

**Focus on Miniatures:
The Presence of Trees in the Sandtray**
by
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Trees hold meaning in many faiths and cultures. In the book of Genesis, we learn of the Tree of Knowledge (King James Bible, 1769/2008). This tree grows in the Garden of Eden, representing both wisdom and temptation. The tree of life grows next to this tree. The tree is a concept taught by Kabbalists who share a diagram of the 10 Sefirot, referred to as the language of the branches (Solomon, 2022).

Hindus also hold tree symbolism. The roots are associated with the creator of the universe, the protector and preserver of the universe are associated with the tree trunk, and the destroyer is connected to tree leaves (Jennings Roth, 2016). Buddhists believe that the Bodhi tree is the tree of enlightenment.

For more than a month, Siddhartha meditated beneath a fig tree in Bodhi Gaya, India. After 49 days, he stood from his meditative position. He thanked the tree for its shade and found enlightenment. It was then that he became the Buddha, or the enlightened one. The fig tree that sheltered The Buddha took on great significance as the Buddhist religion developed. Just as Siddhartha became the Buddha, the tree became the Bodhi tree, or tree of enlightenment. (Study.com, 2022)

In Ireland, some Ash or Hawthorn trees, known as fairy trees, are believed by some to be portals to the otherworld. People will tie ribbons in hopes that wishes may be granted by fairies. These trees or bushes are so revered that people go to a great extent to dare not disturb their growth. The land where the tree or bush stands is considered sacred (Deegan, 1999). If one visits Tara (County Meath, Ireland), a fairy tree that sits on the hill can be observed. This tree is associated with the high king of Ireland and even St. Patrick though it may be toppled by the weight of years of ribbon dressing that is now discouraged by the Tara Skryne Preservation Group (O'Shea, 2019).

Unsurprisingly, trees appear in sandtrays created by builders of all ages. Therapists who utilize sandtray in their practice were asked in a Facebook group how trees are used. Of these therapists, two identified as practicing Adlerian Sandtray, two Client centred/Person centred sandtray, and one Jungian sandtray therapist. They work with a range of individuals (under 10 to 65 years of age) as well as groups and families. These practitioners identified that tree miniatures are used by builders to provide support in the areas of:

- female power
- trauma or traumatic memories family dynamics
- family of origin issues and family dynamics
- connection with nature
- flourishing, growth, or lack thereof.

They also identified that female clients used the tree miniature to represent their core self, often placing it in the center of the tray, particularly when doing parts of self-work. Overall, therapists identified that trees reflected the themes of growth, hope, and family. This is not surprising given we, as both builders and witnesses' have our own life cycle with experiences that can be both positive and negative.

Gisela De Domenico recommends that therapists have trees in their sandtray collection "reflecting the lifecycle from seed to barren branches to broken branches" (De Domenico, 2004, p. 4". This writer encourages students to have tree symbols made of various materials as well as natural wood twigs and leaves. Outside the sandtray room, it is also recommended to observe trees, touch trees, plant trees, and experience the powerful symbol of trees both in and outside the sandtray, so we are aware of whose experience is showing up in the world.



Go Plant A Tree – by Ella Wheeler Wilcox

God, what a joy it is to plant a tree,
And from the sallow earth to watch it rise,
Lifting its emerald branches to the skies
In silent adoration, and to see
Its strength and glory waxing with each spring.
Yes, 'tis a goodly, and a gladsome thing
To plant a tree.
Nature has many marvels, but a tree
Seems more than marvellous. It is divine.
So generous, so tender, so benign.
Not garrulous like the rivers; and yet free
In pleasant converse with the winds and birds.
Oh! privilege beyond explaining words,
To plant a tree.
Rocks are majestic; but, unlike a tree,
They stand aloof, and silent. In the roar
Of ocean billows breaking on the shore
There sounds the voice of turmoil. But a tree
Speaks ever of companionship and rest.
Yea, of all righteous acts, this, this is best,
To plant a tree.
There is an oak (oh! how I love that tree)
Which has been thriving for a hundred years.
Each day I send my blessing through the spheres
To one who gave this triple boon to me,
Of growing beauty, singing birds, and shade.
Wouldst, thou win laurels that shall never fade?

(This poem is in the public domain.)

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Additional Resources

Tree of Life: the ladder of transformation Course from Kaballah Centre - <https://www.kabbalah.com/en/online-courses/lessons/3589-lesson-1-malchut/>

History of World Religions. Study.com
<https://study.com/academy/course/history-of-major-world-religions-study-guide.html>