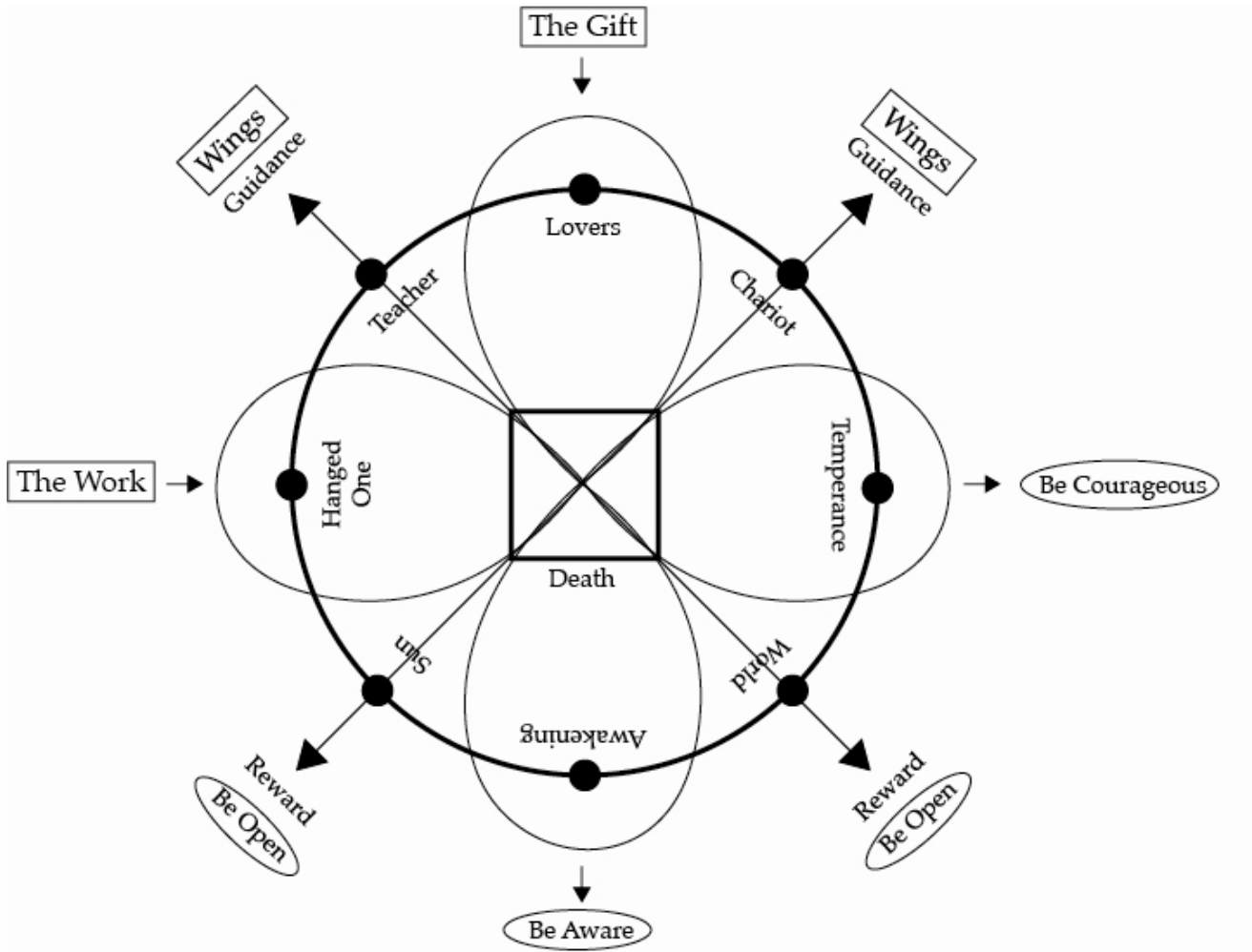


# DEATH'S OCTAVO

## The Tarot's Deep Support for Transition



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## **Practice: Visio Divina**

Visio Divina is an adaptation of Lectio Divina, an ancient practice for praying the scriptures from the Christian tradition in which a text is read a number of times as a way to inspired movement in meditative thinking and prayer. Traditionally it is a 4 step process of Reading (or in this case Viewing), Meditating/Rumination (more of a process of mental engagement than the current connotation of meditation), Prayer, and Contemplating (more like what we currently conceive of as meditation).

### **Taking a Long Loving Look (Visio)**

Rounds:

1. Sit comfortably with a Tarot card (or any inspirational image) before you. Gaze at it. Take “a long, loving look.” Then close your eyes and let some part of the image come into focus for you. Spend a few moments with your eyes remaining closed to be with that image.
2. Open your eyes and gaze again at the card or image for a moment or two. When you close your eyes again for a few moments perhaps a new image will come up for attention or the one from your first round will re-appear. Accept what ever comes.
3. You may want to repeat the process a third time.

### **Ruminate (Meditatio)**

Take up your journal and write or draw/doodle about what you saw / experienced. Muse about what these images might mean to you. Explore now with words and/or doodles for a few minutes.

(Optional / Only To Be Done After Your Own Reflection: Read just a bit from the book that came with your deck or from a book by a Tarot writer who explores card symbols and sources in depth. You are reading for inspiration, not information. Stop when you hit an idea that resonates with or expands on what you have already been journaling/doodling about. Include it in your musings. Stop reading and start writing/doodling again.)

### **Insight and Prayer/Supplication (Oratio)**

Close your eyes and clear your mind with a few gentle breaths. Let some message of insight, gratitude, or supplication arise from your heart. Be with this message.

### **Connecting with Wisdom (Contemplatio)**

Rest in what you have received. Pause before you jump into your busy life. Be in the presence of your new connection to this card and the wisdom of the Tarot.

## **Reading: A Death's Octavo Spread**

The spread can support you at various stages of the Death experience. As you are on the cusp, it can help by showing some of what might be coming, allowing you to identify positive things to move toward or pin point possible challenges to be prepared to grapple with. As you are in the midst, it can help you ground yourself in uncertain times. Toward the end, it can help you make meaning and gather wisdom. You can adjust the verb tenses / focus of the questions below to fit where you are in the Death experience.

The orientation of this spread is in finding the most helpful ways through the Death experience for you. Helpful doesn't always mean easy or pleasant, but as you interpret the cards look for the meanings that offer you the greatest support and positive movement.

### **Preparation**

1. Take out the Death card to serve as a kind of significator around which you will lay 8 cards. Spend at least a moment or two focusing on naming the Death experience that you are going through. (You may want to use the Visio Divina process to contemplate the Death card.)
2. Fine tune the questions below to fit your experience.
3. Shuffle all the rest of the cards as you normally would.

### **The Spread**

**Card 1 / Lovers Position** [Love / Gift / Awareness]:

❖ **What new love can the Death experience bring into my Life?**

**Card 2 / Judgment or Awakening Position** [Awakening / Gift / Awareness]:

❖ **What new consciousness can the Death experience bring into my Life?**

**Card 3 / Hanged One Position** [Surrender / Work / Courage]:

❖ **How can I fully surrender to the Death experience that is in my Life?**

**Card 4 / Temperance Position** [Re-balancing / Work / Courage]:

❖ **How can I bring balance back into my Life as I go through the Death experience?**

**Card 5 / Hierophant or Teacher Position** [Practice (spiritual, creative, connective) / Guidance / Reward]:

❖ **What practice can help me to Live more fully as I go through this Death experience?**

**Card 6 / World Position** [Purpose / Reward / Openness]

❖ **What new understanding of my deep Life purpose would be fruitful to be open to as I go through this Death experience?**

**Card 7 / Chariot Position** [Integration & Movement / Guidance / Openness]:

❖ **What do I need to more fully integrate into my Life in order to keep moving through this Death experience?**

**Card 8 / Sun Position** [Joy / Reward / Openness]:

❖ **How can I stay open to joy in my Life as I move through the Death experience?**

## **Process: “Weather Report” from Death’s Octavo**

The foundation of this process is the Major forces that help us move through the Death experience. This foundation is overlaid with cards from the Minors (numbered and courts) so that we can more clearly see the actions and attitudes that would be helpful to activate these forces in our everyday life.

Just as the weather changes frequently so, too, will our feelings, needs, actions, and attitudes shift during the Death experience. For this reason, it is most helpful to approach ‘The Weather Report’ as something changeable and to feel free to re-visit it with regularity. You may want to do it for 8 weeks in a row, keep a record, and then look back over the 8 reports for re-occurring patterns.

### **Preparation**

1. Separate your Majors from your Minors.
2. Create the Octavo. Put Death in the center position; this serves as the energy focus or significator for the reading. Above the Death card, place the Lovers card, and then continuing clockwise lay out The Chariot, Temperance, The World, Judgment, The Sun, The Hanged One, and The Hierophant. (Yes, that’s the final 3 rows of cards of The Fool’s Journey)
3. You may want to take some time to contemplate the Octavo and bring to mind the Death / Transition / Loss that you are seeking support for moving through.
4. Take up all but the Death card. Place these cards facedown, and shuffle. Pull one of these 8 cards. This is where your “Weather Report” starts at this time.

### **Laying Out the Cards**

5. Re-create the Octavo around your Death card.
6. Shuffle your Minor cards (numbered and courts) as you usual would.
7. Place the first Minor card over the Major card you identified in Step 4 above and then proceed around the circle of 8 cards.

### **Suggestions for Meaning Making**

- Look at each pair of Minor and Major card together to fine tune your understanding of the action or attitude to take. The Major is the foundation upon which the Minor stands. For example, the Ace of Cups over the Chariot might suggest bringing more attention to, and working to better integrate, the emotions in order to move forward in the Death experience; or the Two of Wands over the Sun might suggest that energy and/or vision is just starting to return that can move you back toward the possibility of Joy.
- Tell a story about where you are in the Death process starting from the position identified in Step 4 above. Go all the way around the circle to complete the story.
- Pay particular attention to the starting card and the partner card opposite it in the Octavo. You might keep these cards out in a special place so you will see them over time. You might journal after a time about what you these cards have taught you about moving through the Death experience.
- Remember that both the weather and stories are changeable. Recast “The Weather Report” as needed for support; it is a fluid circle.

## **Inspirations & Resources**

On December 22, 2012, I headed to Rhinebeck, NY for Rachel Pollack's *Tarot For the Day After the End of the World*. Despite the holidays and the forecast cataclysmic end of the world, a good sized group gathered and Rachel lead us through wisdom-rich explorations using the Tarot. She had just read Karen Engelmann's *The Stockholm Octavo*, a historical fiction novel build around an eight-card, divination spread. In the novel, Mrs. Sparrow receives visions and when a vision for someone is of vital importance she casts a special eight-card spread over eight nights to identify the eight people that will help him or her achieve the vision. Rachel had adapted the spread in the book and we worked thought it for insight about how to achieve our personal visions.

I was very taken with the Octavo and started reading the book myself. It was a relief to spend a little time in another world because mostly I was spending time being with my grief about losing my partner John in car accident on November 3, 2012. As part of my grief work, I kept visiting with the Tarot, asking for guidance, comfort, and insight from its images. One day I had the Fool's Journey (the Majors in three rows of cards 1-7, 8-14, and 15-21) laid out on my floor. I sat looking at the cards. The Death card drew my attention and I realized that its Fool's Journey position, the card was ringed by eight cards. And these were eight cards offered very helpful energies: Love, Movement, Re-balancing, Purpose, Awakening, Joy, Surrender, and Practice. I began developing the material that make up this workshop.

I am not working strictly with the Octavo concept as Karen Engelmann develops it in her work, but the idea – as it came through to me through Rachel's workshop – was the spark. The concepts of Divine Geometry that flow through the book – and are so very present in Tarot - also influenced my thinking, especially Mrs. Sparrow statement, "The Octavo is a spread of resurrection."

If you want to explore Engelmann's Octavo ideas, read the novel and there is also a nifty little *The Octavo Handbook Edition Deluxe* available at [www.karenengelmann.com](http://www.karenengelmann.com).

I've also been dipping into the symbology and religion of ancient Egypt in an inspirational exploration rather than a comprehensive study. At a recent talk at the Jung Society of Western Massachusetts, Karen Smyers presented on how ancient Egyptian though offers a guide for healing the splits within the self. She outlined how rather than banish the difficult or bad (such as the brother-killing God Set) the ancient Egyptians gave them a place in within the whole (Set gets to rule along with his nephew Horus, but he does only get the harsh desert as his domain).

Shortly after my talk, I looked at my book shelf and pulled off a book that had belonged to John, *Awakening Osiris: The Egyptian Book of the Dead* (Phanes Press, 1988). In this free and beautiful translation of ancient texts, English Professor Normandi Ellis brings forth a vivid picture of the acceptance of life and death. Here is a story from the chapter called *Triumph Over Darkness*:

"Come said the lord of life to the lord of death on day. "Let us make a truce. I shall bring forth creatures and deliver them unto death, if you deliver the dead into life."

"Why should I bequeath my powers to you?" asked death.

"It is simple enough. If you do not, I shall make no creatures at all. Then what good will your strength do you?"

“I see your point. But what good is death in the face of life, or for that matter, what good is life in the face of death?”

The two gods argued this way and that and the conversation fell upon the ears of truth. “Come now,” said truth, for he was the great uniter and wanted also to show his power. “Surely there is a way to settle this matter. You god of life, shall make two of all your creatures, one visible and the other invisible. Death may take them, but he must keep only one. The body shall be this to with as he pleases. The spirit he shall return to life.”

And so it was done that the world would remain constant in balance.

My experience with the physical death of a loved one is teaching me that this is so. And my other experiences of the Death as a transition or transformation are also held in this balance. So many Death experiences - no matter how ultimately positive - incur a challenging physical shifting of reality that we don't like! But energy or spirit – I feel they are interchangeable in this context – can not be destroyed but shifts to help the new come into being. If you dance with the Death experience, you can find seeds of possibility. I offer Death's Octavo as a support for your process.

### **Follow Up Options**

1. The Saturday morning meditation here at Readers Studio from 8am to 8:30am will be focused on the seeds of Death.
2. If you'd like to explore guided meditations on the cards of Death's Octavo, they are at [www.journeyintothetarot.com](http://www.journeyintothetarot.com).
3. One of the seeds of my experience with Death has been writing that I am working up to share on my blog. You will find these at [www.artofchangetarot.com](http://www.artofchangetarot.com) over the coming months.
4. I am putting the finishing touches on my plan to do a six-session series via conference call focused on helpful energies of Death's Octavo. We'll start with a session focused on the Death card and naming / honoring our losses and transitions. We'll then move through pairs of cards in the Octavo. We'll conclude with an integration session. Each session will have brief meditation / prayer, an inspirational overview of the helpful aspects of the cards explored, a sharing circle, and resources/prompts for work over the week. They'll be no more than 8 people in group to allow for sharing, and they'll meet on Wednesday and/or Friday evenings (U.S.A. ET time) in May and June. There will be a sliding scale fee of \$120 to \$150 – and if you have worked with me in the past – i.e. taken this workshop! – the scale can slide down to \$90. Let me know your questions.