My Mandala

Directions: Create your own mandala. Be sure to include symbols and images that are important to you.

Mandala Activity

Mandala are geometrical representations of spiritual forces. They can be painted, sculpted and even made of colored sand. The most important one is one at the center surrounded by manifestations of its power. In the center, symbols indicate the four directions, while the local and stellar deities appear on the edges. They allow the faithful to visualize the deity and harness their power in order to enlighten, as they strive to achieve enlightenment. Mandalas are often painted on the wall of temples and in parable hanging sacred paintings.

The mandala was created to honor the visit of the Dalai Lama to the Snaket Museum, Staten Island, on October 12, 1991. Aesop Karayi 10 at the center with the Five Transcendent Buddhas. The four sides have palace towers, situating the painting in cosmic space.

- Mantra: A chant, word or sound repeated to aid in concentration during meditation (e.g., Omm)
- Mudra: A symbolic hand gesture, of which there are 184 kinds, a sacred number for Buddhists and Hindus.
- Nirvana: A state of mind achieved after extinguishing the five poisons: ignorance, attachment, desire, anger, pride. In Buddhism, nirvana is cessation of the cycle of birth and death, release from suffering.
- Reincarnation: A religious or philosophical concept that a being being born a new life after death in a different physical body or form.
- Siddhartha Gautama (Historical Buddha, Shakyamuni Buddha): The founder whose teachings are the basis of Buddhism.
- Silk Road: Network of trade routes linked regions of the ancient world in commerce.
- Stupa: A mound or structure that can be big or small, and can be used to hold relics or mark an important spot in the Buddhist religion. Often looks like a temple, but is not one.
- Theravada: A branch of Buddhism that uses the oldest recorded Buddhist texts written in Pali script to inform its doctrine. It emphasized monasticism, as opposed to Mahayana. They both share the four noble truths and eightfold path. It is dominant in countries like Cambodia, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.
- Thangka: A Tibetan Buddhist painting done on cotton or silk, the subject matter can be a Buddha, bodhisattva, mandala, or teaching scene.
- Vajra: Symbol of the thunderbolt, diamond or lightning, used with a bell in esoteric rites.

Infinite Compassion: A Discussion Guide

The topic of compassion is not at all religious business; it is important to know it is human business, it is a question of human survival.

Dalia Lama XIV

Tibetan Gezmo, B. 1935

A collaboration between the Jacques Marchais Museum of Tibetan Art and the Staten Island Museum.
Compassion Discussions:

1. How do you help people in your daily life?
   - Share a story with someone.
   - Visit a friend in need.
   - Help someone with a problem.

2. Why do you help people?
   - To feel better.
   - To feel good about yourself.
   - To make a difference.

3. How would you define compassion?
   - Empathy.
   - Understanding.
   - Willingness to help.

4. Why is compassion important?
   - It helps others.
   - It helps us feel good.
   - It helps create a better world.

5. What would the world be like without compassion?
   - War.
   - Poverty.
   - Conflict.

**GLOSSARY**

- **Asetic**: An individual who lives a life of meditation and detachment from material things and people.
- **Awakshotheva (aw-hah-sho-the-wah)**: A bodhisattva who is the incarnation of compassion of all Buddhas. Also known as Guan Yin (Chinese), Kanon (Japanese), or Kannon (Tibetan).
- **Bodhicitta**: A figure that has reached enlightenment, but chooses to postpone Buddhahood or nirvana in order to help other sentient beings and suffering and achieve nirvana themselves. The path is to stay in the state of samatha. An idea conceived in later Mahayana Buddhism.
- **Buddha**: A figure who has reached enlightenment (found a way to cease their own suffering) and has ended the cycle of samsara.
- **Buddhism**: A religion that focuses on non-attachment and the cessation of suffering created around the 6th century BCE by a former priest turned monk named Siddhartha Gautama.
- **Compassion**: Concern and empathy for those who suffer.
- **Dalai Lama**: Spiritual leader of Tibetan Buddhism, and incarnation of Aksobhaya.
- **Eightfold Path**: The path to nirvana, comprising eight aspects to be practiced: right understanding, right thought, right speech, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness, and right concentration.
- **Four Noble Truths**: The core of Buddhist belief.
- **Incarnation**: Taking physical form of a deity or spirit.
- **Karma**: One's actions and the intention of that action can be either good or bad, the accumulation over a lifetime decides one's next rebirth.
- **Mahayana**: The second major school of Buddhism known as the Great Path, which holds that буддha can secure salvation for an individual as long as the bodhisattvas are taught, rather than that of the Buddha alone.
- **Mandala**: A sacred geometric design used in meditation and as a plan for Buddhist structures.
- **Manifestation**: The embodiment of something, an action or object that solidifies a theory or an abstract idea.

**SYMBOLS**

- **Buddha**: A sign of the Buddha's enlightenment, the symbol of the Buddha is the upward pointing hand, which represents the Buddha's enlightenment. The other hand is passed over the chest in a mudra, a symbolic gesture that represents a specific aspect of the Buddha's life.
- **Compassion**: A symbol of compassion, the heart, and the lotus, which represents the Buddha's birth. The heart is a symbol of compassion, and the lotus is a symbol of purity and enlightenment.
- **Dharma Wheel**: The Dharma wheel is a symbol of the teachings of the Buddha. The spokes represent the various aspects of the Dharma, or the Buddha’s teachings, and the wheel itself represents the continuous cycle of suffering and enlightenment.

**Background Information**

**Founding of Buddhism**

Buddhism was created and taught by Siddhartha Gautama around the 6th century BCE in east India. Born a prince, he led an privileged life through young adulthood, but realized that life was more than material possessions. After escaping life’s cycle of death, rebirth, and suffering, Buddha taught that through self-reflection, a person can find real happiness. He spent the rest of his life traveling through India teaching others what he had learned and understood.

**Four Noble Truths**

The foundation of Buddhism are the Four Noble Truths: 1. Life is suffering, 2. The cause of suffering is attachment, 3. To end suffering one must destroy attachments, 4. The path to suffering is to follow moral and meditative codes as known as the Eightfold Path. Following this path allows one to achieve good karma, and eventually attain enlightenment which leads to nirvana.

**Let’s Discuss:**

Why do you think Siddhartha Gautama grew dissatisfied with his privileged lifestyle?

What do you think Gautama saw throughout his journey?

What do you think nirvana means to other cultures?

**Karma**

Karma refers to good or bad actions one takes in their life. Good actions, such as generosity, morality, and meditation, bring about happiness in this life. Bad actions, such as lying and stealing, bring about unhappiness in the long term.

**Spreads of Buddhism**

Around the 2nd century BCE, Buddhism began to spread eastwards towards Central Asia, China, Korea, and Japan through trade with other countries along the Silk Road. The adoption of Buddhism by many people in different geographical regions expanded the religion into several independent belief systems.

A bodhisattva is a being being (statue) who aspires to enlightenment (buddha). They are said to have arrived in the path to enlightenment at a variety of times and places, and in many different forms. The Bodhisattva of compassion and Tibetan Buddhists believe that he was incarnated in the Dalai Lama.

**Let’s Discuss:**

Why do you think so many countries have adapted Buddhism?

Have you ever experienced another religion? How did it make you feel?

Why do you think non-believers choose to remain believers? Help others.

What traits might the Dalai Lama have that make them bodhisattvas believe he is the incarnation of Aksobhaya?

How does the art in this exhibition express compassion?