

## Astrology as a Symbol System

The purpose of any symbol system is to make it easier, clearer, and more instantaneous, for human beings to communicate with each other. If a group of people are all familiar with a particular symbol system, then they can use those symbols to share ideas and insights. Education consists of giving larger and larger groups the ability to use the same symbol system. Some examples of symbol systems are:

- Every alphabet is a system of symbols. The words made up of these letters are also symbols, since words represent something beyond themselves. For example, the word chair is not itself an actual chair, but clearly communicates a very specific something.
- Mathematics. Here the symbols are generally combined to form equations. The reason for doing this is to articulate a complex idea in an especially succinct way. It might take many paragraphs, if not many pages, to express the same ideas in words (which can always be done). The hope is that the reader of the equations (which can be seen all at once in a few lines) simply 'gets it', before that person has the opportunity to get lost in the details.
- Social, political, and religious systems use symbols to communicate core ideas and instructions. For example, core symbols in Christianity are the cross, the chalice, and the host. Note: a symbol can have physical form as well as thought form.

Chaos enters when we assume other people will use the exact same symbols that we would use to describe a specific something -- and any other symbols that might be used (who knows where they come from) must be talking about something else. And thus we develop an outlook of US vs. THEM.

The astrological signs (Aries through Pisces), the names of the planets, and the four elements (earth, air, fire, water), line up with other symbol systems that look very different on the outside. For example, the ancient religions, whether it be Greek, Roman, Celtic, middle eastern, Tibetan, etc, all had their symbolic ways of describing life's experiences (the archetypes that we meet every day), and were in essence all talking about the same journey. There were obvious differences in vocabulary, and some differences in how things were delineated – for example, some groups differentiate between living earth (trees, grass, ..) and non-living earth (metal). However the basic conversation about life's journey remains the same. But chaos did enter – most often in the form of war – and it seems to continue still.

Sepher Yitzirah is an ancient Kabbalistic text, claimed to have been written in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. In it the 12 months of the year are specified -- each month corresponding exactly with one sign of the zodiac, beginning at the fall equinox with Libra. The Hebrew alphabet (22 letters), as well as the standard diagram of the Kabbalistic Tree of Life, describe complete correspondences with astrological symbolism. And the list goes on.

Some symbol systems, like the Enneagram, also correspond with the symbols of astrology -- but not in a one-to-one fashion. (The Enneagram is actually an ancient Sufi symbol. It was originally used as an inner work tool, and not as a delineation of personality types, as far as I know.)

So, the basic question, why should we care about any of these symbol systems? Because we wish to be understood, and not misunderstood. And we wish to learn, and share, and grow. And hopefully do all this in an atmosphere of peace.

For purposes of this article I have chosen one symbol system, the tarot, to work with. A tarot deck consists of 4 suits and 22 picture cards (the exact number of letters in the Hebrew alphabet, also with a one-to-one correspondence here). The four suits are:

- Wands. This corresponds to Clubs in a modern playing deck. The element is Fire.
- Cups. This corresponds to Hearts in a modern playing deck. The element is Water.
- Swords. This corresponds to Spades in a modern playing deck. The element is Air.
- Pentacles or Coins. This corresponds to Diamonds in a modern playing deck. The element is Earth.

The following table attempts to show the correspondences between astrological symbolism and the cards in a tarot deck (I tend to think of the Fool as a complete section of the deck, all by itself, since it is active even when it is not placed face up on the table):

<b>Fool</b>	Pluto	The Fool represents the seeker, the self. In other words, me -- the one undergoing transformation on this journey (Pluto's specialty). Getting rid of every variety of baggage (Pluto) is always the order of the day. Note: The ancients did not know about Pluto, or its symbolism. But the outer planets fit in perfectly, as though space was reserved for them.
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<b>Magician</b>	Mercury	This is the archetype of mature masculine energy interacting with the invisible world. (Traditionally, 'being' (the conscious receiving of energy) is defined as feminine, and 'doing' (the using of that which is received) is defined as masculine. All people have both masculine and feminine energies within them.)  Magic means an unexpected change in the physical, or in what is usually called the real world. The magician has all the necessary tools on hand -- ways of transmuting earth, air, fire, water. The posture of the Magician is generally in the form of an aleph, the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, indicating ability and training. Actions are very quick and deft. The human response to this performance is disorientation -- what I considered to be fixed, like the North star, is no longer in its same position. And so on. So which way is up, and which way is down?
<b>High Priestess</b>	Moon	This is the archetype of mature feminine energy interacting with the invisible world. There is none of the usual disconnect between the conscious and the unconscious here. In addition, psychic abilities are fully developed and functional. The Moon is a light in the night -- in the darkness of the unconscious, in the dream-space, in the moments of clairvoyance or telepathic awareness. Receiving, consciously, from the unknown, is the gift (and task) of the High Priestess.
<b>Empress</b>	Venus	This is the archetype of mature feminine energy interacting with the known physical world. Using what is received to effect nurturing, productivity, and well-being of all that is surveyed is the task of the Empress. This is the idealized mother archetype.
<b>Emperor</b>	Aires	This is the archetype of mature male energy interacting with the known physical world. Protecting and providing. This is the idealized father archetype.
<b>Hierophant</b>	Taurus	The slow and steady guidance of all who profess loyalty. Helping others to deal with the challenges that this planet presents. In some decks this card is titled the Pope. The archetype is that of caregiver and leader.
<b>Lovers</b>	Gemini	This archetype is about mature adult relationship -- every aspect, not just sexual. Loyalty (being there when the other person needs me), and choice (dealing with ongoing temptations). Note: It's really helpful to keep in mind the polarities of Gemini and Sagittarius.
<b>Chariot</b>	Cancer	A sacred safe space, offering maximum protection and mobility. The safe haven of Cancer's striving. From within this safe space all things are possible. This is an archetype of 'home'. (Think in terms of camper vans, or a turtle carrying its house around with it.)
<b>Strength</b>	Leo	The power to 'do no harm'. The power to recognize our own attachments. The power to choose, to do what is necessary and not just what is expected. This is the archetype of standing firm, perhaps outside the group.
<b>Hermit</b>	Virgo	Like the Magician, this archetype is about transmuting energies received from the universe. The Magician actively passes on the results of this process. The Hermit simply allows (gives personal consent) the passing on of what is created. ('Thy will, not my will'.)

<b>Wheel of Fortune</b>	Jupiter	This is the archetype (symbolic image) of the cyclic nature of all that is.
<b>Justice</b>	Libra	The archetypal image here is a set of scales. Weighing causes / actions / effects. 'Do no harm' is the most basic guideline.
<b>Hanged Man</b>	Neptune.	Forming an image to depict insight, as opposed to the usual perspective of looking and seeing, is a difficult task. This archetype is about recognizing the reality behind an illusion. The general human reaction to such a moment is -- How simple. How come I never noticed that before?
<b>Death</b>	Scorpio	This is the archetype of transformation -- in all of its varieties. The most dramatic transformations, from a human perspective, are physical birth and physical death. Some transformations are too slow for a person to notice – ex. The birth and death of a star. Some transformations are too fast for a person to notice – ex. The workings of a Central Processor Unit in a computer. Nothing stands still. It is always the beginning. It is always a new becoming.
<b>Temperance</b>	Sagittarius	'Craft' means the putting together of known pieces in a new way. The blending together of antagonistic elements, personalities, philosophies, etc – and producing something new and desirable – is what happens here. This is the archetype of 'craft' in its deepest sense.
<b>Devil</b>	Capricorn	This is the archetype of the ties that bind (that which creates a condition of slavery). Literal prison walls and shackles -- and sometimes that which feels like prison walls and shackles. The aftermath of war and disease. On a more subtle level, our attachments – those things that are not automatic in our lives (like breathing), but things that we invest lots of emotional energy in, with a consequent feeling of "I must have THAT" or "I must avoid THAT at all costs". Whatever doesn't pass the 'take-it-or-leave-it' test (which means it's OK to have it, and it's equally OK to not have it) is an attachment. Cardinal earth energy wants to do what is necessary and practical NOW. This energy leads the way in either 'getting-THAT' or "pushing-THAT-out-of-my-way" or 'breaking-the-tie-that-binds' (the attachment).
<b>Tower</b>	Mars.	This archetype is about the abrupt releasing of stuck energy. (Think of it as freeing what needs to be freed.)
<b>Star</b>	♊	This archetype is about a more gentle releasing of stuck energy -- very often this is called healing energy. Aquarius energy is often associated with moving towards a state of self-actualization, the ultimate healing process.
<b>Moon</b>	Pisces	Traveling my path in the safety of darkness, where none will even notice me enough to think about disturbing me. The unconscious and dream-space are fully functional here.
<b>Sun</b>	Sun	Traveling my path in the blazing light of day, in full consciousness. The subtitles are hard to see in this white-out, but the infusion of joy renders all else as backdrop and seemingly not very important.
<b>Judgment</b>	Uranus	This is the archetype of mystery itself. Christian symbolism might posit the possibility of resurrection, and not just reincarnation (as states of being, not limited to physical events).
<b>Universe</b>	Saturn	This is the archetype of the richness of the physical plane of existence. (The result of the seven days of creation. The real world. Note: different symbol systems, then different vocabulary.)

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