IN THIS CHAPTER

- Learning about divination's meaning and true purpose
- Exploring the link between ancient portrayals of fate, fortune, and contemporary attitudes toward divination
- Celebrating the ways you're *already* tuned in to your divinatory gifts

Chapter 1
What Is Divination, Really?

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Welcome, sweet seeker! I'm so happy that you're here with me. You're about to embark on the exciting yet mysterious journey of learning to *divine*.

Divination opens doorways to the truth of your heart and soul. It speaks to you in the language of enchanted symbols. It parses the threads woven through your life's story to offer glimmers of direction on your fated path. And when practiced regularly, divination can be a beautiful reminder that all things are interconnected.

The gifts given to us by divination are as rich and numerous as constellations in the sky, but getting started can be daunting. There are so many practices — tarot, scrying, the throwing of lots and runes, astrology, numerology, to name just a few! — and so many rules to learn about each one. Divination students may worry that they're not "psychic enough" to get a good reading, or won't know how to interpret their divined message when they pull that tarot card, or watch their pendulum swing. If these concerns sound familiar, good! You're in the right place. I want to assure you right off the bat that if you're holding this book, regardless of your exposure to divination, ritual work, magic, or

the language of symbols, your very curiosity is proof that you're meant to learn more about these practices.

It will be my job, and my honor, to guide you through the how-to's of omen reading, helping you build your magical skillset and strengthen intuitive discernment.

This book introduces you to key divination methods that, while by no means are comprehensive (there are so many divination tools!), will serve beginners beautifully. You'll also find creative approaches to divining, troubleshooting tips for difficult readings, and exercises to support your intuitive development. The goal is to equip you with essential tools, and help cultivate a sustainable and personalized relationship with them.

If you're feeling drawn to jump right into a specific divination modality, you can flip ahead to Part 2. Otherwise, linger here in Chapter 1 to read about the origins and purpose of divination and find some validation for all the ways in which you're already walking the path of the diviner.

Defining Divination

The word *divination* conjures strange images. In fact, it may feel hard to define this word if you're not already familiar with the language of the occult or magical realms. What does divination mean, and who can be a diviner?

The word *divination* comes from the Latin *divinare*, "to be inspired by a god," imbuing this practice with an inherently spiritual, otherworldly quality. Divination is the art of interpreting symbols and omens to discern answers to important questions. It is present in the fabric of every culture the world over, and for many ages, it was an important tool for making sense of the world. (Check out Chapter 2 for more on divination systems.)

In ancient times, people saw the world as *ensouled*, meaning the divine was woven through all of nature, inseparable from human life. Signs and symbols were seen everywhere — in the patterns of birds in flight, in the position of planets and stars, and in the contents of our dreams. The divine spoke constantly to those who would listen. Through ritual engagement with elemental things,

diviners interpreted nature's supernatural messages, drawing them closer to a higher power. From palm reading to rune casting, divination created a bridge between humans and all things cosmic.

Diviners and fortune tellers

If you close your eyes and think of a fortune teller, you may imagine some cartoonishly adorned woman, sitting in a dimly lit room before a crystal ball, predicting a doomy future. The idea of fortune-telling carries with it a surprising amount of negativity, thanks to sensationalized depictions in movies and TV. Only dark and scary predictions of death, loss, or destruction seem to emanate from those stereotypical characters, who really read more as evil witches than helpful seers.

Divination, astrology, tarot, and other mantic arts carry a stigma as the result of the values of our post-Enlightenment world. Prior to the Age of Enlightenment, the era of cultural discovery between the 15th and 18th centuries, divination was a respected practice, integrated into mainstream cultural life. Much of the time, it was practiced by or associated with women. The Enlightenment brought great leaps and bounds in medicine, science, politics, and the arts, but one of its chief projects was to push to the side anything deemed illogical or unempirical. Divination was thus relegated to the margins of society, mocked for its "irrationality" and rebranded as wholly frivolous.

Divination, which celebrated a sensitivity to nature and its symbols, was recast as "fortune-telling," something dark and irrational, to discredit it and banish it from respectable culture. Folk healers faced the same fate, rebranded as "witches" and pushed to society's margins as aberrant and threatening.

Old goddesses of fate and fortune

A misconception about divination is that it's little more than fortune-telling, but I must push back here. Fortune-telling, as a term, is often imbued with negativity and judgment, which is garnered from patriarchal attitudes toward the goddesses of fate and fortune. What better way to dismiss and discredit something powerful and deep than to render it ridiculous and even harmful? Cultures all around the world imagined fate and fortune as powerful deities, often feminine, who spun, measured and cut the thread of life, determining the life story of every mortal on earth.

Ancient myths depict fate as something beyond the grasp of human control, which makes the idea of meeting your fate quite terrifying. For the Greeks, the *Moirai*, or the Fates, were three goddesses who determined the length and quality of a person's life. Clotho spun life's thread, while Lachesis measured the thread, determining a life's length. Atropos was responsible for cutting the thread, which signified the moment and circumstances of one's death. No other gods could interfere with what the Fates foresaw; their word was final.

Ancient Norse myth had similar divine beings associated with fate: the three *Norns*, goddesses who guarded the *Yggdrasil*, the World Tree. These sisters were responsible, much like the Greek Moirai, with weaving life's great tapestry. Urd was the Norn of the past, Verdandi the Norn of the present, and Skuld the Norn of the future. Like the Greek Fates, the Norns had final say over matters of life and death. The repeated appearance of the thread in relation to fate is a fascinating echo between Mediterranean and Norse cultures.

From Yoruba traditions in West Africa that teach a concept referred to as the "Ori" to the karma taught in South Asian spiritual systems of Hinduism and Buddhism, similar stories of fate and fortune exist in every culture. And these powers share a common thread: Fate is seen as something vast, feminine, and beyond human control.

The Roman goddess Fortuna personified luck and fate and was depicted in art and literature as blindfolded, spinning her wheel, her *Rota Fortuna*, to determine the outcome of one's life. Her decrees were said to be random, arrived at completely by chance, and again, beyond the influence of any mortal's (or god's) intentions, goals, or desires.

The Wheel of Fortune was a popular image in the Middle Ages that was immortalized in the tarot as one of the Major Arcana. This card's message is profound: Sometimes you find yourself at the top of the wheel, triumphant and powerful; other times you're plunged down toward the wheel's underside, overpowered by the fickleness of fate. Fortuna, therefore, could deliver you to the most exalted feelings of success, brilliance, and achievement, but then, in a moment's notice, dash it all to nothing. Fortune's wild unpredictability gave it an ominous edge. With no room for humans to bargain with cosmic forces, fate and fortune threaten

a total loss of agency. Fortune-telling and divination thus also carry an ominous reputation: there's a real fear that divination will reveal a scary future from which there is no escape.

But true diviners know better. At no point do we arrive at the definitive message of our "fate." Divination returns us to our soul's questions again, and again. This practice isn't here to dispell the mystery, but rather guide us straight into its heart.

21st century diviners

While I can tell you pretty stories of ancient days when people looked to the earth for divine guidance, it's clear that our world is a far cry from valuing divination in the same way. In a time where our smartphones are teeming with rapidly invasive AI tools and software, where life is deliriously fast paced, where superficial distraction constantly commodifies our attention, it's easy to wonder what place divination really has. You may find yourself asking, "What's the point?"

Divination and associated practices, like mindfulness, making art, communing with nature, and seeking out sources of wisdom both within yourself and without, are important antidotes to the contemporary maladies of burnout, isolation, and hopelessness. When you divine in the 21st century, you're suturing a wound that the technologized world inflicted decades ago. Divination is healing in that it returns you to the essential experience of being centered, of living in relation to the world around you, of being sensitive to symbols and informed of the inner workings of the psyche.

For those who are totally new to divination, I want to make something clear: The diviner doesn't determine with absolute certainty what "will happen," or what the overall outcome of one's life will be. Nor does divination say, "This is set in stone." The messages the diviner reveals can be treated as sacred mirrors of the soul, portals into the psyche, that show something quite important about the ever-changing relationship not just with yourself, but with your guides and with the natural world.



REMEMBER

Nothing will be shown to you in divination that you don't already intuitively know or experience. That's why you shouldn't regard divination as scary, as something that might reveal a horrific fate you otherwise couldn't have foreseen.

Ancient people turned to divination to answer questions about royal coronations, the timing of harvests, when to undertake a sea journey — "life or death" stuff you may not need to contend with anymore. As a 21st century diviner, you may, however, use divination to:

- Reflect on the archetypal, emotional, philosophical challenges you face, and using your divination tools as a mirror to bring awareness to the depth and details of what it is you're carrying within.
- Strengthen your all-important but often ignored sense of intuition, a crucial faculty that this fast-paced world encourages you to break away from.
- Restore your relationship with your guides. Yes, you have a team of guides who cheer for you, who love and support you, and who encourage you on your life path. These may be the spirits of beloved ancestors who have passed on, or guardian angel type figures. Divination allows you to be in direct dialogue with them as you balance yourself between the rational and irrational realms while divining. This can lead to deeper feelings of peace, self-knowledge, and overall belief in yourself. For more on connecting with your guides, check out Chapter 15.

One last thing about divining: You already know the answers to your deep questions. Divination is simply a tool for excavating, witnessing, and integrating that insight. Learning to divine brings you into a world of meaning and reminds you of the innate wisdom of the earth, which is reflective, at the end of the day, of the wisdom you carry within. As above, so below, my friends.

As above, so below reflects the ancient insight of correspondence between the macrocosm and the microcosm: heavenly patterns mirror earthly events, divine forces echo the mundane. This maxim is a reminder that nothing on earth is without its celestial counterpart, and that there is a kinship between all living things. It's basically shorthand for *magic is effortlessly and eternally real*.

The Magic of Synchronicity

When was the last time you thought of someone, and then ten minutes later received a text from them? Or you were walking down the street and heard a line from a song blasting from

someone's car that seemed to perfectly reflect your mood or even echoed something you just said? These seemingly unrelated, but coincidental, phenomena are known as *synchronicities*.

Synchronicity, a concept created by Swiss psychologist Carl Jung, claims meaningful connection between your interior states of observation, emotion, or experience and external events. Sudden striking similarities between the inner and outer states seem to have meaningful connection, but those connections can't be rationally explained. These meaningful coincidences emerge in the process of divination, as you draw cards, throw lots, scry, or consult the *I Ching*.

The art of noticing the world around you

This book is here to guide you into the practice of divining in a variety of ways. And though the offered methods of approaching divination are diverse, one throughline runs through all of them: You must trust your own ability to recognize the importance of omens when they present themselves to you.

Divination requires you to speak a symbolic language — one that defies pure logic and works in the realm of the imagination and the collective unconscious. Divinatory messages present themselves via the nature of coincidence and synchronicity, and you must believe what you see, what you feel, and what you intuit to divine with confidence.

Here are some ways to practice strengthening your synchronicity muscles. (Yes, all these points follow a theme!)

- **Pay attention to what's happening around you.** Divining requires a sense of deep self-awareness, especially when it comes to recognizing the symbols that regularly present themselves to you. Make a practice of taking seriously the signs that echo in your midst. Things like repeating numbers on a clock, words that you hear in conversation in passing, recurring sightings of animals in nature or in media, frequent encounters with a particular kind of person or particular sort of setback — these are all important signs to consider.

- **Cultivate awareness of where you are, what you're doing, how you're feeling, and what's important to you when you notice these repeated symbols and signs.** Do you notice a particular set of numbers following you around when you're emotionally activated? Do you see drawings of a particular animal or character when you're exploring a new city? Letting these images speak to you, and then taking stock of the when, where, and why, can strengthen your sense that your guides are reaching out to you.
- **Live with your eyes, ears, and heart open to your surroundings.** Try moving through your day *without* your nose buried in your phone. Go for a walk without headphones. Tune in to all five senses as you move about your day. This can help you build a relationship with your intuition and keep you open to noticing more in your external environment.
- **Cultivate a regular practice of reflecting.** This can be through journaling, mindfulness, breathwork — whatever draws you into yourself and can promote awareness of your innermost state of being.



REMEMBER

The contemporary world encourages you to ignore signals from your guides and from your personal intuition. These practices may feel silly at first, like you're pushing too hard to make "something out of nothing." But one of your greatest tools as a diviner is your innate trust in your intuition and your belief in the meaningful connectedness of all things. Remember, too, that building this skillset requires time and patience.

Coincidences, cause, and effect

How could it be possible that drawing a card from a tarot deck can answer important questions about your life? And could it really be "real" that the moon and sun overhead influence your personality and life path all the way down here on earth? Isn't it more likely that your dreams are just your brain processing the busyness of the day, rather than are artifacts asking to be interpreted? These are reasonable questions, ones posed by a rational person living in a rational world. But you're here with me now, and we must look at the world through a more magical lens.

To divine is to be in relationship with occult — that is, hidden — things and to make sense of what seems insensible. Coincidence

can certainly be mere coincidence. But what if you shifted your perspective, let yourself be drawn in by coincidence, and found deep meaning through this practice?

If, as Jung says, synchronicity is the expression of an underlying interconnectedness between all things, how does your perspective of the world change? When you allow yourself to notice synchronicities and take them seriously rather than shrug them off, you begin to strengthen your noticing faculties.


TIP

As an example, maybe you were close with your grandmother who recently passed away. In working through your grief, you spend some time in prayer, or speaking aloud to her as you get ready for your day. When you leave the house to go to work, you notice a red cardinal sitting on a fence, but you think little of it. Birds can be anywhere at any time. You go through your day and forget about the bird. The next time you have a moment of speaking to your grandmother's spirit or praying for a sign from her because you miss her, you notice a red cardinal while looking out your window. A second appearance. Later, on the subway, you sit next to someone who has a red cardinal patch embroidered on their backpack.

A rationalist would tell you there's nothing to make of these events, that they're mere coincidences. But if you're a diviner, you take these appearances seriously and begin to associate your grandmother's spirit with the appearance of the red cardinal. The cardinal now is a reminder of someone you loved and becomes part of your unique symbolic vocabulary.

Seeing the cause of coincidence, or synchronicity, as an eternal but secret web of connectivity allows you to enjoy strengthened belief in your intuitive capacities, as well as feel less alone in a world that denies the existence of anything numinous. When you stop forcing yourself to seek a rational cause for what you observe, intuit, and sense, you deepen your relationship with the symbolic realms, become more aligned with your intuitive gifts, and as a result, more attuned to the worlds that exist inside of yourself. This is the gift of living life in a way that's open to magic, a life where you're in creative relationship with the energies around you. This can be extremely empowering and deeply healing.

Meeting Your Inner Diviner

You may be thinking, "Okay, Cristina, all this sounds good, but how do I know if I'm cultivating important divinatory wisdom or just slowly losing my mind?" The issue at hand is that you need to both build an awareness of the meaning of some symbols and their systems, as well as cultivate belief in your ability to interpret these symbols when they emerge. First I'll talk about meeting your inner diviner.

Tapping into your innate wisdom

There's no one way to divine, and there's no method of divination that's consistent from practitioner to practitioner. *Yes*, all astrologers will be working with the same set of planetary and zodiacal symbols, but each astrologer's approach to rendering the meanings of these symbols will vary, based on their own interpretation. The same goes for the tarot, for scrying, for dream interpreters — the list goes on!

Divination can be intimidating. You may worry about keeping the definitions of symbols straight in your mind, or fret over remembering what all those tarot cards mean. And while, yes, there's a good deal of basic memorization involved when you're learning about divination, your own personal associations with the symbols you're reading counts for quite a bit. So does establishing a daily practice, which I discuss further in Chapter 15.

Once you commit to your preferred divination method, spend time learning about the meanings of its symbols, and begin to read its particular language, I highly encourage you to start making personal connections with the material. This is not to rewrite or ignore the established definitions of the divinatory symbols, but rather to help you feel like the language of this divination method is familiar, approachable, and your own.



REMEMBER

There are three essential pillars that support our divination work, giving us both support and accountability in our practices. They are ethics (Chapter 12) so you act with integrity, spiritual hygiene (Chapter 13) so that you're mindful of your energies before and after your sessions, and self-care (Chapter 14) to help prevent burnout and be the most effective conduit for divine insights.



TIP

Here are some benefits to weaving personal insights into your divinatory understanding:

- **On a practical level, it helps with memorization.** Just like studying for a test in high school and creating our own mnemonic device for some complex math equation or biology concept, when you bring your own special touch to divinatory concepts, you're way more likely to build strong mental connections between the symbol and its accepted meaning.
- **This can make the symbols less lofty and more approachable.** Divination can feel really intimidating at first. Memorizing the meanings of 78 tarot cards? Of 24 runes from the Elder Futhark? It's normal for this to feel overwhelming. Your personal touch brings these symbols down to earth.
- **It helps you to build a relationship with divinatory symbols.** When you feel comfortable with the symbols you're engaging, you're able to speak with, through, and about them with much more fluidity. This can be immensely grounding, especially if you decide to read for others.
- **It strengthens your intuition and confidence.** Last but not least, and a common refrain in this chapter and perhaps the book, is that bringing personal insights into your divinatory work allows you to strengthen your intuition and build belief in your ability to make compelling connections between the inner and outer realms.

Speaking of your preferred divination method, all diviners are different, and there is a huge proliferation of divination tools at our disposal. The divinatory systems I present in this book are the most accessible for beginner diviners, and I also explore divination tools that I believe get less exposure but can show you the variety in the world of divination. Whether you want to explore tarot cards (Chapter 4) or bibliomancy (Chapter 9), you can explore a range of tools in Part 2 of this book as well as divinatory practices in Chapters 15 and 16.

Cultivating your personal symbolic vocabulary

The symbols that proliferate in divination are endless, and each of them has a generally accepted interpretation — though this sometimes varies by culture. While learning to divine, you may

want to study the meanings of symbols from some reference books. I have a few listed in Appendix B of this book.

But even the best symbol reference books can only get you so far. You need to do the work of creating your own symbolic vocabulary, or relationship with the signs and symbols of divination.

I'd recommend setting up a journal (see Chapter 16) where, for every new symbol you meet, you note down the "accepted" definition of what that symbol means and then leave space for your own reflections, associations, and attachments to the symbol. You can continue to add to these associations over time. Eventually this can help you feel confident explaining or understanding what divined symbols mean. This is especially valuable if you read for others, but it is, of course, still applicable to having a personal practice. See Chapter 16 for an in-depth look at various ways to work with symbols through creative endeavors.

Starting out on the diviner's path

When you begin any journey, you're usually imbued with a mix of excitement and anxiety. There's so much to learn, and the new world you're exploring is so vast and full of possibility. It can be both intimidating and inspiring. I always think of the figure in The Fool card in the tarot, the card associated with the number 0, the alpha and the omega. The Fool steps out onto life's path, bursting with hope, blissfully unaware of what lies ahead but leading with an open heart.

If you're starting out on your divination journey, you too may be full of a mix of excitement, anxiety, and hope. I remember when I began my occult explorations. I was brimming with curiosity but secretly worried that people in my life would think I was crazy for being interested in these things. Maybe this sounds familiar to you.

Whatever the mix of emotions that swirl around you, I want to assure you that you're in good hands with me as your guide because I'm just a little ahead of you on this path, and excited to illuminate the way. I dedicate a lot of space in this book to exercises to build intuition. If you're curious about that sort of work, you can skip ahead to Chapter 3 or Chapter 11. But I walk you through some mindset work here to clarify exactly what you seek from your divination practice.

I've written the following questions with the intention of helping you find focus as a diviner and reminding you of the legitimacy of your curiosity in the mystical realms. Grab a journal or whatever you like to write with and sit with a few of these questions:

- At the start of your divination journey, what do you think you're looking for, in seeking answers from your guides?
- How would you describe your relationship with your guides at this moment? Do you feel familiar with them? Are they completely unknown to you? What could bring you closer or strengthen your relationship with them?
- Do you trust your intuition when it becomes activated? If so, how do you know, and if not, why not? If you have an intuitive block, can you trace the root of that block and explore where it comes from?
- What are some things you expect divination *can* do? What are you looking for divination to *actually* do, bring you, or reveal?
- Imagine your inner diviner. What do they look like? What is their preferred method of divining? What are they capable of? What do they wear? How do they move? Who do they help? What do they know? Describe them in as much detail as you like to build an image of the diviner within. Refer to that image in future intuitive practices.

What if I divine something scary?

The first time I picked up a tarot deck and flipped through the cards, I was immediately taken in by the beautiful fairy-tale-inspired imagery of the Rider-Smith-Waite tarot and felt excited to see what card I'd pull first. Perusing the cards, though, I naturally bumped into some darker images. I remember seeing a card called The Devil. What could that possibly be about? Another card looked like a tower being struck by lightning, with figures falling to the earth below. A third card, Death, presented itself to me as I moved through this new deck. I remember feeling worried about pulling that one too. (If you're unfamiliar with these cards and their meanings, see Chapter 4.)



REMEMBER

Divination tools are always going to include archetypes, symbols, or concepts that are uplifting as well as dark, transformative through love, and transformative through loss. This is because divination symbolism is meant to contain the whole of human

experience, boiled down into a complete set of symbols. There's no life without death, no light without dark.

Considering this, a question naturally arises: "What do I do if I pull a scary card?" This question, of course, can be applied to any form of divination, each of which will seem to have a few elements that gesture toward the darker side of life. If you're a beginning diviner and you bump into something that seems forbidding, take this advice:

- **A dark-seeming answer isn't set in stone.** First and foremost, just because you've encountered a dark-seeming answer to your question upon divining doesn't mean doom and gloom awaits you up ahead. All is far from lost!
- **Consider what you (or the querent) is going through.** Divination offers a *mirror of the psyche*, meaning it's reflecting to you what you're carrying within. This heavy answer is materializing before you because it's time to acknowledge and integrate its message.
- **Divined answers aren't absolutes.** Most of the time, the divined answer makes you aware of not what will *absolutely happen*, but rather, what *may transpire* if nothing changes.
- **You have free will!** Divination isn't here to render a fate set in stone. Take the message that arrives in front of you, and if it intimidates you, work with the symbols to find a sense of peace and make the necessary changes.



TIP

When you encounter an answer that contains symbols that make you feel ill at ease or nervous, spend some time journaling what makes you feel most worried about this divined symbol and consider what this symbol means to you. Remember that this symbol is already part of you, so consider what it wants to share with you about its message and its highest purpose.