

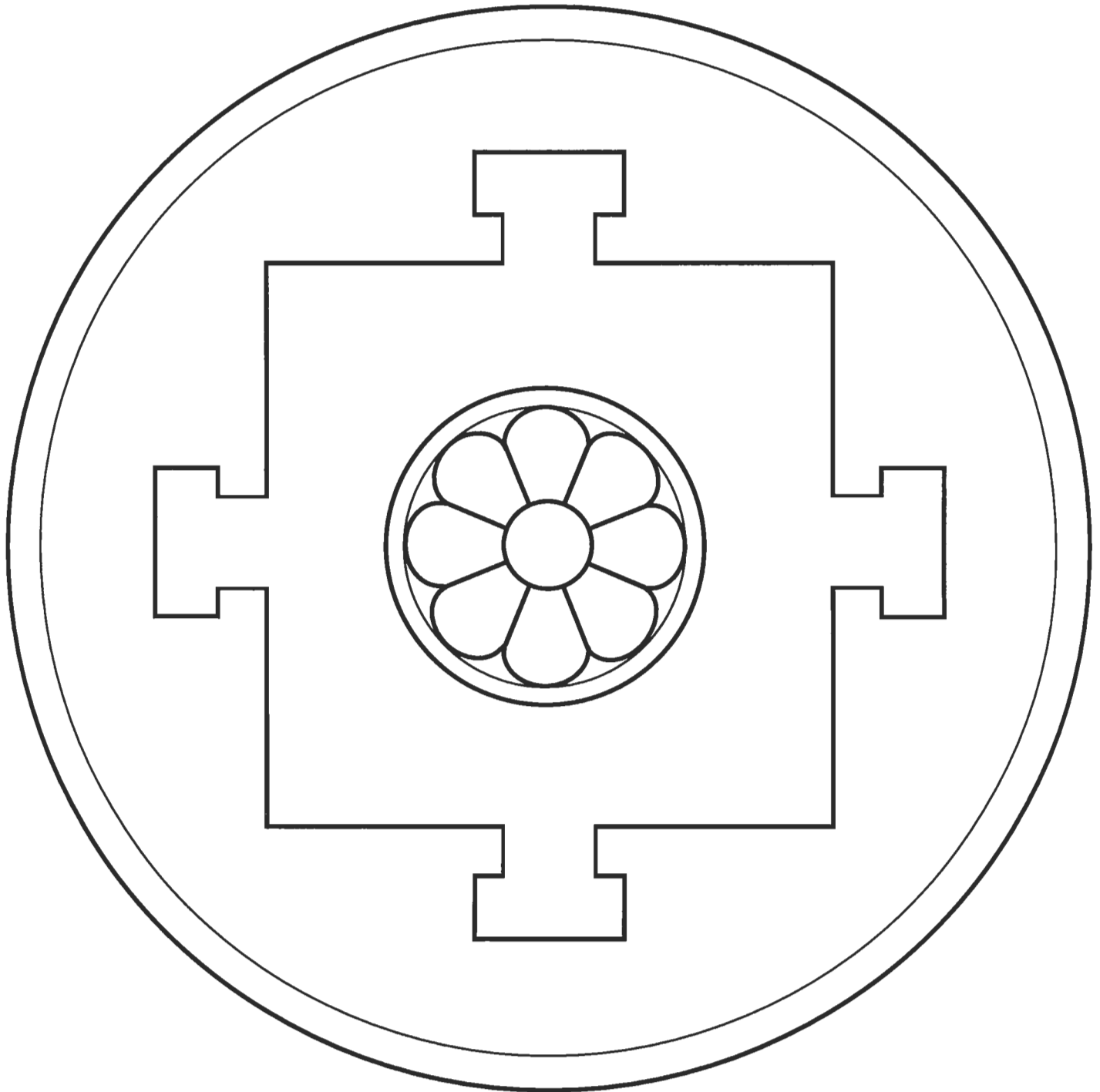


Tibetan Buddhist Mandalas



Mandala Making Worksheet

Create your own mandala using the theme and outline of a Tibetan Buddhist mandala. Keeping compassion as the main theme, create a mandala that reflects your own view of the world, using your choice of symbols, designs, colors, and words. You may use similar designs you have seen in Tibetan Buddhist mandalas, or choose designs from other cultures or art forms.





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Introduction

What is a mandala?

A *mandala* is a geometric design often used as a sacred representation of the universe. *Mandala* is the ancient Sanskrit word for circle. Mandalas appear in the art of many cultures throughout South, East and Southeast Asia, and among native cultures of North and South America. Mandalas are also used in the religions of Buddhism, Hinduism, Taoism and Christianity.

How are mandalas used in Tibetan Buddhism?

Mandalas in Tibetan Buddhism are architectural groundplans that depict the dwelling places of Buddhist deities. The pictorial designs are used to express Buddhist teachings. Through meditation and visualization Tibetan Buddhists will meditate on the mandala in order to connect with the deity who dwells in the center. Buddhist texts guide practitioners along the pathway of visualization to enter the palace where the deity resides. The mental act of entering the mandala and merging with deity provides a vehicle for the practitioner to embody the ideal that the deity represents, such as wisdom or compassion.

Mandalas are often created as part of Tibetan Buddhist ritual ceremonies. They appear in two- and three-dimensional form. Mandalas are painted, constructed out of precious metals, jewels, wood, butter, or made from fine grains of colored sand. Inside the circular, outer boundary is a specific design of multi-colored, concentric circles and squares, symbols, and deities. Mandalas are also the patterns and form of Tibetan Buddhist sacred dance.

How and Why do Tibetan Buddhist monks create sand mandalas?

Tibetan monks will create sand mandalas as ritual practice, or as part of a larger religious ceremony. Before the sand is placed, the intricate design is traced on a two-dimensional surface. The sand is delicately poured through spherical, metal tools. Today, groups of Tibetan Buddhist Monks, living in the Tibetan Diaspora, travel around the world creating sand mandalas as cultural offerings. This is a way they teach others about their Tibetan Buddhist culture and share their values of compassion and non-violence. In a final ritual, the sand mandala is swept up and poured into a body of water, an act meant to symbolize impermanence. Impermanence is the Buddhist belief that nothing lasts forever, teaching that sickness, old age, and death are a part of the human experience.

Buddhism and Tibet

Buddhism is a religion that teaches that enlightenment can be achieved by releasing oneself from suffering. Mindfulness and compassion for others are important virtues in Buddhist practice. Buddhism is an integral part of Tibetan culture. Ninety-nine percent of Tibetans are Buddhists. The religion was introduced to Tibet in the seventh century and transformed Tibet from a warrior to a wisdom society. Since the People's Republic of China occupied Tibet in the 1950's, Tibetans have applied their Buddhist beliefs to regain their independence through a non-violent approach. The exiled leader of Tibet, Tenzin Gyatso, The Fourteenth Dalai Lama, won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1989 for his non-violent efforts to resolve the Tibetan conflict with the People's Republic of China. Today, Tibetans continue their struggle for cultural survival.



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Questions for Discussion and Writing

1. How are mandalas used in Tibetan Buddhism?
2. How is art a useful form of religious expression?
3. How can art and symbols be used to represent cultural values?
4. How can art be used to express virtues such as compassion and wisdom?
5. How does the creation of sand mandalas for different people around the world help Tibetan monks preserve their cultural heritage?