

HOLISTIC TAROT SUPPLEMENT

This text is offered as a supplement to *Holistic Tarot: An Integrative Approach to Using Tarot for Personal Growth* (North Atlantic Books, 2015) by Benebell Wen.

The Three Septenaries

Helena Blavatsky is a late 19th century occultist and philosopher whose works greatly influenced the theosophies behind esoteric tarot. In Blavatsky's seminal work *The Key to Theosophy* (1889), she presents the septenary principle of (i) spiritual self, (ii) the soul, (iii) the higher self, (iv) the body's desires, (v) life force (breath or *qi*), (vi) the astral body, and (vii) the physical body.

That septenary principle is applied to the Major Arcana in tarot and is a foundational building block of every Major Arcana structure in tarot today. In every tarot deck, the Major Arcana can be subdivided into the three septenaries, which excludes The Fool (as the septenaries represent the journey of the Fool, and thus the Fool in one sense is the signifier). Keys I through VII (Magician to Chariot) represent the first septenary, or the Self; Keys VIII through XIV (Strength to Temperance) represent the second septenary, or the Collective; and Keys XV through XXI (Devil to World) represent the third and final septenary, or Apotheosis. See Christine Payne-Towler, *The Underground Stream: Esoteric Tarot Revealed* (Noreah Press, 1999), p. 121.

The **First Septenary** represents the development of the Self, the primal dramas of the ego. It is the journey of the individual of recognizing his or her own personal power and capabilities (Key 1—"The Magician"), making the conscious effort to pursue knowledge (Key 2—"The High Priestess"), manifestation of aspirations (Key 3—"The Empress"), and ultimately, to choose which path to walk, to choose between the Tree of Life and the Tree of Knowledge (Key 6—"The Lovers"), and then to take the first steps forward on that path (Key 7—"The Chariot").

The **Second Septenary** represents the forging of the Self within the context of the collective. These are the ways of cooperation and conflict with others individuals, the collective or community of individuals, and the physical context and environment that forms the development of the Self. It is the path of self-discovery (Key 8—"Strength"), seeking wisdom (Key 9—"The Hermit"), understanding the laws of nature (Key X—"Wheel of Fortune") and within that context, the laws of man (Key XI—"Justice"). It is the severance and transformation of the physical body of the Self (Key XIII—"Death") toward spiritual equilibrium (Key XIV—"Temperance").

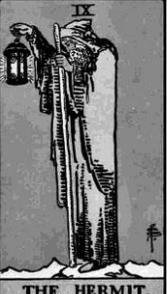
The **Third Septenary** represents apotheosis, or the Self ascending into the divine. In eastern traditions, this can be interpreted as nirvana, or the path to enlightenment. In western traditions, this can be interpreted as being raised by one's faith to the level of sharing in the nature or divinity of a god principle. The final stretch of the Fool's journey begins with facing the mara, or inner demons (Key XV—"The Devil," see p. 108). It continues with the jolting and catharsis of the ego (Key XVI—"The Tower"), and ends with enlightenment, or ascension to the throne of God (hence the lion, ox, face of a man, and eagle in flight depicted on The World card, see "Key 21—"The World," p. 124).

The advanced tarot practitioner works on understanding the tarot in a spiritual context and to start that understanding is to start with the three septenaries. The following pages provides a template for brainstorming your keywords, thoughts, and ruminations on how you view the septenaries within the context of your theosophical perspectives. Keep your work in your tarot journal and from time to time, return to the template to update or revise your notes to reflect any shifts in your understanding.

The First Septenary: The Self

I	II	III	IV	V	VI	VII
 <p>THE MAGICIAN.</p>	 <p>THE HIGH PRIESTESS.</p>	 <p>THE EMPRESS.</p>	 <p>THE EMPEROR.</p>	 <p>THE HIEROPHANT.</p>	 <p>THE LOVERS.</p>	 <p>THE CHARIOT.</p>

The Second Septenary: The Collective

VIII	IX	X	XI	XII	XIII	XIV
 <p>VIII STRENGTH.</p>	 <p>IX THE HERMIT.</p>	 <p>X WHEEL OF FORTUNE.</p>	 <p>XI JUSTICE.</p>	 <p>XII THE HANGED MAN.</p>	 <p>XIII DEATH.</p>	 <p>XIV TEMPERANCE.</p>

The Third Septenary: Apotheosis

XV	XVI	XVII	XVIII	XIX	XX	XXI
 <p>THE DEVIL .</p>	 <p>THE TOWER.</p>	 <p>THE STAR .</p>	 <p>THE MOON .</p>	 <p>THE SUN .</p>	 <p>JUDGEMENT.</p>	 <p>THE WORLD.</p>