

XIV TEMPERANCE

Written by Jeni Bethell for the Tarot Guild of Australia's "MAGICIAN" magazine, August 2018

Before finding the Tarot, I had only ever heard the word temperance used in connection with the 19th and early 20th century Temperance Movement which advocated total abstinence from alcohol. English being a living, fluid language, this is now included as one of the meanings of temperance in the Macquarie and Oxford dictionaries; but the traditional meanings of the word derive from the Greek *sophrosune*, the Latin *temperare*: moderation and self-control, a call to **restrain** rather than **abstain**.

Temperance is part of the 5th suit of the Tarot, now known as the Major Arcana, which was created in renaissance Italy when there was, on the one hand, an enthusiastic revival of interest in art and literature inspired by classical models, philosophies and beliefs, on the other, an ever more powerful, singular and restrictive Christian church. Temperance is one of Plato's 4 classical virtues (the others being prudence, justice and fortitude), one of the church's 7 Christian or cardinal virtues. (It added faith, hope and charity to the classical 4). The virtue of Temperance, as reflected in Tarot card XIV, is the ability of an individual to control the self through moderation, softening the severe, becoming more gentle and mild, and bringing about a desirable state of blending or compromise around them.

Many believe that the intention behind the Major Arcana's creation was far more profound than simply to be the major trumps in the popular tarocchi card game, and a vehicle for cheeky gibes - like naming Card II The Papess - at repressive church dogma. They see hidden in these cards the human story of personal growth and enlightenment through direct contact with spirit/God rather than necessarily via a repressive church, its pope and priests, acting as intermediary. Cleverly, in the original Visconti Tarot deck, each card and its symbols may be interpreted in ways which support or undermine the status quo. The Temperance card simply depicts a woman pouring fluid from one urn to the other. In accordance with church doctrine, this could be construed as reference to the miracle of Jesus turning water into wine of the New Testament, or be seen as affirmation of the church tenet demanding the constant 'moderation' of human sexuality and carnal pleasure. Alternatively, as part of the veiled, esoteric story, it could refer to the alchemical blending process said to enable the literal transforming of base metals into gold, a metaphor for the potential of each individual to independently transform from the prosaic into the spiritually enlightened, evolved human being through the mystical blending of their earthly and godly parts, a process said to begin in earnest with Temperance.

Like the English language, the Tarot too is ever fluid and evolving and this previously covert meaning of the card becomes more obvious pictorially with the passing of time. Move forward to circa 1650 and creation of the Tarot of Marseille, whose style was embraced throughout Europe over subsequent centuries; here the Temperance character's gender is less clear and it has wings, more overtly suggesting that we all contain a spiritual dimension or higher self which can support our endeavours to becoming a model of temperance, and can guide our journey to greater connection with, and understanding of the universe (or God if you prefer). In the early 20th century Ryder-Waite deck, Pamela Coleman-Smith's illustration of Card XIV also includes a clear, direct pathway to what Waite describes as a crown representing 'some part of the Secrets of Eternal Life' or, in Rachel

Pollack's words, 'a glimpse of the greater truths of the universe'. (A glimpse is probably all we are capable of comprehending whilst in human incarnation). When we start to apply the moderation principles of Temperance we are, in effect, stepping onto that pathway.

And, unless we are at least beginning to understand and employ Temperance attitudes, we can never hope to overcome the heaviest of life's challenges which, on The Fool's journey, are the subject of Card XV. So it is always heartening when the Temperance card appears in the Advice or Outcome position of a spread in which The Devil is prominent. To me, it is an affirmation that the querant is aware of their specific problem/s – at least at some level, and awareness is crucial to ever being able to successfully free oneself from entrapment. The presence of Temperance offers reassurance that higher assistance is available to be called upon by the querant. It also provides a more comfortable window through which aspects of the dilemma and possible solutions may be discussed and explored between reader and querant.

The Temperance illustration in the Ryder-Waite deck also depicts the angelic character with one foot in the water, the other on land. In many religious/spiritual traditions we are reminded of the need to remain fundamentally grounded even as we seek illumination of that which is beyond the earthly. Of course it makes sense: think Nelson Mandela: the greater the enlightenment of individuals, the more they are 'living it' in their daily lives, the greater value they have to the world and its creatures. This may indeed be the message of the Tarot when The Hermit card is followed by Temperance. And a V Wands/Temperance card combination is surely a reminder that, on a day-to-day basis, a calm, tempered approach to people and situations can have a positive, snowballing effect on all those with whom we come into contact, reducing hard-line positions and excessive competitiveness.

The natural setting of Temperance in Waite-Smith style decks, and the card's fundamental call to moderation, suggest some fairly obvious health-related messages including the need to live temperately, refraining from excesses of food, alcohol and the like, and perhaps to seek guidance from healers who might assist in the development of a healthy lifestyle with a judicious balance between work and play, between body, mind and spirit. But the Temperance card definitely does not suggest, of itself, rejection of orthodox medicines or surgical practices. Oppositions are a fundamental part of life; Temperance is about blending these correctly – in this case, natural and orthodox medicine. This would be especially emphasised if The Hierophant was also present in the spread. (I hasten to add that I always pre-empt any discussion of health issues in a reading with the reminder that a Tarot reader should never replace a querant's health-care professional/s.)

With more than a small nod to Temperance's traditional association with alchemy, Paul Quinn - who is the author of one of my favourite Tarot books, 'Tarot for Life' – expands on the blending aspect of Temperance, which he describes as synthesis: 'the creative combining of familiar things in unfamiliar ways'. He cites the example of Shakespeare's star-crossed lovers + New York's 20th century gang wars + musical theatre = West Side Story. In my experience, it is not uncommon for people to seek guidance from a Tarot reader when they are trying to establish what they are "meant to be doing" with their lives, particularly career-wise. Should Temperance be strongly placed in such a spread which you are interpreting, you may find it valuable to similarly 'synthesise' with the querant, using surrounding cards as added ingredients or prompts.

In this little paper, I have touched on just a few aspects of the beautiful Temperance card and its possible interpretations in Tarot readings. Here's a little exercise which you might find helpful in

expanding your understanding of the card's potential messages in readings concerning our day-to-day life: Choose a card, any card in the deck, tell yourself a brief story around that card's meaning and then place the Temperance card next to it. Now consider the possible ways in which Temperance alters or expands your story and guides any character/s in that story. The following questions may help:

- Should I be moderating or tempering the manner in which I previously interpreted Card 1?
- What purity and light does Temperance offer in relation to my story and its character/s?
- Were there conflicting or opposing aspects to my story and are they now being integrated harmoniously?
- Is someone in my story now practicing more self-control?
- Was or is there a need for them to take the middle ground on the matter in question?
- What might represent the right balance in this situation?
- Are things now flowing more easily for the character/s or the situation of my story?
- What might be the highest intentions or outcomes that ought to be considered?

In relation to your personal growth and development, meditation on the Temperance card can be profoundly helpful. It is one of the 3 Major Arcana cards I included on my Meditation CD – which you may care to acquire at the next Tarot Guild meeting or can purchase and download any time through my website.

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