it's not very clear which side is up and which side is reverse, you can hand-write keywords along the top and bottom edges of the deck.



Now let's compare the Two of Swords from the Marseille with the Rider-Waite-Smith. In modernity, you often find readers interpreting the RWS Two of Swords and indicating choice, or having to make a hard decision. Arthur Edward Waite says in Pictorial Key that the Two of Swords signifies equipoise, meaning the equal distribution of weight on two opposite sides, or at the polarities.

This is getting stuck between a rock and a hard place. Given the imagery here and what it evokes for us modern readers, we often see this card as calling us to be objective, because unbiased, impartial thought will be required to get us out of whatever predicament we've found ourselves in.

Reversed, Waite tells us that this card means that deception abounds. Someone has not been honest with you. Decisions have been made without integrity. I read the Two of Swords reversed as hitting a stalemate. And so, the divine instruction here is to yield, instead of assert, that way you might be able to pass. Giving your adversary the perception that you've yielded will in fact be what leads you to victory and progress. In modern terms, the Two of Swords reversed might be likened to "buyer's remorse." You regret something you did. There's cognitive dissonance here.

Note also the crescent moons here. When upright, you'll see a waxing moon, which means increase, growth, assertion, and attraction. The direction you're headed is on the verge of deciding correctly, toward the highest good. When reversed, you'll see a waning moon, which means release, banishment, severance, and cessation. The direction you're headed is on the verge of deciding wrong, away from or against the highest good.

The Two of Swords in the Thoth Tarot suggests a point of view and interpretation quite different from both the Marseilles and Rider-Waite-Smith. First, the spirit of this card is titled the Lord of Peace. Crowley notes that encoded into the Two of Swords is the spirit of Harpocrates, the Greek god or personification of Silence, Secrets, and Confidentiality.

Peace is achieved through these offices. That is the key to Diplomacy, or at least that is how we interpret the Two of Swords, Lord of Peace in the Thoth. Crowley further notes that the two swords pictured here are Two Isomers, or two molecules, named Silence and Chastity.

If you look at the imagery on this card, the geometric symmetry of it, and consider its astrological correspondence, the Moon in Libra, "peace" here also means harmony, and more specifically, aesthetic harmony. Overall, returning to the title of the card, the Lord of Peace, the Two of Swords is about asserting yourself in a non-confrontational, congenial way. This is negotiation, mediation between two otherwise oppositional sides, staying silent when it's prudent, and conducting yourself in a way that's honest and pure in intention.

Now here's something peculiar that Crowley says about the Two of Swords. He quotes a line from the Latin poet Gaius Valerius Catullus: *Sed domi maneat paresque nobis novem continuas futiones*, which translates to, oh dear, this is X rated... "But stay at home and prepare yourself for nine back-to-back copulations" – or, let's just call a spade a spade—"nine back-to-back fuckings." That would be from Carmen 32. The speaker in the poem is addressing his darling Ipsitilla, praising her for her beauty and how thinking of her beauty, he now can't keep it together and his, this is the last line of the poem, (quote) "prick is poking through my cloak and tunic." (end quote)

In The Two of Swords from my SKT deck, we definitely see the influence of the Rider-Waite-Smith. The Blind Seer's forearms form a cross like the double vajra in the Two of Scepters (tarot Two of Wands) because they're both active, more, shall we say, masculine forces. Still exercising discernment, will, and control, we are now navigating a stalemate between the Ego and the Higher Self, the True Self. Here, the figure is blindfolded and so you cannot see through your physical eyes, or should not look at the situation through physical sight. Instead, see through the Eye of Providence. This is also "bearing the cross" of twin paths, of possession along both the Right Hand Path and the Left Hand Path, balanced. I also read the card's appearance as an omen of Divine Intervention.

Reversed, the Two of Swords in the SKT might be a sign that you're resisting Divine Intervention, that somehow maybe on a subconscious level, you're blocking out Divinity. This is you being oblivious to the beneficence and Presence of Spirit all around you. I also read The Blind Seer reversed as forfeiture, and the laying down of arms, a surrender, or quitting the fight.



We are now on to the final suit corresponding with the element Earth. This is the Two of Coins in the Tarot de Marseilles, Pentacles in the RWS, Disks in the Thoth, and the Two of Orbs named The Nocturne in the Spirit Keeper’s Tarot.

Because the majority of tarot readers today are used to a modern, contemporary interpretation of the imagery in the Rider-Waite-Smith Two of Pentacles, you may be a touch surprised by some of the other longstanding attributions for this card. If we were to generalize, all four of these earthly-rooted Twos will suggest an equal and opposite polarity that is balanced in harmony, in cooperation despite being fundamentally in opposition. Now that’s the root energy. The logistics of how each deck style interprets that theme does vary quite a bit.

The Two of Coins in the Marseilles tends toward a more practical attribution. Considering the imagery and detailing here, it’s no leap of intuition to accept that this card indicates a stalemate in trade or coming to a temporary impasse in a money matter. Historically, this card has also been assigned the meaning of embarrassment, feeling worried about financial circumstances, or financial challenges. It’s the suggestion that one commercial project is coming to an end, but chin up, a new one is about to start.

A quick point about the meaning of words, though. “Embarrassment” historically meant something slightly different from what you think it means today. Embarrassment here refers specifically to financial trouble, burdens with debt, to be dealing with money trouble. That’s not quite what “embarrassment” means today.

As for its reversed meaning, the Two of Coins may suggest receiving a written message of some kind, a formal letter or written proposal is being delivered and coming your way.

Compare that Marseilles tradition of interpreting the Two of Coins with the Rider-Waite-Smith Two of Pentacles.

In Waite’s Pictorial Key, he describes the imagery here as a young man in the act of dancing, each hand holding a pentacle and the two pentacles in either hand connected to each other by an endless cord forming the figure eight. Waite notes the message of news or messages in writing to come as the divinatory meaning for this card, echoing the Marseilles attributions. He also suggests a negative implication for this card, noting that the Two of Pentacles can indicate obstacles,

agitation, trouble, and embroilment. Events and circumstances will be thrown into discord or conflict. Confusion may ensue.

This is a very different meaning for the card from what modern-day readers work with. More commonly today, the Two of Pentacles in the Rider-Waite refers to juggling multiple ventures at the same time and multi-tasking well, in a way that brings you a better sense of financial equilibrium. Very different from the late 19th century early 20th century attributions.

In reverse, the Two of Pentacles indicates, according to Waite himself, gaiety, or festivities, the finer things in life, so this card in reverse is rather positive, joyous, cheerful. In apparent contrast even dissonance from that original intention for the reversed Two of Pentacles, penned by Waite himself, I personally attribute the Two of Pentacles reversed with instability of finances due to scattered or misdirected effort. Also, you're trying to do way too much at the same time, and you end up doing nothing right.

The Two of Disks in the Thoth tarot is enspirited or enlivened with the Lord of Harmonious Change. Crowley shortens the name to simply Change, so the Lord of Change. Let's start with the decan rulership over the Lord of Change, or the astrological correspondence here, Jupiter in Capricorn. When the planet Jupiter is under the sign Capricorn, the planet is said to be in Fall. The beneficent properties of Jupiter are weakened, suppressed. Its negative attributes tend to be more prominent, because when Jupiter is in Fall, it's basically unhinged.

The Wheel of Fortune is turned against you. I incorporated this concept into my deck, the Spirit Keeper's Tarot, which you'll see later. The Two of Disks, as Crowley explains it, is about having hit rock bottom already, but then right after this, coming soon, there will be a rise back to the top. Thus, the serpent forms the endless band, the lemniscate encircling the yin and yang symbol from Eastern philosophy, the harmony of dark and light, and as illustrated by Lady Freida Harris here, the balance of Fire and Water in the element Earth, as the suit of Disks corresponds with the element Earth.

The Two of Disks relays to you this revelation: The raised will fall, and the fallen will rise.

In the Spirit Keeper's Tarot, I've titled the Two of Orbs, "The Nocturne." First, note that I'm deriving my design mainly from the Marseilles and Thoth traditions here.

So why The Nocturne? This is the dark night of the soul, and a nocturne is a musical composition evocative of the dark night. I am diverging radically from the modern, popular meanings for the Rider-Waite Two of Pentacles. Instead, this is the planet Jupiter in Fall, debilitated by Capricorn. This is material reality causing a spiritual crisis, but bringing you closer, in harmony, in union to the Divine. And so I'm working more with the Thoth approach of Harmonious Change.

Recall that in the Marseilles tradition, this is a personal recession, financial challenges, an ending to one venture but making way for a new venture to come. Consider the spiritual counterpart to that and we get a transformative material crisis, so still that personal recession, which is the catalyst that ends up facilitating profound personal healing. The alchemical Black Dragon pictured here in The Nocturne symbolizes the Great Medicine, or more specifically, the venom of the dragon is the Great Medicine.

Now let's take a look at The Nocturne reversed. Pictorially there is no change to the polarity of the north lunar node and south lunar node. So, the undercurrent of themes remains the same, but here, to me I read the reversal as resistance and an unwillingness to swallow the bitter pill that is the Great Medicine. It's almost like you want to stay in the dark. You've become so accustomed to the Darkness, you don't even know the healing possibilities of the Light.

Ooh, one more thing— Note the ships in both the Rider-Waite-Smith and my deck, the SKT. In the Rider-Waite, if you consider the curvature of the sails, it would appear that both ships are sailing along the waves in the same direction, right-ward, the larger ship leading and the smaller ship just behind. In the Spirit Keeper's Tarot, I intentionally drew the ships sailing in opposite directions, suggesting something surreal, not possible—there being two winds. Take that and see what you can make of it.

Also, remember what I said to note about the Two of Cups? When we talked about the Two of Cups in the two esoteric-leaning decks, the Rider-Waite-Smith and the Thoth, we noted how these keys indicate harmonious stasis, meaning a state of equilibrium between opposing, equal forces.

In contrast, the Two of Pentacles or, in the Thoth, the Two of Disks, we see the indication of harmonious change. This is the state of movement and transformation, or conversion between opposing, equal forces. Together, they call upon the Hermetic principle of polarity.

Now let's talk about this polarity, tension and yet harmonious balance of the Twos. When I was looking at the Twos, two wands, two cups, two swords, two coins, pentacles, or disks as pictured in each of these cards, and I thought about these four particular keywords: Dominion in Fire, Love in Water, Peace in Air, Change in Earth, I was led along a very particular pathway of thought process, and that's what I want to share with you as you consider the Realm of Twos, and specifically, in a study of the SKT tarot deck.

The polarity of the twos reminded me of the binary that is the yin, or dark, passive force, and the yang, the light, active force, together forming the perfected union. I continued the path of thought on to the Ba Gua, where binaries form trinities until we get the eight trigrams formed by the yin and yang polarities— that binary, the Twos— and, stay with me here, that took me to the Divine Ogdoad of Old Egyptian mythos. These are the Eight Primordial Deities that correspond with the four classical Aristotelian elements. For each of the four elements, there is a pair, a god and goddess.

So the Two of Scepters depicts Kuk and his consort Kauket. The Two of Chalices is Nun and his consort goddess Naunet. Two of Swords is Amun and Amunet. The Two of Orbs is Heh and Hauhet. And just for a quick profile, here's a correspondence table I researched and wrote up that you'll find in the Book of Maps.

Now let's connect the dots between the previous video on the Aces and this lecture on the Twos. Think of the Aces as seeds sown, but not visible yet from the surface of the earth, or material world. The Twos in tarot, then, are when that sown seed sprouts. Twos are the actual second stage, but from our vantage point, from the subjective limited perspective on the material plane, through human eyes, all you see is that little bit of green growth above ground, so to you and I, Stage 2 appears to be Stage 1. In other words, the Twos in tarot suggest beginnings at least from our vantage point, but in reality, as you can see here, they are stage 2, because stage 1 was that seed

sown deep underneath the ground. The Twos represent the duality, polarity, and balance of the seen and unseen.

In closing this lecture on the tarot Twos, take a moment now to study a complete spread of all Twos from the four deck styles: Tarot de Marseilles, the Rider-Waite-Smith, the Thoth Tarot, and the deck I created, the Spirit Keeper's Tarot. Pause the video here to study this spread and note your impressions. Then resume when ready.

Now take a moment to consider your thoughts and impressions of the cards when they're reversed and presenting their ill-dignified facades. What comes to mind and how do you feel— where does your intuition take you when you study these cards upside down.

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That concludes the Tarot Twos of the Minor Arcana. In the next video lecture of this series, we will cover the Tarot Threes. This is the ripening of conditions and events. The Realm of Three is also known as the Palace of Mirrors. It is the number associated with Divine Awakening. From scanning the side by side juxtaposition of Waite's deck and Crowley's along with studying the design intentions of my own deck, the Spirit Keeper's Tarot, I hope you'll see that here in the Threes, a little more so than other numerological realms, I've really tried to produce a balance of symbolic references equally from Waite and Crowley. That, at least for me, was really important specifically for the Realm of Threes.

