

The Lighthouse: A Guide for the Journey

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In this study, the psychological meanings of lighthouses were explored through sandplay therapy. In dreams and sandplay, a lighthouse may seem to play a role as a guide for the journey into the inner world. A lighthouse may represent a helper, a secure place like home, a destination, accomplishment of difficult tasks, and arrival after a long arduous journey. A lighthouse in our mind guides us so that we do not repress or neglect our unconscious out of fear.

Keywords Lighthouse, Sandplay, Journey, Inner world

INTRODUCTION

Lighthouses are often found in sandtrays. This has always aroused my curiosity. Why do they keep showing up in sandplay? Why are people who do sandplay therapy so attracted by them? Why do I feel attracted by the lighthouse when doing sandplay?

There is something that lights the dark sea during nighttime navigation: it is a lighthouse. A lighthouse, a type of navigation beacon, is a tower-shaped building located on the seashore or an island that emits light to mark destinations, sea routes, and dangerous spots for ships.

Physical darkness has a psychological parallel in the unconscious in the inner world. From my studies, I understand that the unconscious is vast and deep. It is like the sea surrounding an island called "consciousness" (Lee, 2002). The sea represents the unconscious, and the light represents consciousness. Just as a lighthouse helps sailors to navigate the sea safely, consciousness implies that we remain awake in order to avoid any possible disaster when exploring the unconscious (Kim, 1997). In dreams

or sandplay, a lighthouse may seem to play a role as a guide for the journey into the inner world. From my musings, it seems that a lighthouse may represent a helper, a secure place like home, a destination, accomplishment of difficult tasks, and arrival after a long arduous journey full of difficulties.

What does a lighthouse that lights the dark sea of the unconscious do? Light allows us to see things. In other words, it enables us to be aware of things that we could not be aware of before. A lighthouse guides us inexperienced navigators to safe routes across the dark sea.

HISTORY OF LIGHTHOUSES

The first recorded lighthouse in history was the Lighthouse of Alexandria in Egypt, built between 280 and 247 BC. It reached up to 140 meters tall and looked like a tower. Sometimes called Pharos after the name of the island on which it was erected, this lighthouse was one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World. Forerunners of lighthouses had been built before, as early as 800 BC, on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea. Stones were used to build the early lighthouses and wood was ignited to start fires in order to generate smoke which was visible from a distance even in daytime. As ancient civilizations developed engineering skills, larger structures were built that could guide sailors into harbors. These structures were typically tall statues or temples that could be seen from a distance, but they turned out to be useless at night. Thus a device that could be seen at night was needed. This was how the Lighthouse of Alexandria, the tallest lighthouse in ancient history, came to be built. This lighthouse enabled ships to arrive at their destination without accident by illuminating the sea, just like how a lighthouse in our inner world illuminates

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things of which we were previously not conscious.

The performance of lighthouses improved in parallel with advances in navigational skill and the first modern lighthouses appeared in Europe and North America in the nineteenth century. Western technology spread to other parts of the world, including Korea where previously beacon fires had been lit on mountains or islands to serve as lighthouses (Kim, 2007).

The cylindrical tower design of lighthouses is now ubiquitous and well known, and has evidently become invested with psychological meaning given its frequent appearances in sandplay therapy. Like the axis mundi in many mythologies, the vertical axis of the lighthouse connects heaven, earth, and the underworld; it is a line or direction that an individual follows to reach the level of existence in an intrapsychic way. Moreover, the lighthouse is circular, and a circle is regarded as a symbol of eternity (Turner, 2005).

A lighthouse is equipped with a powerful lighting system to illuminate islands, capes or rocks, which are difficult or impossible for ships to see at night. It is vital for ships to know their exact location when they approach the shore, pass through narrow straits, and change their courses, and when visibility is poor due to rain, snow, and fog. Similarly, a lighthouse in our mind guides us so that we do not repress or neglect our unconscious out of fear.

A navigation beacon is an aid for safe and efficient navigation that indicates the location and courses of ships, danger spots, obstacles, narrow seaways, or any change in course. A lighthouse guides us on our journey into our inner world just like it guides ships to safety.

LIGHT IN THE DARKNESS (BIRTH)

The vitality and essence of a lighthouse is its lantern or lamp. The improvement of lenses along with advances in optical technology have allowed light to shine even farther than it otherwise might (Ju, 2007). The lamp, the core of a lighthouse, creates light in the darkness.

A lamp represents life, sacred light, immortality, wisdom, intellect, guidance, and a star (Cooper, 1978). Lamps and candles represent light and brightness, and these are believed to defeat the powers of darkness. According to the ancient Greek historian Plutarch, the lamps in front of the statues of gods always remained lit; he called them "lamps of eternity" (Choi, 1999). Even in ancient times, light was associated with divinity.

Seeing the light of the world means being born. In the Bible, the Apostle Paul uses the Greek word *Photismos*, meaning "bright light," to describe the Christian rite of baptism. By being baptized a person identifies with Jesus Christ in His death and resurrection, and is reborn spiritually (Romans 6:3-11; Choi, 1999). In other words, seeing the light can mean being born and reborn

in the same moment in time.

It is rather easy to navigate a ship at sea in the daytime, but it is difficult at nighttime because of the darkness. What could the darkness represent here? It could represent the darkness before the creation of the world, the darkness before the hope of rebirth and initiation (Cooper, 1978). The color black is associated with darkness and it can represent the loss of consciousness, death, chaos, fear, depression, and even the Devil. A new ray of light, however, sometimes appears from outside the darkness, and this is why the color black can also mean revival and rejuvenation.

In ancient Egyptian religion Isis, the goddess of the morning, wore a black overcoat that seemed to cover everything, and yet we know from the myths about her womb and her mysterious power to create new life after death. The Black Madonna, found in places of pilgrimage like Einsiedeln, Switzerland; Czestochowa, Poland; and Montserrat, Spain, also emanates this kind of mystery. In alchemy, which Jung likened to a psychological transformational process, black (*nigredo*) is a necessary condition for gaining white (*albedo*) or red (*rubedo*), and the entire process represents the revival of a new life free from depression (Theodor, 2005). In conclusion, darkness is a necessary element of this process.

In the Hindu Vedas, water has the characteristics of the mother. Every living being rises from the water like the sun and goes down into the water in the evening. In Greek mythology humans, who were born in springs, rivers, or lakes, go to the Styx, the river of the underworld, for "night sailing" when they are about to die. The black water of death is actually the water of life, and death in its cold embrace means being inside the mother's womb. It is like when the setting sun seems to be swallowed by the sea, but is soon born again from the mother's womb (Jung, 1985).

The sea encroached on by the darkness, unlike the sea under the sun where we can see everything, makes us pay more attention because of anxiety about what might happen. In complete darkness, our sensory organs work even more keenly, paying attention to outside situations as well as our inner world so that we become able to see even things that we could not see by daylight or things that we did not know before. Whether we are speaking literally or symbolically, when we pay close attention to the dark sea, at some point a ray of light appears, and then our attention and light allow our 'ship' to finally depart slowly.

Beings that emit light symbolize newborn life. Light means the first living creature, the power that drives out evil spirits, and glory, shining, and joy. Hope is made by divine beings or other beings that transport the divine beings. Seeing light means encountering the existent beings (Cooper, 1978). The birth of consciousness means the conclusive and progressive evolution toward light (Neumann, 1959). Furthermore, 'light and dark' are the dualistic aspects of pregnancy, indicating life and love, death and burial, and creation and destruction (Cooper, 1978). The

fact that “being born” can be replaced by the expression “see the light of the world” shows not only how being conscious and a state of consciousness are essential to life, but also how important light as a symbol is to our thinking and speech.

In many myths, light wins the war against darkness and thereby effects the creation or redemption of the world. In ancient Egypt, people lit lamps in front of the statues of gods in many temples. They believed that the light from the lamps represented life and could defeat evil. According to Manichaeism, a dualistic religion that thrived in the Roman Empire in Late Antiquity, the world and mankind originally came from a primordial mixture of light and darkness. Its clergy taught that the redemption of the world and mankind could be achieved by releasing light from this mixture (Choi, 1999).

Similar beliefs are found in the Kabbalah, a Jewish school of mystical thought. The integrity of the sea, representing the maternal instinct, and the night sky occur together repeatedly in *Shekinah*, the divine sea that is born anew every night by the power of night. Zohar, a Kabbalah scripture from the thirteenth century, states as follows:

Morning that comes newly every day represents mankind. Who is born newly everyday, and why? As the scripture says, it happens because of “your great devotion,” that is to say, ‘Shekhina.’ This is fire that dissipates, by which the mankind is born again at night. It is a great thing, not a minor thing that happens, because this sea embraces both of the upper and lower beings (human souls). Besides, it is a great and vast space that embraces everything without letting it overflow. “Every river runs into the sea, which never overflows” says the scripture about it. Every being flows into ‘the sea,’ where every being is embraced without overflowing. And then, the sea makes the beings be newly born and let them go their own ways. This is why your ‘devotion’ is so great (Neumann, 1959).

From these writings, we see a connection with spiritual devotion and the divine. Thus we can see a spiritual connection to the lighthouse.

The common principle seen in countless myths is that there is only one origin of ocean, earth, or sky: the darkness. This primal darkness seems to transform light into the sun, moon, and stars, which are considered to be the offspring of the night mother (Neumann, 1959). The moon and stars seem to be lighthouses in the night sky. We can see the lighthouse connected to creation, protection, transformation, and rebirth.

LIGHTHOUSE AS A GUIDE

A lighthouse functions as a guide that shows ships the way in the dark sea. The sea could also mean the sea of life that we all have to sail across (Cooper, 1978). What does finding a way in the dark sea mean? The way here may be that of self-realization.

When I was eight years old I went to an amusement park with my friends. There was an attraction where illusions of ghosts and monsters frightened people in the dark. When I went inside I was terrified of the darkness and lost my hold on my friend’s hand, which made me even more scared. I started taking slow and careful steps, but then something popped out of the darkness suddenly and I sat down and started crying. Paralyzed by fear, I could not move at all but a staff member came and turned on a light for me, so I felt relief at being able to get out of the place. The light gave me a sense of safety that overcame my fear and enabled me to walk toward the exit.

A lighthouse is the light that crosses the darkness, and the light that comes into the dark world symbolizes hope. Light defeats the darkness and brings hope as the origin and driving force that transforms unconscious contents and processes into conscious thoughts and feelings. Light is libido, spiritual energy, and the strength of creation (Lee, 2002). When light comes into the darkness it reveals the way we should follow, which is like the unconscious turning into consciousness. The ship follows the light across the dark sea to arrive at its destination.

In psychological terms, the recognition of the shadow means the recognition of not only the existence of the shadow, but also the fact that the nature of human beings is that they consist of both light and darkness. In their totality, they constitute the “allness of minds” (Lee, 1999). That is to say, the recognition of the shadow is the starting point of self-realization.

In the process of self-realization, recognition of the unconscious is important. Even when human beings encounter their unconsciousness and failure, they do not fight against it, or explore it, but just run away from it. They, however, tend to show their pride in their external image that remains white and clean to God, themselves, or other people, but they actually owe this to their cowardice, regression, and perfectionism. These type of people believe that they are right because they avoid what they know is not right. However, this behavior does not fill the concrete contents of life, plus they do not know what they can be saved from (Jung, 1995).

Just as it is important to recognize and follow a path when sailing at night, as we would not be able to complete our voyage if we stopped or turned back out of fear of obstacles or rough seas, so we must do it psychologically. In our spiritual journeys, we would not know ourselves if we felt fear about a part of ourselves that we did not know and turned back. The journey into the inner world is not easy at all, therefore we need a lighthouse to guide us.

The symbol of the ship also plays a key role in the journey. A ship simultaneously represents fecundity, life of the sea, productivity, adventure, exploration, life journey, and crossing the sea of death. This means that a ship represents the same thing which a bridge does, that is crossing over from one world to another world

(Cooper, 1978). Also, a “night sea journey,” as a difficult psychological journey is often called, symbolizes a journey into the world of the unconsciousness, the whole individuation process, or the second stage of individuation (Kim, 1997).

“Imagining the brightness does not always bring the brightness to you. The recognition of the darkness brings the brightness, but this is an unpleasant thing to do, so it is unpopular,” said Jung. If we are not conscious of the shadow and neglect it because of our unpleasant feelings, or repress it and become swept away by it, the consequences would be more catastrophic than we think. It is never easy to recognize the fact of our unconsciousness. Acknowledging and understanding our fateful detours and errors are necessary to building the right path toward integrity. The path is not a straight path but a winding and long path that links the opposite extremes. The experience that is thought of as “something hard to reach” is obtained through this path (Lee, 2002). The journey into the inner world is never easy just as navigation is difficult in the outer world. We could be overwhelmed by our unconscious or we might avoid and suppress it. When we are faced with such a dilemma on a difficult inner journey, a lighthouse that appears to us in dreams and sandplay images can be seen as a symbolic guide giving us a sense of stability so that we can complete our troubled voyage.

THE LIGHTHOUSE IN LITERATURE

A lighthouse provides light in the darkness, and represents birth and guidance in developing consciousness. Lighthouses are found in literature, too. The following poem is from ‘A Lighthouse and a Black-tailed Gull.’

*A bitter storm comes over,
the ships are wandering not knowing which way to go
and the lighthouse keeper cannot find the way out of the island.
Thanks to the lighthouse keeper who bears the loneliness,
The ships find and follow a ray of light to the harbor
We, gulls, just like the light from the lighthouse,
shall be the keeper of the vast sea.*

This Korean poem is about a lighthouse. The ships lost in a severe storm represent people who are overwhelmed by their unconsciousness and things they are not aware of.

John Sanford (1982) claims “the shadow tends to attract people because it is full of energy and fascinating.” That is, the shadow is so irresistible that we are easily captivated by it. Once we are captivated, the territory of the shadow expands and it becomes even harder for us to break away from it. But then a ray of light appears in the darkness showing us a way to escape. Similarly, a lighthouse helps ships to find the right way at sea, and guides us to recognize our unconsciousness. The ships begin to

be aware of what lies in the dark sea; likewise, we begin to recognize ourselves in the inner world.

Inseparable from the lighthouse is its keeper. The poem ‘The Lighthouse Keeper,’ written by the Korean poet Ko Un, tells of this person.

*The frozen reflection of the moon sleeps on the waves
The small island draws wild waves
How holy and beautiful is the heart
of the one who keeps the lighthouse*

*The rainstorm, harshly, swoops on the sea
The wild waves, forming a mass, rock the sky and the earth
Even at this harsh night, the heart of the lighthouse keeper
still lights the sea with love and care*

In this poem, the rainstorm that rocks the whole world represents our not recognizing our unconsciousness. The lighthouse here also means guidance in the inner world, with the heart filled with love and care acting as the guide.

CONCLUSION

A lighthouse performs a vital role for boats and ships at sea. Its light guides and enables them to see things in the darkness. If its light were extinguished then everybody would be confused like drivers at an intersection without traffic lights working. This confusion could be very dangerous because ships might lose their sense of direction and strike an unseen rock or other obstacle. Thus a lighthouse enables them to navigate through the darkness safely.

Just as there is a physical manifestation of the lighthouse in our external reality, it has a psychological manifestation too. We would encounter confusion without the lighthouse that illuminates our journeys in the inner world. Without such light, or developing consciousness, we would disregard various parts of ourselves. We might even pretend to be someone that we are not. Contemplating the symbolism of the lighthouse helped me to look into my true self and become ready to mature.

Just as ships that sail the sea need the light from a lighthouse, we need a light to survive in this world. The lighthouse brings things that we did not know before into our lives by guiding us on a journey into our inner world.

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