

Mandalas

For Stress Management and Personal Growth

The word "mandala" originates in Sanskrit and means holy or magical circle. Mandalas are used in a variety of cultures (including Native American and Tibetan), in ceremonies and as a form of meditation.

Circles represent cycles, wholeness and rhythm. One can find examples of them in the Chinese yin-yang symbol, rose windows of Gothic cathedrals, labyrinths and at Stonehenge. In modern culture, we can point to the seasons, the zodiac, clock faces, the solar system and the sleep/wake cycle.

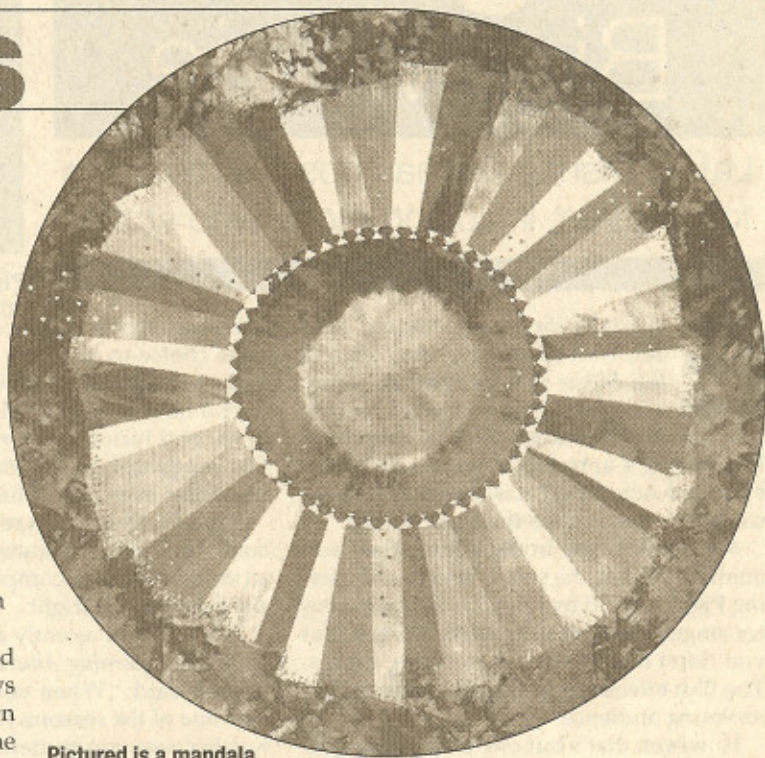
I have been fascinated by mandalas and have studied them for several years. I'd like to tell you how to create and use mandalas to center yourself and quiet your mind. Regular mandala work may increase your ability to think outside the box in both your personal and professional life. I think once you experience the power of mandalas, you will consider sharing this technique with your patients.

Mandala coloring books are a good tool for meditation for the beginner. These books are available in new age bookstores and on the Internet. You choose a design and color it as a way to center yourself. Creating your own mandala is an effective way to journal your thoughts and emotions. Mandalas offer a meaningful path to self-discovery. They can be used to seek inner truth, balance energy, and for personal growth and healing.

Create your own mandala

Find a quiet time when you will not be disturbed. Turn on inspirational music. Close your eyes and focus your attention inward. You may notice forms, colors, and shapes dancing before your mind's eye. Using as little thought as possible, select a color, form, or feeling from your inner vision as the starting point for your mandala. Next, open your eyes and look at the colors in front of you. Choose colors that speak to you to begin your mandala. Create a space or boundary (trace a paper plate or draw a circle free-hand) and fill it with color and form. You may start in the center or around the edge. There is no right or wrong way to create a mandala. Work until you feel the mandala is finished. It is important to try to finish every picture you start so you don't carry a feeling of incompleteness with you. When finished, it is important to date your mandala for future reference.

It is important to work intuitively without a plan, letting the mandala image develop by itself. Go with impulse, flowing with ideas as they come. Don't edit your ideas or work for approval. Do



Pictured is a mandala quilt that the author created.

not be disappointed if you cannot readily express your ideas to your satisfaction. You may experience a phase when you get stuck. Do not force anything. Let the picture rest and detach yourself temporarily. You will see how the blockage is released by itself.

The spontaneous and unexpected should always be allowed to express itself and imagination allowed to run freely. This gives the unconscious the opportunity to manifest its contents. Free your mind and experience the joy of the process. The boundaries and safety of a circle gives you freedom to do whatever you want inside it. A mandala created in a state of intuitive and spontaneous self-abandonment awakens in the creator unknown creative forces which arise from the unconscious.

Modifications for patients

Mandalas can be made from a wide assortment of materials. Choose your materials based on environmental constraints, patient needs or personal preference. Materials to consider are colored sand, colored papers, old magazines, paint, markers, crayons, and/or colored pencils.

The color and content of a mandala can be analyzed for added insight. There are many theories about the meanings of the colors, shapes and images found in mandalas. If you are interested in looking into this, I recommend the book *Creating Mandalas For Insight, Healing, and Self-Expression* by Susanne Fincher. Personally, I find the meditative and expressive value of creating mandalas enough for me. ■

Karen Earith, OTR/L, lives in Dayton, Ohio. She has been studying psychosocial skills extensively and feels teaching these skills to her clients greatly increases their quality of life. She also teaches seminars on the topic. She can be reached at AccessDsgn@aol.com.