Lenore Steinhardt’s latest book, *On Becoming a Jungian Sandplay Therapist*, gives us an impressive overview of both the structure of sandplay therapy and, as the title suggests, aspects important in becoming a sandplay therapist. Exploring both theoretical and practical essentials based on Steinhardt’s extensive experience, the book is engaging and valuable to both the novice and the established sandplay clinician. Covered are themes such as the “sensory instinctual human relationship with the natural world,” (2013, p.19), the interweaving of art therapy with sandplay therapy, the importance of place in art and healing, and the psychic interconnectedness of sandplay therapist and client. Also included is one client’s impressive ten year sandplay process as she transforms constricting pain and fear through the development of creativity, insight, and trust. Her process, in addition to numerous other client examples, is well illustrated in a series of fascinating photographs of sandplay creations and other supporting images.

One of the most powerful aspects of the book as a whole is the connective interface between the personally human and the encompassing natural world.
With it being so easy in this technological age to lose sight and connection to the natural world around us, *On Becoming a Sandplay Therapist* is a gift in the truest sense of the word. Steinhardt gifts to us as readers a beautiful reminder, or remembering, that our place in Nature is to be acknowledged and celebrated as humans in the world and as sandplay therapists in the consulting room. She offers a “deep recognition that working as a sandplay therapist rests on an old agreement that celebrates the reciprocity of giving and taking with mutual respect between One and Other, between therapist and client” (2013, p.15). Steinhardt states:

As individuals, we know progressively less about animal and plant consciousness, and our learning is directed towards books and laboratories and less towards actual experience within nature...Fortunately, there is more social awareness of the great loss of the earth and many trying to remember the experience of nature known to our ancestors. Part of our purpose in sandplay is psychological healing and part is coming into balance and harmony within ourselves and with the world around us, living peacefully between nature and culture. (2013, p.45)

In keeping with this frame of reference, Steinhardt opens with a ceremonial attitude in the Preface through the Native American retelling of The Covenant of the Peoples and River. She carries this attitude throughout the book, culminating with a closing ritual which involves not only the participants of a professional sandplay workshop being described, but involves us as readers in the ceremonial closing of the book itself. Steinhardt herself points out that the theme of water also flows throughout. As mentioned above, the book opens with renewed respect for River and the connection and respect for All Things. Steinhardt reflects on her own upbringing on the ocean and includes her impressions and in-depth explorations on the symbolic themes of fisherman and seashell. Each section and chapter connects to the next like a gentle wave, from the history of sandplay therapy, to Steinhardt’s own thoughts and theories of sandplay therapy, art and art therapy, to the examples of specific symbols within numerous sandplay processes.
Once she has set the attitudinal frame, Steinhardt explores “the felt experience” of being a sandplay therapist. This involves enabling “a sandplay client to feel comfortable with creative uncertainty, and enter into the experience of the body instinct when involved in doing a sandplay, to feel gifted with the mystery of being moved through the sand, or of involuntarily choosing and placing objects, succumbing to the guidance of visual or body instinct, and finally accepting the unsolved mystery of meaning of the image” (p.22, 2013). Steinhardt also describes the theoretical training required in becoming a Jungian sandplay therapist, and its practical clinical application. She discusses Jungian theory, Neumann’s developmental theory, Kalffian sandplay theory, and the knowledge of worldwide myths, fairy tales, and religions which are all essential in the understanding of the use of symbol. Steinhardt also offers an overview and her own views of sandplay’s “connection to wild nature and to the trans-rational in ritual and therapy” (p.25), a view which correlates remarkably with Jerome Bernstein’s view of the reality of the trans-rational (2005) reemerging today as a collective psychic call to return to the natural world. Jung, too, believed that our essential human “task is not to return to Nature in the manner of Rousseau, but to find the natural man again” (Sabini, 2002).

Steinhardt follows with discussing in depth one woman’s ten-year sandplay process. The evidence of her growth and progress is displayed over time through the included images of her numerous sandplay trays, among other creative therapies. Steinhardt describes how this client’s use of two particular symbols (a Sheela-Na-Gig and a triple spiral) triggered her own personal connections to the same symbol. Synchronistically enough, these same two symbols have been powerfully moving for me personally as well. Years ago I drove throughout England exploring out-of-the-way churches with Sheela-Na-Gigs carved in hidden places. And one of the most numinous and memorable experiences of my life is connected with the triple spiral.

Over many years the spiral has grown in importance in my personal and artistic life. About twenty years ago, my painted spirals morphed into triple spirals following a dream of three coiled snakes on the floor of my studio. Several years and many paintings later, I travelled to Ireland and was able to visit the Neolithic underground passage tomb of Newgrange. In the belly of the dark tomb is a triple spiral which had been carved into the stone
wall 4,000 thousand years ago. It connected me immediately and viscerally to the ancestral past. Steinhardt states that the triple spiral is “thought to be a representation of the triple source of life energy necessary for the renewal of life, and is connected to the triple goddess—maiden, mother, crone—and the three phases of the moon” (2013, p.26).

Steinhardt proceeds in deftly discussing “Numinosity and Healing in Sandplay, in Nature and in the Clinic.” She explores the definition of numinous and the felt experience for both client and therapist within a sandplay moment; “the result is individual, unplanned, is not cognitive, and comes upon us bearing a sense of divine mystery as well as intuitive insight” (2013, p.121). She provides a number of stunning photographs of clients’ sandplay images as examples of the numinous.

Chapters Four and Five are beautifully written and well-researched explorations of specific symbols. Both were previously published in part in the Journal of Sandplay Therapy, and it is a treat to read them in their entirety. The first article follows the image of a particular fisherman figurine used often by numerous sandplay clients working with Steinhardt. The symbolism of fishing, of water, and of fish is elaborated upon in depth. The connection between that specific fisherman figure and what is happening in the sandplay process and between client and therapist is also discussed. The second article, initially presented at the 20th International Society of Sandplay Therapy conference in Kyoto in 2009, presents “The Symbolism of Sea Shells in Jungian Sandplay.” It is an engagingly thorough exploration of the sea shell beginning with the shell’s biological evolution and modes of survival. Steinhardt shows that shells have been connected to human life events for about 100,000 years “to represent fertility, birth, death and mourning, and passage to rebirth” (2013, p.27). Numerous examples of the differing types of shell presentations in sandplay are included. The book concludes with a workshop ritual created by Steinhardt and numerous sandplay colleagues.
Lenore Steinhardt has indeed gifted us with this re-membering invitation into a sacred attitude towards nature and sandplay, as well as into her natural flowing of insight, information, and expression of process. She quotes Deloria (2009) in stating that, “In ceremonial activities, the powers...of the cosmos are invited to participate’ and are given primary recognition. ‘The space of the universe is acknowledged, its infinite nature admitted, and its powers gathered at a single precise point in order to participate in the ceremony’” (2013, p.47). One cannot escape the sense that, with On Becoming a Jungian Sandplay Therapist, the powers of the cosmos have not only been acknowledged and invited; they have indeed gathered and participated within the temenos of Steinhardt’s latest work.

REFERENCES

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