

Ancestral Soul Work: Sandra Easter, PhD, in Conversation with Bonnie Bright



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BB Hello everyone and welcome to Depth Insights™, where we take a depth psychological look at news and events going on in your world. I'm your host, Bonnie Bright and am also the founder of Depth Psychology Alliance™, and I'm happy to be here with my guest today, Sandra Easter, who is the author of *Jung and the Ancestors: Beyond Biography, Mending the Ancestral Web*. Sandra offers workshops in ancestral soul work and transformational visioning for individuals and organizations, and we'll talk more about what Sandra does, but meanwhile, Sandra, thank you so much for being here with me today.

SE Bonnie: It's good to see you and thanks for this opportunity to talk about my work and the upcoming Jung and Spirituality Conference.

BB Yes, I'm really excited about that, so let's talk about that first because I think that's an exciting event that's coming up. Sandra, you're going to be presenting at this conference. It is the C. G. Jung Psychology and Spirituality conference. It's going to be in Santa Fe, New Mexico, and it starts June 9th, 2017, and of course, you'll be presenting on ancestral soul work, which is what we're here to talk about.

And also, you'll be doing some exciting experiential work. So, that brings me to the question of the format of the conference which is really kind of unusual in the sense that it's not going to be the type of conference where you show up and take notes on lectures necessarily, but there is so much more to it. It's been designed to be an interactive format where there is going to be a lot of meals will be shared together. There will be dream circles, talking circles. We'll

make excursions out into the community, into the arts community. I think participants will be able to visit some of the ancestral pueblos around Santa Fe which are so remarkable.

And of course, you and I first met in Santa Fe many years ago. We were just discussing that. It's a very special place for me. And definitely, the power of the land and the history that's there is remarkable as well.

So maybe as we start here, I do want to share your bio in just a moment, but I wanted first to capture your thoughts or expectations about the conference itself and this unique format. It's a very participatory and experiential format and I think that fits so well with the work that you're going to be doing there and will really be a wonderful benefit for participants. What intrigues you most about that format?

SE Well, I think it's very unusual for a group of Jungians to come together in a place where nature is so integral; Nature itself is a participant. And this is very experiential. Whereas at the JSSS [Jungian Society for Scholarly Studies] conference last year, one of the things Jerome Bernstein—(who will also be there; It's worth going to this workshop just to be with him)—but one of the things that he said is we really need to have conferences and workshops that are experiential. So, people can experience what we're talking about: Like really have the experience of it.

So, this format is unusual in a couple of different ways. One is that all of the people who are presenting and all of the participants will be there for the entire time. So there really will be a community that's formed—a *conscious* community formed around the theme of the conference. And each person—presenters and participants—bring who they are and what they know.

So I have this sense—especially when we're sitting in dream circle or when we're sitting in the council circle—although there are those of us who will be presenting material and creating experiences for people, we are all equal members of this group. Being on the land and a relationship in the land in this way; being in community in this way where there really is something that builds, I think will have an impact not only on the people who are there but actually will kind of reach out and extend into the world.

It's that idea of when consciousness shifts even in one person, it has an impact in the greater web of being. And we're talking about a group of people who work in this way of Jungian psychology, coming together and really consciously being in relationship with each other, with the material, and with the land. I'm really, really excited to see how things unfold. I think there are going to be lots of surprises. When you're in ritual, who knows what's going to happen?

And there's a whole afternoon devoted to—for those people who want to—to go into Bandelier National Monument, which is an amazing site. Ancestral pueblo people lived there. And so there are cave paintings, rock paintings, and

you can actually see where living spaces were carved into the rock there. And I think just being on that land and being open in the way that, by the time we go there-- I think it's on Thursday-- we'll have talked about listening to ancestors and the land, being in relationship with the land and with nature. And so I imagine this being an extraordinary experience and kind of like a walk-about for people who are open to that. And then we'll come back and sit in council circle before we go to bed and share experience. And really, when I think about it, I mean my heart starts racing because I'm very excited about doing this! It's really what can be known through this kind of community sharing.

BB Yeah, it's really exciting. I just love the whole idea of being able to immerse oneself into this kind of a community experience and I think you said it so well: It's not even just the relationships that can develop between participants, who do tend to get close when you go through these kinds of experiences and events together, but also the relationship with the nature that we're going to be in the middle of, and also the land itself, which is so, so powerful—just to return to that. So, I'm really excited about it.

I'm just thrilled actually that this is coming together in the way that it is and that it is an opportunity for those who can make it to be able to do something, I think, not only good for themselves but also the work that each one of us does individually, of course, has an effect on the collective and I think it's a really powerful way to be able to put some focus on the culture itself and the collective and what needs to emerge in the collective at this point in time. And so, very exciting work!

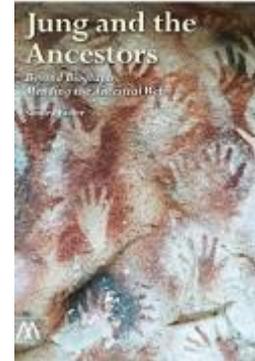
Well, let's talk a little bit about what you're going to be presenting about because I think this plays right into it. It's very much connected. But— let me read your bio first, Sandra, so that everybody has some background on you, and then we'll talk a bit about ancestral work and what that means to you.

Sandra Easter has an M.A. in Applied Psychology from the University of Santa Monica and a Ph.D. in depth psychology from Pacifica Graduate Institute. She's trained in the process of council, indigenous African spiritual technologies, Dream Tending, and therapeutic uses of puppetry. In addition to providing individual and group counseling, Sandra has worked nationally with diverse groups in both urban and rural communities, Washington D.C., Philadelphia, Baltimore, New York, Seattle, and rural Louisiana, providing education, advocacy, and community organization support for 35 years.

She is adjunct faculty at Pacifica Graduate Institute and she maintains a private practice in Denver, Colorado and offers workshops in ancestral soul work and transformational visioning for individuals and organizations. Her creative approach to teaching and counseling is informed by her love for and training in modern dance, puppetry, storytelling, and indigenous ways

of knowing. The foundation of her work lies in the experience of a natural, undivided relationship between embodied world and psyche.

Sandra is the author of *Jung and the Ancestors*, as I mentioned, and by exploring the unconscious psyche as the ancestral land of the dead, Easter argues that we can find greater meaning for our lives and better understand our own personal myths. *Jung and the Ancestors* is an important contribution to psychology, focusing on an area of Jung's thought largely overlooked, yet rendered increasingly significant in the wake of the publication of his *Red Book*.



So, I don't know really where to start with that except to just maybe ask you, Sandra, if you would start us off by maybe making the connection between how ancestral work—and I think that a lot of people who are watching or listening to this will know basically what that means—but maybe just a framework for that, to share with us about how ancestral work fits with Jungian psychology.

SE Yeah, great questions. The first thing I want to say is it's good to be old and have life experience. It's always humbling to hear my biography and it's like, yeah I do that. What's interesting is the book is based on the work I did for my dissertation. And, at the time I was working on that, I noticed that something was happening in the collective. There was a series that was on called “Who Do You Think You Are?”, and people were tracing the roots of their ancestors. And what I love about that program is that, even the smallest piece of information that someone can gather about their ancestors changes the way they see themselves and deepens their understanding of their purpose.

It also reveals where there's healing work to be done, and where Jungian psychology not just compliments, but provides the foundation for understanding the relationship that we have in the present with not only our ancestors but the ancestors yet to be born, our descendants. Jung's work provides the theoretical framework for understanding that in a way that it can be applied psychologically and in one's personal life.

So, let's say someone has experienced trauma. It's kind of interesting: most of the people I work with have experienced some kind of significant trauma, and our framework is often limited to the perspective of our personal and immediate family, sometimes grandparents. You know it's like, “Oh, there's a pattern of addiction” or “There's a pattern of sexual molestation,” but we only go back as far as our grandparents. That's typical psychology. What Jung's work does is it opens up the field to all the different levels that this trauma may actually have resonance and exist. And without going into the detail, by working with it in that way, real healing can occur.

There's a great book called *The Alchemy of Illness* by Kat Duff, who's a Jungian analyst. And she shares her personal story. And she was suffering from Chronic Fatigue Syndrome. And she did absolutely everything she could possibly do. She still was symptomatic, and that did not heal until she talked with a shaman who told her that what she was experiencing in her body was what the land had experienced, and her great—I believe, it was great or great-great-grandfather—removed the Sioux from that land by force. [tearfully] I'm sorry. This is unexpected.

But by doing ritual and addressing that ancestral trauma, she could then heal in her own body. And that's what moves me the most about this work because it's about so much more than just working with our own not only trauma but our own purpose by putting it in this larger context that Young's theory and especially the red book provides. I believe that the healing—and it's in my experience that the healing can extend through generations.

And that's one of the things that's exciting to me about being on this land. I think Santa Fe is a very special place. And my hope is that we will come together and listen in a way that allows the possibility for healing at so many levels. And God knows this is a time when this land and the people on this land are just crying out for adaptive healing. That's really captured in Kat Duff's story.

BB Yes, thank you for sharing that story because I felt very moved as well when you mentioned that. And I think a lot of the time, we don't even know what this grief is that we carry. When it arises like that, we don't know where that's coming from some of the time. Now, I think in this case you did, but all of us are carrying these kind of unresolved emotions at all times. And I think that there's a lot to this idea of disenfranchised grief—where we are not conscious of it and yet, we do carry it, and it has often been passed down through the generations. And access to Jung's collective unconscious—to that field, as you mentioned—is important, because it is a way for us to get into that, and come into some kind of relationship with it. Even if we can't sort of consciously know or hold what it is, it provides a way for us to begin to see it and know it.

SE Yes, and I think, in imaging grief in that way in that larger context, creates a different kind of field. Something different happens. And it's hard. I mean, people want answers sometimes. And I think we move into that field where it's a mystery. And we do what we know we can do. And then they never understand all of the ways that it affects things. But with the grief, [Jungian] Fred Gustafson wrote a beautiful book called, *Dancing Between the Worlds*, and he talks about the relationship that people who are living in this land have with the indigenous people, the Native Americans. And there's such a traumatic history that has yet to be reconciled and he says that it's the grief that unites us. You know, shame, and blame, and guilt, anger, those are all normal totally understandable human feelings around the trauma that's

happened to the people of this land and the land itself. But grief is what unites us all. Those tears that are--every time tears are shed, I believe there's some healing that's occurring.

BB Yes, that's a great way to look at it. Well, part of your presentation, Sandra, at the conference, is going to be that experiential piece that we mentioned. It's going to focus on building ancestral altars and I actually neglected to mention the title of the conference this year is "Nature and Soul: Cultivating a Partnership with the Wholeness of All," which I really love. So maybe you can share a little bit about what it's going to entail to be building an ancestral altar and how this can contribute to the idea of cultivating a relationship with the wholeness of all.

SE Yes. In the morning, what I'll be doing is basically laying the groundwork by talking story and presenting some of Jung ideas and theories. And then, in the afternoon, what we'll be doing is creating a collective ancestor altar. So, people will be bringing pictures of their ancestors, objects, and we will create a community collective altar. We will then sit in circle and again—I have a basic format that I use; however, in the moment things will change because that's the nature of ritual. So we'll sit in circle and kind of create that container among ourselves in relationship to this community altar. People take a break and then what people will have an opportunity to do is to go out into nature or stay in the room, wherever they're comfortable, and create a personal ancestor altar. And they will be taking objects from the group altar. So, we'll carry that energy of the collective and finding a place to set it up—and I'll give people clear instructions and ideas about how to do it-- and they will be in a personal dialogue with the ancestors. Whatever that means to them and however that occurs. And it's great to do it in nature because—in my experience, I always do this in nature with people when I can—a hawk will fly over; or all of a sudden, a tree branch will fall; or an ant will come crawling up your leg; and that's part of the dialogue. People will then—after having time to do that—we'll come back again, sit in circle again, and share using the council process. Those people who want to share anything about their experience will share.

What my experience is in doing it in community in this way is that it's beyond synchronicity. One person will share something and then it will touch something in another and the awareness just keeps unfolding. It's very exciting; I *love* doing this work with people, and especially with this group of people in this place.

BB Yes, well, with this kind of experiential work...Again, it's not something that you can get through this kind of direct transmission if you're not actually in the experience of it itself. You could stand up there and lecture all you want about it and talk about it, and the information might be really interesting and fascinating, but until people are able to embody that, and to be *in* that, and to

receive that wisdom and understanding and experiential piece of it on their own, it doesn't have the same kind of impact, sure.

SE Really. And that's the basis of Jung's work. It's wonderful that we have *The Red Book* now because everything that he wrote came from his experience, and one of the things I love about doing this work with people is that I'm always learning. There's always something new that happens and I'm like, "Oh, my gosh." So, yeah. Experience!

BB Good stuff. Well, I'm really excited about all of this, Sandra. I just so want to honor your work that you've been doing because it is really powerful work and, frankly, we need more of it in the world and so it's lovely to just see you taking up that mantle and being able to bring this to those who maybe are not as aware or able to do the work all by themselves. So you're truly a guide and just a wonderful model, I think, for people to be able to start to get in touch with their own ancestors—and nature altogether—because, of course, they are so intrinsically connected.

SE I really want to acknowledge Malidoma Somé and the work that he's doing, because my work is situated not only in Jung's work, but in everything I've learned from Malidoma. So for me....I'm actually feeling his ancestors as I share this. It was very important for me to also bring his name and the spirit of his people into this conversation.

BB That's beautiful and we have that in common. I know Malidoma as well and the work that, again, he's doing, like you, to bring this in is very unique and much needed, so thank you for that, that's wonderful.

I've been speaking with Sandra Easter who is the author of *Jung and the Ancestors: Beyond Biography, Mending the Ancestral Web*, and, of course, Sandra will be presenting at the C. G. Jung Psychology and Spirituality Conference in Santa Fe, New Mexico, which takes place June 9th through the 16th of 2017. Thank you so much, again, for your time today, Sandra.

SE Thank you, Bonnie.

Get links to watch or listen to the interview at <http://www.depthpsychologyalliance.com/profiles/blogs/ancestral-soul-work-a-conversation-with-sandra-easter-phd>

Get details or register for the Conference at www.JungConference.org



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Bonnie Bright, Ph.D., earned her doctorate in Depth Psychology at Pacifica Graduate Institute. She is the founder of [Depth Psychology Alliance](#), an online community for everyone interested in Jungian and depth psychologies, and of [DepthPsychologyList.com](#), a free-to-search database of Jungian and depth psychology-oriented practitioners. She is also the creator and executive editor of [Depth Insights](#), a semi-annual scholarly journal, and regularly produces audio and video interviews on depth psychological topics. Bonnie has completed 2-year certifications in Archetypal Pattern Analysis via the Assisi Institute; in Indigenous African Spiritual Technologies with West African elder

Malidoma Somé; and she has trained extensively in Holotropic Breathwork™ and the Enneagram.