



## MANDALAS

The word mandala comes from Sanskrit, the ancient language of India. A mandala is a universal symbol or archetype used in all religions and cultures that means “healing circle,” “whole world,” “unity,” completeness,” or “sacred circle.” Circles suggest unity, wholeness, completion, the womb and eternity. Circles are universally associated with meditation, healing and prayer.

In the East, mandalas are considered sacred. Mandalas are thought to hold healing powers and clear away blocks to spiritual enlightenment or to gain favor with the gods. Buddhist monks create sand mandalas to increase understanding of “non-rational realities.” Some of these can be up to eight feet in diameter and take weeks to complete using special tools to apply brightly colored sand in precise, intricate shapes and patterns. The sand mandala is considered temporary and is destroyed at the end of the ceremony – a statement of the impermanence of all things and the importance of nonattachment. Mandala paintings can take years to complete.

In the West, Native Americans use mandalas to tell stories, teach values and are considered a powerful tool for healing. The symbolism in their sand paintings, medicine wheels, and shields represent the universe and all aspects of birth, life and death.

Mandalas are incorporated into the art and architecture of Jewish and Christian cultures. Built during times of war, disaster and plagues, Gothic cathedrals remain powerful symbols of enlightenment for the human spirit. Contemplating the light pouring through the mandalic design of a Rose or Catherine Window while seated in earthly darkness can be a transformative experience.

In early Christian churches labyrinths were adapted as “walking mandalas.” Religions that do not approve of representational art may often employ geometric mandalic forms on walls, decorative tiles, or floor patterns in temples and churches. Circular designs have been used for millenia by Christian mystics to focus on spiritual development and express insights and visions.

Psychoanalyst Carl Jung used mandalas with his clients and himself. He saw the mandala as “a representation of the unconscious self,” as creating “movement towards psychological growth, expressing the idea of a safe refuge, inner reconciliation and wholeness.” Jung called mandalas “vessels” into which we project our psyche. Experienced consciously, this message from the unconscious is a means for restoration and growth.