

# Divine decks

Tarot, oracle and angel cards help SBNRs  
'listen to the voice within'

BY ANNE BOKMA

**L**ots of things were forbidden in the Pentecostal church Rachele Mee-Chapman grew up in, but especially anything with a whiff of the occult. That included tarot cards, Ouija boards and even ghost stories at slumber parties. “It was all considered demonic,” says the 47-year-old Seattle author, an ordained evangelical minister who left church life eight years ago to write *Relig-ish: Soulful Living in a Spiritual-But-Not-Religious World* and create an online spiritual community for women called Flock. Today, reading tarot cards — for herself and others — is a regular part of her spiritual practice.

The tarot, a pack of 78 cards depicting images such as The Hanged Man, The Devil, The Empress and The Lovers, is commonly associated with older women in sparkly scarves and hoop earrings. But it’s increasingly being used as a tool for spiritual direction. “It’s not all magic and woo-woo,” says Mee-Chapman. “You look at the images and make psychological connections between them and what’s going on in your life — it helps you sort your thoughts and feelings and provides perspective to make decisions.”

Many spiritual but not religious (SBNR) folks use tarot for divine direction, she says. “Since they don’t go to church or consult a sacred text, tarot cards are becoming a popular devotional ritual and visual text used at home. They offer a way of slowing down, listening to the voice within and being guided. It’s like a form of prayer.”

If the idea of searching for personal truths by turning up a random card seems as ludicrous as opening a Bible, closing your eyes and landing a pointer finger on an arbitrary verse in the hope it will hold special meaning, consider that millions of people worldwide turn to these cards for answers. In addition to being the mainstay of psychic fairs across the country, there’s an international annual Tarot-Con convention, World Tarot Card Day, an online Tarot Town social network and famous teachers such as Australia’s Brigit Esselmont.

Like their tarot cousins, oracle cards and angel decks are used as sources of insight in times of need. When Maggie Pearson (name has been changed), a 52 year-old Calgary consultant and former Catholic was grieving the end of a two-year affair with a married man, she went to an angel card reader who guessed correctly that the man had developed cancer. Pearson was advised to let him go and let his wife take care of him. “Up until that point, I hadn’t been able to sleep at night. I was really struggling. But this brought me comfort and closure.”

Churchgoers have typically recoiled from tarot, which may be rooted in admonishments against mediums and “spiritists” in Leviticus, but the fear is also the result of sexism, says Mee-Chapman, since tarot has historically been a practice by and for women. “It got tainted with a demonic brush because the male powers were threatened by it.”

Certainly some religious people have no qualms about these cards. Vicki Raymond, a 64-year-old practising Baha’i in Guelph, Ont., consulted a deck of oracle cards when she made the decision to leave her decades-long marriage. “If you don’t find it easy to get answers from the divine, then an oracle deck is a good way to gain wisdom and assistance,” she says. “I reach for oracle cards when I feel alone or lost or vulnerable, and they’ve really helped. I call them my soul cards.”

The Scottish theologian John Drane has suggested tarot cards can be an “effective evangelistic tool” to share the Gospel with New Agers. Today, there are Christian tarot decks such as Loving Words from Jesus, Mother Mary oracle cards, Lilith Bible Tarot and even an Apocalypse deck.

Mee-Chapman wants to get rid of the suspicions around tarot. “Even The Devil isn’t a bad card,” she says. “It’s just a warning to watch out for tricksters.”

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