

THE SPIRIT OF FIRE

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*Give me a spark of nature's fire
That's the learning I desire
- Robert Burns*

Mythic Fire

The quest for fire is a consistent theme throughout all world mythologies. The primal importance of fire to provide warmth and light served Neolithic man in warding off wild animals and chasing away evil spirits. From the earliest epoch fire became invested with the sacred; the magical thinking of the ancients identified fire as the property of the Gods. Still today the awe-inspiring element fire symbolises spirit, the religious quest and the transcendent.

An ancient theme in Greek myth was the theft of fire. Prometheus stole fire from the gods by concealing its flame in a fennel stalk, transporting it back to earth and disseminating it to man. Fire separated the mortals from the gods; therefore its theft and distribution to mankind was a major transgression that needed to be punished. Zeus's punishment for the theft was Pandora, who delivered her cauldron of curses to the human race. Plagues and ills were discharged from the urn, reminding the human race of their mortality and inferiority. Fire encourages cultural progress and civilization; however, the epidemic unleashed by Pandora reminds mankind of the shadow of human inflation and intrusion into the realm of the gods. Ironically Pandora means "all gifts" for concealed at the bottom of the urn was Hope. Fire's spirit is relentlessly eclipsed by mortality and the mundane, its shadow-side. But the gift of Fire that remains after destruction and annihilation is Hope.



Prometheus by Peter Paul Rubens, 1636

Hephaestus was summoned by Zeus to fashion Pandora out of clay as revenge for man's acquisition of fire and as punishment for possessing this illegitimate gift. With fire the human race had become capable of alchemy or the transformation of raw and primitive elements into refined and useful ones. Hephaestus is the god of fire and his name is synonymous with fire. Hephaestian fire is neither wild nor untamed. It is the fires of the forge and kiln that enable products to be fashioned out of raw materials: pottery, weapons, instruments and tools are the by-products of fire. Fire transforms what is primitive into what is refined; it civilises. Fires simmering beneath the earth, in caves and under volcanoes locate the places where Hephaestus creates his works of art. Unlike the intuitive and prophetic fire of Zeus, or the liquid fire of Dionysus, that entrances us into an altered state, Hephaestus's fire is alchemical, changing elements into another state, refining and industrialising. During the Iron and Bronze ages fire was a potent ally to the smith who was able to forge weapons and instruments. Fire has constantly helped shape culture, industry and war and been closely connected to culture heroes like Prometheus or gods who bring culture like Hephaestus and Zeus.

With fire man could now cook meat. Fire had an important role in the religious and festive life of the ancients. At the heart of Greek religion was the ritual of sacrifice, performed at an altar, an essential aspect of every sanctuary. This ritual was dedicated to either an Olympian or Chthonic god. After the animal was sacrificed to the god, it was cooked for a communal feast. The ancients believed the smoke rising to the heavens from the roasting animal pleased the gods. In Greek religion the sacrifice of a domestic animal to the god, its bloody slaughter and the communal consumption of its meat constituted a sacred act. Sacrifice to the god was a form of gift giving, an act of reciprocity, a petition and an insurance policy. The act of sacrifice also reaffirmed the boundary between man and god. Fire had a central place in the culture gods's sanctuaries and temples. Today the tradition continues through the lighting of candles and the burning of incense, an invitation into Fire's sacred inner chamber.

Fire also symbolises a wild and untamed force. It was the daughters of the house, later the Roman Vestals, who tended the fires at the hearth, the home's sacred centre personified by the Greek Goddess Hestia another personification of fire's stillness. As custodian of the hearth Hestia is the eternal firelight burning at the heart of life, the fireplace of the home, and the flame lit in the city's central precinct. She is the hearth, a symbol for the centre of the home and community as well as the metaphor for family life and the family circle. Hestia is also central to psychic life representing the sacred centre and is the goddess who honours sacred space and protects sacred images.

A mythic motif suggests only the pure or virginal could tame the raging fire. Fire is a dichotomous symbol as it embodies both the sacred and the wild. Fire is the process of creating sacred space through sacrifice, questing for the spiritual life and conceptualising a more enlightened way of being. However its polar side is wild, untamed and furious, often destroying and ravaging what stands in its way.

Astrological Fire

The future and its timeless potential captivate the three astrological fire signs Aries, Leo and Sagittarius, which all share the fervour to quest far beyond their familial and cultural heritage. Fire desires to see beyond the visible horizon. Future-orientated Fire is inclined to be high-spirited, enthusiastic and optimistic; therefore Fire stimulates and inspires. Extroverted fire is a motivational energy, a coach or a teacher inspiring others to believe in their potentialities, whether real or imagined, while introverted fire is a visionary, a weaver of dreams and a prophet.

♈ **ARIES** *is the fire of personality, the spark of life, and the impulse to incarnate. It symbolises birth, new beginnings, and the desire to adventure, physically, intellectually or spiritually. It needs to be free to go after what it wants: a warrior, a fighter, an adventurer, a champion, a brother, an expedition leader.*

♌ **LEO** *is the fire of affection and warmth, the fires of romance and search for an ideal other. It seeks its reflection in the admiration and applause from others; however, its burning desire is to create and express its self through an imaginative medium: a loyal friend, a playmate, a benefactor, a hero, an inspiration.*

♊ **SAGITTARIUS** *is the fire of wisdom and understanding, the search for meaning and the quest for the answers to life's big questions. It craves knowledge and freedom to explore what is foreign pushing past the coherent boundaries of its life: a traveller, a professor, a guru, a student, a cross-cultural experience, a guide to other worlds.*

The element of fire appears self confident and adventurous, taking risks and defying the odds. However fire's inferior side constellates a fear of being stuck, unable to move; therefore it has difficulty accepting the reality of a situation if it appears limited by structures and rules. Hence Fire can bolt, dash, take off without having thought through a situation, propelled by a belief, as well as a sense of knowing, that it will work out. Fire is inspired, inspirited, intuitive, prophetic, focused on the distance, the future. However passionate and intuitive, Fire is not always right (sorry!).

Fire does not want to be bothered with details. More important is the wider picture and the broader horizon, the bottom line; therefore the exuberance of fire's faith and vision is often fraught with impracticality. Fire's burning spirit and quest for philosophical perfection and absolute truth meets its shadow in negative feeling, lethargy and criticism.

Fire's optimism can sometimes defend the reality of a situation, especially if the reality is depressing! 'I shall be right!' Fire's positive approach abhors negativity, and one of fire's slogans is **'no negativity'**. Fire's difficulty with negative feeling can distort its feeling perception, viewing negative feeling as damaging, rather than a symptom of something deeper that needs conscious attention. This leads to overcompensating for inferior feelings by constantly proving oneself or taking inappropriate risks or action. Insecurities are hidden behind an over-confident persona. Rose-coloured glasses often interfere with the clarity of vision.

Adventuresome Fire sees life as a play; a game where risk taking and gambling creates new opportunities. Fire's strong belief is that it is destined to win and it often succeeds due to its positive outlook. Its fiery nature is restless, continuously searching for stimulation, therefore is drawn to what is novel, exciting and promising. Its temperament is to quest, to search for the answers, the idea or the concepts that will fulfil its yearning. Fire's desire for certainty and the truth compels them to search for answers. Ethics, reason and morality are important to its religious quest, however on this journey the fires that burn for enlightenment are often extinguished by false gurus and prophets. Naiveté is often mistaken for purity of vision.

Fire is a spirited element: its approach to life's experience is generally highly instinctive, spontaneous, forthright and wilful. Fire is passionate and like its element in nature burns new ground to move farther afield. Its burning desire is often felt like a fire in the belly. There is determination and when inspired, its passionate flame pursues its desires. But where there is passion and excitement, there is also restlessness and boredom. Fire demands its freedom and needs to explore new territory; however, this restless spirit can fear commitment. Fire's gifts are its faith, sense of humour and ability to see the wider horizons of life. Constantly asking questions about the nature of life, Fire's inquisitiveness leads us down the path of self-discovery.

When fire is lacking in an individual's life, physical vitality may be low, as the spiritedness for life is missing. The spirit for adventure and ability to take risks may be compromised – there could be a lack of trust in life or faith that things will work out for the best. Low self-esteem, a fear of life's challenges and a lack of mobility may be evident. If fire is compromised, an inability to be able to digest or burn up energy may be evident. There may be a weak digestive system, unable to burn up and process what

is taken in. Too much fire represents an over-zealous individual, lacking commitment with difficulty settling into a routine, constantly searching and questioning. With too much fire an individual may be at risk of burning himself or herself out or collapsing due to exhaustion. Psychologically this might suggest an over inflated sense of self-importance or an unhealthy regard for natural limitations.

Astrological Fire corresponds to the Jungian temperament of intuition. Jung suggested that this type has an attitude of expectancy, arriving at answers without necessarily being conscious of the process that led to the answer. Intuitive types are strongly convinced they are right, yet the truth is they are not always correct. An air of conviction and expectancy often accompanies their sense of being right. The intuitive is also more prone to questioning the meaning of things rather than believing commonly held beliefs or accepting things at face value. Energetically intuitives tend to be more spasmodic and move between the extremes of expressing great energy and enthusiasm through to exhaustion and collapse. Their nature is to over-reach or over-commit themselves to projects, leaving them burnt out. The intuitive understands theories and theoretical constructs and working with hunches s/he is able to come to conclusions through associations and linking ideas together. These are not necessarily sequential or correct; however, their ability to see the overall pattern endows them with a creative imagination and vision. Fire and the intuitive type are blessed with imagination and otherworldly knowing, which adds to their charisma and magnetism.

Tarot Fire

Wands reflect the intuitive temperament and like a magic wand cast a new spell of opportunity and adventure, investing the spirit of the times with courage and optimism. Wands reflect the spirit of fire and when they appear in a spread, an individual's immediate atmosphere or the question on their mind is probably infused with the nature of fire. Wands reflect this fiery spirit and the soul's prophetic power and vision. When wands appear, the fires of the heart are lit. Whether they are the fires of passion or inspiration, transcendence or creativity, adventure or heroism, the individual is challenged to be spirited and courageous. When Wands dominate a spread we are alerted to the spirit of fire as well as its shadow-side. Whether Wands appear to inspire us beyond our self-imposed limits, to motivate us to be adventurous, or caution us to be less impulsive, the fires of spirit are awoken and we need to acknowledge this in ourselves, as well as those in our personal orbit.

When writing the Celestial Tarot, the suit of Wands represented the fire element. The first nine cards represented the nine decans (10 degree markers) of the three fire signs. Each one also was also represented by a major constellation, as in the following grid.

Minor Arcana	Astrological Harmonic	Constellation	Decanate	Decan Ruler
ACE	Conjunction	Cassiopeia	1 st Aries	Mars
2	Opposition	Cetus	2 nd Aries	Sun
3	Trine	Perseus	3 rd Aries	Jupiter
4	Square	Hydra	1 st Leo	Sun
5	Quintile	Crater	2 nd Leo	Jupiter
6	Sextile	Corvus	3 rd Leo	Mars
7	Septile	Lyra	1 st Sagittarius	Jupiter
8	Semi-Square	Ara	2 nd Sagittarius	Mars
9	Novile	Draco	3 rd Sagittarius	Sun
10	Element	Fire		

What became fascinating to me as the cards revealed themselves were that the Wands highlighted the monsters of myth (Cetus, Hydra and Draco); all represented by the Sun, as if it were our inner monsters that called to us to be heroic. The Wands also highlighted the oldest Greek hero, Perseus and many images associated with the religious quest. The suit begins with Cassiopeia, the Queen who like Hera challenges the heroic side of our nature to come forward.

Let's look at the brief description of the ten cards from this perspective.¹

THE ACE OF WANDS: Cassiopeia

The Ace of Wands augurs a new journey into the fiery realm of imagination and creativity, however, Cassiopeia's arrogance and inflation clearly illustrates its shadow side. A new identity is emerging as a powerful surge of creative energy takes hold, but the gods expect reverence and humility in return. With her hubris in mind, the creative adventure can begin productively. On an oracular level the card suggests a brand new course of action with ample faith and enough energy to follow its route.

THE TWO OF WANDS: Cetus

When the Two of Wands is drawn the horizon is alight with numerous possibilities. Although confronted by the sea-monster Cetus a bold vision of the future is implicit in the card. In myth monsters are guardians of treasure and symbolise what needs to be overcome in order to reclaim our inner resources. A new business venture, academic idea, course of study or relationship may call the individual to move away from their current routine. The Two of Wands calls us to action. Psychologically the card reminds us that courage and heroism are necessary to move forward.

THE THREE OF WANDS: Perseus

Perseus personifies this courage and heroism needed for the quest. With Athena and Hermes's guidance he severed the head of the Gorgon Medusa that he now holds in his right hand; in his left hand is the unbreakable sword. The Three of Wands is ablaze with the fiery spirit of the hero who has accomplished his labour. Surrounded by the gods's gifts Perseus feels satisfied and fulfilled. Having accomplished his initial intention there is confidence and enthusiasm to pursue other adventures and opportunities. The card augurs a new course of action and the instigation of new plans in the world either through career, creativity, study or travel.

THE FOUR OF WANDS: Hydra

Slithering across one quarter of the night sky is Hydra, the largest constellation identified with a primeval water snake. In Greek myth Heracles destroyed the nine-headed serpentine monster after a long battle, personifying the heroic impulse that successfully battles the dragon of fear and doubt. The card is linked with the first decan of Leo thematic of the courage and determination necessary to express the creative self. The card reveals celebration and gratitude for accomplishing the labour; however, it also implies that this phase of endeavor has ended and the future will call the individual farther afield to continue self-exploration.

THE FIVE OF WANDS: Crater

The constellation of Crater sits on the back of Hydra representing the chalice Apollo gave the raven to fill with the waters of life. The goblet has many mythic associations including the wine cup of Dionysus, Medea's cauldron and Apollo's well. A chalice either symbolises the fullness of life but when empty, it represents drought and poverty. As the Holy Grail it represented the knight's quest, competing for the sacred vessel that held the spirited blood of life. When the Five of Wands appears it encourages the championing of your own integrity and ethics and to confront the obstacles that impede the path to the inner chalice of fulfillment.

THE SIX OF WANDS: Corvus

Corvus, the crow, along with Hydra and Crater form a trinity of constellations linked together throughout antiquity. In *Celestial Tarot* they are associated through ruling the three decans of Leo, the

stages of the heroic quest. Sacred to Apollo, the raven was a messenger of the gods and signified prophecy. Corvus heralds news of an advancement or recognition as the quest, the creative project or the job has reached its conscious goal. Crows are also known as negative tricksters; therefore Corvus cautions us against false praise and envy that often accompanies victory.

THE SEVEN OF WANDS: Lyra

Lyre playing is a mythic vestige of the hero-bard-warrior archetype. To the Greeks the constellation of the lyre was the instrument Hermes crafted for his brother Apollo who eventually bequeathed it to Orpheus. In *Celestial Tarot* the card depicts Orpheusø muse, Eurydice, who he unsuccessfully attempted to release from the underworld. The task of the Seven of Wands is to reclaim the erotic impulse, the poetic inspiration and the internal Muse through the battle of everyday life. When the card appears, it suggests being brave in facing challenges and disruptions imposed upon the creative life.

THE EIGHT OF WANDS: Ara

At the heart of Greek religion was the ritual of sacrifice performed at an altar, an essential aspect of every sanctuary. Altars were the centerpieces of holy ground where rituals were enacted. The card suggests we have stepped into sacred time which is full of synchronicity after having sacrificed what is appropriate. In *Celestial Tarot* the altar is on fire with the doubt and anxiety the suppliants have sacrificed to the gods. Having burnt away the pollution and difficulty this card augurs a period of positive action, travel and movement into new territory.

THE NINE OF WANDS: Draco

Coiled around the North Pole, Draco guards the treasure at the center of the celestial sphere. Again another serpentine creature appears to confront the hero. Draco is often equated with Ladon, the dragon guarding the golden apples of the Hesperides, defeated by Heracles. Having accomplished so many labours the hero faces yet another this time with the help of Atlas. When the Nine of Cups is drawn it reveals there may be another obstacle in the path or another dragon to subdue, yet with a second wind accompanied by inner strength and conviction, the individual successfully meets the challenge.

THE TEN OF WANDS: The Elemental Spirit of Fire

A salamander, the mythological fire-spirit, represents the amalgam of the courage of Aries, the creativity of Leo and the vision of Sagittarius. The card suggests that a baptism by fire has renewed the spiritual call and the individual is again ready to confront a new challenge, a heroic labour. Surrounded by the flames of spirit the salamander radiates the heat that transforms and releases the current burdens and responsibilities. Old patterns are being burnt away and new horizons are visible; however, like the salamander, the individual needs to bear the heat of the situation in order to reverently lift their head to envision the future.

Like mythic fire, there is hope as we end our journey through the Wands, held in the regal hands of the Royals that follow: the Prince and Princess, Queen and King, all personifications of Fireø royalty.

¹ The Celestial Tarot Book is now available in kindle at: <https://www.amazon.com/Celestial-Tarot-Book-Brian-Clark-ebook/dp/B07MVS88SR>