

Mandalas: Making Order Out of Disorder

From *The Soul's Palette; Drawing on Art's Transformative Powers for Health and Well-Being*, by Cathy Malchiodi, © 2002, Shambhala.

The mandala is one such centering space for the self and the soul. Mandala is a Sanskrit word for "magic circle." For thousands of years the creation of mandalas, circular and often geometric designs, have been a part of spiritual practices. Almost every culture has revered the power of the circle and circular forms are found at sacred sites throughout the world. You probably know many of them-- Stonehenge and the circular maze at the base of Chartre Cathedral in France. Spiritual seekers have created mandalas to bring forth the sacred through images and have evoked the circle in ritual and art making for the purpose of transcendence, mindfulness, and wellness.



Making a mandala simply means creating an image within any circular space. Self-created mandalas are reflections of your inner self in the moment and are symbolic of your potential for change and transformation. Carl Jung is credited with introducing the concept of the mandala to Western thought and believed that mandalas represented one's total personality. Art therapist Joan Kellogg spent much of her life developing a system of understanding the wisdom of the mandala called the Great Round. She believes that there is self-knowledge about body and spirit reflected in the forms and patterns, particularly about your current emotional context as well as body and spirit.

Mandala making, whether drawing, painting, or through three dimensional media, is often an experience similar to meditation. I find it easy to *slip off* both time and space when drawing a mandala. In the therapeutic work I facilitate with individuals, I often "prescribe" mandala drawing as a form of stress reduction for a troubled heart in times of emotional chaos.

The following materials are helpful in beginning your visual exploration:

- * Several sheets of 12" x 12" white paper; while you can use any size sketchbook, this is a good size to start with;
- * Oil pastels or colored chalks (try both; you may prefer one over the other, depending on how detailed you want to make your drawing);
- * A round plate (about 10 inches in diameter) to trace a circle or use a compass;
- * A graphite pencil to sketch in any preliminary designs or images);
- * A ruler (for making precise straight lines).

Beginning on the sheet of white paper, use pencil to trace the plate or use a compass to make a circle. You can also draw the circle freehand if you wish. Using the drawing materials you have selected, fill in the circle in any way you want, using colors, lines, and forms. You can start at the center or the edges of the circle; you may also want to divide up the space within the circle in some way. You may want to create a pattern or fill the space with a variety of shapes and colors. You may also want to go outside the confines of the circle; if you want to extend your image outside the circles boundaries, feel free to do that, too. There is no right or wrong way to draw your mandala, so add to your drawing until you feel that it is complete.



When you have finished your drawing, mark the top of your paper or an arrow on the back to mark the orientation. Give your image a title if one comes to mind, writing it on front or back of the drawing. Think of the mandala space as sacred and draw consciously from a quiet place inside you that contains your true goodness and compassionate self. If no image comes to you, start by drawing an image of a simple heart shape within your circle and let the rest grow from your intuition. Consider making this image your source for meditation or as the beginning of a series exploring your heart's capacity to give and receive loving-kindness.

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