

VISIO



DIVINA

*The Wisdom of Contemplative Vision*

## THE CHARIOT

*CARD SEVEN OF THE TAROT*

In the ancient world, the chariot was the fastest means of human conveyance known, and it metaphorically signified rapid and energetic movement toward whatever realm it was heading. Jewish mystical tradition understood the chariot to represent the vehicle of divine transport along the vertical axis. The ancient Hebrew prophets, sages, and seers saw it as the means for the experience of ascension to the Throne of God and the Celestial Court.

In the spiritual tradition to which the Tarot belongs, entering the horizontal axis of space and time involves energetic movement that propels the pilgrim forward on the journey of Eternal Return. Forward movement implies there is also the possibility of a lift vertically into the other dimensions of what we call the heavens. This engagement with the vertical axis is essential for the journey into transcendence and immanence. On the horizontal plane, the sign of the chariot is the modality of spiritual transport as we pass through the three fundamental processes of purification, known as *catharsis*, enlightenment, called *photismos*, and union or marriage with the Divine, *henosis*. These are the three key vehicles of mystical experience as we spiritually journey throughout a lifetime.

All of these possibilities await the pilgrim, and so movement in any direction (horizontal or vertical) involves the energy of the chariot of Spirit acting upon the soul. Each individual is invited to enter and be conveyed forward and/or upward by something greater than his or her own egoic energies. The charioteer also signifies a higher form of Intelligence, the Higher Self, which is able to guide and direct those energies from a

perspective that is not limited by the lower self. All of these are aspects of an ancient teaching that speaks of higher intelligence as a holy warrior, protecting, moving and benefiting the individual soul on its passageway across the territory of a lifetime.

Warfare and holy war, if carefully understood, are seen in this teaching not to be the means of evil, but the energetic actions that represent evil's defeat. We are each on earth to "do battle" with the forces of darkness on the side of the Good, engaging the world in a battle for the Soul of the World but on the personal territory (or ground) of one's own experience. As in the tradition of the Bhagavad Gita of India's sacred tradition, we are asked to take up arms and energetically engage the world in a way that may seem contrary to our natural longing for peace or comfort.

The world is often presented to us in stark terms. Our world is not at peace; there is chaos and darkness all around us. We can stay passive and unengaged, or we can "take up arms" and bravely challenge what confronts us. We can join forces with Light and push back against darkness. We can actively involve ourselves in evil's destruction and protect and encourage the rise of the Good in its place. Entering the second quadrant in the Journey means, literally, that we have no choice but to experience this energetic field of darkness and scattered light and respond to it in our own unique and particular way.

In addition to the chariot itself, the image also shows horses and cycling wheels. The scene is one of battle and chaos suggested by the tornadoes of destruction behind the chariot.

All of these add meaning to the metaphor. Horses often signify the animalistic energies of desire which must be brought under masterful control. The wheels are cycles of time that move across the territories of space and time, or, as Ezekiel saw, they are the circling energies of Spirit emanating from the Throne of God. There are vortices of events all around us over which we have little or no control, but which must be endured in some way. The experiences of our lifetimes are not always peaceful. In fact, they are typically the opposite as we move through the field of energy that is called Life!

### Reflections on Image and Text:

1. When you look at this image of the deck of the Tarot as an archetype of human destiny, what are your feelings about it?
2. If love is both the ground and origin of you and your ultimate destiny, how does that understanding change anything for you?
3. The images of the Tarot are evidence of a long traditional spiritual teaching. The fact that this teaching falls early in the deck and at the beginning of the sacred journey through space and time is significant. What is the significance for you?
4. In your life-long experience, what has taught you the most about love—both as a human experience and as a form of God’s care for you?
5. Love is an energy that generates more of itself and ripples out across existence. In other words, it is a fractal pattern. How have you experienced that?
6. For you, what is the most important way to teach love to another human being?
7. How would you describe love’s most important principle? Why do you think the angel is in the image? What role do angels play in the experience of love?

### A Place for Notes and for Journaling your Answers:

*There are Twenty-two cards or images called the Major Arcana in the deck of Tarot cards. Valentin Tomberg uses each one of these to illustrate and illuminate the teachings of the ancient wisdom of Hermeticism. Both the Tarot and the Hermetic teaching are not in the mainstream of religious tradition as we understand them today, though they have played roles in the transmission of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam in the past. Valentin Tomberg, a Russian teacher from the Christian Orthodox and Catholic traditions, met with a group of scholars, teachers and wisdom seekers in the last century who helped bring this teaching forward and reinterpret it for us. **Meditations on the Tarot: A Journey into Christian Hermeticism** (1987) was the collected treasury of their work together.*

*This reflection, text and its illumination have been provided by Alison Hine and Lynn Bauman as a means for contemplative prayer and spiritual vision.*

# LECTIO DIVINA

*The Contemplative Reading of a Sapiential Text*

## *Chariot*

*The Chariots of God are numberless,  
a thousand-fold,  
on those you rode from Sinai to your holy place.  
And taking captives captive as gifts from humankind,  
from there you turned ascending to your throne on high.*

*Psalm 68:17-18  
Ancient Songs Sung Anew*

*The Chariot whose traditional meaning is “victory, triumph, success,” ... warns us of the danger of megalomania and teaches us the real triumph achieved by the Self. ... this means to say the successful outcome of the work of true liberation, which is the fruit of **catharsis** (purification), and which precedes **photismos** (illumination), and which is followed by **henosis** (union), according to the occidental initiation tradition. ... (who is) the integrated man, the master of himself.*

*Valentin Tomberg  
Meditations on the Tarot  
164-165*

*Contemplating*  
**THE ILLUMINATION**

