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*Dora Maria Kalff:
Connections
Between Life and Work*

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DORA MARIA KALFF, ORIGINATOR OF THE JUNGIAN SANDPLAY METHOD, was born in Switzerland on December 21, 1904. Growing up in Richterswil, a small village on the Lake of Zurich, she was the third of four children in a loving but strict upper-class Swiss family. Her father, August Gattiker, was a textile merchant and an important politician. He served as mayor of his town many times, and was an elected representative to Switzerland's governing body. Her mother, Lilly Gattiker-Sauter, came from a highly cultured family, who had lived in Richterswil for many generations. She was godmother to thirty-two of the town's children (Johnson, 1990). Early in Dora Kalff's life it became evident that she had a good mind as well as a highly developed aesthetic talent in music and art. Her family supported both her intellectual and aesthetic interests. After graduation from the Humanistic Gymnasium in 1923, she attended Westfield College in London. Later the family supported both her musical studies in France with the noted pianist, Robert Casadesus, as well as her artistic pursuit of creative bookbinding in Italy.

Many synchronistic events occurred throughout Kalff's life that also supported and directed her work. During her childhood and youth, respiratory problems prevented her from physical activities. This limitation actually contributed to her inherent introversion and allowed a rich inner life to flourish (Montecchi & Navonne, 1989). Because of her delicate health, she was sent to the highly regarded Girls' School of Fetan, high in the Alps, where it was thought that the climate and fresh air would be beneficial. It was here in this breathtaking mountain environment that she was able to follow her natural inclinations to study esoteric religion and foreign languages, including Sanskrit. Later in her life, her facility in speaking five languages enabled her to communicate with audiences throughout the world in their native languages. In addition, the early interest she cultivated in Eastern religious practices was destined to play a role in both her future personal and professional life, leading her on a lifelong spiritual quest.

Her marriage in 1934 to Leopold Ernst August (L. E. A.) Kalff, a cosmopolitan Dutch banker, deepened her interest in the Orient. As a young man, L. E. A. had lived in the Orient and had enjoyed both the art and culture of the region. This shared appreciation was an important connection between them in their relationship.

Their life together in Holland was interrupted by World War II as Dora Kalff fled to the safety of Switzerland with her young son, Peter (born in 1939). By 1944, Dora Kalff had relocated with Peter to the little ski village of Parpan, where he easily made friends with the children of the families who visited there on a regular basis. One day the mother of several of these children requested a visit with Kalff. This woman explained that she was curious to meet Kalff because she had observed that when her children returned from playing at Kalff's home, they consistently seemed relaxed and happy. Who was this woman who created such a positive atmosphere for children? This meeting initiated an ongoing friendship as well as a turning point for Kalff. The woman was C.G. Jung's daughter, Gret Baumann (Kalff, 1982).

Kalff's meeting with Gret Baumann proved to be synchronistic on several levels. After the war, L.E.A. had joined Dora in Switzerland, where their son, Martin, was born in 1946. Later the Kalffs separated,

divorcing in 1949. In 1948, Kalff's father had died and, because of financial setbacks due to his efforts in the War, he was able to leave only a small inheritance. There was just enough money for Kalff to launch a career. Her career direction took shape when Baumann encouraged her to study psychology. Baumann also introduced Kalff to her father, C.G. Jung, and he encouraged her as well to pursue her natural gifts with children. These two events proved pivotal in Kalff's choice of direction.

In 1950, after her first year of study at the C.G. Jung Institute in Zurich, Kalff decided that she needed to live closer to the Institute. Through an acquaintance, Kalff heard about an old farm house that was for sale in the nearby town of Zollikon. It exceeded her requirements of "three bedrooms, a living room with windows, vines growing in the garden, and a Madonna" (Chambers, 1988-89). She immediately hired Jung's son, Franz, an architect, to undertake the renovations for the house. This unique 500-year old country-style home, built in 1485, proved to be the perfect container for her future life and work.

In 1954, Kalff attended a lecture given in Zurich by the British child psychiatrist, Margaret Lowenfeld. She was impressed by Lowenfeld's World Technique and intrigued with pursuing it further. Lowenfeld had developed the World Technique in the late 1920's as a nonverbal way for children to communicate their mental processes. Using miniatures placed in a shallow tray filled with sand, Lowenfeld's technique provided a means for the child's emotional and mental states of mind to be communicated in a way that could be objectively recorded and analyzed.

When Kalff told C.G. Jung how this technique had caught her imagination, he remembered that he had responded to a World Technique presentation that Lowenfeld had given in 1937 at a conference in France. He encouraged Kalff's personal interest in the technique, recognizing its potential as a symbolic tool for children. Until this time, child therapy was not being practiced by Jungian therapists. However, it was clear to Jung that the World Technique, which used an imaginative approach, could be of value. Jung himself was personally aware of the healing powers of his own imagination. After his painful break with Freud in 1912, he had found healing as he played on the shore of Lake Zurich using small objects to build his own imaginal world (Jung, 1961).

In 1956, Kalff traveled to London, where Michael Fordham, a prominent English Jungian Analyst, arranged her introduction to Lowenfeld at the request of Emma Jung, C.G. Jung's wife (M. Fordham, personal communication, 1990). Kalff then spent one year studying at Lowenfeld's Institute of Child Psychology (ICP). This experience with Lowenfeld helped solidify the direction of Kalff's future work (Weinrib, 1983).

After her study in London, Kalff returned to Switzerland to continue her practice, now uniting her Jungian-based approach with what she had learned from her work with Lowenfeld. A long period of incubation followed her work with Lowenfeld. During this time, there was little contact with Lowenfeld or with those in the Swiss psychological community. Only C.G. Jung gave her encouragement, advice, and psychological support (Weinrib, 1983). Out of this isolated time, Kalff's ideas crystallized into a creative integration that joined a symbolic, archetypal orientation with Lowenfeld's approach. This synthesis added a deeper dimension of understanding to the sand tray. Kalff called her approach "sandplay," (*sandspiel*), to differentiate it from Lowenfeld's World Technique.

Kalff viewed the sandplay process as a natural therapeutic modality that facilitated the expression of the archetypal, symbolic, and intrapersonal world, as well as everyday outer reality. She believed that the expression of these realities, within a free and protected space created by the therapist, promoted images of wholeness offering the opportunity for the manifestation of the self. Kalff maintained that the manifestation of the self in the tray is necessary, for it serves as a base for the development and strengthening of the ego. When the ego-self connection has been established, the person functions in a more balanced and congruent manner. Through Kalff's many years of observing the process, she realized that the manifestation of the self could be activated by using sandplay with adults as well as with children in an ongoing therapeutic process.

Intimately connected with her interest in developing sandplay as an analytical tool was Kalff's longstanding attraction to Asian philosophies. During her time of redirection and change, her interests in Asia were revived in a dream. According to her son, Martin Kalff (personal communication, 1990), her dream was set in Tibet, where she was

approached by two monks who gave her a golden rectangular instrument. Implicit in this gift was the understanding that she was to swing the instrument and, as she did, an opening appeared in the ground before her that went through the entire world. On the other side of the world, in the West, she saw the light of the sun.

Kalfff's dream was later interpreted by Emma Jung, who helped Dora understand that through her knowledge of the Orient, she might also serve the Occident. This dream became realized in Kalfff's life through her extensive travels, which enabled her to teach sandplay and make personal connections worldwide. Professor Hayao Kawai, a noted Jungian analyst, was particularly instrumental in providing many opportunities for her to teach sandplay in Japan. Sandplay is currently one of the major psychotherapeutic approaches in Japan, where a yearly conference attracts hundreds of sandplay therapists. Kalfff's work in joining these two opposites, the East and West, ultimately led her to her greatest fulfillment.

Kalfff was a deeply spiritual woman. While remaining open to all spiritual orientations, she felt closest to the Japanese and Tibetan Buddhist traditions. Through her association with several Tibetan monks, including the Dalai Lama's personal instructor who visited Switzerland in 1966 and stayed in Kalfff's home, she had several private meetings with the Dalai Lama. Her spirituality was also influenced by the renowned Zen Buddhist scholar, D. Z. Suzuki, whom she met at an Eranos Lecture. She spoke with him about her practice of delaying interpretation of the sand trays. Suzuki recognized a parallel with the Zen practice, where the pupil as seeker-after-wisdom is not given a direct answer to his/her question, but is rather thrown back on his/her own imagination and inner resources. The meeting with Suzuki reinforced Kalfff's feeling that her approach resonated with a profound inner truth (Weinrib, 1983). Kalfff's connection to her spirituality added another important dimension to her understanding of the movement of the psyche in the sandplay.

Kalfff's work was additionally influenced by her association with Erich Neumann, an eminent Jungian analyst and developmental theorist. She integrated his stages of development (Neumann, 1973) with her sandplay theory. Kalfff's theory assumed that when a child is having

problems, the manifestation of the self has failed to appear because of lack of motherly protection, overanxious motherly care, and/or that normal development was unable to unfold because of external influences such as war, illness, or other environmental disturbances. The child has not adequately transversed Neumann's developmental stages of mother-child unity (birth to one year old), separation from other (one to two years old), and consolidation of self (two to three years old). Kalff believed that if the constellation of the self did not occur in the early years, it could be activated at any juncture of life, regardless of age, and that sandplay could facilitate this manifestation provided the therapist is able to establish a free and protected environment. This therapeutic environment recreates the original mother-child unity and "establishes an inner peace which contains the potential for the development of the total personality, including its intellectual and spiritual aspects" (Kalff, 1966, p. 5).

The worldwide network that Kalff established throughout her life through her lectures worldwide is now sustained by the work of the International Society for Sandplay Therapy. Kalff founded this organization in 1985 to provide certification and training in sandplay. Archives containing in-depth case studies from each of the ISST members are maintained in Zollikon. This society ensures a living connection to the rich heritage which Kalff left through her life's work.

Dora Kalff's life was a rich tapestry of threads connecting her many inner and outer experiences. Through the creative synthesis of her fertile and varied life, she was able to add a greater depth of understanding to the movement of the psyche as it is reflected in the sand tray. She was a profound teacher as well as a truly unique woman, carrying a message that is rare in today's outer-oriented, materialistic world, i.e., the importance of honoring the power of the inner symbolic life. Her charismatic personality and deep connection to her own spirituality helped bring to life the rich images of the unconscious as they unfold in the sand tray. She was able to illustrate that sandplay could facilitate contact with the self and transform energies for people of all ages. Since her death in January, 1990, the legacy of her life's work is now left to people worldwide who have been touched by her extraordinary vision.

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