

*Playing Cards
and the
Game of Living
Well*

Prayers for a Postmodern World



Playing Cards and the Game of Living Well

by

Kenneth P. Langer

part of the

“Spirituality in the

Postmodern World” Series



Playing Cards and the Game of Living Well
by Kenneth P. Langer

First Edition
published by
Brass Bell Books
www.brassbellbooks.com

Copyright © 2015 Kenneth P. Langer

ISBN: 978-0-9764119-7-0

All rights reserved. No Part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the author, except for the inclusion of brief quotations with proper annotation.

Produced in the United States of America
The author may be contacted at ken@kenlanger.com

Table of Contents

Introduction to the Series.....	13
Postmodernism.....	13
Postmodernism and Religion.....	15
Introduction to the Book.....	19
The Use of Playing Cards as Spiritual Practice.....	20
Why Use Playing Cards?.....	20
How Can They Be Used?.....	22
Prelude.....	23
Card Characteristics.....	25
The Suits.....	25
The Numbers.....	26
The Court Cards.....	28
The Jokers.....	29
All Together.....	29
Reading the Cards: Sources.....	31

Prayers for a Postmodern World

The Suits.....	31
Clubs.....	32
Diamonds.....	32
Hearts.....	32
Spades.....	33
The Numbers.....	34
Ace.....	34
Two.....	35
Three.....	35
Four.....	36
Five.....	36
Six.....	36
Seven.....	37
Eight.....	37
Nine.....	38
Ten.....	38
The Court Cards.....	39

Table of Contents

The King.....39

The Queen.....39

The Jack.....39

The Jokers.....40

A Chart of Keywords.....41

Reading the Cards: Individual Cards.....43

The Cards.....43

 The Ace of Clubs.....44

 The Two of Clubs.....45

 The Three of Clubs.....46

 The Four of Clubs.....47

 The Five of Clubs.....48

 The Six of Clubs.....49

 The Seven of Clubs.....50

 The Eight of Clubs.....51

 The Nine of Clubs.....52

Prayers for a Postmodern World

The Ten of Clubs.....	53
The Jack of Clubs.....	54
The Queen of Clubs.....	55
The King of Clubs.....	56
The Ace of Diamonds.....	57
The Two of Diamonds.....	58
The Three of Diamonds.....	59
The Four of Diamonds.....	60
The Five of Diamonds.....	61
The Six of Diamonds.....	62
The Seven of Diamonds.....	63
The Eight of Diamonds.....	64
The Nine of Diamonds.....	65
The Ten of Diamonds.....	66
The Jack of Diamonds.....	67
The Queen of Diamonds.....	68
The King of Diamonds.....	69

Table of Contents

The Ace of Hearts.....	70
The Two of Hearts.....	71
The Three of Hearts.....	72
The Four of Hearts.....	73
The Five of Hearts.....	74
The Six of Hearts.....	75
The Seven of Hearts.....	76
The Eight of Hearts.....	77
The Nine of Hearts.....	78
The Ten of Hearts.....	79
The Jack of Hearts.....	80
The Queen of Hearts.....	81
The King of Hearts.....	82
The Ace of Spades.....	83
The Two of Spades.....	84
The Three of Spades.....	85

The Four of Spades.....	86
The Five of Spades.....	87
The Six of Spades.....	88
The Seven of Spades.....	89
The Eight of Spades.....	90
The Nine of Spades.....	91
The Ten of Spades.....	92
The Jack of Spades.....	93
The Queen of Spades.....	94
The King of Spades.....	95
The Low Joker.....	96
The High Joker.....	97
Reading the Cards: Combinations.....	99
One Card.....	99
Affirmation.....	99
Contemplation.....	100
Which Color.....	100

Table of Contents

Simple Answers.....	102
Where to go.....	104
When.....	105
The Block.....	109
Who is it?.....	110
Spiritual Practice.....	113
The Current Condition.....	115
Two Cards.....	116
A Future Possibility.....	116
Past Influence.....	117
Inner Influence.....	118
Outer Influence.....	119
Three Cards.....	120
Timeline.....	120
Relationships.....	121
Influences.....	122

A Question For Contemplation.....	123
What To Do Next.....	125
A Full Reading.....	126
New Card Games.....	127
Assassin Ace.....	127
Race to the Top.....	129
Whack the Jack.....	131
Fortress.....	132
Battle Cards.....	134
Labyrinth Hunt.....	136
Sewer Wars.....	138
Tower Defense.....	140
Fish Pond.....	141
King of the Mountain.....	142
The Lost Soul.....	144
Stop Gap Poker.....	146
About the Author.....	147

Introduction to the Series

Postmodernism

It has been said that we live in a Postmodern world—a world that continues to expand in information while its lines of separation shrink. Postmodernism has felt to be a threat by some religious movements and established power structures which claim it is destabilizing society. The Postmodern advocates, on the other hand, claim that those institutions have sought to marginalize and oppress minorities and others not deemed worthy of redemption. As usual, the truth is somewhere in between. The diminished influence of the church on general society has allowed more and different people a chance to explore their own spirituality but this vast collection of world views can tug at the seams of cultural cohesion.

How does someone define spirituality amidst this chaos?

To answer this we must first take a closer look at what is meant by the word Postmodern. Postmodernism is a term that has been used to identify some cultural trends that began in the 1960s. It is contrasted against the culture of Modernism which began with the age of Enlightenment and the Industrial Revolution and the culture of Pre-Modernism which was defined primarily through influence from the church.

Before the rise of technology, the majority of Western civilizations were shaped and monitored by the edicts of the church. This lasted many hundreds of years. With the rise of machines in the Industrial Age, that influence began to wane. There developed a feeling that the

universe was nothing more than a giant device created by God. God set the world in motion and then left it to run on its own. This was actually the belief held by many of America's Founding Fathers. They were Deists and thought that God had set the universe in motion like a giant clock but left it to humans to take care of their own affairs. That is why they fought so hard for Democracy. They knew they could not depend on God for their freedom from the rule of Britain but that they would have to fight for themselves and define a new nation that would protect the rights of all its citizens. These actions were the result of the Age of Enlightenment begun by the works of great minds like Descartes and Newton. The great figures of the Enlightenment championed reason over everything else. Scientific experimentation rather than the scriptures became the way to find truth. Modernism encouraged multiple perspectives on many subjects allowing for a separation of Church and State. Scientists were able to explore and develop new and controversial theories which helped to expand our understanding of the world. It led humankind to believe that we were in charge of our own destiny and of the universe itself.

There were downsides to Modernity, however. The idea that humanity is in charge of nature has led to environmental degradation threatening many species—including our own. By now, we are all familiar with the threats of global warming and the loss of limited resources. The dominance of reason has developed into a suspicion of anything other than that which can be understood by the mind. The idea that the heart, the body, and the soul are secondary to the mind can lead to a way of living that is devoid of wholeness and experience. The rights of the individual have been stressed so much that individualism is often championed over cooperation and compassion. Competition and power are seen as the primary means to survival.

Starting in the middle of the Twentieth Century another cultural shift began to take place in Western society. The rebellious and turbulent times of the 1960s brought about people who questioned the dominant power structure—especially as it suppressed and oppressed minorities and other cultures. The change was further influenced and propelled by the advent of personal computers. The culture went from depending on

machines to depending on information. This shift gradually turned a conglomerate of nations into a single global village. People learned to respect differences rather than abhor them and reason began to lose its dominance over emotions and feelings. Physical experience became as important as discovery. The years of war, from World War One to Vietnam, and the years of our abuse of the land, sea, and air engraved horrid scars upon the earth and within our psyche. There was no longer a belief in a single truth but a respect for independent ways of seeing the world. These were the things that lead to the Postmodern society.

Postmodernism and Religion

The traditional religions of the West have always been resistant to change. When the Enlightenment began, new scientific discoveries were viewed as challenges to church doctrine. Scientists were discredited and their theories were ridiculed. With the advent of modernism, church populations began to splinter and decline. Churches lost the power and control they once held over the lives of others. The new trends were looked upon by church leaders as signs that the society was moving further away from the direction set by God even as pews continued to empty. There was a rise in humanism and skepticism but religion did not just disappear.

There was one major exception to the pattern of declining membership in churches: the evangelical Christian churches and fundamentalism in many other religions began to thrive and grow. The evangelicals knew how to tap into the new paradigm. They used contemporary music and encouraged their members to move their bodies. Religion became a personal experience and each person was encouraged to seek and be filled with the spirit of God. The new mega-churches sought to take care of the whole person and their families. They offered child care, counseling, dating services, health programs, free meals, and personalized study groups. People of all races and backgrounds were literally embraced and all were encouraged to take

part in the leadership of the church.

Many thinkers thought that Modernism and Postmodernism would bring an end to religion but the opposite has become true. The strong reaction against Postmodernism has brought about fundamentalistic reactions. Many have been caught in the middle between wanting to break away from religious organizations and wanting to maintain a connection to the mystery and wonder of the universe through some kind of personal spirituality. 'I am spiritual but not religious' is the rallying cry of the times.

There is still a need for spirituality. All the scientific discoveries and all the philosophical dialogue have not conclusively answered the great questions of life: why are we here; what is our purpose; what happens after we die? These are some of the mysteries we all encounter and, until there are indisputable scientific answers to them, we must relegate these questions to spirituality. Thus, the Postmodern person in search of spirituality needs some alternatives but what would a Postmodern spirituality look like?

A Postmodern spirituality would need to help a person seek answers to the mysteries while, at the same time, maintain the sensibilities of the new era. A Postmodern spirituality would need to be personal, inclusive, and holistic. It would need to help individuals continue to expand and grow both individually and as members of a world community. A Postmodern spirituality would need to provide ways to seek answers rather than provide singular responses. It would need to value the inner worth of every person rather than devalue external and philosophical differences. It would need to embrace ways of practicing and studying not just with the mind but with actions, senses, and feelings. It would need to be something different from what has gone on before.

The books in this series help people develop that kind of spirituality by offering ways of thinking and practicing that can honor the self and all things and by helping to find personal answers to life's mysteries

Postmodernism and Religion

that can also benefit the world. They are meant to provide a spiritual connection to the mysterious without defining that connection for each individual. Each one is a guidepost without a destination.

Prayers for a Postmodern World

Introduction to the Book

This is a book about standard playing cards and their use in pursuing a more spiritual and enjoyable life. We tend to think of playing cards as simply a convenient tool for playing games—which they are—but they can also be used for a variety of other purposes, which we will explore here.

It is my contention that the sacred life and the everyday life should not be separate things. We are used to compartmentalizing religious observances, secular living, and spiritual practices. People go to church at one particular time, they go to work at another time, and they may do personal rituals or practices at another time. Rarely do these things merge. That differentiation can lead to fragmentation in our own lives and the way we view the world. If we believe that these separate parts of our lives should not interact, we never see the connection between them. The reality is that we only live one life as one person. The intellectual, the emotional, the physical, and the spiritual parts of us may influence us differently but are all part of the whole person. The more we live wholly, the more we can live life to its fullest.

Whole life spirituality is about connections: how we connect to our true selves, to each other, to our environment, and to the universe itself. The tools we use to make these connections matter less than the way we use them. Anything can deepen our understanding and connection to other people and things. Any object or shape can be a symbol that reveals deep meanings. Since all things and beings are ultimately connected, clues to the truth of the whole can be found in any of its constituent parts.

In this book I have chosen to use playing cards as a way of making some of those connections. How ironic it must seem to choose such a

simplistic collection of objects associated with playing games and gambling to deepen one's spirituality. But, that is often the nature of seeking truth and meaning. Zen monks tell wonderful stories about becoming enlightened in the strangest of places and circumstances. They teach that all things have the potential of revealing a deep understanding of what is truly important. These truths need not always be revealed only in a dusty leather-bound tome nor in the teachings of a disheveled guru.

Playing cards are used for having fun and spiritual truths do not always have to be weighty serious revelations. The Taoists say that those who really understand *The Way* laugh at it. If living a spiritual life means only being grumpy and introspective at every turn then what would be the point? We are here not to just remain on our knees and keep our hands clasped. We are here to open our arms, experience the world, and enjoy that experience. Play and laughter are some of the best ways to experience the joy of living well. Playing games is a great way of having fun but can also promote many facets of well being. When playing and enjoying a game, we interact with others, we enjoy a light-hearted attitude, we learn about cooperation, we join in the triumph of others, and we share together. There may be a host of other things that we experience but, mostly, we just experience a joy in being together.

This book is about allowing the mundane cross over into the spiritual so that they can merge and bring more joy and meaning into everyday life. This can be done with a simple deck of playing cards.

The Use of Playing Cards as Spiritual Practice

Why Use Playing Cards?

One might ask why simple playing cards might be used for a

spiritual practice. Aren't they just cheap little pieces of paper used for playing games? Well, yes, they are but that does not mean they cannot also be used for other things. A book can be just a collection of sheets of paper with a colorful cardboard cover to hold them together or it can be a book of sacred scripture. One book may be thrown in the trash while a sacred book may be wrapped in special paper and kept in a consecrated place. A book is just a book. We attach significance to the book based on how the words inside may affect us but the object itself is insignificant. We place a high value on gold because it is rare but in the end it is still just a rock.

In the same way, a deck of cards can be attributed with spiritual significance and meaning and it can be manipulated in such a way that it can provide insights into life's struggles. But in the end they are just cards. It is you that makes them special and not the other way around.

There are several practical reasons why a standard deck of playing cards can be used for spiritual pursuits. They are small and light and can easily be carried in a coat pocket or bag. They are inexpensive and can be purchased almost anywhere for just a few dollars.

Another reason is that standard playing cards are free of images and pre-conceived notions. A close cousin of the standard deck is the Tarot deck. In modern times, this deck has become endowed with added significance. There are many beautifully designed Tarot decks but it has to be remembered that each has the bias of its designer attached to it. This is not a bad thing. Sometimes we resonate with the viewpoint and images of a particular writer or artist and their insights are helpful but, at other times, it is best to try and find the way on our own. Except for the court cards and the jokers, all the other cards are just numbers with a suit symbol. The lack of any imagery can at first seem challenging if you are trying to attach any special significance to the cards but it also allows you the freedom to give each card as much or as little meaning you wish to give it.

How Can They Be Used?

How can a deck of cards be used as a tool for spiritual development? A deck of cards has a unique characteristic that is difficult for us to produce on our own: chance. We spend our lives developing specific habits and rituals to help us get through the day and to get what we need. Most of us depend on routine and expectations while we also fear change and surprise. Cards can be used to introduce pure randomness into our lives without adding the uncomfortable threat of safety that can come from physical change. This randomness can provide opportunities to see new things or the same things in a different way. Since we can get caught up and ingrained in our own patterns of thought, it often takes a gentle nudge away from those patterns to give us further insight. Introducing chance and symbols can provide that alternative possibility.

I am not suggesting that playing cards have an inherent capability to alter your future. Cards are just cards. We provide meaning and possibility to them, not the other way around. It is up to us to decide what each symbol represents and it is our own actions that provide the fortuity that will surprise us.

Consider the great amount of possible symbolism that can be attached to a simple deck of standard playing cards. There are four suits, ten numbers, three cards in each suit of royal figures (called the Court Cards), two colors, and a joker. Each of these symbols and numbers can be used separately to represent certain things in our lives. When they are put together in ordered and unique combinations we can begin to see even more possibilities.

Prelude

Some of my fondest memories are the times when our family would play cards with my in-laws. We would come for a visit on a holiday or a long weekend. After we had dinner and cleaned up, someone would bring out a deck of cards and we would play games. For some inexplicable reason we would always ending up laughing uproariously before too long. It didn't matter who won or even what game we played. What mattered is that we were together and that we had a good time. Maybe it was those happy memories, or my fascination with symbolism, or my enjoyment of cards in general that made me want to explore further possibilities with them. This work is the result of that exploration.

Prayers for a Postmodern World

Card Characteristics

The Suits

The standard four suits are the clubs, spades, hearts, and diamonds. That set of four can relate to the four seasons or the four directions. Ten numbers relate to our own set of ten fingers and toes and is the basis for our counting system. More than that, each number can also have a deeper meaning on its own. The court cards can represent important figures. The two colors of red and black can symbolize the nature of dualism so prevalent in our lives. What the cards may symbolize is not as important as what the cards actually represent to you. In this work I will give you suggestions for symbolic representations of the cards but you should allow your imagination guide when deciding the meanings for yourself.

Where these symbols actually derived is difficult to tell. The history of playing cards is shrouded in mystery. It seems likely that the cards we call a “standard deck of playing cards” came from England when that country was the dominant power of Europe. They may have attained several different card designs from France, Germany, and Italy and those countries may have adopted their cards from ones brought to their country from the returning soldiers of the crusades. The oldest known Muslim deck of cards had four suits: coins, cups, swords, and polo sticks. It is the English deck that we still use today.

----- end of preview -----