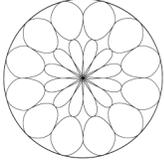


BUDDHISM ACTIVITY
LAURA WETZEL – WHGC FALL 2006

Goal: To become more familiar with meditation and Buddhism by working with mandalas in the context of readings for Wednesday, November 22.



What is a mandala?

The Sanskrit word *mandala* means “circle.” Mandalas are geometric designs used in Buddhism and Hinduism to assist in meditation. Traditional mandalas have a circular border, although many modern versions have other symmetrical outlines.

Materials Needed: Buddhism reading from the Study Guide (pp. 69-87), one printed mandala for each student, and colored pencils or markers. This is an excellent source containing 80 mandalas that are easy to preview and download as pdf files: <http://www.free-mandala.com/en/start.html>. The mandala reproduced above is #20 from this source.

Suggestions for Working with Students

(1) What is meditation?

- Meditation is featured prominently in the readings for today, so ask students for their definitions.
- I am no expert in meditation, but the simplest phrase that comes to my mind is *quiet reflection*.
- From *Buddhism overview.pdf* by Fernandez and Meyer: “One contemplates the truths about nature and one’s own being, and achieves detached consciousness/non-attachment.”

(2) Where is meditation discussed in the readings for today? Why is meditation important in the context of our readings?

- a) Gautama’s first phase towards enlightenment was to seek out Hindu priests. He learned a great deal about the yoga of meditation. (p. 71)
- b) After Gautama tried asceticism and found that it was not leading him towards his goal, he remembered his first deep meditation under an apple tree. This meditation occurred before he left home, indicating that meditation may be accomplished under normal conditions without extraordinary circumstances. “It was his first deep meditation—not an otherworldly trance, but a clear and steady seeing of the way things are.” (pp. 71-72)
- c) In Gautama’s final phase, he meditated under a Bo Tree for 49 days until he achieved enlightenment, becoming the Buddha. (pp. 72-73)
- d) The Buddha founded an order of monks and nuns, preaching for 45 years after attaining enlightenment. During long public hours, he withdrew three times a day, “to return his attention (through meditation) to its sacred source.” (p. 73)

(3) What is meditation?

After reflecting on the role of meditation in the text, do you have a better definition of meditation? Maybe yes, maybe no. Discuss.

(4) Can you think of examples within other religions where silence or meditation are used? Is silence or meditation used at any sacred occasions that you have experienced?

- a) A “Moment of Silence” as common at large events to show respect for victims of a recent disaster.
- b) Prayer—Is this a form of meditation? Are there examples of “moments of silence” in any religious services that people have attended?
- c) Students might look back at Taoism or forward to Hinduism. As a result, this activity could also be used on the section day coming up.

(5) Practice meditating:

Class Exercise from WHGC Faculty Resource *Class Exercises.pdf*: “Everyone sit silently with upright posture, and don’t think about anything except the exact point that your inhaling becomes exhaling and vice versa.” Sit for two or three (often painfully long) minutes. (p.s. – I have no experience in yoga or meditation so I am just using this simple example to make a point)

Questions:

Was it difficult to do this?

Were you successful in thinking only about your breath? What other thoughts came to mind?

(6) Second try for meditating:

Rather than sitting quietly, concentrating on your breathing, try another strategy to meditate.

- a) *Choices:* At this stage, students can chat amongst themselves.
 - Ask students to spend a few minutes looking through *Excerpts from the Dhammapada* and *Commitment* (pp. 79-87) to find one selection that has meaning to each of them.
 - Ask students to choose from among the mandalas that you have printed out in advance or copied from the last page of this handout.
- b) *Explanation:*
 - What is a mandala? The Sanskrit word *mandala* means “circle.” Mandalas are geometric designs used in Buddhism and Hinduism to assist in meditation. Traditional mandalas have a circular border, although many modern versions have other symmetrical outlines.
 - Tantric Buddhist monks create traditional mandalas with colored sand:
The creation of ritual art is both a meditative practice and a means of transmitting the message of the Buddha, which for Buddhists is the main source of happiness and prosperity for all sentient beings. With this in mind, the monks strive for perfection of their art as a means to perfect their minds and to maintain the authenticity of the teaching... [T]heir efforts toward perfection in constructing the sand mandala ensure that everyone, from the experienced Buddhist practitioner to the first-time viewer, will receive the blessings and teachings as the Buddha presented them more than 2,500 years ago. (Bryant, 1992, p. 181)
 - Tibetan Buddhist Monks visited Eckerd to create a sand mandala in the chapel. A short article with a tiny picture is on the Eckerd website at <http://www.eckerd.edu/print.php?f=/news/detail&m=&c=&sc=y&id=614>
- c) *Meditation.* At this stage, ask students to work alone quietly.
 - First, ask each student to write his or her choice from the reading on a clean piece of paper.
 - After copying their selection, ask them to put all of their books away, leaving a clean surface with just their written selection, their mandala, and their colored pencils or markers.

- Next, students should proceed to color their mandala, quietly, keeping their selection from the text in mind. Students may feel free to add detail to their mandala or, if they like, start a new mandala on the back of the page. Set some time frame for this—say 10 or 15 minutes. Tell students not to worry about finishing in that time, but if they finish early they need to sit quietly to think about their mandala and their selection from the readings.

(7) Share selections and mandalas with the class.

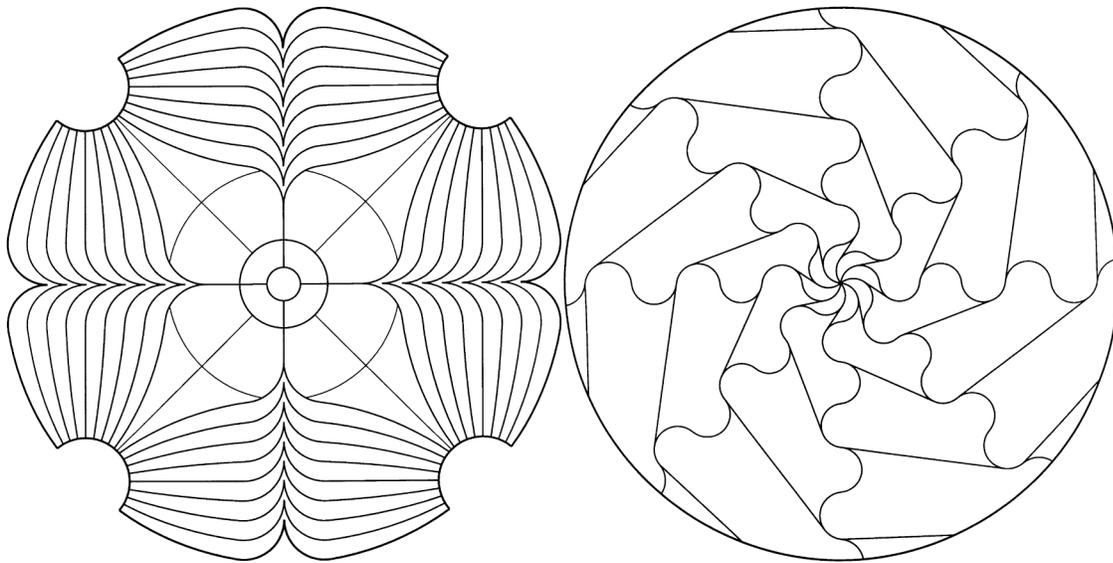
- First, discuss whether or not it was easier to meditate by focusing on their breathing or by considering their readings and mandalas. You may find a variety of answers, including comments on whether or not the coloring exercise really was meditation.
- Finally, with the time remaining, students can share their thoughts, selections and mandalas with the class.

Alternate Activity

If you like the idea of using mandalas but do not want to take class time, then you might hand out mandalas in class and ask them to color them quietly on their own time. Students can bring them to class, along with a selection from the text, and you can use them as the basis for discussion. This might fit in well for the section day on Friday, December 1.

Reference: Bryant, Barry, *The Wheel of Time Sand Mandala*, Harper Collins Publishers, San Francisco, 1992.

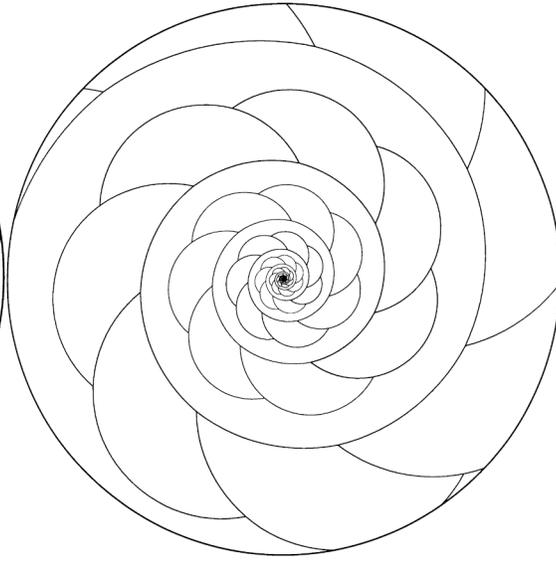
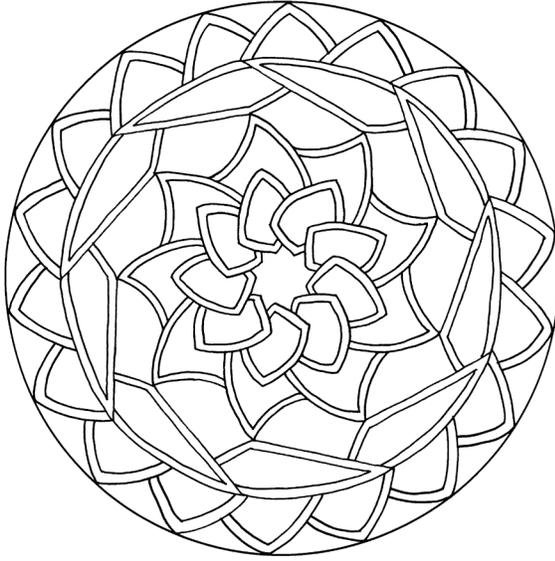
Mandalas: Selections from <http://www.free-mandala.com/en/start.html>:



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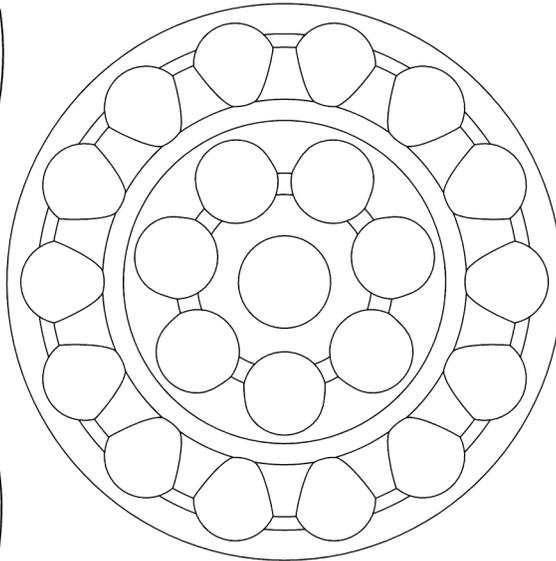
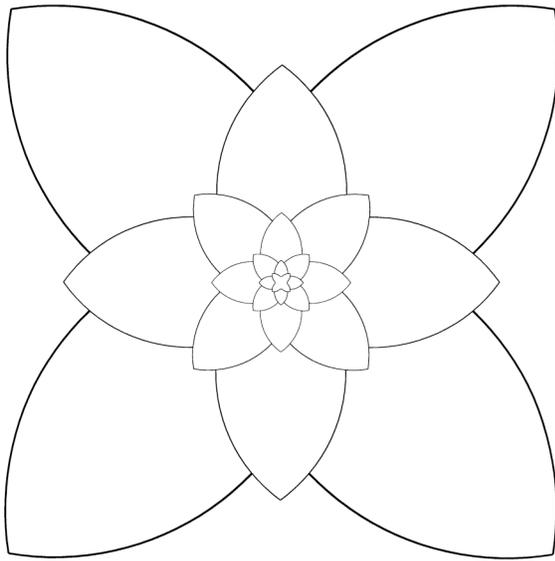
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