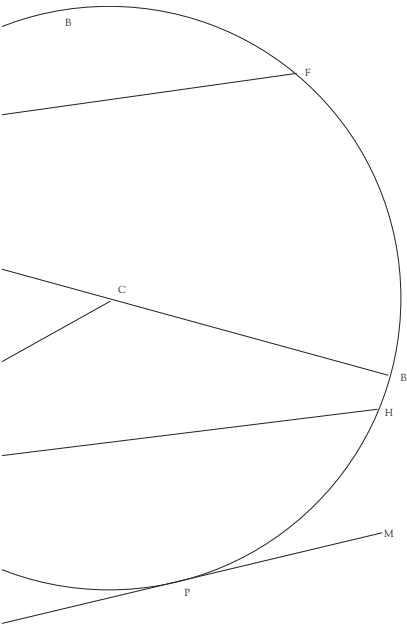


# A LIGHT IN THE MIST

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*Every symbol carries some inner meaning, whether simple or complex. In all*

*cases, a symbol is an object whose content is greater than its form, for with just a few lines or gestures it conveys a message that would otherwise require many words. But precisely because of this meager form, because their meaning is not overt, symbols demand that the viewer reconstruct the original message within himself. As such, they are vehicles for inner transformation, and are among the primary tools of the religious life, which seeks to convey truths that are altogether beyond words. Symbols are points of contemplation, for only by dwelling upon them are their contents revealed. And the more one contemplates them, the more meaningful they become. Furthermore, religious symbols, whose subject is the infinite, have the potential to convey an infinity of meaning.*

*The Temple of Amount by Eliezer Stone.*

*Quoted from Parabola, Fall 1999*

One of the most popular rooms in Healing Environments is our sandtray room. Sandtray technique, or sandplay as it is sometimes called, is often used by Jungian analysts or children's therapists as a tool for directly accessing the subconscious. Offering a "map" of a person's central issues, sandtray can be effectively used to reveal hidden conflicts or to work through painful emotions.

Commonweal, a small nonprofit on the Northern California coast which works with cancer patients, has found that sandtray helps patients come to terms with their illness. At Healing Environments we have found it to have universal appeal, and we believe it can be modified to benefit us all.

Our sandtray room is lined with shelves of small, evocative objects—a bottle of sand labeled "extra time," a small building on fire, a bucket of miniature money. Our sandtray, a handhewn, round antique cheese-making tray filled with concentric circles of sand, sits on a coffee table in front of a loveseat. Visitors are invited to select those objects to which they are drawn for some mysterious reason. They are asked to "turn off their brains," to operate intuitively, rather than analytically. The objects are placed in the sand again without conscious thought. Once the sandtray is complete, its creator is invited to step back and survey the miniature scene. Does it tell a story? Would he or she care to share it with us or perhaps reflect upon it silently? The results are often dramatic.

A friend of my teenage daughter produced the following sandtray: A delicate, winsome fairy stood in the center of the circle, surrounded by

objects of foreboding. The seventeen-year-old girl was eager to share their meaning with us. A pair of dice symbolized the chances she took; a gun stood for the violence in her life; an hour-glass represented time running out; a compass reflected her lack of direction. "And this house represents my home," she said, "but how can I show it is broken?"

My thirteen-year-old son produced a sandtray which unwittingly revealed his inner conflict over our family's dissolution: down the center of the sandtray was a white picket fence. On one side of the fence a miniature surgeon was operating under the caption "healing," a tiny trunk was labeled "abundance," and a large gold heart bore the title "love." On the opposite side of the fence chaos reigned. Tiny soldiers were locked in mortal combat, tanks patrolled, a peacekeeping U.N. truck lay overturned.

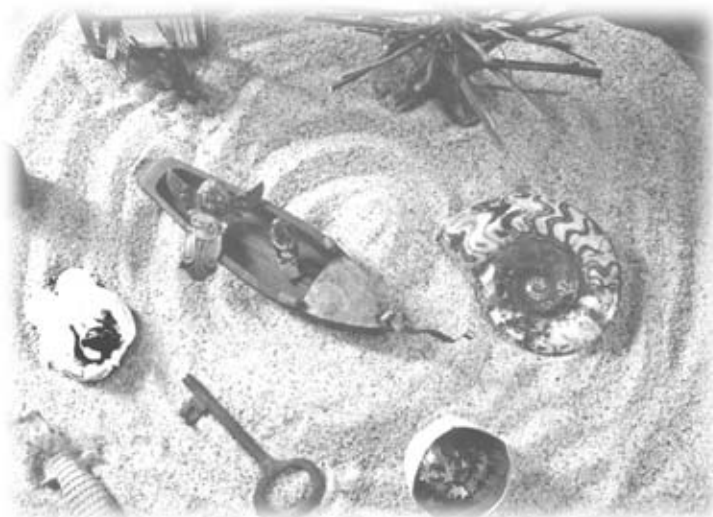
A Commonweal cancer patient produced a similar scene of mortal conflict at the beginning of her week's stay. Soldiers and tanks waged a desperate battle with her cancer, which was seen as the enemy. At the end of her week-long retreat of poetry, yoga, deep relaxation and walks on the beach, the woman produced her second sandtray: a transformative scene in which her illness was symbolized by a sparkling crystal gem, offering wisdom and insight transcending pain and loss.

The power of sandtray technique is not to be underestimated. Six years ago Traci and I packed up several hundred of our objects to take to an East Coast conference on Health, Immunity and Disease. We were not surprised when one cancer patient broke into sobs, sharing with us that the beautiful dollhouse bride reminded her that she might never marry and the miniature dollhouse cake labeled "Dad" brought back memories of her father's abuse. But we were somewhat taken aback when a therapist, whose sandtray had superficially appeared to represent a perfectly ordered and happy life, came to us the next day in tears. Reflecting upon the miniature map of her

subconscious, she had come to the realization that she was unhappy in both her marriage and her job.

Marion Weber, Commonweal's resident sandtray expert, has experimented with the parameters of sandtray technique. She took four hundred small objects and redwood lawn edging to a conference on Art and Healing in the Midwest. There, in a series of workshops, she constructed large group sandtrays in which twelve participants could create communal scenes of healing. In the most dramatic of these, three of the twelve participants had lost children. That session became a moving example of the healing power of ritual, as the group mourned their loss collectively.

When Commonweal hosted a conference on Art and Healing, Marion invited each participant to bring ten "sacred" objects from home. Forty of us sat in an immense circle in Commonweal's "great room." One at a time, as the spirit moved, we rose and shared with the group the meaning of one of our sacred objects. We then placed it reverently in reference to the other objects around a central silk cloth. Over the course of several hours the power of collective meaning grew as the circle spontaneously created two powerful intentions—to heal and protect loved ones and to heal and protect the planet. Just as sandtray technique can be improvised and expanded to offer groups the healing power of ritual, it can bring the meaning of symbolism into individual homes. One of my closest friends had already constructed a sandtray at home for her three daughters when her husband was cruelly taken from them. Brain dead and on life support, he lay for a week without hope of recovery. One of his sensitive nurses taped a small green malachite turtle, which had been a precious goodluck symbol of hers, to his palm. Shortly after John died, his widow Lexi and I found ourselves in Marion Weber's Healing Arts Center in Stinson Beach. Surveying the tray of small objects for sale, Lexi blanched. There in the center were three miniature green malachite turtles. KS



*We wish you a hopeful holiday  
and a peaceful new year.*

To use the "sandtray" on  
the following pages:

..  
Carefully tear out  
all the cards.

..  
Turn off your  
analytical mind.

..  
Select the cards to  
which you are  
intuitively drawn.

..  
Position them instinctively  
on the "sandtray".

..  
Step back and consider  
what your subconscious is  
telling you.

*They move in slow circles,  
circling closer and closer to enclose,  
soft language issuing from their lips.*

James Joyce

Probably the oldest of ideograms is the Circle. It represents the sun and the moon—and the world. The empty Circle was used in primitive paintings to indicate openings in the body such as the mouth and ears. The filled Circle is found in Egyptian hieroglyphs and in Japanese Buddhist symbols. The women in India place a circle (dot) above the eyebrows to indicate marital status. In astrology, the Circle represents the eternal or the endless, as in the Circle of illumination that represents the great Circle around a planet or satellite that forms the boundary between the illuminated and the unilluminated hemispheres.

Once we die, the soul or spirit might continue on since it is not physically attached to one's body, as Carl Jung points out. The circle symbolizes that which is in all of us—our unending life force.

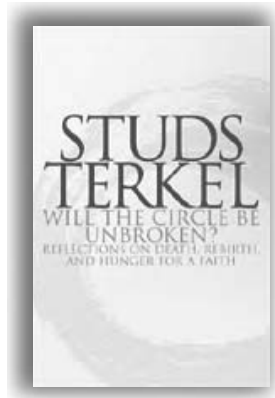
Recently, I gave a lecture to design students who are concerned about the world's present state of uncertainty. I used the Circle as a symbol of the cyclical nature of a lifetime, noting, for example, that I have gone through many difficult periods that affected my career but have come through them in good order.

Given my fascination with the symbolic richness of the Circle, I was interested to see that Studs Terkel had entitled his new book, *Will the Circle Be Unbroken? : Reflections on Death, Rebirth, and Hunger for Faith*. Long a fan of Terkel's, I bought the book and realized how beautifully it spoke both to this issue's theme of symbolism and to the wider scope of our work at Healing Environments. We have reprinted a review of the book and some excerpts from it here. SS

*We have loved ones gone to glory  
Whose dear forms we often miss  
When we close our earthly story  
Shall we join them in their bliss  
Will the circle be unbroken  
by and by, by and by  
There's a better home awaiting  
far beyond the starry sky.*

An Old Hymn

In the past, Terkel... has gotten people to talk about their concrete experiences, like family, war and the Depression . . . . Now Terkel, a gifted interviewer, encourages the subjects of this book to talk openly about their feelings regarding life's final frontier. The raconteurs who share their moving stories in this collection range from emergency room doctors and paramedics to public figures such as Kurt Vonnegut, NPR commentator Ira Glass and country music guitarist Doc Watson. Each of Terkel's subjects brings his or her unique insights to the mystery of death. For example, emergency room doctor Ed Reardon says we fear death because we don't understand it, and that it's hope that keeps us going while we're alive.



Country woman Peggy Terry observes that death would not be so frightening if "we've fulfilled ourselves as human beings, not as collectors of stuff, money, and bank accounts." Tico Valle, a young Latino gay male, reflects on the death of his partner and the significance of reincarnation for understanding the meaning of life. Finally, Emmett Till's mother, Mamie Mobley, poignantly recalls her son's sacrifice: "Emmett had died that men might have freedom here on Earth. That we might have a right to life.... If Jesus Christ died for our sins, Emmett Till bore our prejudices." Terkel's refusal to overwhelm readers with his own philosophical reflections and his willingness to allow ordinary men and women to speak for themselves make this a stirring and enlightening collection that will lead readers to think more deeply about their own hopes and fears.

*Excerpted from Publishers Weekly*

*The following four excerpts are reprinted from Will the Circle Be Unbroken . . . by Studs Terkel . . . published by The New Press, New York.*

*Tammy Snider is a psychiatric social worker at the University of Chicago Hospital. A hibakusha, a survivor of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, she has written a memoir recounting the moment: One Sunny Day.*

August 6th, 1945, it was a beautiful day, and it was the happiest day for me because I had just persuaded my parents to bring me back the day before, to be with them, to be home in Hiroshima. I had been evacuated to a remote village. We think of the evacuation of the British children, but we hardly think of Japanese children being evacuated. We're both small islands. My grandfather, who passed away a couple of years prior to that time, was an industrialist and had a large estate. We lived on this estate, our family and our father's elder brother's family, surrounded with beautiful, beautiful gardens, one mile away from the center of town. So there was this dire contrast of the happy, peaceful, unsuspecting lovely morning suddenly turning into . . . entire destruction of all that was there . . . for me. The fire, the burning, the crushing. . . . On that day, my mother had to go off to take care of business in the center of town. My cousin, who was like my brother, was also in the center of town. My father was away at the harbor of Hiroshima, so he was a few miles away from the center. I was in my room. First there was a warning that a few planes were on their way and then the broadcast said, "Emergency is off, you can go back to work," or whatever you were doing. So the people who were outdoors, a lot of them even took their shirts off. It was very sunny — a beautiful blue-sky day.

I was ten going on eleven. I had just come home the night before, so I was catching up on reading that my cousin gave me which had something to do with a Samurai duel — a boy's book. Then I had a little stomach trouble. My mother left me a little porridge to have. There was this simultaneous flash preceding the humongous sound of explosion, the kind of intensity that I have never heard before or heard since. And then there was the breaking down with the force of the wind and the shaking of the earth and the house breaking up. And then being covered with debris. The thing lasted for, I thought, an unending, infinite length of time. It was pitch-dark and I was just getting hit with all kinds of objects falling down on me. Even as a child it was the first time in this midst of abyss, I said to myself, "I'm going to die." When I said that, something very quiet came through, and I wasn't completely falling apart — that was sort of curious

to remember. It didn't end, the thermal wind and the force. It just went on and on and I thought it would never end. The words coming into my mind saying: "So this is dying in a war. I'm going to die." I was the one who was most surprised when it all ended finally. Everything became still, I found myself still alive and living and breathing . . . yeah.

. . .

After that very day, all of us went back looking for our kin. Most of us didn't know where they were. So we had to go to rescue stations. A lot of these were just people lying on the ground, dirt, or floor of a chapel of one of the temples. I just couldn't stand going by — person, person, person . . . So I would announce my mother's name and then say, "Oh, please answer me," and no one would answer but sort of stir . . . Even if I was so much in a state of shock and desensitized myself, I tried. I just couldn't stand it, thinking *I can't find her, I can't find her, what am I going to do?* I want to see her. But I don't want to see her in that condition. But if I can let her know that I love her and that I want to be there . . . so, just playing with magical things in my mind, I started to sing some songs that she taught me, that she loved hearing. (*With a touch of happiness*) So I said, "Please, God, carry this tune to my mother and comfort her, because I can't find her." That's when my feelings came back and I just cried and cried and cried.

MAURINE YOUNG

*In contrast to her husband's introspective nature, Maurine Young is outgoing, a large-boned woman, overflowing with gusto and ebullience. She frequently laughs out loud.*

**M**My twins were three months old. I was sitting on the beach with them. Somebody came up to me and said, "Could we talk to you about Jesus?" And I said, "It's a public park, it's a free country, you can sit down." So they started to talk to me about Jesus. This lady turns to me and she says, "So how's your life?" And her words shot into my chest like a sword . . . So I began to tell this lady and her two friends how poorly I was doing. She said, "Would you like to commit your life to Christ again?" And I said "I really would. Because I realize I'm not doing very well by myself. Something is missing." So I did that and I prayed that day. Since that day, I've been learning how to parent, and to let God love me, and to love and forgive others.

Nineteen years later, when this happened with Andrew being murdered, I said "OK, I know who I'm following." What would Jesus do? It was pretty clear. He says: Love your enemies

—I consider these little guys my enemies that killed my son. Pray for those who use you, forgive as God has forgiven you. So I thought, OK, *what does that mean?* Looking back at another journal . . . this is from January of 1997. I wrote: "What are the obstacles to forgiveness? How can forgiveness free us? How can it free me? Well, first I needed to know that I must face my own pain and grieve. And not keep anger on, sort of as a suit of armor. Admit the wrong that was done to me and experience the rage. But be honest with God about my pain and why. Releasing my anger to him and pardoning the offender makes me feel vulnerable, even out of control. But what's my choice? If I hold my anger, it will destroy me." And then I also wrote, "It's OK to be afraid of being hurt again." So, obviously, the whole idea of forgiving was there in the back of my mind the whole time, and I kept thinking: *I want to kill them, I want to see them fry.* But God says forgive . . . And I kept going back and forth thinking, *How do you do this?* Scratching my head. Then I realized I could make the choice and trust that the power to do it would be there. Because I know that my faith is the glue that holds God's power to his promises. And He's promised that He would do what I ask, He would do the right thing in my life. I'm going to have the faith and forgive and trust He's going to take care of it all. So I finally did that about July of 1997, about six months after what I just read to you. I forgave and wrote Mario in prison a letter. He was eighteen, my son was nineteen. I told him about my life. I just wanted him to know how I was raised, and that I had done plenty of things that needed forgiving and God forgave me. So how could I withhold forgiveness from him? I couldn't. That I love him and God loves him and I forgave him.

DR. GARY SLUTKIN

*Dr. Gary Slutkin served as an intern and resident at San Francisco General Hospital and stayed on to run their TB program, eventually leaving to work in Africa. After a decade overseas, he returned to the United States.*

**I**n the West, we are the experts at the outer world. In the East, they are the experts on the inner world. We have looked at the telescope and the micro-scope as far as you can, and we're still trying to go further. In the East, they really have been, for four thousand or more years, looking in. They're looking at the way their mind works and looking at all kinds of methods for accessing people who have died. In Tibet, one of their principle teachings is to reflect on death. In the West, no one has ever told me, "Think about death."

My grandmother died—don't think about it. They say: "Think about it. Face it." When we touch that loneliness or fear, we immediately go to the television or the telephone or the refrigerator. We don't want to touch that fear. They say, "Touch that fear, go all the way into that fear." When you go past that fear, that's when you start to see something. But as soon as we feel fear or sadness, "Oh, come on, let's go for a walk." I read and study Judaism, Christianity, and Buddhism, and science — physics in particular. All this stuff about particles, and waves, and energy, and matter, and the interchange ability of energy and matter. Science and Buddhism come close together, actually.

RORY MOINA

*Rory Moina has been an AIDS-certified registered nurse for fourteen years at the Illinois Masonic Hospital, Chicago.*

**T**his night, just before I was getting ready to leave, I noticed he was having breathing difficulty. He became alarmed, but didn't want me to do anything about it . . . I wanted to respect his wishes, so I left . . .

We're talking end stage here. This wasn't like we could do some heroic thing. He'd already had pneumonia five times, his lungs were ravaged. Anyway, I left, went home, I went to sleep. At six o'clock in the morning the phone rang. The nurse taking care of him said "Bobby's dying, why don't you come to the hospital right now." I threw on some clothes, and went to the hospital. The head nurse of our unit, a very compassionate person, and another nurse I graduated from nursing school with were working up there. They knew the scenario. They knew how close I was to Bobby. When I came off the elevator on the unit, they both put their arms around me and hugged me, opened the door to his room and let me go in. I remember him laying on the bed there. He was actually waiting for me to show up, so close to death. He couldn't really speak anymore. I remember going over to him and sitting on the side of the bed and holding him and a big tear came up in the corner of his eye, the biggest tear I ever saw in my life. I remember I had a lot of difficulty with this because going back to that time, people weren't even sure if you could contract HIV from tears — I didn't really know. Part of me thought, *Oh my God, I shouldn't do this . . .* But I saw he had a tear in his eye, and I thought, *That's my tear* — and I kissed it away, even though, you know . . . that's what I did. I kissed it away. And he died right then. I remember not feeling sad, not feeling anything. If anything, in some ways, I was joyful. Because I knew that he was released from this worldly suffering. And I was able to quickly move on.

TRANSFORMING HOLIDAYS IN  
TIMES OF TRAGEDY

Last Christmas Josefina, our beloved housekeeper of sixteen years, did not have the heart to celebrate the season. Not one, but both of her parents were dying. Her two teenage nieces begged her for a tree, but “Viva”, as we affectionately call her, couldn’t bear to act as though nothing had changed.

I ventured a suggestion. Why not change tradition to honor her grief? And so, for the first time, Josefina’s family had a transcendental all-white tree instead of a festive colorful one. Hung with white beaded stars

and glittering angels which glistened with hundreds of tiny white lights, the tree became a symbol of her love and concern, a vigil of sorts, comforting the entire family.

Is it chance, I wonder, in this season of fear and uncertainty that I read article after article suggesting we celebrate with a white, rather than red holiday? Or is it a subconscious longing for peace, a return to innocence?

Whether you have lost or are losing loved ones, or grieving the loss of a more innocent and secure time, consider reframing your holiday—whether Christmas, Hanukkah or Kwanzaa, to hold a vision of hope for the world.

Kate

TOGETHER  
WE  
WILL  
COMFORT  
THE  
SUFFERING

OUR MISSION

Our mission is to aid the current movement toward holistic medicine—toward treating the whole patient (mind, body, spirit) and encouraging hospitals, hospices and individuals to nourish patients, families and caregivers with healing environments. What is a healing environment? We believe a healing environment is one that offers sustenance to the soul and gives meaning to experience. It is one that enables those who are suffering to transcend their pain by connecting to the universal through the transformative power of beauty and art, and that gives comfort through this connection.

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