

Path to Spirituality through Mandala Art

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Abstract

The term mandala translates to “circle (mandal)” in Sanskrit.

Mandala is a representation of the cosmos in a circular pattern that leads to a central point.

In most cultures, the circle is a symbol of oneness or wholeness, of a new beginning and a state of completion or end.

Mandala is a powerful spiritual symbol in Asian cultures that is used in ceremonial rituals, sacred art, and meditation. It can be understood in two different ways: externally as a visual representation of the universe or internally as a guide for several practices that take place in many Asian traditions, including meditation.

In Hinduism and Buddhism, it is believed that by entering the mandala and proceeding towards its center, you are guided through the cosmic process of transforming the universe from one of suffering into one of joy and happiness.

Keywords

Mandala, Buddhism, Hinduism, Spirituality

Introduction

We notice mandala patterns and designs everywhere around us. But mandalas are more than just geometrical figures.

Symbolism of Mandala

Mandalas are not only rich in symbolism but also in their sacred meaning. It is believed to be a sacred figure that represents the divine powers that are at work in the universe.

The images are formed from deep within our unconscious mind. Therefore, it can represent a dream in psychoanalysis or a search for self-unity and completeness.

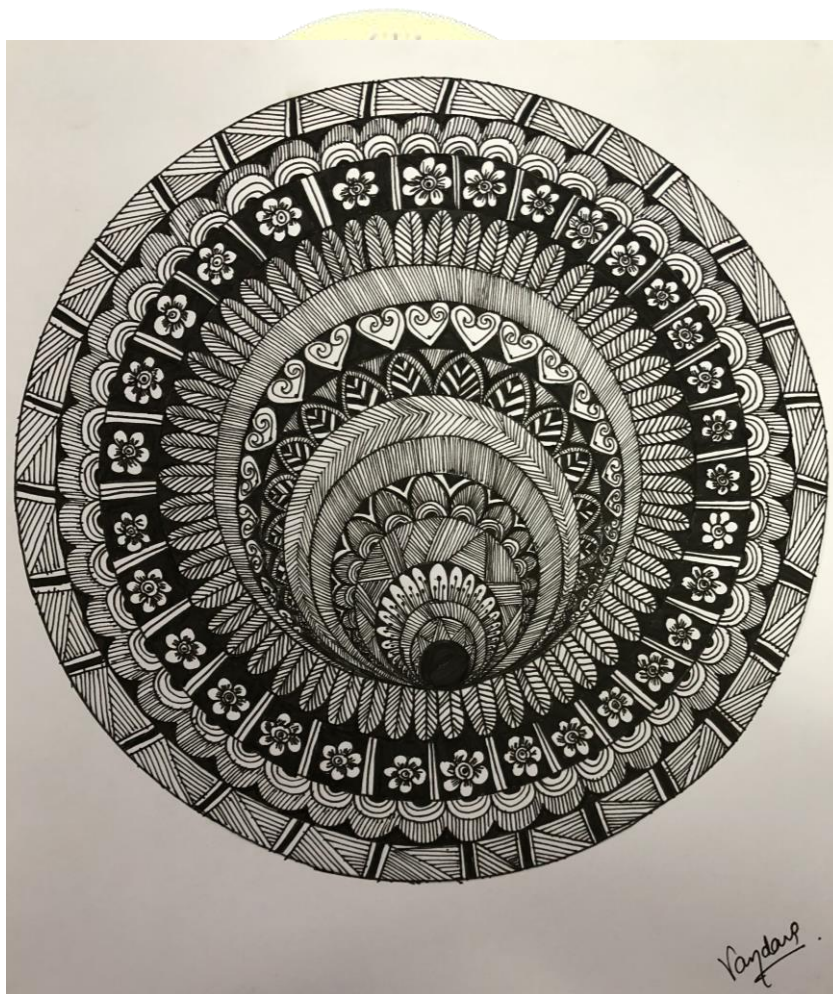


Image 1: A Mandala Created with 3D Effect

When one mentally enters a mandala's center, the person is symbolically given a tour through the cosmos to reality's essence. The mandala symbolizes the totality of existence, both at the inner and the outer level.

Traditional Meaning Across Cultures

Buddhism:



Image 2: Mandala of Dharmachakra or Wheel of Dharma with Eight Spokes

Representing Eightfold Buddhist Path to Enlightenment

Most of the mandala patterns and designs trace their roots back to Tibetan *Buddhist* cultures, where they represent the purity and holiness of existence, as highlighted by

Buddha. These mandalas can be described as highly complex paintings with captivating details and vibrant colors that depict the cosmological traditions of Buddhists.

Hinduism:

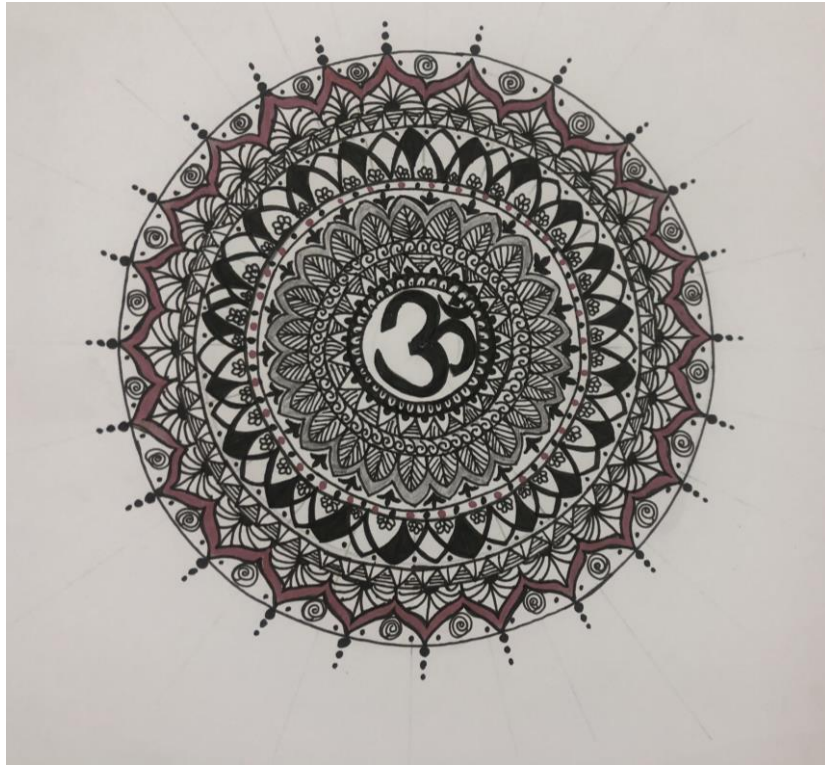


Image 3: Mandala with the holy symbol of “Om” in the center where all cosmic energy is believed to be located

Ancient Hindu scriptures depict mandalas as a period of creativity, of powerful existence, and a symbol of deeper connection with the self and the universe at large. Many of these designs are symbolic of Hindu deities, such as Ganesha, Saraswati, and others.

Modern Interpretation:

In the *modern-day*, mandalas have become a popular symbol of meditation, which aids in enhancing focus, silencing thoughts while meditating, combating stress and anxiety, and forming a greater connection with oneself.

Western Psychological Interpretation:

Carl Jung, a popular Swiss psychoanalyst, was the first to introduce mandala to western thinkers and scholars after comprehending the therapeutic powers of the art. He believed that mandalas were symbolic of the psychological and spiritual self, and they lead to greater awareness of life and spirit.

In his autobiography, Jung wrote:

"I sketched every morning in a notebook a small circular drawing, which seemed to correspond to my inner situation at the time. Only gradually did I discover what the mandala really is: the Self, the wholeness of the personality, which if all goes well is harmonious."

— Carl Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, pp. 195–196.

Sand Art Mandala By Monks

The whole process of constructing a mandala is considered to be a very sacred and meditative ritual. It can take anywhere from a few days to a couple of weeks to complete.

When monks construct a mandala, it helps them to participate in Buddhist teachings. However, before they can participate in the construction of mandalas, they must go through a lengthy period of artistic and philosophical study that takes approximately three years.

Patterns are formed on the ground with colored sand known as *dul-tson-kyil-khor* in Tibetan, using metal and a small tube to create the exact texture and organization of the grains. A mandala may also be constructed using bronze or 3-D stone figures, as seen in China and Japan.



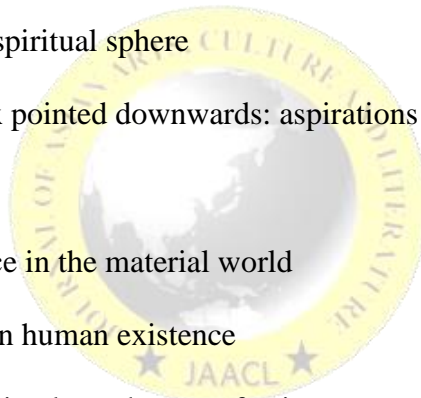
Image 4: Sand Art Mandala

While some mandalas are painted after they've been constructed, some are deliberately destroyed afterward.

Those that are painted serve as an enduring object of contemplation. On the other hand, those that are destroyed act as a reminder of the impermanence of life and things. Once it's been destroyed, the sand is poured into a nearby water body such as a river to distribute the positive energy.

Different Shapes in Mandalas

- ❖ Mandala patterns and designs use a variety of shapes, each of which signifies a vital element
- ❖ Dot: everything is one, a symbol of the unmanifested
- ❖ Circle: wholeness, integrity, unity
- ❖ Horizontal line: divides up from down, the earth and the sky; maternal energy
- ❖ Vertical line: the connection between worlds, energy; divides right and left
- ❖ Cross: Two lines meet and form a center; recognition.
- ❖ Triangle with the vertex pointed upwards: aspiration, energies pointing upwards, in the direction of the spiritual sphere
- ❖ Triangle with vertex pointed downwards: aspirations towards the earthly, material sphere
- ❖ Square: our existence in the material world
- ❖ Octagon: harmony in human existence
- ❖ Pentagon: human being brought to perfection
- ❖ Heptagon: spiritual way
- ❖ Circle divided into twelve parts: the cycle of nature, wholeness
- ❖ Swastika: Sun, energy, movement of the Universe
- ❖ Spiral: cyclic movement of nature, dynamics. The two directions of the spiral symbolize the constructive and the destructive aspects
- ❖ Bell: Bells represent the openness of the mind to allow the entrance of wisdom and clarity.



- ❖ Lotus flower: A sacred symbol in Buddhism, the symmetry of a lotus depicts balance. As a lotus reaches up from underwater into the light, so does a human for spiritual awakening and enlightenment.
- ❖ Sun: A popular basis for modern mandala patterns, the sun tends to represent the universe, often carrying meaning related to life and energy.

Different Colours in Mandalas:

Colors can be interpreted in many different ways:

- ❖ According to the colors of the chakras
- ❖ According to the seasons, natural forms
- ❖ According to the interpretation of different spiritual schools
- ❖ According to Feng-shui



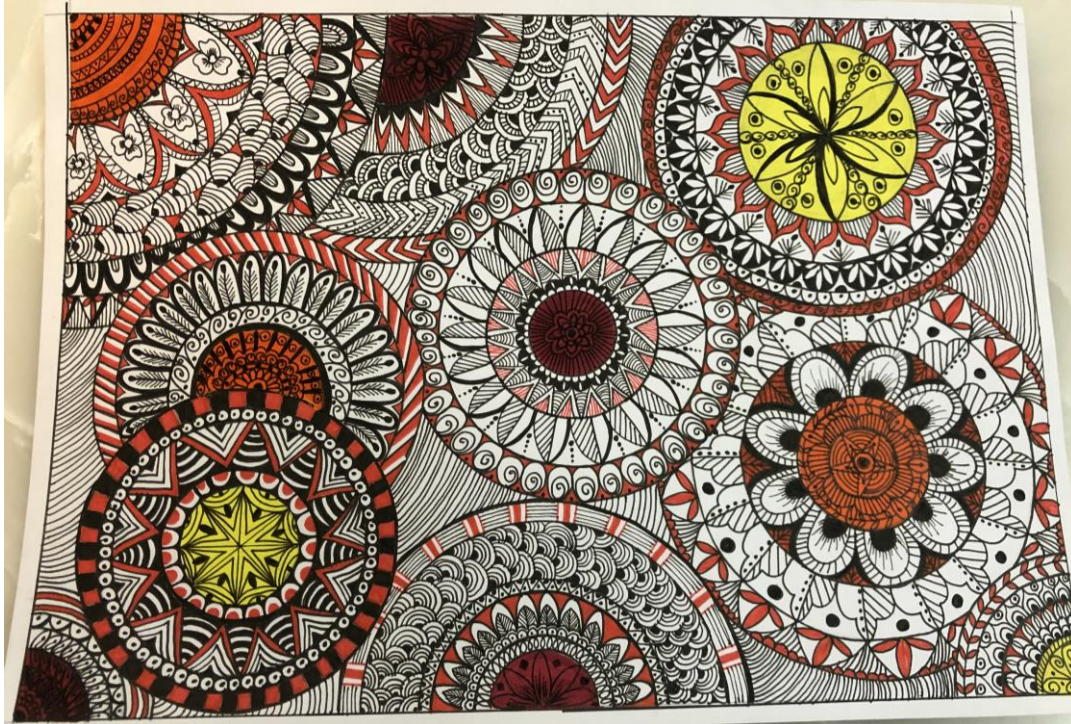


Image 5: Overlapping mandala using few basic colors, representing how various aspects of our lives are different yet interconnected.

The significance of commonly used colors is as below:

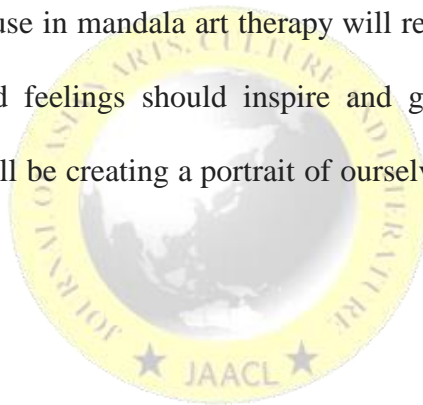
- ❖ Red: fire, passion, the color of the 1st chakra
- ❖ Orange: ample energy, heat, the color of the 2nd chakra
- ❖ Yellow: power, light, joy, the color of the 3rd chakra
- ❖ Green: peace, nature, the color of the 4th chakra
- ❖ Blue: protection, tranquility, coldness, the color of the 5th chakra.
- ❖ Violet: spiritual forces, the color of the 6th chakra
- ❖ White: purity, unity, the color of the 7th chakra

- ❖ Black: secret, darkness
- ❖ Grey and brown have several shades. They can either be cold or warm and they can be almost identical with one of the pure colors. They can be vivid or soft, can express boredom and sadness or, on the contrary, vitality, and cheerfulness.

Mandala as Art Therapy

The very idea and purpose of creating a mandala are therapeutic and symbolic. Making ourselves aware of our feelings, intuitions and experiences, are primary in the creation and interpretation of mandalas.

The shapes and colors we use in mandala art therapy will reflect our inner self at the time of creation. Our instincts and feelings should inspire and guide us through the process of creation. Ultimately, we will be creating a portrait of ourselves, as we are, while creating the mandala.



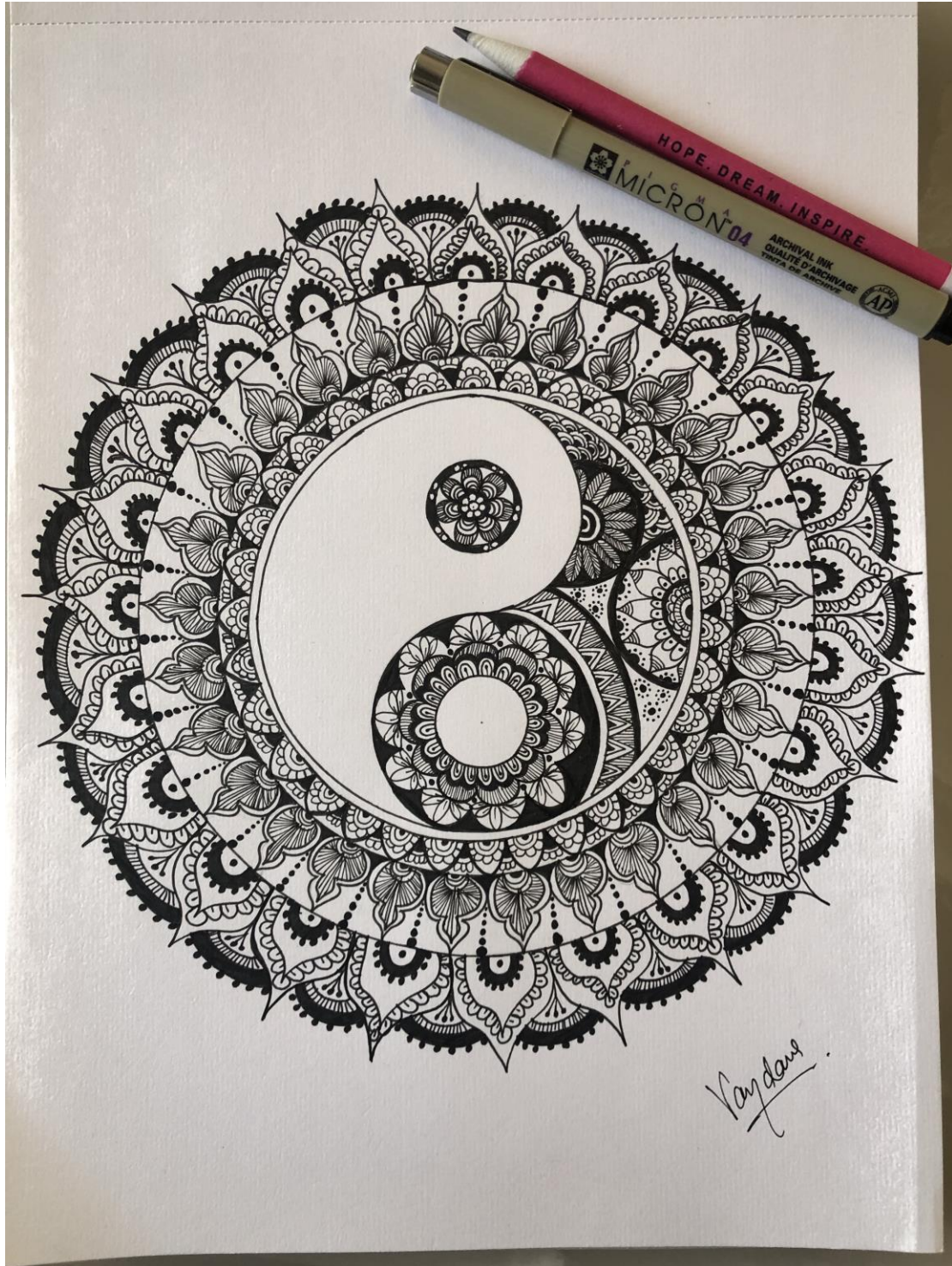


Image 6: Yin Yang Mandala representing balance of energies in life

Mandala art therapy & healing can be a great source of reflection on one's soul.

Conclusion

The habit of creating and collecting mandalas is a transformative practice that is intended to restore inner peace and wisdom within.

Creating mandalas helps stabilize, integrate, and restructure inner life.

The mandala symbolizes something that a person wants to achieve in life. It helps one to get in touch with one's inner self and find innermost desires through the journey of self-discovery.

Acknowledgment

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Image 4 (Sand art mandala) is a copyright free image from Dreamstime.com

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About Author

Ms. Vandana Bhasin is a writer and artist based out of Gurugram. She is a published author and a recipient of numerous prestigious awards for her literary contributions. A few notable

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