

## **An Explanation of the Sand Mandala**

Sand painting is one of the oldest artistic traditions of Tibetan Buddhism. Called "Kultson Kyilkhor," which means "Mandala of colored sand powder." Mandala is a Sanskrit word meaning "cosmogram, or "world in harmony." In Vajrayana Tibetan Buddhism, it is said that wherever a Sand Mandala is created, all sentient beings and the surrounding environment are blessed. Whoever views the mandala experiences profound peace and great joy. The colorfulness and harmony of the millions of sand particles in the mandala gives a powerful message that we all can live in peace if each of us work in creating a little more space for others in our hearts. It is said that for children in particular, upon seeing the Sand Mandala, one is left with very positive imprints which will germinate as sprouts of peace as they grow older.

### **The Purpose of a Sand Mandala**

Sand-painted Mandalas are used as tools for consecrating the earth and its inhabitants. According to Tibetan Buddhist belief, in general all Mandalas have outer, inner and secret meanings. On the outer level they represent the world in its divine form; on the inner level they represent a map by which the ordinary human mind is transformed into an enlightened mind; and on the secret level they depict the primordially perfect balance of the subtle energies of the body and the clear light dimension of the mind. The creation of a sand painting is said to effect purification and healing on all three levels.

### **The Mandala Construction Process**

The monks begin with an Opening Ceremony by consecrating the site of the mandala and sand painting with approximately 30 minutes of chanting, music and mantra recitation. Immediately following, the monks begin to draw the lines for the design of the mandala on a base or table. The artists measure out and draw the architectural lines using a straight-edged ruler, a compass and a white ink pen. This is very exacting work that takes about three hours to complete.

Throughout its creation, the monks pour millions of grains of sand from a funnel-shaped metal tool known as the "Chakpur." This funnel is filled with colored sand and is then rasped in order to release a fine stream of sand. In ancient times, powdered precious and semi-precious gems were used instead of sand. Thus, lapis lazuli would be used for the blue color, and rubies for the red color, and so forth. The artists begin at the center of the mandala and work outward. The finished mandala is approximately four feet in diameter, and usually requires a week or so to complete.

### **The Mandala Deconstruction Process**

During the closing ceremony, the monks dismantle the Mandala, sweeping up the colored sand to symbolize the impermanence of all phenomena. It is meant to be a teaching to show that everything that exists has a beginning, a middle and an end. At this time, when requested, half of the sand is distributed to the audience as a blessing for their personal

health and healing. The sand can either be kept in one's home on the altar, or be dispersed around your yard as a protection for your home and family. The whole region, and in fact the whole earth, is said to be blessed by this process.