

## Gypsies, crystal balls and tarot stereotypes

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Whether it's gypsies, crystal balls, fair grounds, the aroma of incense wafting through candle-lit rooms decorated with purple velvet curtains ...let's face it, we're usually seen as a bit 'odd'. However, that can be a good thing, because it means we're exciting and mysterious, we're like members of a secret society.

At the other extreme, this 'oddness' is associated with evil and the work of the devil. Only recently, I mentioned to someone that I was into tarot and was somewhat surprised at the way she almost recoiled in horror. "I'm Catholic," she said, as though this was somehow a defence against the evil world I had just conjured up by mentioning tarot.

The initial irritation I felt at her reaction turned to sadness, as my mind clicked over into 'taroteeze'. I was sad because her reaction epitomised the dark side of the Hierophant or Pope, the tarot card with multi-layered messages about the power of

institutions.



Traditional images of the Hierophant have him sitting high above two disciples who kneel before him. His red cloak suggests inner warmth, the yellow in his robes symbolizes the power of his intellect,

while the two crossed keys at his feet suggest he can open the door to the secrets of the universe. However, the grey pillars on either side of him represent the boundaries of society,

the boundaries set by the doctrine he espouses and which he imparts through his staff to the disciples at his feet, waiting to absorb his words of wisdom.

The Hierophant can represent a teacher, priest or guru in your life whose view of the world you accept without question. However, if he is truly a teacher, he will allow you to challenge his doctrine, to question whether conforming to what society expects of you is the right spiritual path for you. The answer may be "yes" or "no", but unless you question the doctrines you have grown up with, you run the risk of allowing the views and beliefs of others to fashion your behaviour.

When the Hierophant appears in your cards, you know that you have reached a point in your journey where you need to take responsibility for your own spiritual development. From your parents and environment you have inherited a set of beliefs that shape your behaviour. They could be religious beliefs or they could simply reflect the way people behave in the culture to which you belong.

The "I'm Catholic" reaction to hearing that I was into tarot, signalled to me that this person's mind was closed to anything that challenged the safe world of her religious beliefs. A pity really, because there are so many wonderful ways to look at life and they are not necessarily mutually exclusive. To restrict oneself to a single way of viewing the universe is to deny the diversity of experiences that life offers.

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**Image:** the Hierophant from the *Universal Tarot* published by Lo Scarabeo: artist Robert De Angelis.