

OH Cards: The Game of Inner Vision

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If you need an ice-breaker in a room full of strangers, open up a deck of OH cards. According to their creator Ely Raman, "The cards will get people talking and you won't be strangers for long".

Made up of two decks of interactive cards – one of paintings and the other of words – the OH cards provide an entertaining medium for deeper understanding of certain personal issues. By choosing one card from each deck, a concept or scenario emerges, the meaning of which the player must then attempt to figure out for him/herself.

For example, just prior to writing this I drew the word card "Should" and a picture card depicting a desk in an office. For me this combination meant that I should get to work and stop daydreaming. The combination would have different meanings for different people and may even be interpreted differently by me on another day.

The power of the cards lies in their ability to tap into the unconscious and perhaps bring to the surface buried feelings and emotions. In fact, the cards are often used as a counselling tool – particularly with those who have difficulty expressing their emotions.

Other ways the cards can be used range from light-hearted story-telling to corporate communication. They can also be used as a game of solitaire or a springboard for journal writing or meditation. Their primary focus is on instilling a process of self-exploration, sharing, discovering and creating. There are no wrong interpretations. The pleasure of an OH card game is in the creation of an atmosphere of trust and fellowship where people feel heard and respected. The cards can be used with all ages, although some cards should perhaps be removed from the pack when playing with children.

Raman thinks of the cards as a new genre, halfway between literature and art; we can interpret the pictures in a way that creates our own stories. "There's fun in the cards – not competitive fun, but a kind of co-operative, tribal fun," he says. "The cards enable us to create our own soap operas, a form of gossip humans everywhere seem to thrive on." The cards are like an unbound book, with the story constantly changing as the pages are re-shuffled, or like a newspaper that contains news about our inner world.

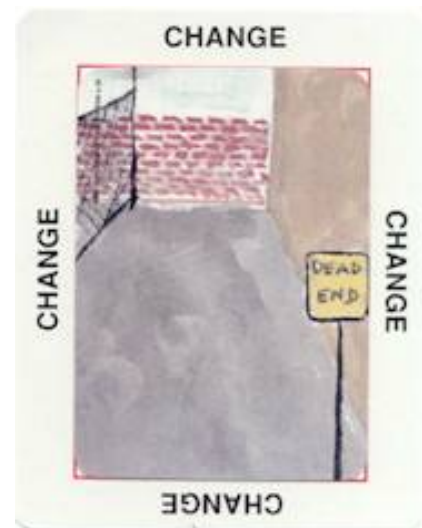


Raman has an eclectic background. He is a Mexican-born, avant-garde artist who studied history and literature at McGill University in Montreal, then moved to New York where he obtained a Masters Degree in Fine Art at Rutgers University. He then joined its faculty and settled into a SoHo loft in Manhattan where he soon became involved in an exploration of what he terms "variable structures" – structures that can be re-configured to take on other forms.

The OH cards grew out of his involvement with the New York avant-garde art scene, pop art, his study of psychology, and an interest in esoteric insight-provoking practices such as the I Ching and the Tarot. In the 70s, he was given a single Tarot card on his birthday. In his search to find its meaning, he discovered the Tarot as another variable structure, and decided to create his own version. From this, the idea for the OH cards was born. At the same time he was developing an interest in the Gestalt therapy. He teamed up with a psychotherapist friend, Joseph Schlichter, to come up with the words to pair with his images. They chose words they felt were highly charged and contained mirror images or double meanings, possessed the potential for a variety of interpretations, had a suggestive impact and were active rather than passive.



Although the cards were created between 1972 and 1976, it was not until Raman teamed up with his future wife Joan Lawrence in 1982, that the two combined forces to present OH to the world. They are affectionately referred to as Oh-Pa and Oh-Ma. Lawrence's entrepreneurial spirit and her appreciation of the cards as a communication tool helped launch them internationally and they are now available in 13 languages. Lawrence was also instrumental in having the University of Victoria recognise the cards as a valuable counselling tool.



Raman says the cards can touch us in a holistic way on all levels – emotionally, intellectually, socially, physically and spiritually – enabling us to integrate them all. The use of interactive tools like OH provides a convivial structure in which to safely grieve, rejoice, communicate our feelings and desires "and bridges the gap between the sexes" – although men sometimes find the cards more challenging than do women, because they tend to be more concrete thinkers, while the cards call for imagination.

"OH gives us a chance to reveal and respect our different perspectives," says Raman. The cards are able to break down barriers to communication and have the power to transform people's ways of being. "I've seen the cards transform people. After a round of OH, people I was prepared to dislike became my friends." He adds, however, "they're not a force to resolve conflict, but rather to explore it. We often learn and grow through conflict."

Raman and Lawrence often use the cards themselves whenever they're feeling distanced from each other. It brings them together quickly – more from the experience of having said what is on their mind, than the actual contact. The cards facilitate the communication process.

Although the cards were inspired by the Tarot, Raman says that unlike the Tarot, no expert is needed to interpret them. The only expertise is with the process. This is very new for most people. There is no goal other than the process – unless the goal is perhaps better health. There are no winners or losers.

The process of drawing cards by chance almost invariably generates information that is pertinent to the person drawing the cards – an example of what Carl Jung calls synchronicity. Raman says we have a peculiar relationship with chance in this culture. By chance, he doesn't mean luck, as in winning the lottery, but rather being open to synchronicity – letting chance encounters show us something we wouldn't otherwise see. "Chance scares many people. But chance is one way to touch the Deity", says Raman. "We can use the cards to tap into our subconscious to discover truths or secrets about ourselves."

While people do not need any advance preparation before using the cards, Raman does suggest that people bring an attitude of curiosity, willingness and serendipity, in an experiential rather than technical sense. He says some people choose to centre themselves through meditation beforehand. People are free to customise their OH experience to suit their needs but to gain the most from the cards, he recommends people first read the guidelines enclosed with each deck.

He says the only way the cards can be misused is by violating another's exploration and interpretation – by saying his or her interpretation is wrong. There are no incorrect interpretations, only different perspectives.



There are nine other decks of cards that followed OH; some created by other artists. These can be played alone or in combination with the OH deck.

The others are:

Saga – characters scenes and objects from a land and time that exists only in our imagination.

Ecco – a series of abstract paintings

Habitat – paintings of our natural environment – both in fact and fiction.

Persona – a combination of portrait and interaction cards.

Claro – this deck is intentionally blank so as to invite others to create their own.

Morená – illuminating tribal life in the Brazilian Rainforest.

Orca – whale storytelling cards.

Raccoon – picture cards about the lives of raccoons.

Quisine – appetising picture cards with 110 foods.

In the book *Strawberries Beyond My Window* each game with its unique theme is described and discussed. This book is alive with practical details and examples plus personal reports from a wide variety of card-users. An incitement to in-depth use of this genre of games. This is an important source of information for all users of any of the titles.

Gail McKerrow, Principal of the Scottish Kinesiology College, discovered OH cards while at an international conference in the USA in 1993. She had a decision to make which would have far-reaching effects on both her personal as well as her professional life. Should she stay in her present position or take a chance in a new direction, which could be risky but could also bring incredible job satisfaction and financial benefits? A friend who had a deck of OH cards suggested that she use them. She drew two cards – the picture card showed a person diving from a very high place and the word card was "wonderful". She interpreted this to mean that if she took the chance and just dived in head first, the outcome would be wonderful. Instantly she knew this was the right decision and her fears and doubts left her. She took the chance and it paid off beyond her wildest dreams.

Gail has used the cards with her clients and students now for several years and feels they are of such incredible benefit that she and her husband and business partner Stephen Ralston have taken on the distribution rights for the UK and Ireland. Their goal is to make them readily available to all: businesses, counsellors, therapists and individuals.

Further Information

For more information and a price list, please contact: Exploration Cards, Scottish Kinesiology College, Bogpark Road, Musselburgh, EH21 6RT Tel: 0131 665 9599, Fax: 0131 665 9577.

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