

## Rationale for Why Prisons Must Allow Inmates to Use Tarot Cards in Group & Private

Individual inmates must be allowed to keep and use their own personal Tarot decks. It is Wiccan tradition for adherents to use their own deck in spells, to divine, in person and in group practice if desired, as described in the book *It's in the Cards* by Lady Passion, at: [oldenwilde.org](http://oldenwilde.org).

As a traditional form of divination – a word that literally means “communication with the Gods” -- Tarot cards are a key aspect of Wiccan religious observance. They are a Craft equivalent of Christian divine scripture. Traditional Tarot decks such as the *Tarot of Marseille* and the *Minchiate* are structured around the ancient Cardinal Virtues – Temperance, Justice, Courage, and (in the *Minchiate* deck) Prudence, originally described by the Pagan Greek philosophers Pythagoras and Plato – because the Tarot was historically first conceived and has always been used as a means to gain ethical and moral guidance. Witch belief is that the Divine gives guidance through a Tarot “reading” in which a question is asked and a series of cards is randomly drawn and laid down in a fixed, meaningful pattern. (See *It's in the Cards*.)

The Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act forbids federal funding of any state or federal prison that “substantially burdens an exercise of religion”. According to the Oct. 6, 2017 Memorandum by Atty. General Jeff Sessions re: Federal Law Protections for Religious Liberty, interpreting Dept. of Justice guidelines regarding the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993 (RFRA, the basis of RLUIPA): “13. A governmental action substantially burdens an exercise of religion under RFRA if it bans an aspect of an adherent's religious observance[.]” (For detailed citations, see my initial letter, which is reproduced at: [oldenwilde.org/prisons](http://oldenwilde.org/prisons).)

Any claim that Tarot cards are a “security risk” that justifies violating RLUIPA is absurd. Tarot cards are simply lightweight pasteboard rectangles, far less dangerous than, say, a heavy bound Bible that could be thrown at someone's head. Tarot decks are never used for gambling, which would be sacrilegious and, frankly, impractical because of their complexity. Its images, while vivid and evocative, are far less subject to abusive misinterpretation than Christian scriptural passages such as “Thou shalt not suffer a witch to live”, Exodus 22:18 (King James Version) -- which is not banned from prison Bibles even though it has directly led to countless murders of Wiccans by religious zealots. There is no Tarot card whatsoever that commands Witches to kill Christians.

Most states now allow Wiccan inmates to keep and use personal Tarot decks. Any federal, state, or county prison or jail that bans them is vulnerable to a lawsuit under RLUIPA that will lead to loss of all federal funding that institution currently receives. For more information, see: [oldenwilde.org/prisons](http://oldenwilde.org/prisons).

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