

## 0 THE FOOL – AIR ELEMENT



### – DEPARTURE INTO THE NEW YEAR WITH THE FOOL'S WISDOM IN THE BAG

By Ursula Sammann

**At the end and at the beginning of the journey:** the transition from the old to the new year challenges us to pause, to open ourselves to the energy of the Yuletide nights, also called Twelfthtide. The time from Boxing Day to Epiphany is a time between the worlds. The periods of daylight and darkness remain unchanged. The gates to the world beyond are open. "Yuletide is a period of holy nights. During this period, we step through a gateway, a time of change." (1) The old is left behind, and the new has not yet begun, "...it is a time of spirits and souls. Through the air rushes the wild hunt, led by the wild hunter Wodan, pushing into the houses...sunken palaces and treasures rise up." (2)

The more we allow ourselves to pause, the stronger we will be touched by the power of Yuletide. Saying goodbye to the old creates space for inspiration and vision. And finally there will be the moment at which we can decide what we want to take with us in our rucksack for the next twelve months.

For a number of reasons, the beginning of the year is the ideal time to focus on the Fool and his qualities. Not only can he completely change our view of things, but he can help us to be much more at ease.

#### Lessons and gifts: The Fool

also marks a transition, albeit of a very different nature. In the Major Arcana (a), the 0 that is associated with him is framed on the right by the I, the beginning, and on the left by the XXI, the end of the journey. This position indicates that – like Yuletide – he is an energy space between worlds. It is important to pause, to listen and to open oneself to his special energy. At the moment at which we get a glimpse of what his message is, we will immediately pack it in our rucksack as sustenance on our journey and as food for the soul. Because his wisdom is exactly the support we need

to cope with the trials and tribulations we face on the journey through the twenty-one levels of consciousness. If, in addition, we are prepared to use all our experiences for our inner growth and maturation, we will gradually recognise the great value of what we have been given to take on our journey. Because his advice is the key that opens the door to the space where we learn what it is all really about.

#### Archetypes and the ability to break the mould:

The Fool is one of the most significant cards in



the Crowley Tarot. His special position and his enormous, untamed power is a clear indicator of this.

One of the archetypes (b) this card is based on is carnival. Reflecting on its historic origin and its meaning for the collective is very revealing. It widens our view of the Fool from an individual, personal perspective to a position of social relevance. As I was born in Cologne [where *Karneval* is celebrated as a major event], I am very familiar with the symbolism of carnival. Its high time begins on Fat Thursday, when – at the Town Hall – the mayor has his tie cut off and the sceptre taken away. It

ends on Ash Wednesday when the priest, in church, marks an ash cross on the foreheads of the fools.

The Fool's unwillingness to comply with the norm is legendary. "In view of the fact that the ship was floating in water, i.e. in no-man's land so to speak, it was not bound to the laws of any country, and it is not surprising...to see the 'lawless' Fool often depicted on ships." (3) The key meaning of the Fool's ship as a lawless zone and the associated Fool's licence is the release

of unbridled joie de vivre without interference from the authorities.<sup>1</sup> They were powerless.

**Don't be a fool, be sensible, behave yourself:** It is not surprising that the energy of the Fool, which is threatening to the established powers, is considered negative in common parlance. Don't make a fool of yourself. Leave off this nonsense, this foolishness. You are making a fool of me. I would be a fool if I didn't accept the offer, etc.

Nowadays, there are no longer any court jesters and there is no positive image of a fool. It is therefore a challenge for all of us to identify the deep social norms that prevent us from integrating the Fool's energy more in our lives. I hope to inspire you to make a conscious effort to try to pack this energy into your rucksack for the year ahead.

**The theme:** the important position of the Fool at the beginning and end of the Major Arcana endows this card with a key meaning. It encompasses deep insights and wisdom. The circle opens and closes with it. The Fool knows each of the twenty-one cards. He is familiar with the tests that go along with the process of growing up.<sup>2</sup> For this reason, he reminds us that inner lightness and unshakeable joie de vivre, as well as humour, are strong weapons and help us to succeed. He admonishes us to always preserve some space for our inner child (4).

The Fool's actions are driven by pure joie de vivre rather than by intellect. He is not dumb by any means, but very sharp. The quality of air manifested here is its unbridled desire for freedom and its creative, playful strength that does not want its fun to be spoilt. The spiritual knowledge of the impermanence of things is an essential part of the Fool's personality and is proof of his understanding of the deepest mysteries (c). He sees through the illusion of material security and the desire for permanence. It is not without good reason that he refuses to adapt to the norm and remains focused on what is essential. You cannot fool

him. In brief, routine and what goes along with it simply is not the life for him. You cannot sell him life insurance. He does not pay attention to fear. It does not penetrate his armour.<sup>3</sup>

Since he is not involved in the values and norms of this world he never loses his laughter, even in difficult life situations, because if the journey is uphill, there will be a time when it goes downhill again. Ultimately, even that does not matter to him. The universal law (d) here is this: there are no pockets in a shroud. The true, indestructible wealth in life are insights. Once these are attained, they can never disappear or be taken away from us.

If the maturation processes are not engaged in, the personality remains trapped in childlike behaviour, even at an advanced age.<sup>4</sup> This includes the refusal to take responsibility and to accept the challenges of daily life. This card tests us and tempts us to venture too much into extremes. The Fool's energy is seductive. After all, who likes to return to everyday life after a lovely holiday?

**The image:** On the card we see the circles with which we are familiar by now and which represent the influence of higher dimensions on our human existence. They are a symbol of the interplay between microcosm and macrocosm, i.e. the human and the universal dimension. The Fool, in a relaxed manner, fills the space in between. His energy-charged, playful and forward-facing figure in green armour is not anchored to the ground, but almost seems to float. His smiling face looks at us with a bright and astute gaze. His shoes are those of a jester. On his head we see a small three-pointed hat and horns. The right hand holds a diamond, and the left a ripe ear of corn. On his left there is a white dove and, further down, a green crocodile. On the right we see coins, grapes and a tiger attacking his armour. He is surrounded by three white rings. On the line of the smallest, inner ring, a butterfly and a caduceus (e) make their way towards his heart. The inner loop ends at his heart in the shape of a heart. A sun is

<sup>1</sup> It is no accident that, in Cologne, the rate of divorce is highest after the *Karneval*.

<sup>2</sup> Most fairy-tales are about the tests associated with this archetype.

<sup>3</sup> As we can see today – see the politics of coronavirus and the media who, in my opinion, are today's court jesters but only poorly fill this role – fear is the means by which people are enslaved. Those who overcome it can no longer be easily governed.

<sup>4</sup> It is important to make a distinction between childlike and infantile whereby the former is considered positive and the latter negative.

shown at the root chakra. Its yellow colour can also be seen between the Fool's spread legs, as well as three blossoms of a plant under which two naked children play with each other. The areas around the edge and behind his head are white. The soles of his feet and his hands can be seen clearly.

**The symbolism: we are taught how the microcosm and macrocosm are intertwined and act on each other.** The **green armour** expresses the Fool's connection to the green power of Mother Earth and the power of nature in spring. (5) The red tiger symbolises fear. The **Hebrew letter Aleph** means oxen and plough. In former times it was impossible to survive without these. This emphasises the key position of the Fool. **The four elements** represent the material level: the ear represents fire, the butterfly air, the grapes water and the coins earth. The hands portray the Fool's playful use of them. The **diamond** symbolises the indestructible awareness. **The three loops**, Ain, Ain Soph and Ain Soph Aur, i.e. nothingness, infinity and limitless light represent spheres that surround the Kabbalah (f). They represent the Universal Law. They correspond to the inner emptiness and valuelessness of **the zero**. **The colour white** portrays the divine origin of the energy. Yellow can be seen as a luminous aspect. Green underscores the Fool's creative energy, see also the crocodile. Only the air element which is associated with him has the ability to overcome the material level with the help of consciousness; see the feet that are not rooted to the ground. "The air star signs do not contain any animal symbols. This indicates that this element seeks deliverance from the material instinctual level." (6) Furthermore, the new Age is under the sign of Aquarius, an air sign. <sup>5</sup> The playing twins are the children of Isis and Osiris. I think, by now, it has become clear how rich the symbolism of this card is, of which I can only attempt to convey the most important aspects. But we are not quite there yet. The little hat – the triangle in itself – reflects the spiritual dimension. It expands the dualistic quality of the microcosm. The horns symbolise

the immoral aspect of the Fool, his obstinacy and lack of morals. Together with the central position of the sun on the card, they emphasise the male sexual <sup>6</sup> energy that drives him. The white dove and the heart are aspects of the Goddess Isis and of love. They symbolise the female life force with which he is linked internally. The three blossoms and the two serpents that coil around a staff (see caduceus (e)), are a product of the forces of the Tetragrammaton <sup>7</sup> formula (7).

**Interpretation:** quite possibly this indicates a person with a character like that of the Fool, e.g. an affable, chaotic individual who somehow always manages to be in a good mood. During my time as a student, I shared digs with such a person. In the morning he got up with a smile, never wore matching socks or – dare I say it – anything that was ironed and, in the evening, still managed to be in good form. That seemed a natural state of affairs. On a trip to the south of Europe, he managed to cross all the borders without a valid passport. He hadn't realised that it had expired until he was on his way. So he waved it in front of the border guards, always with an impressive expression on his face. As a result, the guards laughed and waved him through. I think that you may also know someone like that.

*The most frequent interpretation*, which is typical of the performance-oriented society we live in, is that we are told that we are taking some aspects of our current lives much too seriously. Worth noting here is that we need to focus on the light-hearted aspect of the Fool, even if we find it very difficult. This doesn't mean that we should suddenly see everything in a positive light – in the sense of the adage "all good" that we often hear these days. Looking at difficulties through rose-tinted glasses is not what it is about. We need to be much more patient with ourselves, and it is quite OK to go forward in small, appropriate steps. Therefore, just reminding ourselves of the impermanence of things is sufficient. What matters is that we focus our attention not on external factors but

<sup>5</sup> The Age of Aquarius follows the Age of Pisces. It takes us 2,000 years to live through an aeon. Horus, the child of Isis and Osiris, is the symbol of the new aeon.

<sup>6</sup> Here, sexuality refers to the energy that opens access to the original life force. This means that the Fool has heightened energy.

<sup>7</sup> The Tetragrammaton is the 4-letter theonym YHVH, i.e. what these days we call the Holy Trinity. It is one of mankind's greatest mysteries and, for A. Crowley, was the reason why the fourth court card clearly had to be female (6).

on being aware and handling them appropriately. People with chronic pain who answer “well” when asked how they are, know why they do so.

The card may also mean that we consider working less to gain more free time, or that it is not a good idea to accept a promotion that would lead to more responsibility and overtime. Pointers may include everything that makes life easier, such as early retirement or a change of abode, and that reduces our commitments and responsibilities. Today this is known as “downsizing”, and refers to a popular trend. The card may also advise us that this would be good for us and worth considering. We need to be watchful though, because there is a common tendency to fill newly-gained freedom with commitments leading to so-called “pensioner or leisure stress”.

*Another aspect* can be that somebody makes a fool of us. Who is that person who corresponds to the shadow side of the Fool? Do we see this clearly or do we not want to admit it? Usually we are under the illusion that we can change this person.

And there is also the version that we ourselves are trapped and are living out the shadow side of the Fool. We can be our own victim, talking things up and refusing to take responsibility for ourselves, much less embarking on change. On the other hand, it may refer to people close to us, such as our spouse when we have a secret affair, or when we have quietly become addicted to gambling.

Finally, I would like to mention an interpretation that I was privileged to experience two or three times in my forty years of consulting. Given that the forces of ego are not prominent in the Fool card, what we are dealing with is spiritual energy. This may then indicate that the right moment has come to focus on this energy, i.e. to retire from working life, if possible, and to meditate more or to do a retreat.

This highlights another facet of the Fool; it is alluded to as the “holy Fool”. In Paul’s letter to the Corinthians he talks about Christ’s fools: “If

any one among you considers himself wise in this age, let him become a fool so as to become wise!”. “The holy Fool does not stick to any rules or fixed patterns. He adopts a role outside of conventions and norms. His wisdom is spontaneous, innocent and without prejudice. Milarepa, Ramakrishna, Christian monks – this tradition of the madman can be found everywhere; it is like a rainbow-coloured thread through the history of religion.” (8)

**Last but not least:** the Fool’s humour is based on his awareness of impermanence and true wealth. His laughter, his manner of making fun of something, should be seen as a call with which he wants to wake us up and be more at ease. He knows that the goal is not the journey, but the journey is the goal. Thich Nhat Hanh (9) recommends that we start the day with a smile. At an individual level, also collectively relevant, the Fool’s journey is the journey that can liberate us from suffering. My wish for you is that you can laugh about yourself more often; a benign smile won’t cut it.

**In conclusion** I would like to mention that there is an interesting social acceptance of the Fool’s energy. Hospital clowns are now officially recognised. It is a proven fact that laughter is good for our health. A study discovered that operations go more smoothly when the hospital clown accompanies the respective children and parents up to the operating theatre. It relaxes the situation; it makes parents and child less uptight. A doctor in the hospital where the study was carried out recounted that he had not expected that the clowns would also make fun of him in front of the children. But then he had no choice but to put a good face on things and discovered that, having laughed about himself, he was much more relaxed during the operation.

It’s a pity for us healthy ones that we are neglected in this respect. For example, would it not be possible to financially support street clowns – as a preventive measure as it were?

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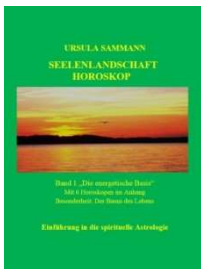
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#### Definitions:

- (a) Arcana – the hidden secret
- (b) Archetypes – symbolic prototypes of mankind, the collective subconscious: Jung, Carl Gustav – *Man and His Symbols*, Penguin 1990
- (c) Mystery – something that cannot be explained, and is hidden
- (d) The Universal Law – the law of life we are born into; it is beyond our influence.
- (e) The caduceus staff / Hermes' staff – here a symbol for the transformation of sexual energy.
- (f) Kabbalah – it represents the Tree of Life, which is omnipresent in Tarot and is a Jewish journey of initiation, amongst others.

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