

Sand, Water, Silence –
The Embodiment of Spirit
Explorations in Matter and Psyche

Mary Jane Markell



Jessica Kingsley Publishers
London and Philadelphia

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any material form (including photocopying or storing it in any medium by electronic means and whether or not transiently or incidentally to some other use of this publication) without the written permission of the copyright owner except in accordance with the provisions of the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 or under the terms of a licence issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency Ltd, 90 Tottenham Court Road, London, England W1P 9HE. Applications for the copyright owner's written permission to reproduce any part of this publication should be addressed to the publisher.

Warning: The doing of an unauthorised act in relation to a copyright work may result in both a civil claim for damages and criminal prosecution.

The right of Mary Jane Markell to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988

First published in the United Kingdom in 2002
by Jessica Kingsley Publishers Ltd
116 Pentonville Road
London N1 9JB, England
and
325 Chestnut Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106, USA

www.jkp.com

Copyright © Mary Jane Markell 2002

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

A CIP catalog record for this book is available from the Library of Congress

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A CIP catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 1 84310 078 9

Printed and Bound in Great Britain by
Athenaeum Press, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear

Contents

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	8
LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS	9
Foreword by Lauren Cunningham	11
Introduction	13
Chapter 1 The Vision	23
Chapter 2 Sacred Time, Sacred Space: Creating Temenos	37
Chapter 3 Meeting with the Serpent: The Divine Secret of Renewal	64
Chapter 4 The Flowering of the Serpent: Chakras as an Archetypal Path	94
Chapter 5 Origins and Source	132
Chapter 6 Ordering Rhythms: The Play of Subtle Energy	171
Chapter 7 Loon and Fish: The Emergent Integration of Opposites	197
Chapter 8 The Manifestation of the Compassionate Heart	227
BIBLIOGRAPHY	256
SUBJECT INDEX	265
NAME INDEX	

Acknowledgments

Many thanks

to all those gentle souls who over the years courageously shared their personal sandplay journeys with me and thereby expanded my own wisdom;

to Lauren Cunningham and Linda Dean who helped in the birthing of this book through their reading and support each step of the way;

to my Dutch colleagues, students and friends who held and contained the process throughout;

to my friend, David Corner, whose mercurial mind created so many dialogues which bore fruit;

to my friend, Jan van Embden, for his kindness and encouraging voice as well as a considerable technical know-how;

to Kay Bradway, Harriet Friedman and Karen Signell, who all held up a lamp for me;

to all my colleagues in the International Society for Sandplay Therapy who have created an international temenos of friendship, sharing and inspiration;

to Nancy Forest-Flier for her editorial work;

to Nancy Fairbrother for her inspired and creative administrative assistance;

to my publisher, Jessica Kingsley, and editor, Jo Gammie, for their vision

and deepest gratitude

to my teacher, Dora M. Kalfé.

List of Illustrations

Cover illustration: Hand, Nantembo (1839–1925), private collection

- 1.1 The *Wu-chi* diagram known as “On the Rock”
- 1.2 Kokopelli, Mimbres pottery
- 2.1 The threshold, Palacio de Pena, Sintra, Portugal
- 2.2 Thunderbird carrying whale with lightning snake and wolf, British Columbia
- 3.1 Hand, eye, serpents: early woodlands culture, Mid-America
- 3.2 The dream cure of the temple sleep, Attica
- 4.1 Enso, Torei
- 4.2 Krishna as divine child dancing on the head of the serpent, Kaliya, India
- 5.1–5.10 Ten Ox-herding pictures by Kaku-An
- 5.11–5.20 Ten Ox-herding pictures II, China
- 5.21 Smiling frog, Sengai
- 6.1 The Kalachakra, a typical multi-armed deity
- 7.1 Loon and fish, Jackson Beardy, Ojibway Indian
- 8.1–8.2 Hand, feet, head and skull: an embodiment
- 8.3 Stillness and movement: sand image of the zia and *yin-yang*

FOREWORD

Lauren Cunningham

You are holding in your hands an important book that helps elucidate why imaginal work in healing modalities such as sandplay therapy holds such transformational power. Sandplay therapists long have needed an in-depth review and elaboration of what Dora Kalff taught about the transformational process in sandplay therapy as it affects the body. Kalff believed that working imaginatively with the elements of sand and water had the possibility of engaging a person in a transformative experience at a cellular level that touched upon the deepest sources of healing. This occurs at a non-verbal, symbolic level that has analogies in the ancient mystery religions. Markell writes "The logical conclusion of this process is the self as shaman, and it is in this area that the greatest changes in Western scientific and medical thought are now occurring." Jung intuitively knew about the unconscious connection between body and psyche at what he called the "psychoid" level, and it was Kalffian sandplay that demonstrated and offered the experience of this connection. Mary Jane Markell's book offers extensive amplification of this wisdom.

Sand, Water, Silence – The Embodiment of Spirit provides a container for the author's considerable creative and intellectual energies that focus on distilling and uniting a wide array of traditions and viewpoints. These include Eastern and Western, scientific and spiritual, spatial

and temporal, body and mind. She draws on and integrates ancient and modern ideas and wisdom from such diverse sources as quantum physics, Mesopotamian myths, Taoism and Buddhism, and Jungian depth psychology. She points the reader towards an integrative view that she thinks is already happening in the human collective consciousness of a transcendent state of non-duality in the reunion of the mind–body disharmony that has plagued modern man. She believes that with the conscious balancing and reconciliation of opposing traditions and perspectives into a unitive world-view a deepening understanding of the cosmos as well as a personal, individual unfolding will evolve.

Mary Jane Markell has written a book that emerged from the currents of her own individuation journey that had one beginning in her relationship to Dora Kalff and her sandplay therapy process. In the years that followed, her connection to natural and internal landscapes as well as to the world of ideas incubated. Mary Jane Markell's inspiration springs from her own internal alchemy that began in the water and earth and in the "woods and valley" of her life experiences. These provided the foundations that led to writing this book. She integrates her intuitive connections that come directly out of her with objective learning from studies and reading that she shares extensively. This is a book both to savor and enjoy.

INTRODUCTION

All of nature is organized according to the activity of significance.

David Bohm, in *Dialogues with Scientists and Sages* (Weber 1986)

An idea is a kind of seed which unfolds. Every idea must be vulnerable.

David Bohm, in *Dialogues with Scientists and Sages*

My particular mythology has led to my having lived during a certain period of history in which a singular event seems to be happening in the human collective consciousness. While quite subtle in the general scheme of cultural events, there is a shift occurring, an earth movement, in which science and spirituality, the two greatest forces that the human race has known, are coming together again. I say singular because the new element in this contemporary manifestation of perhaps a more subtle process is the richness of the spiritual traditions of the East blending with the materialism and technological scientific endeavor of the West, introducing the possibility of an entirely new level of consciousness to the collective and individual life. This adds a new dimension to our thinking, for one could say that the East lives in space while the West in time, the one centered in a spiraling movement and the other riding the crest of wave through the void. So at many more subtle levels this outward form or manifestation speaks to a hidden form which at its most sublime hints at a transcendent state of non-duality, for this indeed is the reflection of that state we call the union of opposites.

When the first faint stirrings began that led to the writing of this book, I could sense the necessity of retreat. Indeed the allure of the inward retreat beckoned to me, something already foreseen many years earlier when I was studying sandplay with Dora Kalff. During one partic-

ular workshop Kalff suddenly stopped, and staring intently at those of us in the audience, she asked, "Do you see a change in the awakening understanding in the world?" The silence in those around me was palpable! For myself, I believe it was another of those synchronistic events that often happened in our sandplay community in which life's meaning and direction were unalterably changed. A curtain had been lifted just slightly, and I had had a glimpse of something in the wondrous Beyond.

As yet I had no architectural form for the book but began with bits and pieces of flotsam and jetsam floating up from the unconscious and demanding attention, nudging me, leading me down a path whose direction and time dimension were both unclear to me. I knew in an intuitive way that this urge would require sifting the known, the related and the unknown, in an attempt to comprehend the natural character of my own individual – and of our collective – being in the world. It would require an immersion in a process of creation to discover the world's secrets – into the continuous creation of a world spilling forth like a never-ceasing fountain. I would enter again into that universe of the four elements – solid earth, the infinite sea, the spacious air, the fiery heat – and a fifth dimension encompassing time and space, whatever the risks.

But to pursue this path, the first steps had to be taken into the forest, for that is where every serious writer must begin. And this entails entering the forest, the green wood, the dark, mysterious place of the free and independent imagination, the green wood of the soul. That is, a place outside the normal world, intensely private and enclosed, haunted and haunting, sometimes numinous, often lonely, sometimes dark, often lost, but possessing a sense of fertility and greenness, and indeed, a sense of divine magic. So it was to that wilderness that I took myself, or I should say was led by those earliest promptings.

A significant symbolic figure for me during that initial period was the great Kokopelli, the infamous American Indian trickster figure, carrying his bag of corn seed on his back, piping his flute. I could say this had been prefigured earlier when I traveled to Nepal some years before and first encountered those living embodiments of the archetype, the wizened old man carrying a huge piece of carved wood held high up above him like a tree, from whose branch-like notches were balanced dozens of hand-carved wooden flutes. One could often hear the song of his flute on

the wind in strange and lonely places even in the furthest reaches of the high mountains. It echoed for me another symbol of equal significance, a small Zuni fetish, coyote, howling at the moon in his solitary night.

What I found in my wilderness forest, of course, was a deep, abiding and rich valley, verdant and abundant, miraculously lush, intensely secret, with a sense of a mysterious yet profound unity to all of existence, and that became the valley of my mind during the necessary retreat from the real world. And rippling out from that inner valley of the mind was an often pressing need to mirror the richness of that natural world in my own writing process. So it was that the path led me syncretically to a place of natural beauty in the real world as I hesitantly brought forth fresh chapters of the book.

What I discovered about that wilderness retreat as I approached the end of the book was the great temptation, or perhaps risk one might say, not to return from the wilderness. So a great lesson came in having known two kinds of exile: the first, the formidable real exile from home and homeland, friends and family, in undertaking the original path of retreat into the wilderness; and the second much later, the exile from that discovered and enchanted valley existing far off in space and time, for that latter exile, painful as it was, represented a retreat from the imagined that I had discovered in my secret valley. That became a formidable transition requiring the integration of a certain loss and a new struggle to find a suitable bridge for return.

So the reader perhaps feels the movement from myth to image and back in this inner journey of mine where, as Jung once noted, "the living spirit grows and even outgrows its earlier forms of expression," the process suggesting that the names and forms which we have given that spirit "mean little enough for they are but the changing leaves and blossoms on the stem of the eternal tree of life" (Jung 1933, p.244). I say this in humility, for much in my book is not new but of a very old character. I had simply outgrown my own earlier forms of expression and explored some new forms and perhaps an idea or two on the nature of sandplay.

During the first year of my journey I spent a considerable amount of time simply reading, not in any organized or systematic manner, but rather what "drew" me intuitively. One of those books quite early on

THE VISION

He who realizes the truth of the body can then come to know the truth of the universe.

The Ratnasara

In *Modern Man in Search of a Soul*, Jung asks:

In primitive tribes we observe that the old people are almost always the guardians of the mysteries and the laws, and it is in these that the cultural heritage of the tribe is expressed. How does the matter stand with us? Where is the wisdom of our old people – where are their precious secrets and their visions. (Jung 1933, p.25)

Those who knew Dora Kalff and studied directly with her, as well as those more recent students of sandplay, are heirs to a great legacy in her teaching. In the early years of the development of sandplay there was scant literature available, and much of the teaching was handed down in an oral “storytelling” tradition based on the copious notes taken by those first students who participated in Kalff’s visiting seminars and workshops in Europe, Japan or the USA, with their rich clinical and slide presentation.

Other than her book, *Sandplay: A Psychotherapeutic Approach to the Psyche* (1980), first published in English as *Sandplay: Mirror of a Child’s Psyche* (1971), students had little support in terms of either theoretical backing or a collective community of others struggling for clarity. The late 1960s and 1970s were difficult ones for any clinician endeavoring to follow Kalff and the emerging Jungian sandplay development. As Mitchell and Friedman (1994, p.73) point out, many of the originators and early leaders of the broader sandtray movement were no longer

actively working in the field, and it was during this period that Kalff's Jungian symbolic approach to sandplay took center stage. In a retrospective look at Kalff's wisdom – for surely she was one of those exceptional teachers who imparted considerable vision to her students – one can now say that her contributions were prophetic. Nowhere is this more apparent than in her contributions to healing and the creative mystery of the transformational process in sandplay as it affects the body. In this, Kalff has reconnected us with the ancients and has helped redeem the "lost mysteries" through healing with the gifts of the imagination. The logical conclusion of this process is the self as shaman, and it is in this area that the greatest changes in Western scientific and medical thought are now occurring.

This is not to say that Kalff was in any sense one-sided. In an early article on sandplay she comments:

Another aspect of wholeness, upon which particular emphasis is placed in sandplay, is the totality of body and spirit. In its negative aspect the spirit appears as exclusive intellect which has lost all connection to feeling and the body. This lack of connection expresses itself in contempt for feeling as something unclear and in the opinion that the body is primitive and non-spiritual. This attitude, all too frequent in modern man, is often the cause of psychic disorders. (Kalff 1978, p.10)

Thus the ultimate goal of sandplay is that wholeness of ego and self, of body and soul, or psyche and matter which finds its expression through the transformation of energies. This is consistent with Jung, who stated:

To solve the problem you must give equal value. We cannot say the side of the spirit is twice as good as the other side, we must bring the pairs of opposites together in an altogether different way, where the rights of the body are just as much recognized as the rights of the spirit. (Jung 1988, p.107)

Synthesis of East and West

Professionals living in the milieu of modern technology and science, and under the influence of contemporary psychology, usually feel compelled to find rational explanations for unusual or mysterious forms of healing.

However, if we cling to these logical explanations, we lose sight of our ancient roots. It is as though we are being confronted with another pair of opposites created by the very progress we have achieved in modern medicine. The task then is one of reconciling those opposites and finding the balance between the ancients and their wisdom in healing, and new and revolutionary ideas in the field of imagery and healing, illness and health, science and spirituality – recent findings in both traditional and non-traditional approaches to holistic health in the West as well as the East.

Kalff brought to her development of analytically oriented sandplay her own involvement and intimate experience with Eastern philosophies. During a period of personal reflection and change, she had an important dream set in Tibet. In the dream she was approached by two monks who gave her a golden rectangular instrument. She was to swing this instrument, and as she did so an opening appeared in the ground which cut through to the other side of the world, the West, where she saw the light of the sun. Emma Jung, who helped interpret the dream, aided Kalff in understanding that through her knowledge of the East she might also serve the West (Seminar at Pajaro Dunes, California, 1987).

Kalff often spoke of the many important influences in her life, including the discussions she had had with many spiritual leaders. These included His Holiness (HH) the Dalai Lama, the Zen Buddhist scholar D.T. Suzuki, as well as many notables from Tibetan and Zen Buddhism. She acknowledged Chang Chung-yuan as her first teacher, followed by Master Suzuki (Seminar at Pajaro Dunes, 1987). These personal anecdotes constituted a rich part of her oral teaching, although there is much less reference to them in her written works.

Thus Kalff had begun a synthesis of Eastern and Western philosophical traditions which was incorporated into her evolving theory of sandplay and became a significant part of her lectures and workshops. It was here that she discerned the possibility for blending and bridging the ancient wisdom of the East with Western historical and contemporary thought. So for students observing the impact of sandplay on certain responses in the physical body, a close awareness of these traditions is just as important as a familiarity with Jungian thought.

Indeed because the strength of the West is grounded in its exploration of the material world – in what is “outside” ourselves – it is important that we explore in this process emerging paradigms from contemporary thought which incorporate known aspects of the material world with knowledge carried by those from the East who have had centuries of attunement with the inner sciences. In the 1980s and 1990s an increasing number of dialogues have occurred bringing together scientists and physicians and some of the world’s leading spiritual teachers from both the Eastern and Western traditions. A leading question has been the relationship between the mind and body, or psyche and matter.

Jung himself was inclined to think that the unconscious has a material aspect. Speaking of the relationship between psyche and matter from a Jungian perspective, Von Franz comments:

The psyche–matter problem has not yet been solved, which is why the basic riddle of alchemy is still not solved ... ultimately, the question as to whether and how the unconscious is in some way connected with matter is quite unsettled ... we merely make the hypothesis that there is a psyche which manifests in dreams and in involuntary psychological ways which we can study, just as physicists say that there is something like matter, or energy and study that. But we are already beginning to see that certain results are so similar that it is as if we were tunneling from either side toward the center of the same mountain. Though we have not really met yet, it looks as though we are moving towards the same goal and therefore there is the possibility of meeting one day. (Von Franz 1980a, pp.37–40)

Kabat-Zinn has referred to this as a kind of “intrapyschic technology” which has been developing over several thousand years within traditions that had considerable wisdom about the mind–body connection (Moyers 1993, p.116). That is, ancient interventions aimed at healing and renewal have taken many forms within every culture, religion and group of people. Some have taken the guise of hidden rites often intricately woven into sacred ritual, while others have involved visits to healing shrines or religious pilgrimages.

The essence of these teachings, however, has consisted of similar processes: a stilling and quieting of both mind and body; a focusing in which the individual can experience both an inner and a transpersonal

sense of peace and contentment; a state of oneness with the cosmos – all of which we increasingly have come to associate with physical as well as mental well-being. These esoteric teachings are harbored in all of the great spiritual traditions: in Islam with Sufism, in Judaism with the kabbalah, and in Christianity with the great manuscripts on prayer and meditation. At the heart of this essence lies the symbolic process. One of the most urgent needs of our historical epoch is an appreciation of the value of that inner subjective world of the psyche, the inner symbolic life. The historian Arnold Toynbee predicted many years ago that one of the most significant events of the twentieth century would be the coming of Buddhism to the West. And it is Buddhism, and particularly Tibetan and Zen Buddhism, which now confronts Western psychology with its vast exploration of the inner sciences derived from centuries of Buddhistic inquiry dating to many years before the birth of Christ.

In the mountainous remoteness of Tibet, monasteries once existed which at one time had over ten thousand resident scholars intent on exploring the inner sciences derived from the richness of the ancient Indian Buddhist philosophy. The blending of Buddhism with Taoism in China and its subsequent Zen development in Japan led to similar explorations, all having their origins in the complexity of Indian Buddhistic thought and experience. This included the knowledge of the self, depth consciousness, and the extraordinary states brought about through these transformative experiences.

The importance of symbols

From a Western psychological perspective, Edinger (1973, p.117) has commented that "the symbolic life in some form is a prerequisite for psychic health. Without it the ego is alienated from its suprapersonal source and falls victim to a kind of cosmic anxiety." The ultimate goal of Kalfian sandplay therapy is a conscious integration of the inner symbolic processes. For as Kalf herself stressed, the archetypes of transformation work through the power of symbolic language. Imagination becomes the clearing in the forest, the light breaking through darkness, the mysterious and sacred place of the soul's epiphany. And it is through experiencing the strange flora and fauna of our inner life, that which can disturb or