

SOUTH AFRICAN SANDPLAY THERAPY SOCIETY



NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2024

This newsletter provides information about the South African Sandplay Therapy Society (SASTS) and Sandplay Therapy as developed by Dora Kalff. It aims to facilitate communication between all SASTS members and to provide access to current research, events, and educational opportunities in the field of sandplay therapy. SASTS is a member society of the International Society of Sandplay Therapy (ISST) that encourages the highest quality of sandplay therapy practice from ISST certified sandplay therapists.

Visit our website at www.sasts.co.za

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PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Dear Jungian Sandplay Therapy Colleagues and Friends

What a wonderful privilege for SASTS to celebrate its first year of existence as a Member Society of ISST. Happy birthday SASTS!

A big thank you to all of you who support our society and for the hard work of our Executive Committee behind the scenes. It gives a collective meaning to all of us to feel that we belong to a society that honours on a theoretical and practical level the work of Frau Dora Kalff.

I would also like to congratulate SASTS Vice President, Retha Roux, on qualifying as an ISST Teaching Member recently. She is one of the most hard working people in the field of sandplay. We are so proud of you, Retha!

In this newsletter SASTS Secretary Sylvia Clutten talks about her journey with Sandplay Therapy. It is always interesting to see how Sandplay Therapy actually finds us. Thank you for sharing your story, Sylvia!

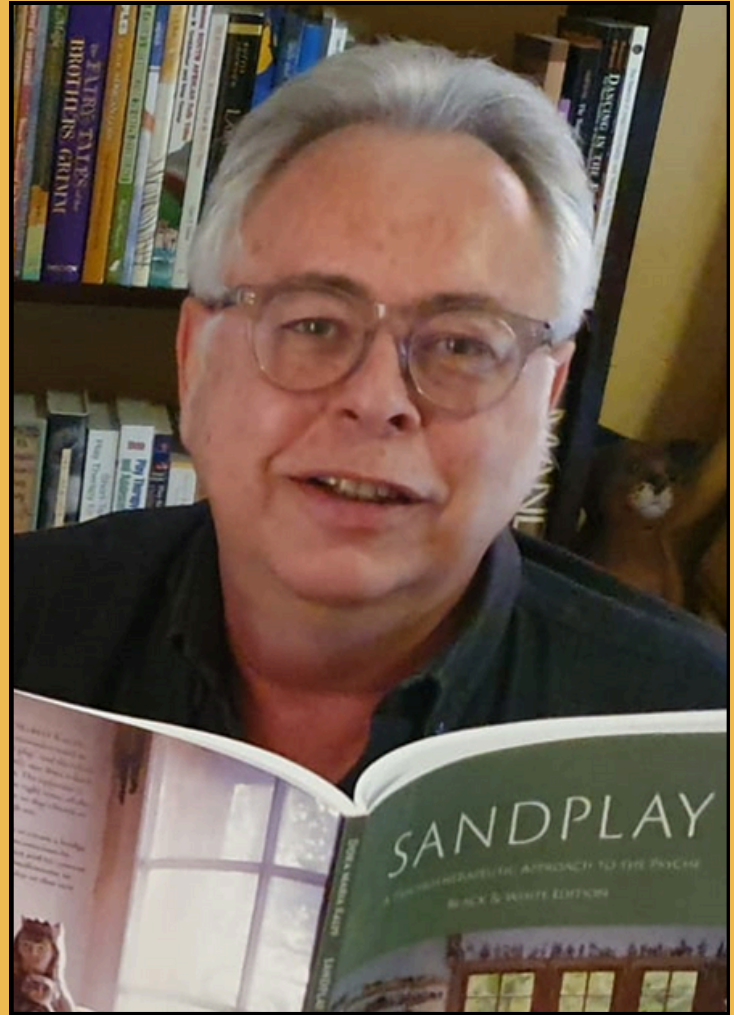
We continue to learn from Dr Martin Kalff who was the first ISST member to do a formal 7-day training in South Africa in 2009. Enjoy his wisdom.

In October, we will have the honour to welcome Mark Boltz, a visiting Jungian Analyst and ISST Teaching Member from Israel. Please keep the late afternoon of Friday 18 October open and join us for the 2-hour seminar and 2-hour group supervision led by Mark. You can find more details about this event on page 8.

CG Jung said that the dragon is a symbol of the universal unconscious, because there are so many myths about it worldwide. Make sure to read more about this fascinating creature in The Symbol Shack.

I send you all my best,

Braam



IN THE BEGINNING



Sylvia
remembers...

Travel with me...unpacking body-based emotions and memories...in, with and through sand..., play..., and Sandplay...

A portmanteau...pronounced “port-MAN-toe” is the blending of at least two words when the original words’ sounds and meanings are combined. This process involves the intentional attachment of the first segment of the word to the final segment. Wordplay, word-creation and word-formation is a creative and playful technique (Renner, 2015). In her profound wisdom and drawing on her Jungian training, on the “world technique” of Margaret Lowenfeld, and on Buddhist philosophy, Frau Dora Kalff attached the meaning of two German words “sand” and “spiel” for her modality of psychotherapy “Sandspiel”. The blending of the words “sand” and “play” became “Sandplay” in English; and “Sandspel” in Afrikaans.

As a lexical blend, this wordplay ‘portmanteau’ is believed to have its origin in Lewis Carroll’s 1871 book “Through the Looking-Glass”. We read how Humpty Dumpty shares with Alice the practice of the merging of words in the language of “Jabberwocky”. At the time of writing, a suitcase opening into two equal sections for packing was known as a ‘portmanteau.’ The word’s etymology arrived in the English language through this French word porte-manteau. Blending porter meaning “to carry” and manteau “cloak” devised from the Old French mantel, which came from the Latin word mantellum. This is according to The American Heritage of the English Language, and as cited in Wikipedia.

Jungian Sandplay Therapy allows for playing on, with, and or in sand to pack or unpack psychic material from the various layers of the psyche. Whether from the conscious or unconscious, personal, cultural, collective unconscious or archetypal realms, the packing or unpacking takes place into a Kalffian “free and protected space.” Haptic movements through either intentional or

unintentional placement of the sand or accessible objects (i.e., miniatures, figurines, natural elements e.g., shells) on offer or on a rare occasion hat a client has brought with them into the therapeutic space. The movement is into or onto this contained dry or wet sand within the sandbox or sandtray.

An open flat base rectangular receptacle, this specific container with its low frame can hold, carry, or exhibit chosen elements. A particular blending, merging within the presence of an often silent, yet attuned witness of the other - a sandplay therapist. In the Journal of Sandplay Therapy, Volume 27, Issue 1, 2018 Anke Seitz writes that “In Relation You Are Created” as she embroiders on the “Unconscious Communication in the Relational Space of Sandplay Therapy” and how C.G. Jung’s had accentuated the relational dimension within psychotherapeutic analysis. She echoes C.G. Jung’s idea of a wounded healer. Within this resonant space, there are profound embodied movements, experiences, and memories that I have and still am packing or unpacking...not only for myself, but for others too.

This image of a ‘portmanteau’ made me consider the ‘emotional baggage’ we carry with us. And how we pack or unpack, contain, or spill out the baggage out... Often on entering the Paarl Practice for supervision, a meeting, or workshop I would be deeply enchanted by a figurine that sat on the far right of the reception desk encased in glass - a young girl sitting, no slumped, on suitcases. Each time I fantasized about lifting the delicate glass casing. What was mysteriously packed or could be unpacked from them. And this idea of a ‘portmanteau’ would lead me to thoughts of probable symbolic understandings for important Jungian concepts i.e., ‘the merging of opposites’; ‘the process of individuation’ or as ‘the transcendent function as synthesis’. This article would allow me the joy of briefly unpacking sand, play and sandplay as my own body-based emotions and memories emerged. A merging, blending not only as a young child growing up in my family of origin, but as a wife, and mother, and as an evolving psychotherapist who continues to uncover the landscape of the human person’s psyche through Jungian Sandplay, and as an ISST certified sandplay therapist.

Sand...has been, and will always remain a natural play companion, a worthy sensory experience, and a regulator for myself. As a child, I spent many hours playing in the sand - adding more freckles, those sun kisses onto my fair complexion. This happened on several beaches, like the then untamed Swartklip Beach, in Plettenberg Bay and

her now famous beaches, as well as the many others my family frequented along our Western Cape coastline. My beloved father loved to fish, as did his father before him, four of his five brothers, and as my youngest brother still enjoys today. This allowed my Dutch mother (hence my fair complexion) the opportunity to offer her five growing children exciting natural playgrounds to explore through sand and play. Today on sandee.com Swartklip Beach (Afrikaans for Black rock) is described as “a gem of a beach, characterized by its length and striking dark sand.” It is on, in and with this sand that I built many a sandcastle, participated and partook in proprioceptive fun of partial sand burial with my family. I also experienced my first anatomy lesson taught by my eldest sister, Mary-Ann on a sandshark (*Rhinobatos annulatus*) also referred to a flattened guitarfish. This happened whilst my father landed many a fish through the tactfully playing with his rod, reel, line, sinker, hook, and bait.

On the sands of Plettenberg Bay as children, we found precious pansy shells (*Echinodiscus bisperforatus*), some of which now form part of my sandplay collection and have often become an integral part of my clients’ process as they packed it into their sandtray. Pansy shells are sought after by conchologists as they are only found along our Garden Route. On the back of the pansy shell, Mother Nature has engraved a flawless five petaled



My fortieth birthday in the Saudi desert.

flower. Yet it is not a shell, but the skeleton of a flat sea urchin, a living creature born as a male becoming a female to lay eggs already fertilised within. Under the surface of the sand, a pansy shell lives and feeds whilst buried in the shallow water of the Indian Ocean. It is purple in colour when alive and covered in short furry bristles, yet after death it is bleached by salt and the sun to a perfect white fossil-looking structure. It holds the myth of Christ’s narrative as Christian missionaries assigned symbolic meaning to the internal dove-shaped structures, and its fivefold radial pattern.

At the beginning of the 21st century, my family were privileged to play in, on and with the desert sand of Saudi Arabia, in the ‘Rub’al-Khali’, the Empty Quarter. Our vehicle would once get stuck in this fine quartz sand, we would successfully dig ourselves out, enjoy ‘spit ball’ racing, and endless dune rolling whilst searching for Saudi diamonds, Qaisumah diamonds, natural gemstones buried in its surface. On this sun-baked sand, I would celebrate my fortieth birthday, as the sun set that day.

On our recent travels, John and I would be privileged to walk on the red dune sand of the Kgalagadi. In ‘the waterless place’ we gathered fine iron oxide sand in our hands which quickly filtered through our fingers. Unbeknownst to many, buried beneath this ecological formation of the Red Sand Dunes is the largest non-subglacial underground lake on Earth, named Dragon’s Breath Cave. These dunes are truly active, this once ancient sleeping sand is awake as nature and human persons play on it.



Play...happened and still does in, with and through the combination of sand, water, and the various objects for not only myself, but my family, and friends, and my clients too. Serious playing allows for transformation, healing, and the process of individuation. Although their path never crossed, Fredrich Froebel (recognised as the father of kindergarten) and C.G. Jung both believed firmly in the importance of play for our development. Froebel claimed that “the plays of childhood are the germinal leaves of all later life” (1980, as cited in Russel and Alridge, 2009). “This urge starts functioning when other urges are satisfied; indeed, it is perhaps only called into being after this has occurred. Under this heading would come the urge to travel, love of change, restlessness, and the play instinct” (Jung, 1960 in CW 8, as cited by Russell and Alridge, 2009). Although we read much about C.G. Jung’s playing, I was told that he never played in a sandplay environment.

Sandplay...this ‘portmanteau’ first reached my consciousness during my UNISA Master’s Training when as prospective therapists, we were tasked with briefly unpacking one of the many therapeutic modalities found within the realm of psychology. I would first stand in front of a sandbox during my internship, spontaneously allowing my hand/s to move through soft dry white sand contained within this particularly sized wooden box with its blue painted base and sides. I have unpacked and packed many a body-based emotion and memory through play within sand held in this containing space. This was not only individually for my own personal process, but on rare occasions with my young clients and within various groups here in Cape Town and abroad. I could unpack and embrace vulnerability thanks to Christine Laidlaw and Deborah’s naked female figurine; and allow my shadow to emerge. In scripture we read, “my power is manifest in my weakness” (Cor. 12:9). C.G. Jung viewed humility as the acceptance of the shadow and deems it a necessity for the process of individuation (Milovanovic, 2021). So, I am humble to say, “I am a wounded healer.”

I am truly blessed to have experienced (and I continue to value) the mentorship and guidance of a grounded, and well-rounded psychologist that especially insisted to delve deeper into what sandplay could offer. With her vast interest of not only anthropology, child development, education, Jungian analysis, longitudinal cross-cultural research in psychology, psychotherapy, and systems theory, Elzan Frank has continued to unpack and share with me as I travel along not only my personal, but professional journey. Through her encouragement, a fellow intern Sarah Jervis and I

attended a presentation by Gillian Barton hosted by the South African Jungian Association (SAAJA) at the Iziko Museum. Gillian’s passion and love for sandplay and her creativity spoke volumes that evening, so much so that Sarah’s and my infectious enthusiasm would entice the entire Stellenbosch Child and Adolescent Unit, even our much-loved secretary, Petro to travel together to “the farm in Darling” for Gillian to unpack Sandplay. Her Sandplay practice, at that time, was in a white painted cottage on a farm above the small town of Darling. There for the first time I would be intrigued and captivated by the shelves and shelves of miniatures. So, I confess that the stories told by Elana Burger and Cornel van der Merwe about their fanatic buying and packing of miniatures in their suitcases are true - I too am an active member of the Miniature Anonymous (MA).

I would and still do travel towards the Cape Fold Mountains turning left from the N1 into the third oldest settlement in South Africa, Paarl. It led to meeting Deborah Bedford-Strohm, my first sandplay teacher as I joined Judith Bredekamp and Habib Kagee and met extraordinary therapists in her first Cape Town Intensive Sandplay Training. She would engrain theory and the practicalities of sand, play, and sandplay for us. After our training, Judith and I connected often with Deborah in Bloubergstrand. She would walk on the very sand that I walk every day. She would introduce our group to C.G. Jung through the eyes and voice of Anke Seitz. They, together with Braam Beetge, would become an integral part of my formation as a ISST Jungian Sandplay Therapist.

Anke became my supervisor, and a respected colleague and friend. She introduced Judith and myself to the projective drawing technique of House-Tree-Fire-Water-Person (H-T-F-W-P); Clay Field Therapy; and especially to the world of Jungian Child Analysis. With great excitement she would place in our hands Audrey Punnet’s book. I would read the first pages on a bullet train heading towards Paris with John. I would sit in the front row of the auditorium as she presented to an international audience in Berlin. And she would encourage me to unpack the cultural unconscious at the 26th ISST Sandplay Conference in Israel. And I playfully drill into this concept with the structural skeleton of the West Coast Argobuccinum angus, a zebra wrinkle shell. In Jerusalem I would be present, alongside Braam and Nikki Themistocleous, and Retha Roux online, when South Africa was accepted as a member of ISST. This was the reward after Braam, Retha, Judith and I had packed and unpacked our constitution for many hours.

In the entrance foyer of Lemoenkloof, I would meet Braam in person for the first time and presented my first symbol paper: The Hand. He would and continues to share and unpack his insight, knowledge and infectious love and passion for sandplay. He has allowed many the privilege of attending international workshops here on our African sands - for myself, Ruth Amman's and Audrey Punnet's training in the stone barn on the d'Olyfboom Family Estate. At my first ISST International Congress in Berlin, I would meet Lorraine Freedle because Braam had tasked me to relay his greeting in person. Deborah would introduce me to Imme Thom during our initial training -not only in name but through the "sandplay wagon" and then in person at 25th ISST Sandplay Conference in Germany.

COVID allowed online access to the wealth of the international sandplay community. As a developing group or individually, I would meet and interact with many a sandplay therapists like Martin Kalff, Carlo Ruffino, Maria Kendler, Judy Zappacosta, Betty Jackson, Lynne Ehlers, and Ruth Noel-Hermann who was one of the readers for my final case as they unpack Sandplay. In Israel, in the hills of Jerusalem, I was warmly welcomed and felt that authentic love and affection of being a member of this great Sandplay family. In Israel I would reconnect with Carina Conradie (a fellow South African living and working in New Zealand) especially in an early morning walk in the nearby forest, I would meet Michal Troudart (Conference Committee Member) and Lenore F Steinhardt (who introduced me as a speaker at the conference) after many email communications. So, now I am looking forward to stepping onto Dutch sand once more, but this time with more of my sandplay family in 2025 at Egmond aan Zee.



With Nikki, Maria Kendler and Audrey Punnet
at the 2023 ISST Congress in Israel.

A promise I made in my initial stages of my sandplay journey as I travelled to and from Paarl, I have fulfilled. On that day John, my sister, Mary-Ann and my colleague and incredible friend, Frauke Wood were with me. The word "sandplay" had first been spoken by Frauke in that UNISA lecture room. As I stood on top of the granite rock formation of Paarl, the Dutch name for 'a pearl' as it glistens in the sun after the rain, I could loudly shout out: I am a Jungian Sandplay therapist". It was Gillian who had invited us carers who had for many years arrived on "the farm" for care to stand on top of an indigenous rock, a Darling batholith that had crystallised at considerable depth below the earth's surface as a ritual to affirm our name. "My name is Sylvia."

By Sylvia Clutten

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*Through the world of
imagination
which takes us beyond
the restrictions of
provable fact,
we touch the hem of
truth.*

Madeleine L'Engle



Dr Martin Kalff. Picture: Braam Beetge

Tell us about your book "Old and New Horizons in Sandplay Therapy" in which you integrated the fields of mindfulness, neural integration and sandplay therapy. Can you share some of the most rewarding insights while working on this book?

It is important to know that this book was a group project. I have an Italian group - some of the original people are still continuing and there are also now new people. It was groupwork of over 10 years. We had meetings in Zollikon and we tried to get enough time so that we could go deeper into exploring how we can best respond to the case material, to the images that are brought to supervision.

This was a very lively group and so it gave me a lot of opportunity to try out new ideas which I didn't have before, for example such as when we see a sandplay image and project it on the wall, there are many ways one can interact with the image. The usual way that I learned and that was known to me was to immediately reflect on the symbols, reflect on the case history and such things. But I thought that it is more important in the beginning to connect with our inner resonance to an image.

One method that was completely new to me was an inspiration - maybe of Marion Woodman who was a Jungian Analyst who worked a lot with the body. She explains in her work how you can express the meaning of a dream by translating it into body movements. So, the idea was to view an image, close our eyes and just concentrate on ourselves for a bit. Then we open our eyes again and see which parts of the image speaks to or

ASK AN ELDER

The article is a transcription of a recorded online interview by Retha Roux with Dr Martin Kalff.

interact with us. This is followed by creating a corresponding body movement and then we share about that - what movements came, what we felt. Sometimes images had the quality that some people felt frozen - they couldn't move at all. That was important to notice as a possible expression of countertransference or co-transference as Kay Bradway has called it. So, I think this group was a very good container for exploring many things.

Then the idea came to write it up, because people thought it was a very valuable experience that we had shared for so many years. We made new discoveries together, it's not just me - it was through our interaction. I was not so excited about the idea of writing it up, but they insisted.

I had a very good editor Paulo Feliga who first published the book in Italian. When we decided that we were going to write it all up, we had to sharpen our minds to really understand more precisely what we are doing and what we are doing differently. That was kind of an additional stimulus that came from the idea to write.

In some ways it also brought us more closely together, because we had a common project. That was a very good experience to see how one can get focussed and really connect with each other when here is a common project, a group project. For me that was very good, because I sometimes find it very difficult to sit alone and try to write. You think about something and you have to imagine who is going to read it, what are they going to think about it. It was very stimulating to in a group that has a common idea and exchange ideas. The members of the group also contributed with written material, explaining how they felt that our methods influenced their work with clients.

We had a lot of discussion, we even brought some of our insights to the clients - maybe drawings or poems we made in response to the sandplay images - and we got feedback from the clients. All these things were very interesting for us and we saw that something was evolving as a cooperation. That was very rewarding to experience first-hand how useful it is to work together, not just alone.

It sounds like the group explored how an image can be felt and can resonate. You use the word experience-related case work and supervision in the book.

Of course we can say well that's not so important and that we also have to reflect and bring insights from our psychological theories. I agree that theory is an important part. But I think it is very good if you start with personal reactions, because I have noted that when you jump too early into concepts there suddenly arises disagreement. Is this the right or the wrong way to see the image? It brings lots of argument about why this could be right or why it should be seen in that way and not in another way.

But behind our concepts, there is always those first feeling impressions. Depending on our feeling, then we say OK, it seems to be such and such an issue, such and such a complex, such and such a pathology. When you start with the feeling and then go to the concepts, it is transparent what the source of the concepts is. About feelings we cannot argue. You can see a picture and you feel fear, and another person can say the picture feels like a very good moment and someone else can feel a lot of activation. They all have different emotions, but you cannot say to the others their emotions are wrong.

On the level of concepts, you might argue. So, we avoid the arguing part. I had groups before where there were too many arguments and the people started to talk bad about other people in the group, saying they are ignorant, they don't know this or that. It created too much tension. When people expressed what they felt, I sensed that it supported the group work more. Maybe not always completely, there are always dynamics which you cannot control. But it really helped a lot, and because we had such a continuity in the Italian group who collaborated on the book, we could go deeper and deeper. That was very satisfying - it was an experience!

But experience-related does not mean that we underestimate the value of reflection, of interpretation, of knowledge about different ways that you can read a sandplay scene. The pathology that the client face is of course also part of the reflection. We could say interpretation of or understanding a sand scene is a kind of integration of the experiences of the neo-cortex and the limbic system. We bring it all together.

That is actually what also happens for the client who works in the sand.

It is absolutely true and it is one of the strengths of sandplay therapy. It involves body sensations, it also allows for different parts of the brain related to the experiences of touching to be activated. Adding miniatures is not always necessary, sometimes it is sufficient if the person manipulates the sand, touches the sand, boxes the sand. These actions are very important.

Therapists of trauma says trauma is in the body - if you touch and manipulate and shape and have a relationship with the sand, it is a relationship with the body that unfolds. Ultimately, it may activate the more primitive parts of the client's brain- at one point this was referred to as the reptilian brain. Sandplay therapy does activate that part.

Sometimes we can also use enquiry to enhance this type of integration. I think it works best with adults if we ask: "How did your body sensation change after you did the sandplay?" Some people may feel more relaxed, or they feel that the energy goes down, or they feel more energy in the stomach. Sometimes they feel blockage in certain parts of the body after creating a scene. Then, based on their response, we can add some stabilizing work that may help to dissolve the knots, the difficulties, the result of their sand creation. Sometimes we can help them to root the work they did in the sand more consciously in their bodies. I think rooting it in the body is very effective.

We are so used to interact in indirect and technical ways. Children spend hours sending messages to each other, which implies that they cannot absorb any feelings that get evoked in themselves or in others, because it is too much. That creates the danger of dissociation from the body and feelings. Of course, much of our lifestyle encourages this dissociation. So it is very significant if we can help people become aware of their feelings and bodies, and maybe if they are able to, to express what the resonance is between feeling and body.

INDABA

SAVE THE DATE 18 October 2024

Meet Clinical Psychologist, Jungian Analyst
and ISST Sandplay Therapist Mark Boltz.

Online or in -person at Paarl Practice.

Programme
16:00-18:00
Group supervision

18:30-20:30

Case Presentation: Holding the Image and
Holding the Transference

Mark shares the following about his
presentation:

"Moran was in therapy for a long and deeply profound therapy with me for many years. In many ways I felt I had brought her up, filling huge gaps from her deprived childhood and accompanying her in her first years of adulthood. About 5 years later, she returned for a short therapy, which was all her circumstances allowed. Nonetheless she created incredible sand worlds.

We will look briefly at her first three trays during her first therapy and again briefly at seven trays she made as a response to a terrible trauma which she used for her development. And then we will focus on the three sand trays she created in the brief therapy. Together we will explore how she held the image and the transference."

CONGRATULATIONS!



SASTS Vice President Retha Roux recently
acquired ISST Teaching Member status.
Well done Retha!

WEBINAR PROGRAMME

19:00 on Zoom

Thursday, 1 August

**The Observing Ego:
A Camera into the Soul**



Presenter: Carina Conradie
Clinical Psychologist, STANZA &
ISST Teaching Member

Tuesday, 10 and 17 September

**King Tut's Existential Crisis: Applying
Archetypal and Neuro-developmental
Paradigms to treat Children with Severe
Anxiety using Sandplay and Play Therapy**



Presenter: Lorraine Freedle
Clinical Psychologist, STA &
ISST Teaching Member

CPD points to be confirmed.

The Symbol Shack

Dragon

2024 marks the Year of the Wood Dragon on the Chinese lunisolar calendar. But the dragon seems to have coiled and uncoiled its sinewy limbs around humanity since time began.

It is not hard to recognize its slithering trail in the uroboros and in the Stone Age portrayals of serpentine and bird deities that dwelled in our ancestors' imagination. From these early spores, the dragon emerged as a hybrid image of the ultimate solidarity between life and death, heaven and earth, growth and decay. Today, we recognize the dragon as a magnificent winged or unwinged snake-like creature with razor-sharp talons and a keen intelligence.

Dragons capture the pulsating potency of natural elements that drive transformation through creation and destruction. The Mesoamerican feathered serpent Quetzalcoatl offers a splendid example of the divine power that resurrects buried seeds to bear seasonal crops. The association with cyclical renewal also occurs in the East, where dragons traditionally feature as water and weather deities. Symbolically ascending into the heavens in spring clouds, the dragon roars and flashes its talons in the thunder and lightning of summer storms before it crashes down to earth in the autumn waterfalls.

Early Mesopotamian hymns hail the goddess Inanna as "the dragon." Depictions of a female figure standing on a winged reptile figure with a thunderbolt in her hand may well honour Inanna-Ishtar as the giver of both life-giving rain and raging storms (Baring & Cashford, 1991).

The Greek root word "*drakon*" hints specifically at vitality and glinting light. In its enlivening aspects, the dragon is the benevolent carrier of abundance and new beginnings. It represents



Chameleons capture the ambiguity of dragon symbolism in a novel way.
Graphics by Custom Digital

fierce resilience and vast prosperity on the physical and spiritual plains. In medieval times, dragons were believed to favour subterranean lairs such as caves or bodies of water where they guarded great treasure.

In its devastating aspects, the dragon manifests volatile darkness that evokes primal fear. It embodies deep-seated uncertainty and potential chaos that may swallow a known world in its entirety. The simple inscription "There be dragons" on ancient maps warned seafarers of uncharted waters.

The dragon may appear in a sandtray as an archetypal image of the collective unconscious. A threatening dragon may hint at trauma or the eruption of a complex that has the potential to paralyze or obliterate current ego functioning. Simultaneously, the dragon may also portray the unquenchable drive of the unconscious Self to realise itself by challenging the ego to a duel.

Flight and avoidance of the beast are not uncommon. These choices inevitably lure the ego into the impression that danger or difficulty have been circumvented. In actual fact, the dragon may only be rendering itself invisible while it wounds itself around the unseeing ego's potential for growth.

If the urge to flee can be resisted, a fierce and prolonged struggle may ensue. The alchemists believed that facing the dragon was to seize life itself. To them, the dragon represented the element mercury that exemplified the mysterious life force that thrives in the tension between opposites. They imagined the evanescent dragon hiding itself in plain sight - in the natural world of the metals and the physical body. They saw progress as its shadow slinked in and out of sight during the work in the alchemical vessel. They ultimately gave it credit for the sparkling revelations and visionary understanding that materialised unexpectedly for those who prevailed.

Dragons never leave those who encounter them unruffled. They imprison the fainthearted. They devour naïve wanderers to digest and regurgitate them into unknown psychic territory where new horizons wait to be explored. They shred innocence, strip the scales from unseeing eyes and scorch the status quo to expose both skeletons and buried riches.

Dragons breed heroism. They ignite available resources and facilitate the forging of new ones. Heroes realise eventually that they themselves shroud dragons within and that engaging with these “frenemies” reveal unperishable treasures that are impossible to attain in other ways.

Slaying or taming a dragon earns heroes an embodied sense of resilience and a profound awareness of both their precious individuality and trivial significance in the majestic scheme of things. Humble heroes wear the pearls of true maturity and wisdom relinquished by the dragon with confident dignity and an irrepressible passion for the continuing quest.

By Karin Gerber & Retha Roux

Reference:

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Only one who has risked the fight with the dragon and is not overcome by it, wins the hoard, the "treasure hard to attain". He alone has a genuine claim to self-confidence, for he has faced the dark ground of his self and thereby has gained himself. This experience gives him faith and trust.

C.G. Jung
CW 14, par 756



Picture: Karin Gerber