



Ace of Cups: the gift of love by Jeni Bethell ©2006

Recently a small group of students and I have been enjoying weekly meditation sessions centred around different cards of the Waite-Smith Minor Arcana. Because we have all experienced these sessions so positively, what began as a 9-week course has been extended and continues...

The original short course was inspired by Rachel Pollack's reference to 'gate' cards. In *78 Degrees of Wisdom*, she suggests that "joining ourselves meditatively to particular cards in the four suits will bring experiences reaching beyond the cards' specific meanings." She names nine specific cards that she calls 'gate' cards, for she believes they offer a *gateway* to far greater personal exploration and understanding. She emphasises that her selection is subjective.

Participants in my meditation course – whether the focus has been on 'Gate' or other Minor Arcana cards – have found these sessions to be invaluable in helping them develop a deeper understanding of each card's meanings – even sometimes offering new interpretations for some of the more enigmatic cards. The sessions also seem to offer individuals personal insights about situations they are presently experiencing in their day-to-day lives, and frequently challenge their thinking and attitudes at a deeper level.

With the blessing of all participants I wish to share with you some of our experiences relating to the Ace of Cups, our focus card in a recent meditation session.

The Ace of Cups is a very special card, as are all four Aces. They contain the full potential of what each suit/element has to offer us. So if we can grasp the energy represented in each Ace – be it Wand, Cup, Sword, Pentacle – then our ability to interpret all other cards in that suit is made easier.

Our meditation format

Our meditations follow a regular pattern that includes some quiet time thoughtfully examining the focus card in detail, a relaxation exercise to open participants to an altered state of consciousness, and then a guided visualisation into meditation. Our sessions usually conclude with a reading activity that includes the focus card.

I am including the words used for both the relaxation and meditation, so you can read these onto a tape to replay, should you wish to try this exercise yourself. Of course, you may prefer to compose your own wording. Choose appropriate incense and music to accompany the exercise.

Relaxation – (Some general focus on posture and breath, followed by the following):
Today as we relax, all of our focus is on our Heart Chakra, the centre of love.

As you continue to breathe slowly and deeply, turn your attention to this beautiful, green energy centre in the middle of your chest. See it as an enormous clear, deep, emerald-coloured sphere of infinite depth, just like our capacity to love and be loved.

Feel the love emanating from this place. Allow it to spread through your body, sending love, the greatest healer, through your entire body. Feel that love in your feet and moving up your legs – all warm and tingly; now in your buttocks, your hips and lower back....

Massage your internal organs with this love, slowly, caressingly....

Send love to your middle and upper spine, across your shoulder blades and shoulders, then down through your chest and lungs....

Back in the heart centre, be aware that there is no limit to how much love you have to give. Send some now to each other person in the group. At the same time, be open to receiving the love they are sending to you right now

Notice how good it makes you feel to give and receive love. Send that love now up into your neck and throat and feel proud of who you are, what you believe in, and how you are trying to live this out in the world....

Meditation

As your awareness moves to the top of your head, experience your loving Heart, your true being, moving out through your Crown Chakra and floating out into space. Feel a soft breeze on your face and body as you gently glide through the air....

The sky around you is a soft powder grey/blue. Looking down, you see a beautiful, deep blue lake that stretches out way beyond the horizon....

You drift closer, landing near the water's edge. Now you can see that there are many lily pads on the surface, with pink water lilies open to the light and love from the sky...

As you gaze out at this peaceful scene, you become aware of an enormous, but somehow gentle, white hand. The hand emits powerful radiating white light. Balanced in its palm is a golden cup and, from that cup five streams of water fountain out, falling down to merge with that in the lake below. Miraculously, they make no splash. All is gentle, harmonious. A white dove carrying the cross of unity in its beak confirms this for you. So too do the blue droplets, leaves or yods drifting down towards the water's surface....

You begin to realise that the Divine hand is offering you the cup. Yes you... as a gift. Fly up now towards the hand bearing the cup. Stretch out your arms to indicate your desire to receive it. Take hold of the cup by its stem. Feel its great and beautiful power surging through you, and enjoy the experience.....

Participants' meditative experiences

Most of the images revealed to participants during the exercises were symbolic – not unlike those we experience in dreams. Guided visualisation can work in similar manner.

Miranda:

I started out flying in the air and realised I was a sea bird. As I landed on the shore of the lake, I transformed into myself wearing a white tunic. Beside me, I noticed, were my animal totems. We were all standing by the lake gazing at the hand and marvelling at it...“Wow, look at this hand!”

Then I chose to float across to the hand. I knelt before it and bowed my head, where the hand blessed me and opened itself up. I then stood in place of the cup and all the water was flowing out of me and into me. I had a beautiful feeling of renewal flowing through me.

Once I had taken my fill of that energy, I dived off the hand into the lake and was swimming in the blue and having a lovely time floating amongst the lilies. I came back, took the cup, and went back to my friends on the shore. They each took a drink from the cup and it refilled itself. Then I went and took the cup and poured it into a very ornate trough that had many paths from it. The liquid turned into a thick, lava-like, gold fluid, which floated down these channels. As I watched, it floated past people, cities, towns, animals, and forests; then out of this world into other worlds and other times and throughout the universe – it just kept going. As all these images kept floating past me, I had the feeling that this was the fabric of the universe; what binds and nourishes it, and we are just part of this cycle. When we finish with one life, another life begins; but this universal force – the ongoing nourishment of the universe, which we can tap into – nourishes everything.

Danielle:

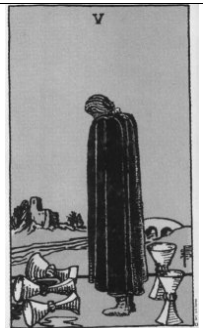
As soon as I floated up to get the cup I turned into Cupid. I picked the cup up and held it above my head so that the fountains of water were dripping over me. Carrying the cup in my left hand, I flew to the scene of the *Four of Wands*. I started sprinkling water from the cup onto the two characters standing in the archway. From then on, in a completely arbitrary way, I visited characters in other Minor Arcana cards. When I flicked water on them, I became the character in the card and could feel the effect.



For example, in the *Seven of Wands*, the hero didn't lose his fighting spirit – he just felt a greater amount of inner calm and strength about what he was fighting for or defending. For the woman in the *Eight of Swords*, the bindings around her body instantly dropped to the ground; although she was still blindfolded with all those swords still surrounding her. As I became her, she felt lighter, less trapped by her circumstances.



The other card I remember very clearly was the *Five of Cups*. Having sprinkled the figure with water, I stood lifting my head to gaze out at the flowing waterway in front of me. My face felt wet from the spray of Cupid's water and then tears began to stream out from my eyes. It wasn't a traumatic experience; it was one of release and relief. I could feel my neck and shoulders gradually straightening up, my lungs expanding to breathe in fresh air.



Two other participants shed tears during their very different meditations. Though the tears came as a surprise to both Lucille and Monique, neither felt them to be negative or unpleasant. Lucille's meditation focused especially on Mother Earth and mother love, unconditional love. Monique's meditation saw her meeting and greeting many of her loved ones (past and present), feeling them surround her with love before they all developed wings and "turned into angels". Veronica's meditation involved fairytale themes - a cottage in the woods that she entered, knowing it was especially for her. It contained all the gentle creature comforts she would love to bring into her life, including a special little spot she knew was just for her in which she could pursue her passion for handcrafts. She had the sense that she was sharing this life with a like-minded, loving 'other'.

How these Experiences reflect on the Ace of Cups

Let's begin by listing the positive interpretations usually attributed to this card:

- The emblem of love underpinning life.
- The essence of love which is selfless love, loving without strings.
- The gift of self love.
- The beginning of a love affair.
- The personification of our feeling nature, our dreams, our imagination.
- A spiritual force alive in our work.
- Success/triumph in matters of the heart.
- Triumph over our feelings and emotions, that is, trust in being able to hold the cup gently.
- Feelings and emotions of happiness, contentment and peace.
- Positive loving feelings/experiences with another – perhaps partner, parent, child.
- New spiritual insight and sensitivity developing.

With this particular focus card, the effect of the meditation exercise seemed to have more to do with focusing, personalising, and therefore intensifying individual understanding of the card, rather than experiencing new interpretations of its meaning.

To summarise the experiences, and conclusions reached by participants in the exercise:

- Each participant experienced the Ace of Cups as the Gift of Love in one form or another.
- Danielle viewed her meditative experience as a reminder that no matter what is happening in our lives, we can bring that Divine Love we are all offered into our beings. Although we may still have to go through the same challenging experiences, our inner strength is increased and our wounds are more easily healed.
- Miranda felt her meditation encouraged us to act as an instrument for sharing this love around - the more we share it, the more there seems to be for all to receive.
- We were all reminded to open our hearts to receive love from others, but this is hard to do without first loving yourself. As Veronica put it, "if you are open to the gift of the Ace of Cups, it will give you what you want – but you must love yourself and allow yourself to be loved by others".
- Yet, as Monique pointed out, "Even if you aren't feeling loving towards yourself and others seem aloof, I realised that we have Divine Love within us always - so

really, we are always being loved. Miranda agreed: “The energy/love source is around us. It supports and energises us. It is a universal gift.”

- Several of the meditations seemed to be reminding us that tears are a natural and important part of our physical and emotional lives. They may be – probably *should be* – shed in many different emotional situations, be they joyous or deeply painful. Shedding tears is an acknowledgment of, and potentially a release from, emotional intensity. It’s when we swallow or deny them that we can get stuck.
- So the water flowing from the cup can represent the giving and receiving of love, and the flow of emotions which this love inevitably activates.

Danielle’s Meditation in Action

Not surprisingly, my very next professional consultation involved a client who was in the midst of a very challenging time in her life. The heavy cards presented in her spread – past, present and future – spoke to the ongoing nature of difficult circumstances for some time to come. Yet in the midst of all this heaviness, there was the Ace of Cups, looking very much like a rose surrounded by many thorns – as indeed it is sometimes!

Immediately recalling Danielle’s meditation, it felt so intuitively right to encourage the querent to try to bring the card’s loving energy into this difficult situation and thereby break an otherwise negative cycle of thought and activity. This may not have altered her physical situation for the moment (given the other cards in the spread), but it would certainly help her at an inner level to better cope, accept and learn from the hard times she was going through.

Love is the essence of our being and our lives - it does indeed ‘make the world go round’. The phrase, “love conquers all” is not fantastic. Love is surely the greatest healer of our emotional and sometimes even our physical wounds, for it emanates from a higher, Divine source and is constantly flowing around us, to receive and to share with the world. This is the gift of the Ace of Cups... the gift of love.