

## The Fool's Journey

by Judith Waller, "The Soul Connector"

The Fool is a fascinating archetypal character, with interpretations ranging from the playful but harmless aspect of the April Fool trickster through to the malevolent aspect of The Joker, the creepy villain of Batman comic fame. Perhaps the most beloved is the Court Jester, the medieval clown. My favourite expression of this would have to be Danny Kaye as the hapless carnival-player turned jester in the *The Court Jester* (1955). Have you seen it? The film has many funny moments, especially the jousting scene with the famously tongue-twisting exchange: "The pellet with the poison's in the vessel with the pestle, the chalice from the palace has the brew that is true..."

### Who is The Fool?

Symbolically, The Fool can be understood as one who is naive and lacking in forethought, or as someone possessing great wisdom – maybe both. The film *Being There* (1979) satirises the impact of a fool on a foolish society. Peter Sellers portrays Chance, the simple-minded gardener to a wealthy businessman. Somehow, Chance has grown up with almost no contact with the outside world, other than through watching TV.

Upon his employer's death, he is forced to leave his sheltered environment and venture out into the world. The people he meets, so caught up in their own issues that they can't truly "see" him, interpret his artlessly simple comments about gardening as profoundly wise insights. Absurdly, Chance is turned into a public figure and, ultimately, an advisor to the US President – possibly even his successor. Hmm, not that that could ever happen in real life, could it?

### The journey of life...

The Fool also features prominently in the Tarot. The 22 Major Arcana cards relate to deeper meaning and higher purpose; as distinct from the Minor Arcana cards (the suits of pentacles, wands, swords and cups), which relate to everyday life. As occultist A.E. Waite demonstrated in his classic book, *The Pictorial Key to the Tarot* (1910), the Major Arcana can be read as a journey through life, with The Fool as the leading player. The first card in the deck, The Fool is traditionally unnumbered or given the value 0, putting him uniquely outside the other players in the game. He is the zero point, unbound by the constraints faced by others, and thus the one for whom anything is possible.

Like the mythical hero's journey illustrated in Joseph Campbell's influential work, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), subsequent Major Arcana cards – from The Magician (I) through to The World (XXI) – may be read as representing the different stages our protagonist, The Fool, must experience in order to achieve enlightenment. If you have a tarot pack, you may find it interesting to lay out all the major arcana cards sequentially and see how this progression works for yourself.

In the beginning, The Fool is like a newborn – fresh and unsullied by life's experiences, boundlessly enthusiastic about the awesome possibilities before him. Along the way, he undergoes many trials and gains great wisdom. The journey is one of self-mastery, and includes both inner and outer exploration. The Fool must draw on inner strength, integrate his masculine and feminine energies, discover his purpose for being here, eliminate the things that aren't working in his life, and come to understand the universal connectedness of all that is.

### The Fool's gift...

The Fool exhibits incredible resilience and an indomitable spirit. He brings the gift of being open to life as it unfolds – and being truly happy in the moment. As Joseph Campbell says:

*"We must be willing to get rid of the life we've planned, so as to have the life that is waiting for us. The old skin has to be shed before the new one can come."*

I think the greatest quality of The Fool is his fearlessness. In the Rider–Waite Tarot, The Fool is depicted at the edge of a cliff, his head held up high and his arms outstretched. He is about to step out into the abyss, yet shows no fear – he is ready to go wherever life takes him. This appears to be complete idiocy, but what he's actually doing is trusting in the Divine flow of life. You can't always see where you're going, but sometimes you need to have faith that it's okay to step off the edge of the cliff.

In Campbell's view:

*"The conquest of fear yields the courage of life. That is the cardinal initiation of every heroic adventure – fearlessness and achievement."*

### **Travelling light...**

In the Tarot, The Fool sets out on his journey equipped only with a simple staff and pack, holding a flower as a reminder of his Divine essence. But, really, what more do you need? The Fool is a great reminder that you already have, within you, everything you require to undertake your own journey – to follow your bliss. The Fool travels light, because he travels in The Light.

The Hindu sage, Sankara, sums up the concept of The Fool perfectly:

*"Sometimes a fool, sometimes a sage, sometimes possessed of regal splendor; sometimes wandering, sometimes as motionless as a python, sometimes wearing a benignant expression; sometimes honored, sometimes insulted, sometimes unknown – thus lives the man of realisation, ever happy with supreme bliss."*

What gift does the The Fool bring to *your* life? Do you feel happy in this moment? If not, what's holding you back from experiencing joy? Do you need to set aside your fear and trust your inner guidance more? What if you were to wipe the slate clean and give yourself permission to start over afresh? Allow the energy of new beginnings into your life and move forward with the boldness of the open–hearted Fool, on your own fabulous adventure...

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