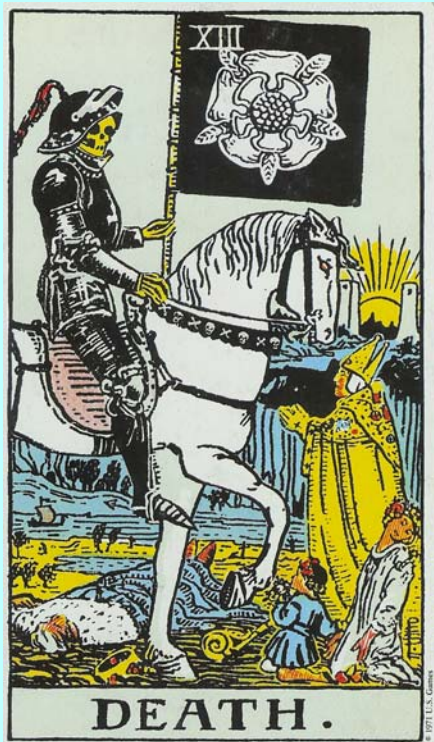


THE TAROT CARD OF DEATH

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To undergo the transformational experience symbolised by the Death card, can be a painful experience. In ancient times, it was seen as the journey into the underworld. Tarot readers attempt to present its grim reaper picture in a positive way to clients, but the image itself touches us on a primitive level. Even those who have never seen a tarot card before, connect to its images. It brings to the surface very deep fears. Primarily fear of physical death, our own, or that of loved ones. It also brings to the surface fear of change, fear of loss, fear of nothingness. The death card, is an archetypal symbolic of an ending. We find it painful because as human beings we are attached to life. We are also attached to the familiar of life; the self we know, our bodies, our habits, our memories. To be separated

from them is difficult. Our relationships, our families, our friends, our jobs, our homes, are all parts of the life we have created. To let go of any of these attachments is a painful process for us.

The rite of passage symbolised by the Death card of the tarot is an image of the process of letting go of attachment. The symbolic images on the Rider Waite card show us the process that needs to be undertaken if we are to successfully reach resurrection and rebirth, as symbolised by the sun beyond the pillars of The Moon tarot card seen at the back of the Death card in the Rider Waite deck. The first aspect of the self to befall the vehicle of death is the ego and its attachment, symbolised by the king with his lost crown. This is the first transformation stage and if we are able to willingly let go of our ego, the transition will be much easier for us. But willing or not, an ending will occur. This tarot card may well be called Death, because it symbolises an ending which cannot be avoided, no matter what our ego believes. The situation under transformation, cannot survive in its current form.

The young maiden pictured in the card, symbolises the feminine or feeling response to the death experience. She is partly innocent and partly aware of what this ending will mean. Therefore she kneels, in homage to the

arrival of death, knowing that it will mean loss of emotional innocence, but that the processing of this loss will be a maturing experience and is part of life itself. It is our feeling nature that needs to be willing to participate in the death experience. Through the feeling function we are able to acknowledge the loss; to mourn the loss; to process our sadness of letting go of whatever death has taken away from our lives. It is this grieving process that is symbolised by the boat journeying across the water towards the sun. This journey is also symbolised in the minor arcana cards of the six of swords and the five of cups.

The child, pictured in the card, with its offering of flowers, is symbolic of the future. It knows that without death, there would be no space for anything new to grow. One day, also our physical life too will come to an end. By confronting these mini death experiences, we are preparing ourselves for our own death.

Eventually we will be able to celebrate the arrival of new growth in our lives. The spirit will renew; the soul will again rejoice; the mind will move on and there will be new growth in our physical world - if we are willing to allow this to happen and can understand that it is the natural order of life. Often we need support from others to undergo this transition and it is a time to seek that support. Perhaps we need more time with family and friends with whom we feel comfortable talking about our feelings or perhaps we need professional help whilst we undergo this difficult and often painful process.

This is not to suggest that all death experiences are equal. But when we view another's experience, it is not for us to judge if the loss of a brief first love is as tragic as the loss of a beloved partner of many years, or the loss of a long loved pet. Who is to judge whether the loss of a job is more or less traumatic than the loss of a friend, the ending of a relationship, or the loss of a dream. Each loss creates a personal response. This personal response and the process being experienced can be seen in a tarot reading through the minor arcana cards that accompany the Death card in a tarot spread. From these minor arcana cards we can also see how the spirit, heart, mind and physical body/physical world is reacting to the changes that the Death card symbolises.

We need to welcome Death, knowing that if we are willing to let go of our old spiritual, emotional, mental and physical reactions to life and move through this natural cycle of change, the experience will bring rebirth and new experiences into our lives. This aspect of the card is often shown by the symbol of the phoenix rising from the ashes. The experience of death is a cycle of transition and an initiation into a new life. These major rites of passage are not usually undertaken with ease. But after Death life will go on.