

## Dolphin: Symbol of rebirth

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### <Abstract>

The purpose of this study was to examine the symbolic meanings of dolphins, which frequently appear in sand boxes. To this end, information about dolphins was researched and their symbolic meanings were explored through the researcher's sand boxes, observation records and reflective journals. The researcher was a woman in her late thirties who was living an exhausting life of child-rearing, household chores, work and education as well as striving to be a capable and professional worker. Through the changes of dolphins in her sand boxes in the sandplay therapy course for three years (more than 200 hours), she was able to overcome her problems and find inner freedom for her soul. For the researcher, the figure of the dolphin symbolized salvation, guidance, collaboration and rebirth.

*Keywords* : symbol, salvation, guidance, collaboration, rebirth

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## I . Introduction

I am an islander. The sea is a daily presence for me. It is my habit to visit the sea when I am tired of life. Sitting on a breakwater, watching the ebb and flow of the sea, my mind somehow becomes calm. Then as I look out over the sea, if I am lucky, I witness the dolphins leaping vigorously from the water. The sea has calmed my mind and now the dolphins give me “strength and passion.” Eventually I head back again into the world, yet I never forget the dolphins. Often when I visit lighthouses to view dolphins, I cannot see them because they are swimming deep under the sea. I like to imagine that they are resting even though they are probably not.

I have long been aware that I carry an image of the sea in my imagination, and in this sea of my mind’s eye there lives a dolphin. At times the dolphin dives deep into the sea and at others it swims vigorously. One day, I suddenly realized that my emotional state and the image of the dolphin were somehow connected to each other. Whenever I felt sad, depressed or tired the image of the deep-diving dolphin entered my mind, and when I became energetic the image of the swimming dolphin occurred to me. As time passed, I realized that the dolphin was myself and I told the diving dolphin, “You’re tired, My mental image of the dolphin is probably a symbolic image that originates from my unconscious. Symbolic representations are attempts to express abstract realities which are invisible to our eyes, that is, representations of invisible energies through visible forms. We cannot understand symbols only with our intellects (Vergote, 1966) as they have an emotional component. Furthermore, the emotional nature of symbols has a power that makes people respond to them repeatedly. Thus symbolic images and human emotions interact with each other in the process of meaning-making (Seo, 2011).

I was shown my depressed or lively emotions that were otherwise invisible to my eyes through symbolic images of the dolphin. Moreover, the dolphin’s symbolic images were changed by unconscious power into conscious power, thereby making me aware of archetypal images that have dynamic power and allowing me to access the power within them.

Meanwhile, just as a dream can show a scene before an event occurs (Jung, Henderson, Franz, Jaffe, & Jacobi, 1964), the symbolic image of the dolphin may have been

unconsciously intended to show me in advance through her image of diving that I would become depressed and that through her image of surfacing and brisk swimming I would become energetic again. It is probable that when I lost vigor and became severely depressed, the image of the swimming dolphin appeared because I needed energy and courage, and when I was in a mad rush for achievement, the image of the diving dolphin appeared because I needed calming and containment.

Consoled by the symbolic image of the dolphin, I obtained energy and passion from her. I became more relaxed and mature, and freer. My experience may be in line with Jung et al. (1964) remark that “symbols exist in order to liberate humans from their modes of existence or make them transcend such rigidity of their existence in any form and lead them to a more detached or maturer state of growth.” In the same context, Jacobi (1968) noted, “Experiencing symbols leads to surprising effects. It resolves humans’ mentally complex problems and liberates their internal personality by enabling them to get out of complexly tangled problems.”

Despite reading such words and understanding them intellectually, I still wondered: How was I able to obtain consolation, energy, passion, composure, and freedom as well as grow through the symbolic images of the dolphin? In order to resolve such a question, I intend to examine why the symbolic images of the dolphin hold meaning for me and what they mean to me. This attempt will contribute to my presentation of evidence that humans can approach archetypes activated in them through symbols which are representations of that archetypal energy.

## II. Method

This study is based on my personal interest and history. I intend to understand the dolphin’s relationship to me through the process of describing and interpreting the symbolic meanings of the dolphin that I myself experienced and what such symbolic meanings mean to me. Through my research I examined information and knowledge about dolphins in the

literature of animals, customs, and general terms and then linked such information and knowledge to sandplay therapy by exploring the psychological meanings of dolphins in sand pictures. Therefore, in this study, I am both a researcher and counselee. The following is an introduction of myself as a counselee.

### **III. Personal history**

I was the third child born to my father, a public servant, and my mother, a housekeeper. My older brother, who was five years older than me, and my sister, who was three years older than me, were brought up receiving a lot of educational attention from my father. As a result, my brother finished learning the Hangul alphabet and the thousand basic Chinese characters before entering elementary school, an outstanding accomplishment.

My brother always studied at a table in his room and my sister would play beside him. When I went to them, my parents told me not to interrupt them and play elsewhere. When I was two or three years old, my younger brother was born. He suffered from a congenital heart condition. My parents did their best to look after him until he became old enough to undergo surgery. Every family member had to be silent in order not to make him cry and allow him to sleep. Therefore I, a young child, had to keep away from him and my mother, who always stayed beside him. Despite her efforts, my younger brother died. I have hazy memories of my parents' sad faces, and their sobbing.

Not long after the death of my younger brother, my mother became pregnant again and my younger sister, who is four years younger than me, was born. Maybe because my younger brother had suffered from heart disease, my mother always worried that my younger sister would have a weak heart too. My mother always held her close even after she became old enough to walk. Thus in my youth I felt isolated from my older brother and sister, who were heart-broken by my younger brother's death, and deserted owing to the birth of my younger sister and my mother's overprotection of her. I became sad and depressed, and maybe had a sense of victimization. Such an emotional state seems to have continued until now, even though I have passed through adolescence into adulthood and become a parent myself.

I entered graduate school right after I got married at age 27. During my master's program, I became pregnant while I was writing my graduation thesis and gave birth to my first child. I gave birth to my second child six months after receiving my master's degree and I got a job one month later. It was not easy for me to rear two children as well as work. Physical and psychological exhaustion slowly came over me. Around that time I suddenly lost my mother due to a traffic accident. When I was an adult, she was a strong support on whom I could rely and my resting place. That disappeared in a moment. My mental wandering became severe. Then my older brother, who had suffered from depression for a long time, committed suicide. I was completely in a panic. In order to overcome my condition, I had to do something. It was the only way I could forget my pain. Just as my father always studied, I thought I should return to study. I reasoned that if I started a PhD course, I would be very busy studying and therefore able to forget my pain.

For two years, once every week, I got on an airplane to fly from Jeju-do to Seoul in order to attend classes. Performing work, housework, and child-rearing together with study seemed effective for a while. However, my exhaustion was worsening; I fell into a deep depression. It gradually became harder for me to engage with my colleagues and therefore I increasingly stayed by myself. At this time, the image of a dolphin diving deeply under the sea began to appear in my mind. I was not able to continue work. I no longer had the will to continue and so I submitted a letter of resignation. Thereafter I happened to have an opportunity to receive training in sandplay therapy and educational analysis.

I undertook sandplay therapy training programs conducted by J Child and Adolescent Counseling Center from February to October 2007 once a week, three times per session, for a total of 108 hours, and by H Society for Clinical Sandplay Therapy from August 2009 to January 2010 for a total of 100 hours. During these programs I made a few sand pictures. My colleagues' records of their observations of my sand pictures, and my own records of the associations as well as photo data were used as basic materials for my study.

This study presents the symbolic meanings of the dolphin in the order of "descriptions as a researcher," "records of observations by my colleagues or records of associations by the counselee," and "interpretations by the researcher."

#### **IV. Characteristics of the dolphin**

Whales and dolphins live in every ocean of the world. There are some species that live in fresh water, though it is rare that they do. However, they did not live in water to begin with. Millions of years ago a species of mammal that resembled a cross between a bull and a wolf lived on a supercontinent that later broke up into Asia, Europe, and North America. Now extinct, this species is called Mesonix and its family is Mesonychidae (Kim, 2010).

As competition for survival with other animals became fiercer, they left the land for the sea. Some of them started to look for food in the water, and generation after generation they came to adapt themselves to the water environment. First of all, they replaced their fur, which obstructed their swimming, with sleek skin and a thick fat layer which kept their bodies warm and allowed them to endure cold water. Adaptations for a streamlined body shape included the disappearance of their ears and the transformation of their front and back legs into pectoral and caudal fins, respectively. Their nares were relocated to their heads so that they could breathe while lying on their backs on the surface of the water. Through this process, the Mesonix evolved into modern whales and dolphins (Kim, 2010).

Beyond this interesting story of their origin, dolphins and whales have a mysterious attractiveness that cannot be expressed succinctly or clearly. They seem to have a mystique or spiritual quality to their natures. People say that they have a beautiful and elegant body and describe them as swimming easily as if sliding. Their eyes are similar to those of human beings. Different types of dolphins have smiling eyes and ambiguous smiles like that of the Mona Lisa. Some say that the attractiveness of dolphins is their excellent intelligence. Looking into their eyes at a close distance makes one feel that they are intelligent and not ordinary animals (Kim, 2010).

At present, dolphins live in coastal sea areas, gulfs, and estuaries of tropical and temperate zone waters between the northern latitude of sixty degrees and the southern latitude of forty degrees. They are largely found in coastal sea areas which are surrounded by land such as the Black Sea, Red Sea, Mediterranean Sea, and the Gulf of California. In Korea, they largely live in the Yellow Sea, South Sea, and the East China Sea, as well as the coastal areas

of Jeju Island.

There are almost forty species of dolphins, but the typical dolphin has grey backs and sides while their abdominal areas are pale. There are distinctive wrinkles between their snouts and foreheads. Their foreheads are steep, with their dorsal fins located in the center of the backs. The dorsal fin is high, large, and sickle-shaped. Its base is narrow and its tip is sharp. Dolphins have about 18 to 26 teeth in the upper, lower, right, and left sides of their mouths. As they age, they often lose their teeth or wear them down.

The largest dolphin ever discovered was 3.9 meters in length and weighed 600 kilograms, but the height and weight is typically 2.7 to 3.3 meters and 300 kilograms or less, respectively. Male dolphins are larger than female dolphins and their size varies according to species. Baby dolphins at birth are 1.0 to 1.4 meters in length. Males become mature at 10 to 12 years (reaching 2.2 to 2.4 meters) and females at 5 to 12 years (reaching 2.4 to 2.6 meters). Their pregnancy period is 12 months, with mature female dolphins giving birth to babies every two or three years and baby dolphins being protected by their mothers for at least one year. Dolphins live up to forty years. When male dolphins grow, they have continuous ties with another male or two and collaborate with them in order to compete with other male dolphins and obtain their mates.

Bottlenose dolphins and Indo-Pacific bottlenose dolphins are the two types found near Jeju Island. Dolphins know where they are and navigate by means of echolocation whereby they emit sounds underwater that bounce off objects to give them a sense of their location.

Dolphins' movement on the surface of the water is very brisk; they often jump, wag their tails, surf, and cleave the water. Sometimes they jump up several meters into the air. They co-exist well with whales, as well as with sharks and marine turtles. Dolphins that live alone stay at the same place for years and occasionally follow small boats.

Dolphins make different sounds. When they are with humans, they change their frequencies to be suitable for humans and try to imitate human sounds. They shout to each other in order to know other dolphins' feelings and listen to each other's bodies. They live in an ocean of synesthesia: they can touch emotions and hear movements, feel songs, and hear electric signals. They can see with sounds (Griffiths, 2006).

For centuries female divers (haenyo) have lived on Jeju Island, where I reside. Collecting various marine products, they encounter dolphins(gomsaegi) that are swimming around in pods and shout at them, “Mulalro Mulalro” or “Baealro Baealro.” The dolphins seem to understand their word and quickly disappear into the water. Moreover, dolphins and female divers on Jeju seem to share each others’ feelings. It was reported that when a diver was searching through coral and caught an octopus, a dolphin playfully held it in its mouth (Min, 2011).

## 1. Dolphin as a symbol of salvation

In many ancient cultures and religions, dolphins were considered as saviors of human souls. They are strong and able to swim swiftly, and so therefore were understood as animals that could bring souls across the sea of death to the other world, often conceived as an Island of the Blessed (Dodohan, 2006).

In modern times, there have reportedly been cases in which dolphins saved the lives of those who were in danger. For instance, there are many stories of surfers who were saved from shark attacks by dolphins. Thus, dolphins are considered as having a symbolic meaning not only as saviors of souls but also as saviors of lives.

### a) Case 1

Four people who were swimming in New Zealand were surprised when six to seven dolphins surrounded them at sea. Previously, swimmers had encountered one to two dolphins but never before had a pod of dolphins been reported as behaving like this. One of the swimmers tried to shoo away the dolphins, thinking they might hurt people. Then he noticed that something huge was approaching behind them. It was a Great White Shark. Fortunately, a nearby patrol ship rescued the swimmers, who realized that the dolphins had surrounded their group in order to protect them from the shark. The dolphins then followed the patrol ship until it reached the shore (Anonymous, 2008).

In Korea, there was a reported case of one dolphin helping another whose life was in danger. An exhausted dolphin was drowning, so the other one pushed it above the surface of



the water so that it could breathe air.

b) Case 2

A whale research team of the National Fisheries Research and Development Institute (NFRDI) photographed a dying dolphin which was being pushed by other dolphins so that it could breathe. The team on their ship witnessed four to five dolphins pushing the dolphin for two hours in the sea near Ulsan. Even when the researchers approached to within two to three meters of the scene the dolphins did not stop pushing their companion. Despite such efforts, the dolphin died and sank into the sea. The research team guessed that the dead dolphin was an adult and its death was a natural death as no external injury was observed (Kweon, 2009).

It seems that the dolphin in me has lived for a long time. When I was young, I would help my friends whenever they were in trouble. At these times, I would ask myself, "How can I console the broken heart of this friend?" Such care and consideration by me toward my friends continued through my childhood into adolescence. Indeed, I was motivated to major in psychology at university in order to learn how to counsel others. I am now a forty-year-old psychotherapist who aids counselees with psychological difficulties so that they may regain the energy to live again. In the process of helping them, I feel happy and fulfilled.

The dolphin in me appeared when I had to help myself during the psychological crisis which I described in my Personal History on pages 5 to 8. After my children started their schooling, I would spend my free time wandering the streets of Jeju City. I spent one-and-a-half years wandering. However, I gradually recovered my composure and realized what kind of life I wanted. It seemed that an imbalance made a greater balance possible (Gilbert, 2006). Wandering amid such a severe imbalance allowed my true self to emerge and I became more comfortable and natural. I realized that I had put on a kind of persona that I could not sustain, and wandering gave me the time to discard those unsustainable elements. I had time to ask myself what I wanted in life. This led to my realization that I had forgotten my true self while living a hectic life with too much attention on the outer world. All the while, my true self had been gradually losing its vitality. My physical and psychological exhaustion, plus my grief at what had happened to my family members, had led to severe

depression. I believe that the dolphin appeared in order to save me during this crisis; that is, my life experience had activated the image of the dolphin diving into the depths of the sea, an image which consoled me.

The thought occurred to me that here was another entity – the dolphin – whose mind, appearance, and emotional state were similar to mine. I felt sorry for her and wanted to console her. I told the dolphin, “You are sad, lonely and exhausted. Take some rest here.” The dolphin answered me, “Thank you. I need time to stay alone. If you permit, I would like to take some rest here.” The thought that I too needed time to be alone struck me at the same moment I told her, “Of course you can. Stay as long as you want. Everyone needs such time.” And I did so. It was a lonely and hard time, but I was able to feel the “strict joy of meeting myself” (Handsard, 2009). I began to think of this phrase, “strict joy,” after hearing an interview with a musician who had named his record after it. This combination of words seems perfect to represent both the joy of meeting myself and the strict discipline and difficult times that went into the process. Such times helped me grow more mature. In order to save my soul in this crisis, I brought out one of the dolphin’s symbolic meanings, “savior.” The dolphin was the savior of my soul.

## 2. Dolphin as a symbol of guidance

Dolphins symbolize saviors and, at the same time, guides that take the souls of the dead to the world over the sea, to the Island of the Blessed. Dolphin guides are mentioned in Greek mythology where they are said to be the messengers of Poseidon, the god of the sea. Amphitrite, the goddess of the sea, rejected Poseidon’s marriage proposal and ran away to another god, Atlas. The dolphin-god, Delphin, gave chase and persuaded her to become Poseidon’s wife, however. Due to such myths, it is said that when a person gives a dolphin as a present to the one he or she loves the dolphin manifests the couple’s love for each other.

In Case 1, dolphins assumed the role of guides: they followed the swimmers who were threatened by the sharks until they were rescued by a patrol ship and then brought safely back to shore. Such behavior by dolphins is reminiscent of their mythical role of bearing souls from this world to a new, blessed world.

Just as the dolphin in me seems to have the role of a guide, the work that I do as a psychotherapist is also that of a guide. A psychotherapist aids counselees in overcoming difficult situations so they can live a healthy life, one in balance. This process can be understood as one of guiding counselees from this world (the difficult world they must overcome) to that world (the world they want).

Throughout my life I had given too much importance to the outer world, and now, as I reached middle age, I needed to connect with my inner world. Therefore it seemed that I had activated the role of the dolphin in me as a guide. The dolphin that approached me, who had lived a life of adapting myself to the values and standards of the outer world, guided me into a life where I discovered the genuine values of the inner world.

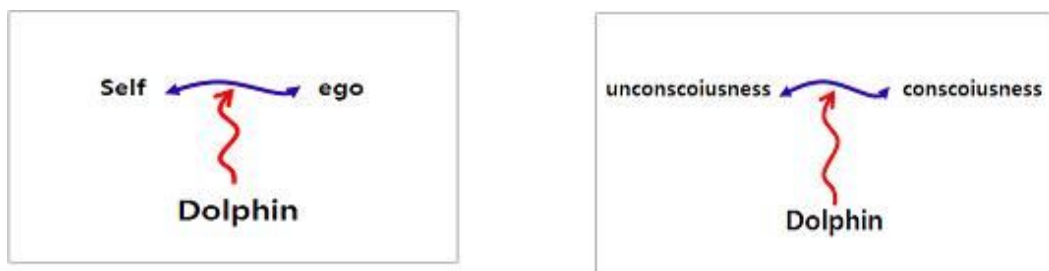


Figure 1. The dolphin that connects my ego and self, my unconscious and conscious

### 3. Dolphin as a symbol of collaboration

Dolphins are considered very collaborative animals. As presented in Case 2, a dolphin pushed another, struggling dolphin above the surface of the water so that it could breathe air. Similarly, dolphins collaborate with humans so that they can catch fish (see Case 3 below).

#### a) Case 3

A lagoon near Santa Catarina, Brazil, is home to a colony of Bottlenose Dolphins. They are famous because they help the local fishermen to catch their fish.

Humans and dolphins working together is a common sight in this area, and happens all year round except for the winter months. According to local records, this type of

cooperation has been documented as long ago as 1847.

One fisherman said that his father and grandfather had worked with the same dolphin. Fishermen wade into the shallow water and stand in a row. The fish they seek lie in waters between them and where the dolphins swim. Suddenly the dolphins turn round and swim toward the shore, driving the startled fish before them. When this happens, the fishermen get ready to cast their nets.

As soon as the dolphins come to within five to seven meters of the row of fishermen they abruptly turn round again and dive. On cue, the fishermen cast out their nets as the fish are caught in the trap between the dolphins and humans (Fandg, 2010).

The dolphin in me also has the characteristic of a collaborator or helper. As I recounted earlier, it was natural for me to help my friends in trouble when I was a young. This instinct has continued into my adult life too as I tend to put off my own work at times in order to help my colleagues who are experiencing difficulties, but it makes me happy. My job as a psychotherapist also involves playing the role of a helper or collaborator. Perhaps this is why I consider my profession as my vocation for life.

Even when I was on my journey from the realm of consciousness to that of the unconscious, the dolphin helped me. When I was afraid and thought about abandoning my journey, when I had to go further into the depths of my unconscious, when I had to confront my shadow, when I had to meet my archetypal father and mother images, the dolphin was always with me. Thanks to her, I was able to realize what I wanted to do and what kind of life I wanted to live.

Looking into my inner world was uncomfortable and frightening. However, I knew that unless I did so, I would not be able to find the meaning of my life. In order to overcome such fear, I seemed to activate the dolphin's role as a collaborator or helper.

#### 4. Dolphin as a symbol of rebirth

Christians interpret the 'big fish' that swallowed the prophet Jonah as a dolphin and use it as a symbol of rebirth (Hanljigi, 2004).

##### a) Case 4

The Prophet Jonah was ordered by God to travel to Nineveh, the capital of the warlike Assyrian Empire and there to prophesy divine judgement against its citizens for their sins. Since Jonah wants God to destroy the city, he is reluctant to prophesy in case the people repent and are saved. Therefore the recalcitrant prophet gets on a ship and sails in the opposite direction to Nineveh. A terrible storm engulfs the ship at sea, though. The sailors pray to their own gods but with no result and finally they draw lots to find out who is responsible for bringing this calamity down upon them. Jonah draws the short straw and confesses that he is responsible as he ran away from God. He insists they cast him overboard to save themselves and they eventually do so. Immediately, the storm abates and the sailors worship God for sparing them. Jonah is swallowed by a 'big fish', possibly a whale, and he spends three days and nights inside it. Inside he prays and repents of his disobedience and he is regurgitated by the fish back onto land. Then God commands him, "Stand up and go to Nineveh." Jonah obeys and goes to Nineveh where he prophesys against the city, and amazingly the people and even their king repent of their wickedness.

In this story the big fish can be interpreted as a symbol of the womb, and rebirth. Indeed, the word "dolphin" is derived from the word "womb." The prophet Jonah is a character who has brought misfortune on others, and has gone into and come out from the big fish's stomach. Afterwards he mends his ways, that is, he is reborn. The psychological terms, "womb honing instinct," and "Jonah complex," originated from Jonah's story. This symptom usually occurs in minors. They show an excessively closed character or display habits from their childhood or degenerative developmental symptoms. This is because they miss the experience of being inside their mothers' wombs and cannot adapt to the outside world.

Such characteristics can be observed in the character of Jacques Mayol in the French movie *The Big Blue*(1988). When the boy was two years old, his mother left him and his father. He was psychologically wounded by her rejection of him and throughout his life he tried to cure this wound. In order to do so, he enters the sea as a mother's womb. The sea and its dolphins do not reject him, but always embrace and accept him. From them, he receives what he should have received from his mother. In part, they are able to heal his wound. However, because they are not human beings, their cure cannot be one like that which

people find in reality. Therefore, he continues to feel uncomfortable and awkward in his relationships with others. He cannot ask questions of people or answer “no” to them because of his fear of being rejected. He cannot even stay with the people whom he loves.

In addition to his fear of another rejection, Jacques faces another difficulty: the sea and the dolphin do not teach him “healthy separation from the mother,” a developmental necessity taught by mothers so their children can live an independent psychological life as a human being. Therefore he cannot leave the sea and the dolphin, even after he has grown up. He always stays around them and remains absorbed in them. Grief from the death of his friend, Enzo, again makes him feel that he has been rejected and reminds him of his mother’s rejection. He remembers this wound with loathing and decides to reject the world. He heads toward the sea and the dolphin that have always accepted him. Jacques leaves behind his girlfriend who is pregnant with his child and dives deep into the sea with the guidance of the dolphin. This is the last scene of the movie.

This last scene can be variously interpreted as Jacques committing suicide or abandoning part of himself for a new birth. The fact that his girlfriend is pregnant with his child strengthens such a symbolic interpretation as the latter.

Personally, I can extend the connection of womb or rebirth to the dolphin as a symbol. Owing to my profession as a psychotherapist, I become the environment that embraces and accepts my counselees and helps them to adapt to the world again. The embracing environment suggests a womb and at the same time the potential for new birth.

While I was leading a hectic life and my true self was losing its vitality, the dolphin in me seems to have endured and waited for the day of rebirth even while diving deeply into the sea of the unconscious. The dolphin in me started to swim vigorously in the sea after sufficient rest. I began to work again and to follow a daily routine in a more leisurely and natural manner than previously, controlling the speed of my life. I manifested the characteristic of the dolphin—rebirth—and was able to change the direction of my life, and I began to live the life that I genuinely wanted.

What made the dolphin in me dive deeply into the sea and stay there, silent? It is hard for a dolphin with its vigorous nature to stay in one place for a long time. I tried to

find the answer to this question, “What has made it possible?” The following story about the dolphin and the anchor suggests an answer.



Figure 2. The dolphin and the anchor

b) Case 5

The Roman emperor Titus engraved a dolphin entwined with a sail on a coin in order to remind his subjects of the virtue of moderation. A sail means slowness and a dolphin refers to fastness. When these two meanings are integrated, they mean moderation between two extremes, that is, “do it quickly step by step.”

Some people are considered to be anchors for others. As an anchor they offer stability for another person. Although an anchor may fail because it is excessively considerate, it has merits in that it guarantees safety and certainty. On the contrary, a dolphin may fail because it hurries excessively, but it is swift and capable of adapting to changing circumstances. Therefore, one needs to acquire the virtue of moderation by observing the merits of both anchor and dolphin. Moderation does not simply mean finding a middle position between two extremes; rather, it concerns the wisdom of adjusting between slowness and fastness, and strength and weakness. Figure 2, shown above, is the coat of arms of a European family whose motto is “Festina lente,” that is, “Hurry slowly” (Lee, 2003).

A sculpture of an anchor and dolphin in Seongsapo harbor on Jeju Island prompts many passers-by to think about the wisdom of moderation that enables adjustment between slowness and fastness.

My energy that caused the dolphin in me to dive deeply into the sea and stay silent

for a long time is probably the power of the anchor that exists somewhere in my psyche. An anchor holds a ship amid a storm and symbolizes stability, toughness, and hope (Mitford & Wilkinson, 2008). I consider that the anchor in my psyche that has held me amid the storms of my life (hardship, frustration, betrayal, and separation), and that has allowed me to dream again, may be the axis of my ego and self.

I have consciously lived a busy life without taking any rest as a means to achieve success or to forget the pain of separation from my mother. Yet it seems that I have brought out the characteristic of the anchor in me in order to stop myself living a hectic life, and I have learned the wisdom of moderation to regulate slowness and fastness and strength and weakness. The juxtaposed images of the dolphin and anchor have helped me to answer my question.

## V. Dolphin in sandplay

The characteristics of the dolphin as a symbol that are explained above are clearly revealed in my sand pictures. As a researcher and counselee, I participated in training in sandplay therapy from February to October 2007, three times per week, for a total of 108 hours, in which I created more than twenty sand pictures; and from August 2009 to January 2010 for a total of 100 hours, in which I created ten sand pictures. I will discuss four sand



Figure 3. Sand picture #1



pictures from each of these workshops because they all contained the dolphin figure. In addition, I completed a sandplay process with an ISST-certified sandplay therapist. I will not discuss sand pictures I created during this process, however.

I have included my observations of my sand pictures and subsequent reflections as recorded in my journal.

*A woman wearing a yellow overcoat and carrying a blue knapsack is walking across a hot desert with a camel. A small dolphin pushes its face out of the sand as though she is playfully encouraging them to cheer up. A mass of red flame in the rear left area of the tray symbolizes passion, energy, desire, and achievement, and a dark blue, flat slice of agate in the left rear part of the tray symbolizes a silent and peaceful rest. The woman tries to maintain silence and calmness in her mind while heading toward the symbol of passion. When she feels overwhelmed by her difficulties and exhaustion in a life full of passion for achievement, she seems to rest silently and peacefully in her inner world.*

*(September 2007)*

The dolphin seems to guide the woman's journey and console her when she feels overwhelmed by her difficulties and exhaustion. Here the dolphin may have the same meaning that is found in ancient Greek mythology when Dionysos, the god of wine and pleasure, transforms himself into a traveler and sails across the Mediterranean. Sailors who did not know his identity tried to kidnap and sell him into slavery. Learning of their plot, Dionysos filled their ship with grape vines and wine barrels. Uttering a magical incantation, he called together wild animals such as leopards and lions, and changed the oars of the ship into snakes. The sailors jumped into the sea in order to escape from the dangers. To punish them, Poseidon, the god of the sea, changed all the sailors into dolphins whose destiny was to guide sailors as they navigated their ships. I regard this myth as the origin of the dolphin energy in my sand picture that guides the woman's journey into her inner world.

Meanwhile I seem to have found a symbol—the dolphin—that represents a link between the deep layer of the collective unconscious and my conscious self. Jung et al. (1964) wrote about a symbol—the fish—that emerges as a transcendent symbol that bridges the collective unconscious and consciousness. This dolphin seems to play the role of delivering

messages from the underground realm to the domain of consciousness (Jung et al., 1964). In order to save me from my chronic exhaustion, the dolphin living in my unconscious emerged into the domain of my consciousness and guided me so that I was able to make a journey of renewal into the unconscious, a journey of soul into my inner world (see Figure 4 below). To me, the dolphin is my guide in this journey and the savior of my soul. Such symbolic meanings of the dolphin are also shown in sand picture #2.

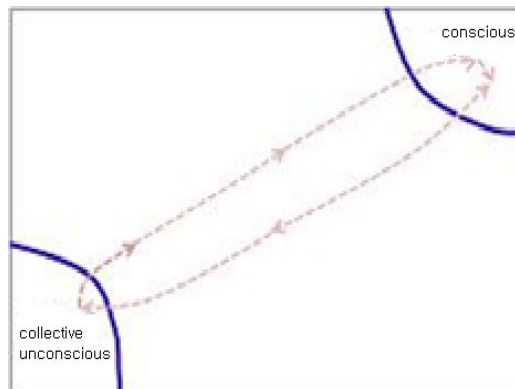


Figure 4. From the domain of collective unconscious to that of conscious, from the domain of conscious to that of collective unconscious.



Figure 5. Sand picture #2

The woman in the yellow overcoat who is carrying a blue knapsack appears again in this sand picture. She is heading toward a white gate. There is a stone wall on the left side of the tray behind her. A blue dolphin within the gate is in the sea. A golden lighthouse is located in the rear center and two small dolphins near the lighthouse are heading toward a round, bronze object. I wrote in my journal:

*My sand picture reminds me of the Ten Ox-Herding Pictures in which a herd boy wanders about looking for his cow. In my sand picture, I feel as though I am heading somewhere looking for dolphins or, more exactly, following dolphins. The stone wall reminds me of a path and many scattered stones that surrounded my house in my youth. There I played alone or with my village friends. The place of that time seems to be the starting point of my journey. When I come back after passing through the white gate and looking at the lighthouse and the dolphin playing and jumping vigorously, I feel that the world I want will be created. The round object seems to be a symbol of an ambiguous expectation that everything will be all right.*

*(September 2007)*

The world beyond the white gate looks like a world where I wanted to go once, a place which aroused both my curiosity and trepidation. In this sand picture, beyond the white gate is a large dolphin that seems familiar and may in fact be me consoling myself. I feel as though the woman transforms into the large dolphin while passing through the white gate. The lighthouse gives light, it seems, so that I can find my way. Perhaps the special ability of the dolphin to find its way under the sea also serves to orient me on my journey in the sea of the unconscious or a journey of my soul. The two small dolphins playing and jumping vigorously head toward the round object which looks like the destination of the journey. The dolphin (the woman or I) that has reached the destination will surely have met her genuine self.

The symbolic images of the dolphin as a harbinger of guidance and salvation, as explained earlier, seem to be within me and appear when my soul is exhausted. In order to save my soul, the dolphin appears to have led me on a journey. Through this journey of my soul, I seem to have approached myself and the life I genuinely want.

In later sand pictures, such characteristics of the dolphin appear more strongly. In

sand picture #3, the woman in the yellow overcoat with the blue knapsack is standing on a triangular-shaped breakwater, looking at the dolphin who appears to be swimming vigorously toward the center of the sea. In the rear right section of the tray, at the end of the breakwater, there is a lighthouse. In the right rear section there is a large silver-gray stone. In the sea are a white shellfish and turban shells. A ship is in the center of the left side of the tray. Towards the rear of the tray are planets. In the near left side of the tray is the dark blue agate lying in a depression made in the sand.



Figure 6. Sand picture #3

I wrote in my journal: The dolphin seems to be myself (October 2007).

Sand pictures #1 and #2 appear to be a preparatory stage for sand picture #3. In other words, I feel as though in sand pictures #1 and #2 I did some deep breathing and



Figure 7. Sand picture #4

warming up, encouraging myself, whereas by sand picture #3 I am finally prepared for a journey into the world of my unconscious. I become a dolphin and enter into that world. Anxious as to whether I can return, I am hesitating on the breakwater, but the lighthouse that illuminates my way offers some hope. What will I (the dolphin) meet on my journey. Sand picture #4 seems to give the answer.

The woman wearing the yellow overcoat and carrying the blue knapsack is at the center of the blue agate with a blue dolphin. I wrote in my journal:

*Me: Dolphin, I have always missed you. When I think about you, I am consoled and I can breathe again. I wanted to follow you but did not.*

*Dolphin: Now, I am with you.*

*Me: Whenever I feel overwhelmed by my difficulties, I think about you and imagine that I become you and dive into the sea. Then, even for a short while, my burdens feel light.*

*Dolphin: Don't be too busy. Then you will be exhausted. Now take a rest. Calmly... At this place.*

(October 2007)

In sand picture #3 I am standing on the breakwater and looking at the dolphin heading toward the sea. It seems that I am not yet courageous enough to leave on my journey into the unconscious. However, in sand picture #4, the dolphin and I are at the center of my unconscious world. It was possible because the dolphin helped me. It seems that the dolphin “collaborated” with me to reduce my fear.

There the dolphin and I had a sincere dialogue with each other about what each of us wanted to say to the other. The dolphin consoled me: “You’re in difficulty? You’re exhausted? Now you take a rest beside me.” After finishing my personal process in sandplay in November 2007 I began to make more time for myself, while still performing the social roles required of me. I learned to refuse others’ requests and tell them that I would not do what was not required of me. I also learned to give up “big” social accomplishments that were motivated by my desire and to enjoy “small” accomplishments. I enjoyed again what I did in my youth and, as a result, I became reinvigorated. I felt that I was reborn thanks to the dolphin’s consolation and guidance.

Two years later I felt ready to begin my second sandplay therapy training, and at that time I also created some sand pictures in which the dolphin appeared. Sand picture #5 below reminded me of sand picture #3 that I created in 2007. Perhaps my soul and spirit were yearning for another “sublime, thirst-quenching” spiritual experience (Jung et al, 1964). Perhaps I was not strong enough to confront my issues again on a deeper level.



Figure 8. Sand picture #5

In the rear corner of the right side, there is a lighthouse and below it there are smooth pebbles. In the diagonally opposite area of the tray the blue agate appears again. This time there is a white dolphin on it.

Now, without hesitating any longer, I become the dolphin and depart on a journey into the unconscious through my imagination. However, I am very afraid that I will not be able to come back from my journey. I express my fear to my sandplay teacher who says, warmly, “Don’t worry. Depart on the journey and come back. The lighthouse will illuminate your way back. Feel at ease and come back after having fun to the fullest.” At that moment, a flash of insight struck my heart and mind. “I can trust myself. I will come back. I can come back. Don’t worry and have fun to the fullest. I will go to the places I did not go because of my fear. Don’t worry. There is the lighthouse that will guide my way back.” My body and heart were full of joy and excitement. The last part of Murakami Haruki’s novel *Kafka on the Shore* (2003) came to me:

*Times with significance come to me all together at the same time like old dreams with many meanings. You continuously move in order to escape from such times. Even though you reach the end of the world, you will not be free from such times. Even though you try so, you will not be able to go to the end of the world. There are things that cannot be done without reaching the end of the world. Before long, you fall asleep. When you open your eyes, you have become part of a new world (p.455).*

With this in mind, I resolved to travel to the end of the world and so I departed on my journey. “The awful daring of a moment’s surrender, which an age of prudence can never retract.” (Eliot, 1963, cited by Jung et al, 1964). “The body seemed to have a spirit of compassion” (Jung et al, 1964).

The dolphin guided me again from my conscious world to the realm of the unconscious, and she saved me by discovering and resolving or healing some unresolved tasks and psychological wounds which still existed in the unexplored country within my spiritual world. Such symbolic images of the dolphin as a harbinger of guidance and salvation are clearly revealed in sand pictures #6 and #7.



Figure 9. Sand picture #6

At the center of the sand mound in the center of the tray is an erupting volcano with a flame at its peak. The inside of the volcano, previously empty when it stood on the shelf, is filled with gems that now also stud the sand mound. The gems are not visible unless one lifts the flame and looks inside. A transparent white dolphin is kissing the volcano.

*Sand picture #6 is the scene where the dolphin lets me face my sense of inferiority. The dolphin is kissing the active volcano that may erupt at any time. The volcano seems to be consoled by the dolphin with warmth. To the dolphin that is not afraid of it, the volcano says this: "I am not so bad. Even though I am hot and simmering, my insides are not. It is filled with beautiful gems. If you genuinely know me, you can see and touch my gems."*

*(August 2010)*

When the red flame of the volcano is lifted, the volcano has transparent gems in it. Then the gems overflow from the volcano and become embedded in the sand mound, where they start shining. The dolphin that approached the volcano with courage was able to see and touch the gems. The dolphin realized that I had the capacity and courage to confront my sense of inferiority. By doing so, I saw that it was not something frightening; rather, it was beautiful, as symbolized by the shining gems. I realized that although the shadow has unpleasant and destructive aspects it also has precious aspects, like normal instincts and creative impulses (Jung et al, 1964). As Jung said, the self contains all, including the opposites.

Nevertheless, the ego conflicts with the shadow. According to Jung, it is a "struggle for emancipation." It is revealed in sand picture #7 too.



Figure 10. Sand picture #7

A female figure without facial expression, staying without any movement, represents the shadow elements of depression, sadness, and loneliness. A dolphin in the opposite side of the tray faces the expressionless figure. The two are connected with dense golden petals.



*When I am depressed, I look for you. Then I become you and dive deeply into the sea. Sinking deeper into the sea and staying quiet for a while, I feel alright again. Thank you for protecting me. However, suddenly, I become afraid from time to time that I will not be able to come back from the sea that I entered while following you. No, I am afraid of forgetting to come back from the sea because I might like the place better. So I am afraid that I will become you and live deep under the sea.*

*(August 2010)*

Around the time I finished conversing with the dolphin, my spiritual world underwent an upheaval. I realized that the shadow had given me time to take a rest and had advised me persistently not to stay, but to go out and play in order to become freer and more joyful. I had been receiving gifts from the shadow and yet I did not know it. At the moment I realized it, I was not afraid of the shadow any longer. After all, I “recognized the existence of the shadow and realized that I had lived drawing out some energy from it” (Jung et al, 1964). At that moment, I felt that I had an epiphany that surpassed my ego consciousness through this new relationship with the destructive power of the shadow by overcoming and assimilating it (Jung et al, 1964). It was such a holy experience!

Through this experience, I came to know that the shadow was my companion, an energy that I must allow to accompany me and even try to integrate, whether I liked it or not. Knowing I must accompany it, sometimes yield to it, resist it, and placate it, I have access to its energy. The shadow becomes a destructive force when it is ignored or misunderstood (Jung et al, 1964).

The dolphin ran a risk in guiding me to my shadow—my sense of inferiority, anger, depression, sadness, and loneliness—and saved me from them. The dolphin accompanied me on the journey with pleasure. This is probably the collaborative energy that is one of the symbolic meanings of the dolphin. Sand picture #8 represents my return after the completion of the journey.

The golden petals are brightly welcoming the dolphin's return. The lighthouse is also illuminating the way brightly. The dolphin that was left alone is no longer alone. The five small dolphins are following and cheering her. Behind them, the shadow in the form of the faceless woman seems to watch them proudly.



Figure 11. Sand picture #8

Sand picture #8 seems to echo the tenth of the Ten Ox-herding pictures (ipjeongsusu, 入塵垂手), in which a cowboy who came home to find his cow then went out into the world to help other people.



Figure 12. The 10th picture from the ten ox-herding pictures.  
(Source of the photo: <http://blog.daum.net/mirine19/17204629>)

With my chest wide open, I walk into the market with a big smile, though I am covered all over with mud and ash. A dry tree spontaneously blossoms without the magic of a mountain wizard. Entering the streets of stores, I move along with the public of the mundane world and look like a sage. ... The circle becomes complete by returning to its beginning. If a person departs from this world, he is complete only if he has finished in this world. We

should finish in this world if we wish for achievement at the end of our journey. I returned to the public. The world is where one both starts and finishes. Now I help the public. ... Brightness and joy follow me. ... All trees blossom on the paths I travel.

After I (the dolphin) returned from my journey of self-discovery into the inner world, I began to enjoy inner freedom and was able to draw upon my inner reserves of courage and vitality so that I could live with others in this world. Indeed I was reborn and thanks, it seems, to the power of rebirth that is one of the symbolic meanings of the dolphin.

## VI. Conclusion

To me, an islander, the sea is a fence like the presence of a mother. I have identified myself with the dolphin, a familiar animal living in the sea, and therefore have been able to resonate with her symbolic image. The dolphin connected my world of the unconscious and my world of consciousness (guidance) and saved me from the danger of a very weary conscious life (salvation). Moreover, it helped me to balance myself when I was in a psychological imbalance (collaboration) and through the process I was able to be reborn (rebirth).

The dolphin is travelling in me, and in the process both small and large and diverse growth and change are continuously take place. Although it is difficult and frightening from time to time, I trust the dolphin's characteristics that exist in me and I am confident that this journey is a journey of hope.

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