

The Chariot in the Tarot

By Jeni Bethell

The Chariot is card number seven of the 22 Major Arcana or trump cards of the tarot. These 'trump' cards are particularly powerful because they each represent an archetypal character, image or concept to which we all, as humans, can relate. In this regard the Chariot card may be seen as the hero archetype, the individual setting forth on some particular quest in life, as we all do from time to time. Certainly we all have worldly goals and aspirations. It is the Chariot energy upon which we need to draw in order to harness our skills and provide us with the focus, drive and will power required to achieve success.

The particular Chariot design depicted here is from the popular tarot deck designed by Arthur Waite and illustrated by Pamela Coleman-Smith, both of whom were members of the British esoteric Golden Dawn society around the turn of the twentieth century. So popular have their images become - and remained, that many of the hundreds of newer decks now available have retained much of their style and symbolism.

The symbols on a tarot card are very significant. Sometimes, when we read the cards one symbol draws our attention, and this may well be a clue to the importance of a particular aspect of the card on that occasion. For instance, studying the card now, you may notice that the charioteer is able to drive his draft animals - the two sphinxes - without the use of reins. Instead, what he holds in his right hand is a wand. This emphasises the notion that ultimate success in the world has much to do with 'mind over matter', that it's as much - or more to do with mindset than with actual physical effort. And the right mindset requires faith - belief in self and in life's inherent positive possibilities, as the wand and the magical symbols on his tunic also affirm. Being master of the draft animals as the charioteer is, suggests that he has conquered his more base desires - those things which can hold us back, drag us down. So the Chariot card is the perfect card to focus upon when willpower is at issue - for example, when trying to quit smoking, lose weight, and the like.

Perhaps you are drawn to the moon face he wears on each shoulder, pondering why one looks miserable, the other happy. In order to be focussed and successful, the charioteer must control his emotions, harness any excesses that could undermine his confidence or distract him from his purpose. The colours of black and white represent the dualities, the polar oppositions which form the basis of our perception of the conscious world. In the Chariot card the sphinxes that draw the chariot of the hero - one black and one white - each contains the colour of the other within itself, much like the symbolism of the Tao, the Chinese symbol of wholeness. Similarly, the sacred Indian symbol of the lingam and yoni on the front of his carriage suggests the unity of such polar opposites. As an added safe-guard, the charioteer also wears protective armour that not only protects him from any physical perils he may encounter on his journey, but the breast plate in particular guards his heart against too much emotional vulnerability.

There are many mythological associations which can be meaningfully made with this card. In the charioteer we are reminded of the Greek god, Apollo, who represents the daily movement of the sun. Apollo is frequently depicted riding his chariot across the sky. Traditionally we associate the sun with what is light, optimistic and positive in

the conscious world, all of which are qualities of the archetypal Chariot that we need to employ to obtain the victories the card promises. The charioteer represents young, masculine or yang energy, energy that all of us – male or female, young or old, can tap into. A female character from mythology with Chariot energy in abundance is the Celtic goddess Rhiannon. An accomplished horse-woman, she used her inherent qualities of confidence, determination and drive in gaining the life partner of her choice, Pwyll, rather than accepting a lesser man whom her father had selected for her. These same character traits also helped her through many trying times later in her life. Drawing upon Chariot energy during times of trial and tribulation can ensure we are able to grit out teeth, get on and get through in one piece, much like Rhiannon.

All tarot cards contain both positive and negative potential and the Chariot is no exception, as the third mythological charioteer demonstrates. For Ares, the Greek god of war, can also be associated with this archetype. Always eager for another quest, he would ride his chariot into battle with extraordinary boldness and gained many a conquest in war and in love. But his lust for warring, and for winning were excessive and took no account of the feelings and needs of others. This is an example of the Chariot energy taken to extreme, to its negative pole. You may have noticed that the two sphinxes face in different directions. Another challenge - or potentially negative aspect of this card, can occur when we are pulled in very different directions, or have opposing desires and are unable to choose one priority and focus on it properly. Alternatively, we may need to learn how to manage two equally important priorities in our life so that they run smoothly, in parallel with each other – like balancing work and study, when we want or need to do both at the same time.

A great way to work with the tarot alone is in a meditative manner. If, for instance, you wish to gain greater insight into the Chariot archetypal energy and what it means for you at this time, sit quietly and study the card, trying not to think too much; just experience it visually and emotionally. Then, when the time seems right, close your eyes and see yourself stepping in to the card. Spend some minutes in these imaginal realms with the charioteer. He may impart pearls of wisdom, meaningful insights for you to apply in gaining willpower, mastery and success in your life.