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PROMOTING THE ETHICAL PRACTICE OF SAND THERAPY

Focus on Miniatures: Fire

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Fire is one of the four classic elements (along with water, air, and earth) in Greek philosophy and science. Fire has a presence in ancient cultures and religions. References to fire are found with Moses and the burning bush, Shiva is encircled by a ring of fire, and the phoenix is reborn after being turned to ashes by fire. Depicted on caveman walls, the power of fire is used to give warmth, dissuade predators, and cook food. Quotations with fire references show up in spiritual documents, such as the following: *“When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and through the rivers, they will not overflow you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be scorched, nor will the flame burn you”* (Isaiah 43:2; New American Standard Bible). This quote from the Bible refers to fire in its destructive form. Other references use it as a force to cleanse. A Buddhist reference to fire as being necessary in its nurturing or survival form, *“just as a candle cannot burn without fire, men cannot live without a spiritual life.”* Other spiritual references to fire are seen in the “tongues of fire” during the Christian Pentecost, and in Shintō “new fire” falls at the New Year (Chevalier & Gheerbrant, 1996). Sometimes, we may not see the fire, but get ready it is coming: *“Where there is smoke, there is fire”* (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Carl Jung stated, *“a symbol does not disguise, it reveals in time”* (1990, p. 483). Over time the symbol of fire has meant many things. It can communicate anger, rage, or destruction. It can be something feared when it destroys or conversely be sought or created when in need of warmth, connection, and gathering. It can represent renewal, love, and passion. Fire can be controlled, or it can be out of control. Fire can kill, or it can support survival. Like many miniatures of symbols, fire can communicate one thing for one builder and something else for another. As a witness, we may also experience the use of fire in our own way or in the context of the world being shared.

Maureen, a female client in her late 20s, built a sand tray world where there was a teepee, and beside the teepee were chairs around a firepit. No one sat on the chairs. The people figures,



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who were to represent family members, were missing. Maureen described the setting as one where the family members knew the world wasn't safe even though sitting around a fire might feel safe to others. The felt safety (not observable to the naked eye) was absent, yet the scene appeared to be a positive one. The absence of people was as important in this world as the presence of fire, which could bring them warmth and protection from threats. However, the fire for this family was not strong enough to combat the lack of safety that was created when they all got together. The threat was not spoken of, but its potential presence was identified and processed by Maureen in later sand worlds.

Four therapists from our worldwide community (whose practice with sand therapy is described as Jungian, humanistic, child-centered, and psychoanalytic in their orientation) participated in this Focus on Miniatures article. They shared that in their work with individuals across the lifespan, fire is used in some of the ways noted above. Fire can communicate connection and attachment or dysregulation. In the context of other miniatures, such as homes, fire can be experienced as violent or even painful. One clinician described fire as being a loss of family or origin issues. Another indicated that in their work with survivors of abuse fire images are often used when processing the specific trauma they survived.

Given that fire images in your collection can communicate many things, it is a miniature that a therapist may want to have in various forms and sizes, such as a campfire or a flaming fire.

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