

## Death and the Devil



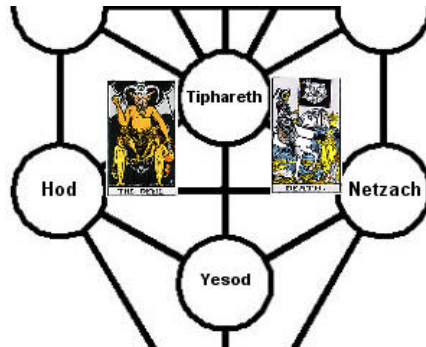
*Two symbols of the Mysteries of Time & Space*

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## Introduction

The Golden Dawn referred to the two cards of Death and the Devil as the “two great controlling forces of the Universe.” Their position on the Tree of Life places them as symmetrical supports of Tiphareth, the central Sephirah on the Tree.

The Devil is attributed to the path connecting Hod and Tiphareth, and Death the path connecting Netzach and Tiphareth as illustrated below.



It might be observed that Death and the Devil are deemed the most negative of the Tarot cards by those receiving them in divination – as is the Tower which is part of the triad of paths interconnecting Tiphareth, Netzach and Hod.

That these cards have an immediate impact on our psyche is indicated by their position on the Tree; both are attributed to the Paths which cross the so-called Veil of Paroketh – an indication of the state change between the lower Sephiroth and those above the Veil. The Initiate ascending the Tree will have to learn the lessons of both if he should wish to pass through the veil and partake of this state change. (Although once the lesson of these two cards is learnt, the path taken is the central one from Yesod to Tiphareth – the path of the Angel Temperance).

Indeed, as the engraving by Durer illustrates, the soldier of faith is constantly assailed by the twin forces of Death and the Devil, and must maintain his steed (the horse whose four legs are the lower Sephiroth and is depicted in the Tarot on the Sun card, which corresponds to consciousness and Tiphareth) in its course. We see also in this emblem that both forces are inherent in any activity – Death rides a horse in the manner of the soldier, as the Devil carries a spear similar to that of the soldier. This suggests that it is inevitable that all activities – the very process of the Universe – demand the presence of these forces.

The soldier, as all, rides towards death, ultimately, and his actions leave a material impact in the world. This is reflected again in the depiction of evolution - the dog racing forward in the hunt, and the lizard moving backwards towards history.

## Death



The Death card has the zodiacal sign of Scorpio attributed to it, the Hebrew letter Nun, meaning “fish” and carries the correspondences of death, time, and transformation

“The sign of transmutation and disintegration” it is called in the Golden Dawn. The Sun rising between the far towers indicates the rebirth implied by the card – the figures can also be seen as the family rising from the tombs in the resurrection of the Last Judgement card.

Aleister Crowley had Frieda Harris use the symbols of the Fish & Serpent in his version of the card, emphasising these symbols of resurrection. About the whole Atu, he wrote, “it is even a compendium of universal energy in its most secret form.” (Book of Thoth, Pg. 101).

The 24<sup>th</sup> path on which this card is placed is called by the Sepher Yetzirah the “imaginative intelligence,” and it is said that it gives “similarity to the likeness of Beings.” For more on this, see the section on the Paths in **The Magicians Kabbalah**.

Linking Natzach to Tiphareth, this card represents the relationship of the cyclic patterns of nature to the Solar source of light. The path is that of the cycle of life and death, and all change, transforming one thing into another. The card is one of movement then, not an ending, indeed, those that represent stability and conservation – the King (Regal Law) and the Bishop (Religious Law) are depicted as ineffectual in halting Death’s work of inevitable change.

## Exercise

Compare with the Wheel, which is placed upon the path leading from Netzach to Chesed, and represents a further level of the process of time and change.

## Devil



The Devil card has the zodiacal sign of Capricorn attributed to it, the Hebrew letter Ayin, meaning “eye” and carries the correspondence of material force.

The Golden Dawn was emphatic that “this card should be studied in conjunction with No.13. They are the two great controlling forces of the Universe, the centrifugal and the centripetal, destructive [Death] and reproductive [Devil], dynamic [Death] and static [Devil].”

The 26<sup>th</sup> path on which this card is placed is called by the Sepher Yetzirah the “renewing intelligence,” and it can be seen to govern the process of regeneration. In a sense this card is the sexual procreative act contrasted with the death and transformation of the opposite path. Again, we can read elsewhere of the relationships between sex and death;

The Creative	Birth	Brahma	DEVIL
The Transcendental	Death	Shiva	DEATH
The Preserver	Life	Vishnu	TEMPERANCE

Linking Hod to Tiphareth, this card represents our intellectual awareness, bound as it is in spatial constructs; logic, geometry and science. It allows us to work with the manifest world, but also chains us to it. The Devil is the card of creativity in its rawest sense, often blind to the consequences of that creativity. Crowley wrote, “This card represents creative energy in its most material form.”

## Exercise

Compare with the Hanged Man, which is placed upon the path leading from Hod to Geburah, and represents another level of relationship to space.

## ***Conclusion***

The two cards of Death and the Devil represent our views of time and space, our fear of change and our fear of stagnation, and are the matrix that construct the Universe.

Their position on the Tree of Life reveals much about the creative process of the Universe and our ability to learn and transcend the limitations we impose upon ourselves. Although this mystery is discovered more fully in the card of Temperance, it is essential – in fact, inevitable – that Death and the Devil are understood first.

## **Exercises**

### **1. Telling Time**



Pause for a moment and consider the change taking place around and within oneself. Start with the easily visible changes; the dripping tap, the ticking clock, the cars passing outside. Notice these things and more for a while. Now start to consider the smaller change events occurring; the beating of your heart, the flow of blood and air through your body. Note, as you begin to sense the minute trembles of your skin, as you sense deeper into space, your sense of time is changing, speeding, as you see deeper changes, microscopic changes of hairs growing, tastes changing, time itself runs faster, more

charged, more driving. Now move back and up and higher into larger-scale changes, returning first to your usual perception of the dripping tap, the ticking clock, or the cars passing outside. Go outside your body, your immediate environment and consider the changes of the clouds, the air currents in the sky, the vast but imperceptible breathing of the earth, thinking now of the rotation of the earth about the sun, the sun about the galaxy, the vast unwinding change of the universe. Realising that as we expand to the edges of everything, time is appearing to slow, to crawl, to eventually, now, stop, as we come to rest in that state at the edge of awareness, where there is indeed, world enough and time.

### **2. Making Space**



This exercise encourages you to extend your banishing to infinity. As you visualise your banishing circle, increase its circumference in steps outward. Imagine that it surrounds you, imagine that it surrounds your room, then your house, your town, your state, your country, your continent, your planet, your solar system, your galaxy, then ever outwards until you cannot be aware of its circumference. It is said that God is a circle whose circumference is nowhere and whose centre is everywhere. The recent advances in membrane theory – a development of string theory – might support this view. Time is measured by changes in the structure of space – but change can only be perceived when comparisons are made between two separate entities. If the Universe is perceived as a singular whole, without anything else out with to be compared to, where does time go?

## References & Links

Cover. Knight, Death and the Devil by Albrecht Durer, Copper engraving, 1513.

<http://www.ku.edu/~sma/durer/ritter/ritter.htm> (*Close-ups of engraving*)

<http://www.aiwaz.net/Duerer/Reuter/pathofadepti.htm> (*engraving placed on Tree of Life – although I'm not sure that the interpretation of 1513 as Card 15 + Card 13 is necessarily meaningful*)

Tarot images and further Tarot information can be found at <http://www.learntarot.com>

Table of Principles after Douglas & Slinger, pg. 13, Sexual Secrets, Arrow Books Ltd, 1982. ISBN 0 09 927900 2

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A Site for the Enquiring Mind

*Cognitione sui secumque colloquio firmitatem petere.*