

Bondage

The first thing to get into your consciousness in connection with this Tarot key is that the condition that manifests as *bondage* is an illusion, a wrong construction put upon the principle of limitation, and that therefore this principle takes on the appearance of the Devil. So you are warned in advance that it is necessary to look behind the grotesque and terrible appearance of this Key to discover its true meanings.

Let us start by examining the number 15. The Roman numeral is XV. X and V are the last two letters of that which we call L.V.X., or the One Force which we concentrate by acts of attention. In other words it is L.V.X. *minus* the L. L is Lamed, which means “to instruct” when used as a verb, and “ox-goad” when used as a noun. Thus L.V.X. minus L suggests the absence of the equilibrating and directive quality represented by the 11th Key. In other words the Devil is the One Force as it works in the realms of nature below man, where it is truly a fatal force working by the mathematical law of averages.

We see this law of averages working in what is known as the survival of the fittest, and we see it becoming increasingly less operative as evolution progresses. A certain poet once wrote of the Life Force, “How careful of the type it seems, how careless of the single life.” In the lower forms of life countless numbers are apparently being wiped out of existence, only the strongest and most fit surviving. That is how nature perfects her types. But behold how different this is among men. Here the survival of the individual takes on increasing importance, because there is a new force in operation. Man is learning to control his environment, and he is waging a successful war against forces that cause sickness, poverty and death. Successful, that is, wherever he has developed the conscious unfoldment that enables him to bring his own superior powers into operation to control the automatic forces of nature below his own level. Slowly, but surely, he is learning to exercise the Devil. He is inserting the L in L.V. X.

In other words this picture symbolizes the false conception of the Life Power held by those who are wanting in knowledge of its real nature. There are several other points in connection with the number 15 that may help you to establish a connection between this Key and others in the series. 15 adds to 6, and you will note at first glance that this key is just the reverse of what is pictured by Key 6. Again, 15 is the extension of 5 (that is, the sum of the numbers from 0 to 5) and here you have another reversal of the pictorial symbolism. You noticed in the last lesson that Key 14 is also closely related to Key 5, so that you have here an established relation between Keys 14 and 15. See what you can make of the various relationships.

The Hebrew letter Ayin (pronounced ah-yin) means “eye.” The all-seeing eye has been a symbol of deity in all parts of the world for ages past. This tells us at once that, no matter how strange the symbolism of this Key may be to unaccustomed minds, everything connected with it has something to do with certain aspects of the One Power with theologians call “God.” In addition Ayin means “fountain.”

The eye, as the organ of vision, immediately establishes a relationship with Key 4, since an eye is the means whereby the faculty of vision is exercised. It is a commonplace that the sense of sight, important as it is, is nevertheless the commonest source of deception. Every student of elementary psychology is familiar with the phenomena of optical illusions. We all know that it is necessary to make mental adjustments to interpret correctly the things we see. A common instance is that of a man standing upon the observation platform of a train. If he believed his sense of sight he would be under the delusion that the parallel tracks over which the train had just passed had somehow become welded together as they receded into the distance. In this thought, and in those related to it, we may expect to find clues to the strange symbolism of Key 15, and the reconciliation between the surface appearance of the picture and its inner meanings.

A connecting link is provided by the second meaning of the letter Ayin. A fountain is a spring, origin, source; that which nourishes the growth of plants and makes waste places fertile. Where a fountain appears on a desert, there is a renewal of life activity. The “Book of Formation” says “the twenty-sixth path (on the Tree of Life) is called the Renewing Intelligence, because by it the Holy God renews all that is begun afresh in the creation of the world.” The renewal of the desire to escape from bondage is the

beginning of freedom, and is an essential forerunner to the awakening from the dream of sense. The twenty-sixth path of the Renewing Intelligence (Key 15 in the Tarot) connects the Sphere of Splendor with the Sphere of Beauty on the Path of Return. Thus it becomes clear that, in spite of its appearance, the Devil has its roots in Splendor, and the outcome is Beauty. Keep this in mind when you tend to become morbid and depressed by the appearance of Bondage. Depression is nothing but slavery to unpleasant appearances, and this is told to you most graphically by Key 15.

By this time it must have become evident to you that Key 15 represents a power which both binds and liberates. In its binding aspect it creates form. In its liberating aspect it destroys form. The zodiacal attribution is the sign Capricorn, the goat, which ruled by Saturn, the planet of limitation and restriction, and in which Mars, planet of disruption and dissolution, is exalted, or finds its highest expression. When the force symbolized by Saturn is seen and understood, it is used in the practice of concentration for the creation of a happier environment and more pleasant conditions. See how clearly this is indicated by the first column of Keys in your tableau. The exercise of concentration (Key 1) puts into operation the law of suggestion (Key 8) which results in a renewal of consciousness that releases from bondage (Key 15). When the force symbolized by Mars is brought into proper activity it brings about regeneration that dissolves the appearances of limitation.

Key 15 is also connected with the idea of Mirth. Laughter is caused by a perception of the incongruous. It is but a step to the truth that joy results from the perception of the incongruity between the appearance of limitation and bondage and the truth of the situation. This is an actual fact, for the perception of reality is an experience of the most intense bliss, far beyond, yet comparable to, the most ecstatic moments that we know in our present existence.

The title is derived from the Greek “diabolos” meaning “calumniator.” In the New Testament the Devil is called the “father of lies,” that is, the progenitor, originator, cause, source or principle of falsehood, deception, perversion of truth, delusion, error, fallacy, hallucination, mental disorder, and confusion. The Devil represents matter as opposed to Spirit, and in Sanskrit matter is also called Maya which means “illusion.” Remember that in the Old Testament, the Devil is identified with the serpent that tempted

Eve, and you have the clue to the proper interpretation of this Key. Serpent is NChSh in Hebrew, and this word has the same numerical value as MShICh, Messiah or Redeemer.

An ancient occult maxim declares that “The Devil is God inverted.” This means, of course, that the Devil is the false appearance which the One Reality presents to those who observe its physical or material manifestations through the eyes of ignorance. The Life Power is the producer of physical existence and the source of physical sensations. These lead us astray until they are rightly understood.

The black background of Key 15 represents darkness, and is therefore symbolic of ignorance.

The central figure itself is that of an androgyne goat with the wings of a bat, the arms and hands of a man, and the lower extremities of an eagle. His wings refer to the fact that the Devil is called the “prince of the powers of the air.” They refer to the subtle energy contained in the atmosphere, which is one of the powers directed by the practical occultist. The lower quarters refer to the sign Scorpio, which symbolizes the potencies which must be purified and sublimated before man can be set free from the chains that bind him to earth. The arms and hands are shown in a gesture similar to that of the magician, but the uplifted right hand is open, and bears the symbol of Saturn, or limitation, on the palm. The position of the fingers is the reversal of the gesture of esotericism made by the Hierophant, so that it signifies, “What is visible, what can be grasped by the senses, is all there is.” This is the basic fallacy of materialism, and it is associated with the sign of Saturn, because that error is the cause of our worst limitations. The inverted torch in the Devil’s left hand burns wastefully, and gives little light. It is the light of materialism, and also that of rebellion.

The symbol of Mercury, just below the navel, refers to the activity at work in the subtle processes of digestion and assimilation, which you studied in connection with Key 9, which represents the sign Virgo ruled by Mercury. It is interesting to note, in passing, that the monster is possessed of a navel, and is therefore a human production. His red eyes refer to the exaltation of Mars in Capricorn, the meaning of the letter Ayin, and the fact that vision is ruled by the sign ruled by Mars.

The inverted pentagram between the horns of the Devil is a well known symbol of black magic, because the essence of black magic is mental inversion. It is also a symbol of the domination of Spirit by the elements, another error of materialism. Thus it is a symbol of essential falsehood, because it is never true that Spirit can be so dominated, and all appearances to the contrary are delusive. Again, the pentagram is the symbol of man; so that to reverse it is to deny the essential truth that man has power to control everything below him in the scale of creation.

This inverted star is a clue to the meaning of the whole design. Man's false notion of himself is the source of his belief in a Devil. Primitive man, afraid of his environment, imagined that every stick and stone held a malignant goblin that must be propitiated. Later on all of these little demons were merged into one big Devil, just as; on the other hand, all good spirits were merged into one God. A synthetic Devil opposed to a synthetic God: that is the picture of most men up to now. It is a small wonder that intelligent people are rejecting exoteric theology.

The pedestal is a half-cube, representing imperfect understanding of the physical world, because the cube represents that world. At the front of the pedestal is a large ring. To it are fastened the chains which bind the two smaller figures, representing the self-conscious and subconscious minds. The bondage of delusion which affects both the conscious and subconscious minds has its basis in man's erroneous interpretation of the nature of the physical universe. The horns, hoofs, and tail, with which these figures appear, intimate that delusion bestializes human consciousness.

This week put into practice the things you have learned in this lesson. Get busy on your own limitations, whatever they may be. If you are annoyed and hampered by lack of physical supply, practice seeing and understanding what is meant when you repeat, "From the exhaustless richness of Its limitless Substance I draw all things needful, both spiritual and material." Learn that substance is not the food you eat, the money you spend, the clothes you wear. All these are the appearances, the symbols if you will, of what Substance really is. And of that Substance you have neither more nor less than any other person. All of it is available for your use.

How about your health? Are you thinking constructively about your body, knowing that it is perfect in reality because nothing created by Spirit can be anything but perfect? Are you backing up this knowledge by giving your sub-consciousness the proper suggestions indicating that you really desire health by supplying your body with the proper food, sufficient water, plenty of air through correct breathing? If you are not, now is the time to get busy. Do not delay until tomorrow. There is no tomorrow. Now is all the time that there ever is.

Do you suffer from fits of depression? Learn to laugh at appearances. Laugh at the notion of a Devil, for the most effective weapon against error is ridicule. Laugh at the Devil and he and all of his angels will flee. And keep in the front of your mind, whenever you are beset by these false appearances that take on the form of a veritable devil which has its roots in Splendor, and its outcome is Beauty.