



# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

## Welcome to 30 Days of Mandala Journaling!

### About mandalas

#### Introduction

“Mandala” is sanskrit for “circle”, “essence”, or “container”. It’s very simple really - any creative process that happens in circle can be referred to as a mandala.

Is mandala-making an art form? It can be - many mandalas are beautiful works of art. More importantly, though, it is creative process that brings us closer to centre. **Carl Jung, who used mandalas a lot in his psychotherapy work, once commented that it was reductive to refer to it as art.** To call it art implies that the product is the only thing of value, when in reality, the process is more important than the product.

The mandala is a reflection of nature & the universe. It is one of the ways in which humanity has sought to relate to and sum up the awesome universe of which we are part. Mandalas are cosmic diagrams - attempts to represent the essential elements of the macrocosm in an ordered, coherent manner.

Mandalas are both simple and complex, and that’s what makes them fascinating. They are as simple as a circle and as complex as an intricate labyrinthian pathway to Spirit. Mandalas are meditation, ritual, therapy, art-making, and spiritual journeying.

#### From many traditions

Mandalas (or other related circle creative/spiritual processes) have evolved independently in many traditions all over the world. While all traditions use the circle as the basic container, what goes on inside and outside of that container can be vastly different. For some, every shape and colour has symbolic significance, while for others the significance is found in the process, not the colours or shapes.

In **Tibetan Buddhism**, monks make elaborate sand mandalas that often take days to build and are eventually swept up and either poured into a body of water or distributed to viewers. The shapes in Buddhist mandalas are very symbolic. The mandala represents the whole universe, with the square inside the circle representing the temple. The four openings in the square represent gates into the temple. The four gates in Tibetan mandalas symbolize the bringing together of the four boundless thoughts, namely: lovingkindness, compassion, sympathy, and equanimity.

At the centre of Tibetan mandalas are two deities - Kalachakra and his consort, bright-yellow Vishvamatr - male and female





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united. According to Buddhist tradition, as you wind your way around the corridors of the mandala and up the stairways — circumambulating the center and the pinnacle — you will get closer and closer to Buddha-hood.

**Hindu** mandalas are similar to Buddhist mandalas and have similar symbolism. The Hindu mandala is thought to be the abode of the deity. In liturgy (puja) the mandala is the place where a deity is invoked by the mantra. The placing of mantras upon the mandala (nyasa) gives it life, and the mandala is then regarded, like the mantra, as the deity itself, and not merely representing the deity.

In **Australia**, aboriginal artists make circular ground paintings that are like Buddhist sand mandalas, but with more simplicity and different symbolism. The alternately coloured red and white concentric circles mark the exact spot in the desert where the Great Ancestor spirit energy is believed to have first emanated from the ground. It is an initiation ceremony of great power, in which an older man, a shaman, initiates the others into the primal mysteries of Aboriginal life.

**Navajo Indians** also have mandala-like sand paintings. Navajo sand paintings are complex healing ceremonies - performed for the benefit of tribal members who request them. They are reenactments of the native legends which provide the foundation for all aspects of Navajo life.

There are several different types of **sandpainting** ceremonies- known as 'ways' - Blessingways, used for prevention; Holyways, for healing; and Evilways, for exorcism. The appropriate 'way' will be chosen by a Hand-Trembler, or native Shaman, and executed by a trained 'chanter' who will draw the paintings and perform the songs and dances associated with it.

In the sandpainting ceremony, the painting functions as a mandala, with the person who is ill, or out of balance (the Navajo believe that all illness is a symptom of being out of balance with the natural order) placed in the middle of the painting. After the painting is finished, the chanter rubs their skin with sand from the images, bringing him or her back into the balance depicted by the painting.





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In other **Native American** traditions, mandalas take the shape of dream catchers. They emerged out of the **Sioux** nation, but were adopted by the **Ojibwe**, **Lakota**, and other tribes.

The traditional dream catcher was intended to protect the sleeping individual from negative dreams, while letting positive dreams through. The positive dreams would slip through the hole in the center of the dream catcher, and glide down the feathers to the sleeping person below. The negative dreams would get caught up in the web, and expire when the first rays of the sun struck them.



In villages in **India**, women draw **rangoli** designs on their front doorsteps that are mandala-like. Using rice powder or crushed limestone, they start with a grid of small dots, then fill in the design with a series of lines. Rangoli not only add a touch of art and beauty to the home or temple, they also protect the family or holy place.



Also in **Native American spirituality**, the Medicine Wheel can be considered a form of mandala. The Medicine Wheel symbolizes the individual journey we each must take to find our own path. Within the Medicine Wheel are the four cardinal directions and the four sacred colors. The circle represents the circle of life and the center of the circle, the eternal fire. The eagle, flying toward the East, is a symbol of strength, endurance and vision.

There are differences of opinion about which colours represent which concepts, but the most common seems to be: White for north, for wisdom gained through winter stories; Red for east, and enlightenment; Yellow for south, and innocence; Black for the west, and its power. They are also considered the four aspects of human personality: white for mental, red for spirituality, black for physical, and yellow for emotional.

In **Christianity**, mandalas can be found in symbols and icons such as rose windows in cathedrals, the crown of thorns, labyrinths, etc.



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**Hildegard von Bingen**, a Christian mystic and nun, for example, modeled a creative practice in her spirituality that was considered mandala-like. Central to her mandala paintings is the understanding of a 'cosmic equilibrium' and a reverence for all life. In her use of 'quartering of the circle' we recognize the four elements (fire, air, water and earth), an archetypal depiction also used by Native American sand painters for the four sacred directions.

The **astrological zodiac**, with its twelve distinct energy fields, is also a form of mandala.

Mandalas can also be seen in **dance** in many traditions. For example, in Sufism, whirling dervishes spin in circles, evoking the sacred. Like mandala-making in other traditions, this spinning is meant "to find the eye of the chaotic whirlwind within our minds, the silent centre that is the seat of the being."



## Mandalas as therapeutic tools

Carl Jung, in his exploration of his own interior life, began to make mandalas and discovered how good the process was for helping him peel away the layers and get to his centre. He began using them in therapy to help others get to their centres.

Jung saw the mandala as a "representation of the unconscious self". During the time when he explored mandalas for his personal exploration, he is said to have found his "anima" or feminine side.

## Jung on Mandala-making

*"While painting them (mandalas), the picture seems to develop out of itself and often in opposition to one's conscious intentions." - C.G. Jung*

*"Most mandalas have an intuitive, irrational character and, through their symbolical content, exert a retroactive influence on the unconscious. They therefore possess a "magical" significance, like icons, whose possible efficacy was never consciously felt by the patient." - C.G. Jung*

## Why circle?

The circle is an organic, feminine shape that appears naturally in many forms. Circle is the shape of the womb, Mother Earth, tree trunks, flowers, etc. It is the most basic shape in nature on which other shapes are built.

Circle is also the strongest shape structurally. There is a reason why water pipes are tubes - the circle gives them strength. The circle does not put pressure on any one point, but distributes the



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weight evenly. Unlike squares, triangles, or other shapes, there are no weak points or strong points - all are equal. The circle is about community, spirituality, strength, equality, and wholeness.

Bringing circle into our creative practice can help deepen our relationship with Self and with Spirit. *It is like an entry portal into the intuitive.*

*"You have noticed that everything an Indian does is in a circle, and that is because the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round. In the old days, when we were a strong and happy people, all our power came to us from the sacred hoop of the nation and so long as the hoop was unbroken, the people flourished."* - Black Elk, Sioux elder.

## About mandala journaling

### *A brief personal history*

I have long been a journal-keeper, and I have long been a doodler. Gradually, those two things started to come together for me in the form of a circle.

Twenty-five years ago, I wrote my first mandala poem - a long string of thoughts spiraling into centre. When I did it, I remember thinking it held some significance and that it was opening me to something new. It would take another 20 years, though, to recognize that the new thing that had evolved for me was the **mandala journal process**. Words in a circle did something for my subconscious mind that words in a straight line had never done before.

Journaling is a powerful tool, but sometimes when we get too stuck in words, we get trapped in left brain thinking. Our left brain wants to define things, give them logic. Words are firmly rooted in the left brain - they serve as boxes for ideas - ways to give them logic and meaning. Those boxes often trap us in limited thinking.

Shifting into mandala journaling, where words emerge only as part of (and often secondary to) colour and shape and circle (all right brain concepts), we integrate our left brain thinking with our right brain thinking, and new pathways emerge in our brains. Surprises show up that take us to deeper understanding when our right brain has space to influence and shape the journey our left brain takes.



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## Mandala journaling - The Practice

I invite you to create space for your right brain to play, explore, learn, and engage with mandala journaling. As you begin this new practice, I encourage you to keep these guidelines in mind:

1. **Don't over-think what you're putting on the page.** The best way to make a mandala is to use an intuitive, spontaneous process of simply allowing whatever wants to show up next to show up. You will learn more by allowing this intuitive process to happen than by trying to direct it.
2. **It's about the process, not the product.** Keep in mind what Jung said about mandala-making not being art. You are not creating a product, but rather you are engaging your creative mind in a process of discovery and spiritual journeying. In many traditions (such as Tibetan sand mandalas) the mandala-makers are quite intentional about destroying their creation once it is complete, which can be a meaningful practice in non-attachment to the product.
3. **There is no "wrong" way to do this.** Start with a circle and then move on from there - it's that simple. Try different forms, come up with your own ideas, and don't let yourself be limited by a certain expectation of what it should look like. Sometimes you'll end up with a mandala that seems ugly to your eye. There is a lesson to be learned even in that process. Just let it happen.
4. **You can break the "rules".** While I will provide guidelines for the mandala-making process, they are simply that - guidelines. Make the process your own and don't worry about pleasing anyone other than yourself and your Creative Source.
5. **Find a space and time that works for you.** Mandala-making is a powerful meditative process, and to get the most of it, I encourage you to find quiet spaces and times in your schedule when you can still your mind and be free from interruptions. This doesn't mean that you can't have fun with it though. Making mandalas with friends or with your kids in a less contemplative fashion can also be a meaningful exercise.
6. **There are no rules for interpreting your mandalas.** While some may be deeply meaningful, others may simply serve as ways of stilling your over-active logic-seeking right brain. Sometimes you will find meaning in a mandala as you're making it, and other times you'll realize it has meaning only a week after you've set it aside. Sometimes the colour or shapes may have symbolic meaning (and you can research more about those meanings [here](#)) and other times they will have meaning only for you.
7. **To find meaning, simply sit in inquiry with your mandala.** As I said before, don't over-think it, simply be curious. Ask yourself questions such as "What might these shapes represent in my life? Why am I drawn to these particular colours? How does the flow of this mandala seem different to what I've done in the past? What feelings did this process evoke in me? Is there a greater sense of clarity in any area of my life after doing the mandala?" If no answers come, simply let it go and walk away. Something may come to you later, or perhaps it will remain in your subconscious mind and you'll never fully be able to articulate it. Remember that you have evoked your right brain thinking and there are not always words to attach to what is going on there.



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This is a suggested toolkit. Feel free to add or subtract as you develop your own practice.



## 1. Mandala Journal

- Any art journal with unlined pages is fine, but I would recommend that you find one with square pages. These are a little harder to find, but are sometimes available at art supply stores.
- Make sure the journal has heavy pages so that the markers won't bleed through.
- I always tear out a page of the journal to tuck behind the page I'm drawing on - to protect the next page from bleeding. I poke a hole through the centre of this page to use as a template each time I start a new page and need to know where centre is.



## 2. Coloured markers

- Any coloured markers will do, but you may want to test them to see which consistency you prefer. Some of the expensive paint markers don't cover smoothly - they look more like paint brush strokes, which I don't particularly like for my mandalas.
- My personal preference is Sharpie markers.
- I use fine tip and extra fine tip Sharpie markers. It's good to have a variety as some are used for filling in colour, and others are used for writing words.



## 3. Pencil crayons

- Any pencil crayons are fine. I use Crayolas, the same kind I buy for my kids.
- You may want to experiment with watercolour pencils, or other coloured pencils, but I haven't found that spending more money on pencil crayons is a worthwhile investment.



## 4. Compass

- A compass from a child's geometry set is fine, but just be sure that it has a sharp point and that it doesn't slip from the paper easily.
- If you're buying a new one, you may want to look for one with a larger pen holder so that you can use it with markers. The cheapest ones usually only fit a pencil.
- I bought a nice one that has an optional built-in pencil (that you can switch with the pencil/marker holder). It also has an extension arm for when I make large mandalas. It's handy, but unnecessary.



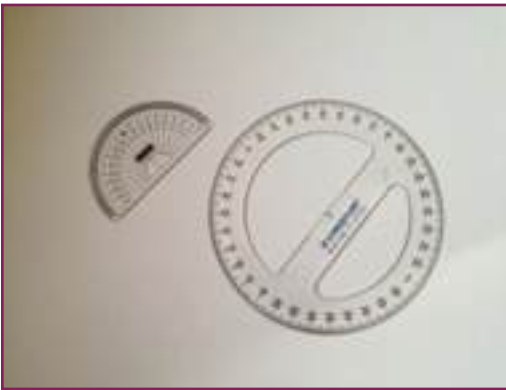
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## 5. Ruler

- A simple, inexpensive 12-inch ruler is fine.
- I have a curved ruler (the blue line on the photo) that's a drafting tool that's kind of fun to use when adding curved lines, but it's just a fun extra. (You can find them at most office supply stores.)



## 6. Protractor

- The half-circle protractor (that you can find in most children's geometry sets) is good to have for geometric mandalas when you want to divide the circle.
- I found the full circle protractor to be a good investment (it simplifies the process and makes it a little more accurate), but again, it's just a nice extra and isn't necessary.



## 7. Stencils

- This is one of my favourite and most well-used purchases. If you like mandalas with a lot of different sized circles in them (as I do), then you may enjoy having one of these.
- I also have a few other stencils, but don't use them nearly as often as this one.
- You can find these at most office supply stores.



## 8. Collage supplies

- Sometimes I make mandala collages, with photos from old magazines, coloured paper, etc.
- You'll need glue or mod podge (available at any craft stores), and an inexpensive brush to apply it.
- Note: You may want to have heavier paper (eg. watercolour paper or cardstock) for collaging, as the journal pages tend to warp.





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## 9. Paints & brushes

- Feel free to make mandalas with other art supplies - paints, clay, etc. (though you don't specifically need paint for any of the prompts in Mandala Discovery)
- As you develop your practice, your own favourite material may emerge - give yourself permission!
- Your only limit is your imagination!



## 10. Lids, bowls, etc.

- If you don't want to invest in a compass, protractor, or a circle stencil, find what you need to make circle shapes around your house.
- Anything goes - bowls, lids, etc.
- Be creative!





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## LESSON 1 - PLAY!

play [pley] (verb)

1. to exercise or employ oneself in diversion, amusement, or recreation.
2. to do something in sport that is not to be taken seriously.
3. to amuse oneself; toy; trifle
4. to take part or engage in a game.

### Start with play...

To begin your mandala journey, let's begin where every discovery and every childhood adventure begins - with play!

**PLAY [pley]: (verb) to exercise or employ oneself in diversion, amusement, or recreation; to do something in sport that is not to be taken seriously.**

A lot of grownups have forgotten the importance of play, because we think there are more important things to do. We forget that play is how it all began. Play is what taught us much about what we know of the world.

Play is transformative. It brings us closer to our most authentic selves. It invites us to see the world through fresh lenses. It helps us reframe our lives and it opens new pathways on which we can to explore our futures. It can be the vehicle through which we hear the voice of the Divine. If we follow it in an intuitive way, it can lead us into what we are meant to do in this world.

*"A little nonsense now and then, is cherished by the wisest men." - Roald Dahl*

*"You can discover more about a person in an hour of play than in a year of conversation." - Plato*

Remembering how to play may be one of the most important things you'll need to do on this mandala discovery journey. Unless you return to play, you will have a tendency to turn your mandala-making into work or art or perfection-seeking, and that's not what it's about at all. **Mandala-making is about the process, not the product, and the process is about first inviting yourself to PLAY!**



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Unless you give yourself permission to play, you can't enter a deeper space in this practice. **Play is the invitation to the right brain to show up for the party.**

What does the word "play" evoke for you? Would you consider yourself to be someone who has enough play in her/his life? If you were to invite play into your life in a new way this week, what would that look like? How does play show up in your creative and/or spiritual practice?

## Your Playful Mandala

I encourage you to make the playful mandala your own and to practice playing with colour and lines. Below are a couple of options, but mostly for this one, I want you to begin by bringing yourself back to your childhood when you didn't need to be given instructions. If you were given a box full of crayons and some blank paper, you'd simply sit and play with colour. **Remember:** Play has no rules!

Beginning with play helps us to open our creative right brains. It's a warm-up exercise for our 30 days of mandala journaling.

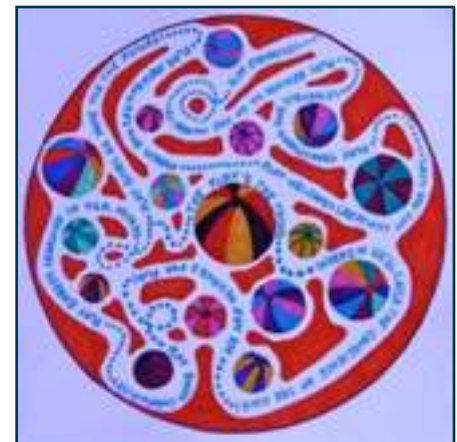
### Option 1:

Draw a large circle on a page. Inside the circle, draw many smaller circles of multiple sizes. Fill in the spaces the intersecting lines create.



### Option 2:

What image evokes play for you? A beach ball? A party hat? Draw that image repeatedly all over your circle. In a meandering line in the spaces in between, add the words those images evoke. You can also do this with images cut from an old magazine.





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## LESSON 2 - JOURNEY

journey [jur-nee] (noun)

1. a traveling from one place to another, usually taking a rather long time; trip: a six-day journey across the desert.
2. passage or progress from one stage to another: the journey to success.

### On a journey

*"The journey in between what you once were and who you are now becoming is where the dance of Life really takes place." - Barbara De Angelis*

Each of us is on a journey "traveling from one place to another". This is not a journey to a NEW place or a NEW self - it's a journey to our TRUE place, our TRUE Self.

Some of us forget that, and allow ourselves to get stuck in one place. It feels safer if I don't change, refuse to grow, and avoid the discomfort of being stretched. It might feel safer at first, but that stuck place is an unhappy, toxic place, and the toxicity will kill you.

Mandala-making is like a journey for the mind. It awakens us from the semi-conscious business of our day-to-day lives, and invites us on a pilgrimage into something deeper.

If we open ourselves to the possibilities, the mandala serves as a circular portal to the intuitive, to the deepest parts of you that are hidden beneath layers and layers of ego, lies, false-self, and fears.

As we see in [this 3D version of the Tibetan mandala](#), Buddhists see the mandala as a journey to the two dieties - feminine and masculine as one. However you see those two dieties - as Gods, as Source, as Self, or simply as representations of the Universe, there is a journey we must all make to something deeper in our interior selves. That deeper place is an integration of our yin and our yang, our feminine and masculine. The mandala can help us on that journey.

I welcome you on this journey to Self/Source/Centre. This is the hero's journey that Joseph Campbell teaches about, or the heroine's journey (that is different and yet the same). It will not always be an easy journey, and sometimes the twists and turns will make it feel nearly impossible, but it is a worthwhile journey. You know this journey, because you have always



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been on it, though you often felt like you were sitting still rather than traveling. Just like a mandala that is circular rather than linear, your journey will never be straight.

Your mandala practice will help you lend meaning and depth to this journey as you learn to peel away the layers that distract you from what's at the centre.

## The labyrinth as mandala

The labyrinth gets its name from a Greek myth, in which the skillful artisan Daedalus built an elaborate structure - a labyrinth - for King Minos of Crete. He designed it to capture the Minotaur, a creature that was half-man and half-bull, which the hero Theseus would eventually kill. In order to capture the Minotaur, Daedalus made the labyrinth difficult to escape from. But the clever Ariadne provided Theseus with a ball of thread, enabling him to kill the Minotaur and find his way out again.

Like Theseus, our journey takes us through the labyrinth toward the centre - that place of the great unknown where we must cross a threshold (kill the minotaur) to get closer to our true selves.

The labyrinth symbolizes the search for the One, or God, salvation or enlightenment. The journey to God takes us on a path that leads along many deceptive twists and turns to the centre. The labyrinth also symbolizes the many dangers of the spiritual path; for example, one can get discouraged or lost in despair, or fall off the path altogether. But if these dangers are overcome, the centre awaits as a symbol of love and completion.



**The labyrinth is a winding, confusing path, but it's not one that you can get lost on.**

When you walk the labyrinth, there are times when you find yourself tantalizingly close to the goal, but then, suddenly, you find yourself moving away from the centre. You can trust the path to take you to the center eventually, no matter where you happen to be at the moment.

We might say that the labyrinth is a symbol of God, who is both the centre we seek and the path that gets us there. What we need is to trust the centre and to trust the path that leads to it.

It is the labyrinth's lack of complexity that allows so many people to use it as a meditative or devotional tool. Once we are on the path, our minds are freed from the need to make decisions. Whether we walk the labyrinth alone or with others, its simplicity offers the possibility that we can clear our minds, cleanse our souls, and celebrate our bodies.



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Like all rites of passage and initiation ceremonies, walking the labyrinth is structured as a pilgrimage with three parts. According to Veriditas, walking a prayer labyrinth involves 3 stages: purgation (**releasing**), illumination (**receiving**), and union (**returning**). First comes the journey inward (releasing), toward the sacred space where change happens. Next, time is spent at the centre, where the new life begins (receiving). Finally there is the journey outward, the return of the transformed person to the world, often with a new identity (returning).

For inspiration, here's a video I made about my favourite labyrinth: <http://youtu.be/hPiXVsRhp4s>

## Labyrinth Mandala

Begin by drawing a small circle at the centre of a much larger circle. This small circle will be the centre of the labyrinth. Starting at a point on the large outer circle, start drawing a line that spirals inward toward the small circle at the centre.

In labyrinth walking, the way in is about the **RELEASE**, when one sheds the cares and distractions of life and opens his/her heart and mind. Standing at the centre is about being open to **RECEIVING** whatever is there for us. Departing from the labyrinth is about **RETURNING** when we integrate what we have received and prepare to bring it back with us into our lives.

Following the spiraling line, begin to write intuitively about whatever you want to release. Don't censor yourself - simply write what comes to mind. Do you need to release control? Stress? Relationships? Negative thoughts? (You can start your sentences with "I am releasing...".)

Once you're at the centre, write words inside the small circle that represent what you are open to receiving. Again, do this intuitively without censoring yourself.

On the opposite side of the spiraling line and starting from the centre, write about your returning. What do you need to bring out into your work, relationships, etc.? What can you do to integrate what you are receiving into your day-to-day life? (You can start your sentences with "I am trusting that..." or "I am growing in...".)





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## LESSON 3 - CHAOS

chaos [key-os] (noun)

1. a state of utter confusion or disorder; a total lack of organization or order.
2. any confused, disorderly mass: a chaos of meaningless phrases.
3. the infinity of space or formless matter supposed to have preceded the existence of the ordered universe.

### Open yourself to chaos...

Chaos is an important part of life. Chaos is where creative ideas are born. It's what gives birth to ingenuity and new paradigms. We've all heard the saying "necessity is the mother of invention". I would add that "**chaos is the mother of invention.**"

Chaos feels uncomfortable. There's no solid ground to stand on. There's nothing familiar to rely on. But chaos is absolutely necessary, and the sooner you can learn to embrace it, the sooner you will welcome the transformation.

Like the caterpillar who has to give up everything familiar, surrender itself to the cocoon, and deconstruct into a gooey messy chrysalis before it can emerge as a butterfly, you have to be willing to step off the cliff of the familiar and enter into the chaos of un-knowing before you can emerge as a stronger, more beautiful you.

When making mandalas, the greatest temptation is to seek order and turn away from chaos. Again and again, I hear people say "But... how do make it symmetrical? How do you make sure the sections balance? What if it's not perfect?"

What I hear in these words is not simply a desire to create something that's pleasing to the eye, it's a **fear of chaos**. Many of us do not want to create if the act of creativity means that we have to get messy and let chaos into our lives.

The truth is, chaos is embedded in the very act of creation. Nothing new can be created unless there is some element of brokenness and chaos. A bird can't grow unless it first breaks the eggshell that holds it. A seed can't grow unless it breaks through its shell and then breaks through the soil into the light.

*"You must have chaos within you to give birth to a dancing star." - Friedrich Nietzsche*



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What does chaos have to do with mandala-making? A lot. Mandala-making, though it may seem like a very orderly thing to do in many traditions, is also about accepting some chaos in our lives and being willing to till the soil in preparation for new seeds to grow.

This week, you are invited to bring chaos into your mandalas, to let go of the outcome, to not care about perfection, and to let creativity happen.

## Chaos Mandala

Imagine yourself surrounded by chaos. How does that feel for you? Are you content, anxious, strong, energized, weak, afraid? How do you manage chaos? By creating order to help you cope with it? With prayer, meditation, or some other spiritual practice?

At the centre of a large circle, place something that represents you when you're in the middle of chaos. It can be simply a coloured circle, your name, a photo of yourself, or something that represents a spiritual practice you turn to when you need to be centred and grounded.

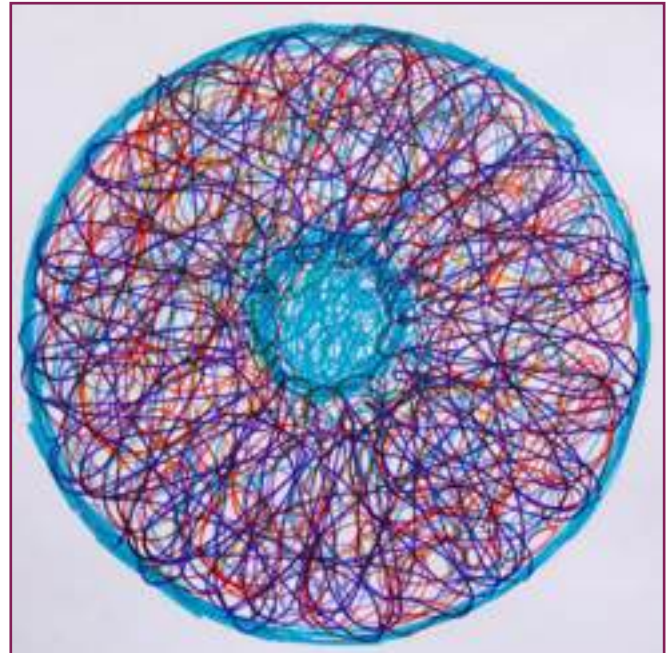
Around the centre, but inside the larger circle, build chaos. You can do this in a variety of ways:

- Scribble wildly with multi-coloured markers, without any perceivable order or "art".
- Cut images out of old magazines of things that represent chaos for you. Glue them in the space between the centre and the outside circle.
- Fill the space with words that represent chaos for you.
- Or do a combination of these three - images, scribbles, and words.

Let go of self-judgement. Remember - this is not art, it's process.

Once you're done, sit back and reflect on your mandala. Does the mess of it leave you with discomfort? Does it please you in an unexpected way? Does anything surprise you?

*"No one can save us from the state of chaos or samsara unless we understand the meaning of chaos and confusion, unless we have experienced it and suffered from it. Otherwise, although we may be in the midst of chaos, we don't notice it. You don't begin to notice chaos until you are already on the path. Then you begin to feel uncomfortable. You feel that something is a nuisance. Something's bugging you constantly. You realize the chaos when you are already making the journey." - Chogyam Trungpa*







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## LESSON 4 - BALANCE

balance [bal-uhns] (noun)

1. a state of equilibrium or equipoise; equal distribution of weight, amount
2. something used to produce equilibrium; counterpoise.
3. mental steadiness or emotional stability; habit of calm behavior, judgment, etc.

(verb)

4. to bring to or hold in equilibrium;
5. to be equal or proportionate to.



### Finding balance...

In the last lesson, we talked about chaos, and one might assume that we are now talking about the opposite. That's not the case though - balance is not the opposite of chaos. Balance is about learning to live within the chaos without getting overwhelmed by it.

**Balance is about finding your equilibrium, your still-point.** Mandala-making can help with that.

Mandala-making helps us quiet the voices in our heads that respond the most loudly when chaos appears. You know the voices... "Your life is out of control! You'll never be able to figure this out. You're failing. You can't keep everyone happy. You're going to crash and burn!"

When you make your mandalas, your mind shifts away from all of that noise and into a place of more calm. You slow down the chaos around you enough to get more perspective. Often, after making mandalas, you'll find that new ideas have formed that help you through the chaos, simply because you managed to quiet your mind enough to listen for the deeper truths.

### Out of chaos, birth

In the biblical narrative and in many other religious narratives, before the creation of the world, there was chaos. The black hole. The abyss. The nothingness.

Many of us are familiar with the Yin and Yang symbol that is, in itself, a form of mandala. The Yin and Yang symbol is about that act of creation - something forming out of nothing, balance and meaning emerging out of chaos.



# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

For the ancient Taoists of China, it starts with an empty circle. That empty circle represents Wu Chi or Tao, a pregnant void from which the universe emerged. Wu Chi then gave birth to a primordial organic unity from which emerged two apparently opposite forces, Yin and Yang.

Yin and yang are actually complementary, not opposing, forces, interacting to form a whole greater than either separate part; in effect, a dynamic system. These dynamic forces ceaselessly interpenetrate each other, giving birth to 'myriad beings'. Everything has both yin and yang aspects, (for instance shadow cannot exist without light). Either of the two major aspects may manifest more strongly in a particular object, depending on the criterion of the observation.

This is the order that emerges out of chaos - a dynamic system that balances yin with yang, light with the dark, feminine with masculine, hot with cold, and life with death. This is what we invite into our lives when we walk through chaos and invite birth to happen.

*"The things we fear most in organizations—fluctuations, disturbances, imbalances—are the primary sources of creativity." — Margaret J. Wheatley*

## Yin Yang Mandala

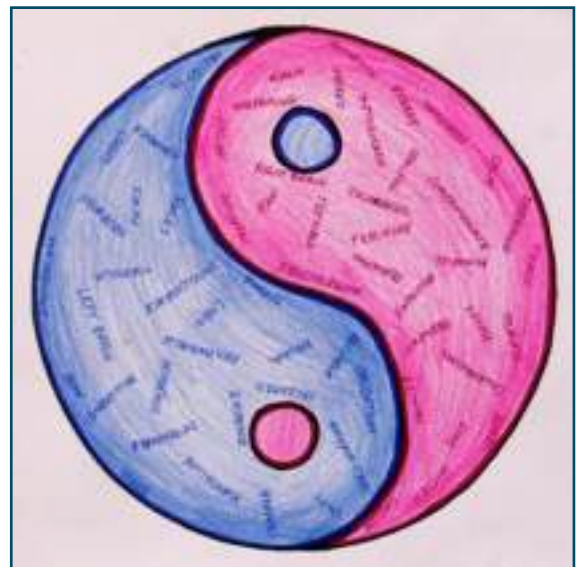
Turn a large circle into a yin-yang symbol, with a curved line in the middle and a dot on either side of the curve.

Fill one side with words that represent chaos/spontaneity/disorder, and the other side with words that represent order/planning/rigidity. (These words should reflect both the positive and negative aspects of each word - both hold the paradox of being both positive and negative.)

If you wish, colour over the words in two contrasting colours.

Which side feels the most comfortable for you? Which side would you turn to in times of stress? Is there tension between the two halves of who you are? Is your life out of balance, leaning too far one way or the other? Do you walk that centre line?

In [The Art of Hosting](#) work, we call that centre line between chaos and order the "chaordic path" and it is that path we need to walk on if we want to be involved in transformative change.





# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

## LESSON 5 - PRAYER

prayer [praɪr] (noun)

1. a devout petition to God or an object of worship
2. a spiritual communion with God or an object of worship, as in supplication, thanksgiving, adoration, or confession
3. the intercourse of the soul with God

### The doorway of prayer

**Praying** - by Mary Oliver

*It doesn't have to be  
the blue iris, it could be  
weeds in a vacant lot, or a few  
small stones; just  
pay attention, then patch*

*a few words together and don't try  
to make them elaborate, this isn't  
a contest but the doorway*

*into thanks, and a silence in which  
another voice may speak.*

It was a revolutionary time for me when I realized that prayer didn't need to include words.

In my childhood, I couldn't eat a meal without a prayer of thanksgiving, and couldn't go to bed without saying my bedtime prayers. To me, THAT was prayer. And yet... As I grew older and became more and more aware of the complexity of the world and the limitation of language, I felt less and less satisfied with the kind of prayer that implied a one-way communication and didn't leave space for those things that are too deep for words.



# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

As Mary Oliver says, prayer is a “doorway into thanks, and a silence in which another voice may speak.”

That “Other Voice” (God, Goddess, Source, True Self, Universe), wants to speak with you, but unless you enter into silence once in awhile, you won’t hear it. We always miss the deepest wisdom when we are too caught up in the noise and busy-making of our lives.

**Mandala-making provides us with an opportunity to sit in silence and open that doorway. When we sit in silence and play with colour and circle, we invite the Spirit to visit.**

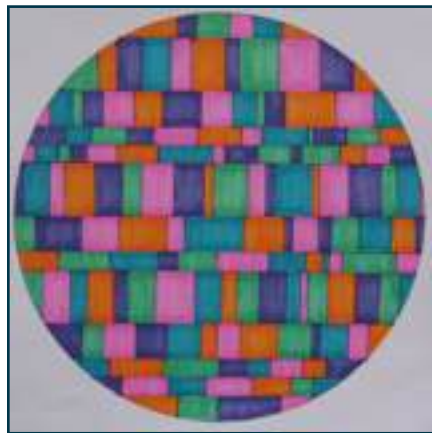
## Prayer Mandala

Today’s mandala will be about creating that space of silence into which the Other Voice can speak. As the definition of prayer says at the top of this lesson, it’s “the intercourse of the soul with God.”

I am reluctant to give you definitive instructions on how to make a prayer mandala, because prayer is a very personal thing. Instead, I will say... Sit silently, breathe deeply, close your eyes for a moment and picture a door to your heart opening. Then, when you have relaxed your muscles and your mind, proceed to fill your circle with colour. Like meditation, just let the thoughts flow through your mind unhindered.

This is YOUR prayer and your mandala-practice, so make it what you wish. Let the breath of Spirit move through you as you pick your colours, your shapes, and your lines. Listen quietly for the still small voice while you colour.

I don’t want you to get caught up in making it look a certain way, but here are a few visuals for inspiration:





# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

## LESSON 6 - THROUGH

through [throo] (adverb)

1. in at one end, side, or surface and out at the other: to push a needle through; just passing through.
2. all the way; along the whole distance: eg. this train goes through to Boston.

### The things we pass through on the journey

Along life's journey, there is much that we must pass through. Sometimes we pass through cycles of grief, sometimes we pass through joy and lightness, and sometimes we pass through fear.

It is important to remember that we are **passing through**. Like pilgrims on a journey, passing through one town after another, we are passing through the villages of our lives, stopping as long as we need to in order to replenish our food supply, rest, learn, and connect with our loved ones.

We can't stay forever in a town called grief, or another town called joy. Each one is meant to be passed through. Sometimes we come back to a town, or visit another with a similar one, but we can't stay in one place. We learn much along the journey when we are willing to spend as much time as necessary in each town we pass through, but when we cling too tightly to one place or another, we become stuck, bitter, and unfulfilled.

*"Everything has its wonders, even darkness and silence, and I learn, whatever state I may be in, therein to be content." -Helen Keller.*

*"Yes, it's uncomfortable to feel lost. But you won't find magic on the highways on the map. Your true destiny is on a dirt road only you can name. Maybe you don't feel like you know where you're going. But at least you're daring the truth. It's worse to have a label, a place, a certainty that you know is never going to be yours." - Tama J. Kieves*

**What are you passing through in your life right now?**



# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

## Passing Through - a Mandala

Wherever you are in the journey - whatever is showing up in your life right now - acknowledge it and do a “through” mandala (like the ones below) around that theme.

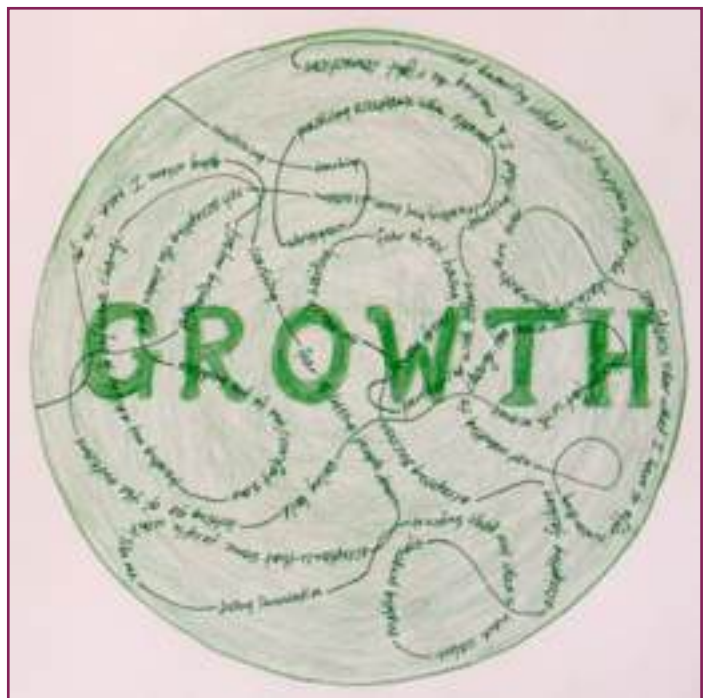
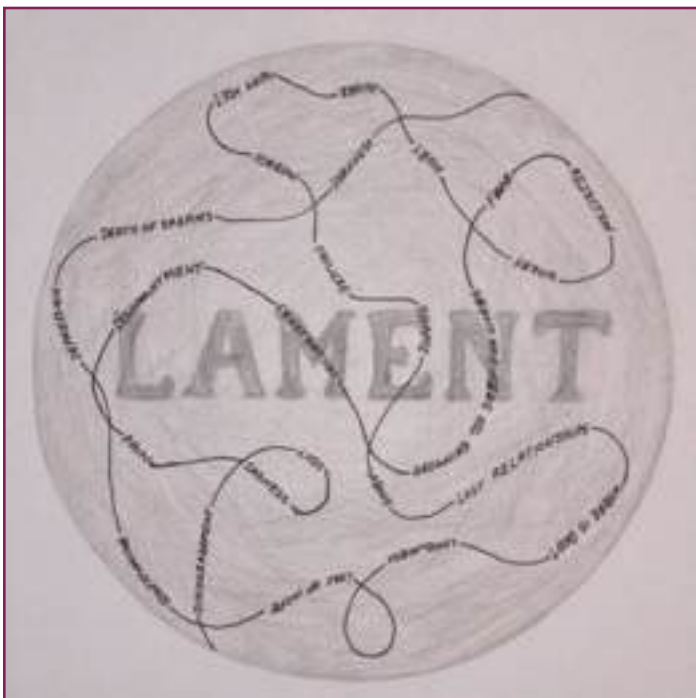
It might be that you’re passing through a place of **lament**, **growth**, **change**, **chaos**, **grief** or **joy**. Begin with that word at the centre of the mandala. Print it in large letters across the circle.

Beginning at the edge of the mandala, start drawing a meandering line all over the circle.

Stop periodically to write whatever words, ideas, or questions come to mind (along the theme of the word at the centre) along that meandering line.

Don’t censor yourself or try too hard to make words fit. Just let them show up intuitively. Once you’re done, you can shade the mandala in a colour that fits the word.

What is showing up for you in as you pass through the “village” at the centre of the labyrinth? Did anything shift for you as you began to acknowledge the feelings and questions along the way? Did you feel like you’d arrived at a different place at the end than you were in the beginning?





# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

## LESSON 7 - QUESTION

question [kwes-chuhn]  
(noun)

1. a problem for discussion or under discussion; a matter for investigation.
2. a matter of some uncertainty or difficulty; problem

(verb)

1. to ask or inquire
2. to challenge or dispute

### Sitting with the Questions

Mandalas invite us out past our linear, problem-fixing mindsets, into a circular world, where truth leads us down spiral pathways instead of straight lines. They help us shift out of the space where language and logic box us in, and into a space where colour, shapes, intuition, prayer, circle, and meditation open the world in new ways for us.

In a mandala practice, you explore the shades of grey that were missing when you first looked at the issue through a black and white lens. In the context of a mandala, questions and ambiguity become things of beauty rather than obstacles to be wrestled with.

**There is scientific evidence that suggests that asking questions is more effective for getting stuff done than goal-setting.**

Three social scientists once conducted a series of experiments to determine which was more effective, “declarative” self-talk (I will fix it!) or “interrogative” self-talk (Can I fix it?). They began by presenting a group of participants with some anagrams to solve (for example, rearranging the letters in “sauce” to spell “cause”.) Before the participants tackled the problem, though, the researchers asked half of them to take a minute to ask themselves whether they would complete the task. The other half of the group was instructed to tell themselves that they would complete the task.

**In the end, the self-questioning group solved significantly more anagrams than the self-affirming group.**

The researchers – Ibrahim Senay and Dolores Albarracin of the University of Illinois, along with Kenji Noguchi of the University of Southern Mississippi – then enlisted a new group to try a variation with a twist of trickery: “We told participants that we were interested in people's



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handwriting practices. With this pretense, participants were given a sheet of paper to write down 20 times one of the following word pairs: Will I, I will, I, or Will. Then they were asked to work on a series of 10 anagrams in the same way participants in Experiment One did."

This experiment resulted in the same outcome as the first. People primed with "Will I" solved nearly twice as many anagrams as people in the other three groups. In follow-up experiments, the same pattern continued to hold. Those who approach a task with questioning self-talk did better than those who began with affirming self-talk.

*"I would like to beg you dear Sir, as well as I can, to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer." - Rainer Maria Rilke*

## Question Mandala

Divide the space between the centre and the edge of the mandala into three equal circles.

In the circle at the centre of the mandala, write a "what if" question that you're wrestling with. It could be something like "What if I live more authentically?" or "What if I end this relationship?" or "What if I go back to school?" or "What if I go on the trip I've been longing to go on?"

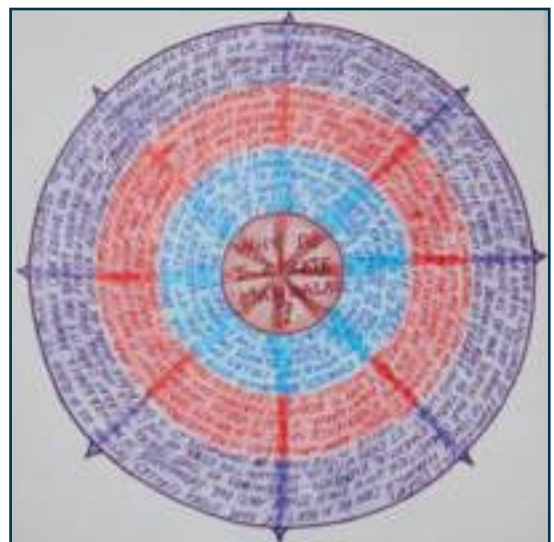
Starting in the circle just outside the inner circle, begin writing intuitively in response to your question. This could be answers to the question, or deeper questions that it brings up.

In the first ring, focus on the question as it relates to **your own personal life**. How are you impacted by the question?

In the second ring, focus on the question as it relates to **the people closest to you** - your family and closest friends.

In the third ring, focus on the question as it relates to **the people you come into contact with who aren't in your inner circle** - your clients, neighbours, colleagues, etc.

If you wish, shade the rings of the circle and add any embellishments you'd like.







# Mandala Discovery

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## LESSON 8 - SURRENDER

surrender [suh-ren-der] (verb)

1. to yield (something) to the possession or power of another; deliver up possession of on demand or under duress
2. to give (oneself) up to some influence, course, emotion, etc
3. to yield or resign (an office, privilege, etc.) in favor of another.

### Transformation through surrender

What if surrender is not about admitting weakness or giving up control or accepting a life of drudgery under someone else's power? What if surrendering to my True Self means that I'm choosing a life of DELIGHT? What if it's not about giving up everything I am and dream of being, but rather it's about stepping more fully into my natural giftedness and interests? What if it's about living more fully and richly than I've ever lived before?

Let's take a look at the humble caterpillar and consider what surrender means to her. Chances are, if caterpillars dream, they dream of adventure and being beautiful and growing colourful wings and seeing vistas beyond their limited capacity on the ground (not unlike what I dream). Ms. Caterpillar may be convinced that she is the only one who can make those things happen, and so she'll work and work at primping and painting herself and reading hundreds of books on "ten easy steps to grow wings". She'll consult the experts and read travel books about what she could see if only she could fly. She'll subscribe to the "Become a Butterfly" newsletter, and pay thousands of dollars to attend butterfly retreats. She might sign up for butterfly yoga and "paint yourself beautiful" art retreats, all the while dreaming of being something she's not. She will try and try to CONTROL her destiny - quite the opposite of surrender.

But here's the truth of the matter... poor Ms. Caterpillar can not turn herself into a caterpillar, no matter how hard she tries. The retreats, the newsletters, the expensive consultants - they can't do it for her either.

The only thing that can turn a caterpillar into a butterfly is surrender. She has to surrender to the mystery, to the Creator, and to her own DNA.

There's a reason why you are drawn to certain ideas, why you have the interests you have, and why you have deep longings that won't let you go. There's a reason why you long to dance, find your fingers itching to hold a paintbrush again, yearn for the stage, feel drawn to people who



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are hurting, want to spend all your time digging in the soil, or get really restless when you haven't traveled in months. Those are all messages from your True Heart saying "follow your true love and you will find the way to flight."

When we do mandala journaling, we are opening ourselves to the possibility that something new will emerge out of the depths of our hearts that will surprise and challenge us. It's a surrender to the divine within each one of us - a surrender to what we have been created for.

## Surrender Mandala

At the centre of the mandala, place an image (cut from a magazine or drawn), or word that represents what/who you are surrendering to. It could be an image that represents your higher power (God, Goddess, etc.), your best Self, or the Universe. It might be something you don't fully understand yet - a concept that is still fuzzy in your mind but you have a sense that it is that Source that holds you and wants the best for you. If you are confused about it, simply make an intuitive choice about the image or word and don't over-think it. Perhaps something will show up that will surprise you. For example, it may be a simple picture of nature that reminds you that there is a Creative Source out there bringing beauty and meaning to the world.



Fill the space between the centre and the edge of the mandala with images and/or words that represent the things that you are surrendering. Your ego? Your control over money? Your love? Your willingness to serve? Again, make these choices intuitively and see what shows up. It may not have meaning right away, but perhaps when you look at it a week later, something will surprise you.

### Reflection:

What are you surrendering? What are you letting go of? How is that represented?

To whom/what are you surrendering? How is that represented?

What does the surrender feel like while you're doing it and once you've finally released it?



# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

## LESSON 9 - COURAGE

courage [kur-ij] (noun)

1. the quality of mind or spirit that enables a person to face difficulty, danger, pain, etc.; bravery.
2. (obsolete) the heart as the source of emotion.

### Stepping into courage

Stepping off the precipice of solid, familiar ground and into the chaos of uncertainty, questions, and change brings up a lot of fear for people. Surrender is a scary thing. You need courage to step into the abyss.

**Courage is not the absence of fear, it's about choosing to step forward despite it.**

Fear is a natural and necessary part of life. Without fear, we do irrational things - we hurt people we love and we never learn to recognize danger or the deep longings in our hearts.

**Fear can be very useful to us.** It keeps us from getting hurt when we spot an angry dog foaming at the mouth. It reminds us to lock our doors at night. It sends us physical signals - sweaty palms, racing pulse, trembling lips - when we need to protect ourselves. In this context, fear is a life-preserving reaction to a recognizable danger.

The problem is not that we HAVE fear in our lives, the problem is that we let fear CONTROL us and keep us from the things our hearts are longing for.

The next time you face fear, your first and most important task will be to sit in inquiry with it and examine what it is trying to tell you. This is where your mandala journaling practice can help. Have a conversation with your fear. Is it a legitimate fear that is trying to keep you out of danger? Is it giving you useful information about where the risks are and where you should be more prepared? Does it have its basis in truth, or is it making up lies to keep you small? Is it rooted in an old story that you've been carrying around with you that really isn't useful anymore?



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*“One isn't necessarily born with courage, but one is born with potential. Without courage, we cannot practice any other virtue with consistency. We can't be kind, true, merciful, generous, or honest.” ~Maya Angelou*

*“The safe road may be the easiest road, but if you want growth, then the safe road is not for you.” - Brene Brown*

## Courage Mandala

*“The root of the word courage is cor—the Latin word for heart. In one of its earliest forms, the word courage literally had a very different definition than it does today. Courage originally meant ‘To speak one’s mind by telling all one’s heart.’ Over time, this definition has actually changed, and today, courage is synonymous with being heroic or performing brave deeds. Heroics and bravery are important, but I think we’ve lost touch with the idea that speaking honestly and openly about who we are, about what we’re feeling, and about our experiences (good and bad) is the ultimate act of courage. Heroics is often about putting your life on the line. Ordinary courage is about putting your vulnerability on the line. In today’s world, that’s pretty extraordinary.” - Brene Brown*

Imagine yourself choosing to be courageous in a situation that causes you fear. What does that look like for you? What do you say? What old belief do you need to challenge? What voices do you need to silence?

In the centre of the mandala, write the words “I am courageous when I...” In a spiraling fashion around those words, write what intuitively comes to mind for you about the courage that is centred in your true heart.

This may mean, for you, that the centre - the heart of your courage - is the Higher Power that you identified in the lesson on surrender. If you rely fully on this Higher Power (or best self), what courage emerges out of you?





# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

## LESSON 10 - INTUITION

intuition [in-too-ish-uhn] (noun)

1. direct perception of truth, fact, etc., independent of any reasoning process
2. a fact, truth, etc., perceived in this way.
3. a keen and quick insight.
4. the quality or ability of having such direct perception or quick insight.

### Learning to trust the voice of intuition

There are many competing voices - those inside our heads and outside it - vying for our attention when we try to make decisions. Of all of those voices, the voice of intuition is often the least trusted.

Most of us live in cultures that value reason and logic over intuition. When we were children, our intuition showed up instinctively and we followed it, but then when we left the playground for the classroom, our intuition was pushed to the side and treated like the poor second cousin of logic. We spent at least twelve years in school being taught to trust the facts, the scientific evidence and the historical data. Our high school and college years were spent learning how to write objectively where our own voices, opinions, and intuition were intentionally left out of the picture.

We were never taught to listen to our intuition.

**Without our intuition, we make decisions based on only HALF of the wisdom we have at our disposal.**

The good news is that even though it's been ignored for so many years, our intuition remains stubborn and it sticks around, waiting to be acknowledged. All we have to do is begin to coax it back into our lives and it will begin to guide us again.

An active mandala practice helps us coax the intuition out of hiding. Like the sandbox in the playground many years ago, a mandala journal offers a safe space for the intuition to play and grow.



# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

*“Most mandalas have an intuitive, irrational character and, through their symbolical content, exert a retroactive influence on the unconscious. They therefore possess a ‘magical’ significance, like icons, whose possible efficacy was never consciously felt by the patient.” – C.G. Jung*

As Jung says, we don’t always have a conscious, rational understanding of what’s showing up when we make mandalas, and sometimes the understanding of what is showing up remains unclear until after we’ve walked away. By simply beginning, we open a doorway into our subconscious that may bring up things we were never aware that we knew.

## Mandala - giving your intuition a playground

It’s difficult for the intuition to show up in a crowded, busy mind, so for today’s mandala, let’s work at creating space where the voice of the intuition can be heard. Work on your mandala in a quiet place where there are no interruptions or distractions (or at least as few as possible).

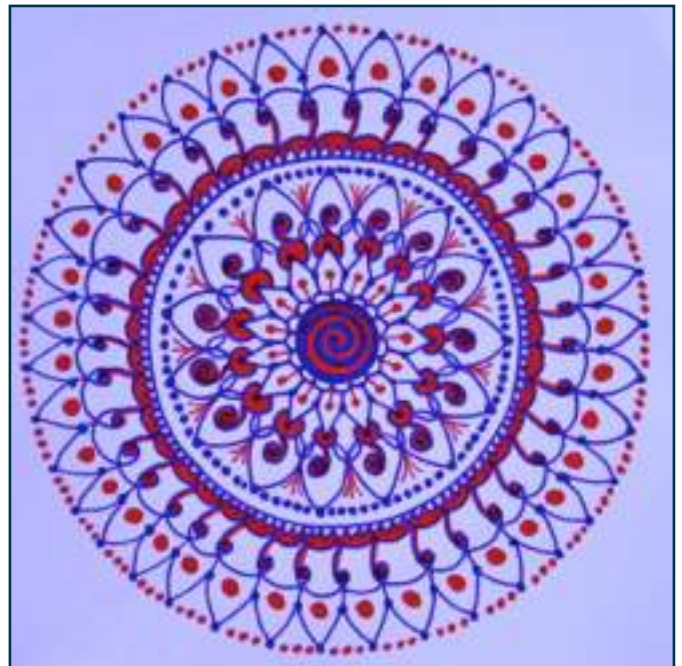
Draw a large circle in pencil, with a dot at the centre so that you know where to begin.

Begin to make a shape at the centre. Make whatever shape comes to mind, but keep it relatively balanced so that you can build on top of it in a circular fashion.

Add a simple shape that repeats itself around the centre shape. Keep doing this in ever-expanding circles until you reach the outer edge.

You can do this with a single colour, with two colours, or with as many colours as you wish.

While you’re working on the mandala, simply open your mind to whatever shows up, not judging your thoughts or feelings, but simply entertaining them and then sending them on their way. When your mind threatens to distract you from your mindfulness, return to your breath and focus simply on that.





# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

## LESSON 11 - CYCLE

cycle [sahy-kuhl] (noun)

1. any complete round or series of occurrences that repeats or is repeated.
2. a round of years or a recurring period of time, especially one in which certain events or phenomena repeat themselves in the same order and at the same intervals.
3. any long period of years; age.

### Moving through the cycles of life...

In an earlier lesson, we talked about the journeys we are all on throughout our lives. Though we do make progress in our journeys and there will be change and growth if we allow it, we must also remember that life goes through cycles and often what feels like progress ends up bringing us back to the same place we were once before.

Our journey is not a linear one. Like the seasons, we pass from a period of planting, to growth, to death, to dormancy - and then we do it all over again.

Our cycles are not as predictable as the seasons, and sometimes winter feels like it takes years before we finally shift into the season of green again. But we trust that change will come again and that the dormancy is necessary for the growth to happen.

Like the labyrinth, there are times when we feel like we are finally getting closer to the centre, and then suddenly we turn the corner and we are far away again. In these times, we need to trust that the journey is taking us where we need to go, and that putting one foot in front of the other is the best that we can do.

### The Buddhist Wheel of Life

The Buddhist Wheel of Life mandala represents the cycles of our lives. It illustrates the Four Noble Truths of the Buddha's teachings:

- Life is suffering.
- The cause of suffering is attachment and desire.
- It is possible to end suffering.
- There is a path that can lead to liberation.



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The Wheel of Life is an optimistic affirmation that redemption is possible by recognizing the delusions that plague our existence.

**There are many symbolic illustrations in the Wheel of Life: (source: [www.religionfacts.com](http://www.religionfacts.com))**

The creature who turns the wheel of life and holds it in his clutches is Yama, a wrathful deity and the Lord of Death. Yama symbolizes the inevitability of death, samsara and the impermanence of all things. This does not lead to hopelessness, though, because outside of the wheel stands the Buddha, who points the way to liberation (symbolized by the moon).

The inner circle of the wheel contains symbols of the three root delusions: hatred (snake), ignorance (rooster), and greed (pig).

The ring around the center represents karma, with the figures on the left ascending to higher realms of existence because of virtuous actions, and the figures on the right descending to lower realms of existence because of evil or ignorant actions.



The middle ring of the wheel (the areas between the spokes) symbolizes the six realms of existence. The top half, from left to right, portrays the three higher realms of existence: humans, gods, and demi-gods. The lower half shows the three lower realms of existence: animals, hell-beings, and hungry ghosts.

The outer ring represents the 12 links of dependent origination, as follows:

1. Just to the right of the top is a blind man with a cane, representing ignorance of the true nature of the world.
2. Moving clockwise, a potter molding a pot symbolizes that we shape our own destiny with our actions through the workings of karma.
3. The monkey climbing a tree represents consciousness or the mind, which wanders aimlessly and out of control.
4. Consciousness gives rise to name and form, which is symbolized by people traveling in a boat on the river of life.





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5. The next link is an empty house, the doors and windows of which symbolize the developing sense organs. Buddha noted six senses: sight, smell, taste, hearing, touch and thought.
6. The six senses allow us to have contact with the world, which is symbolized by lovers embracing.
7. From contact arises feelings, which we categorize as pleasant, unpleasant, or neutral. Feelings are represented on the wheel as an arrow piercing the eye.
8. From feelings arises desire or attachment to pleasant feelings and experiences, symbolized by a couple falling in love or a man drinking alcohol.
9. Desire or attachment leads to grasping for an object of desire, symbolized by a monkey picking fruit.
10. From grasping arises existence, represented by a man and a woman making love.
11. Existence culminates in birth (entry into the human realm), which is symbolized by a woman in childbirth.
12. Birth naturally leads to aging and death, which is symbolized by an old man carrying a burden.

For further learning, check out this [interactive wheel of life](#), and [further explanation of its meaning](#).

It may surprise you to know that one of the wisest guides for what to anticipate in the cycles of our lives is Dr. Seuss. At first glance, his writing has little to do with mandala-making, but I invite you to take a closer look into the journey he invites us into in “**Oh the Places You’ll Go.**” There are some remarkable parallels to the Buddhist Wheel of Life.

*Note: If you don’t already own it, I encourage you to go out and buy the book and re-read it regularly. In the meantime, though, you can watch a [video with John Lithgow narrating](#), watch the [Burning Man edition](#), or read the text below.*

*Congratulations!  
Today is your day.  
You're off to Great Places!  
You're off and away!*

*You have brains in your head.  
You have feet in your shoes.  
You can steer yourself  
any direction you choose.  
You're on your own. And you know what you know.  
And YOU are the guy who'll decide where to go.*

*You'll look up and down streets. Look 'em over with care.  
About some you will say, "I don't choose to go there."  
With your head full of brains and your shoes full of feet,  
you're too smart to go down any not-so-good street.*



# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

*And you may not find any  
you'll want to go down.  
In that case, of course,  
you'll head straight out of town.*

*It's opener there  
in the wide open air.*

*Out there things can happen  
and frequently do  
to people as brainy  
and footsy as you.*

*And then things start to happen,  
don't worry. Don't stew.  
Just go right along.  
You'll start happening too.*

*OH!  
THE PLACES YOU'LL GO!*

*You'll be on your way up!  
You'll be seeing great sights!  
You'll join the high fliers  
who soar to high heights.*

*You won't lag behind, because you'll have the speed.  
You'll pass the whole gang and you'll soon take the lead.  
Wherever you fly, you'll be best of the best.  
Wherever you go, you will top all the rest.*

*Except when you don't.  
Because, sometimes, you won't.*

*I'm sorry to say so  
but, sadly, it's true  
that Bang-ups  
and Hang-ups  
can happen to you.*

*You can get all hung up  
in a prickly perch.  
And your gang will fly on.  
You'll be left in a Lurch.*

*You'll come down from the Lurch  
with an unpleasant bump.  
And the chances are, then,  
that you'll be in a Slump.*

*And when you're in a Slump,  
you're not in for much fun.*



# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

*Un-slumping yourself  
is not easily done.*

*You will come to a place where the streets are not marked.  
Some windows are lighted. But mostly they're darked.  
A place you could sprain both your elbow and chin!  
Do you dare to stay out? Do you dare to go in?  
How much can you lose? How much can you win?*

*And IF you go in, should you turn left or right...  
or right-and-three-quarters? Or, maybe, not quite?  
Or go around back and sneak in from behind?  
Simple it's not, I'm afraid you will find,  
for a mind-maker-upper to make up his mind.*

*You can get so confused  
that you'll start in to race  
down long wiggled roads at a break-necking pace  
and grind on for miles cross weirdish wild space,  
headed, I fear, toward a most useless place.  
The Waiting Place...*

*...for people just waiting.  
Waiting for a train to go  
or a bus to come, or a plane to go  
or the mail to come, or the rain to go  
or the phone to ring, or the snow to snow  
or the waiting around for a Yes or No  
or waiting for their hair to grow.  
Everyone is just waiting.*

*Waiting for the fish to bite  
or waiting for the wind to fly a kite  
or waiting around for Friday night  
or waiting, perhaps, for their Uncle Jake  
or a pot to boil, or a Better Break  
or a string of pearls, or a pair of pants  
or a wig with curls, or Another Chance.  
Everyone is just waiting.*

*NO!  
That's not for you!*

*Somehow you'll escape  
all that waiting and staying  
You'll find the bright places  
where Boom Bands are playing.*

*With banner flip-flapping,  
once more you'll ride high!  
Ready for anything under the sky.  
Ready because you're that kind of a guy!*



# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

*Oh, the places you'll go! There is fun to be done!  
There are points to be scored. There are games to be won.  
And the magical things you can do with that ball  
will make you the winning-est winner of all.  
Fame! You'll be as famous as famous can be,  
with the whole wide world watching you win on TV.*

*Except when they don't  
Because, sometimes they won't.*

*I'm afraid that some times  
you'll play lonely games too.  
Games you can't win  
'cause you'll play against you.*

*All Alone!  
Whether you like it or not,  
Alone will be something  
you'll be quite a lot.*

*And when you're alone, there's a very good chance  
you'll meet things that scare you right out of your pants.  
There are some, down the road between hither and yon,  
that can scare you so much you won't want to go on.*

*But on you will go  
though the weather be foul.  
On you will go  
though your enemies prowl.  
On you will go  
though the Hakken-Kraks howl.  
Onward up many  
a frightening creek,  
though your arms may get sore  
and your sneakers may leak.*

*On and on you will hike,  
And I know you'll hike far  
and face up to your problems  
whatever they are.*

*You'll get mixed up, of course,  
as you already know.  
You'll get mixed up  
with many strange birds as you go.  
So be sure when you step.  
Step with care and great tact  
and remember that Life's  
a Great Balancing Act.  
Just never forget to be dexterous and deft.*



# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

*And never mix up your right foot with your left.*

*And will you succeed?*

*Yes! You will, indeed!*

*(98 and 3/4 percent guaranteed.)*

*KID, YOU'LL MOVE MOUNTAINS!*

*So...*

*be your name Buxbaum or Bixby or Bray*

*or Mordecai Ali Van Allen O'Shea,*

*You're off the Great Places!*

*Today is your day!*

*Your mountain is waiting.*

*So...get on your way!*

I invite you to find the parallels between the Buddhist Wheel of Life and Dr. Seuss' "Oh the Places You'll Go". Both help us understand the many places we need to go on our journey.

## The Twelve places in Dr. Seuss' journey:

13. **Beginning:** "heading straight out of town" to the "wide open air"

14. **Action:** The place "where things start to happen" and "where you start happening too"

15. **Highs:** "Flying to high heights"

16. **Struggle:** The "prickle-ly perch", where you're "left in a lurch"

17. **Lows:** The Slumps

18. **Lost:** The place where the streets are not marked - where you get confused

19. **Pause:** The Waiting Place

20. **Celebration:** The bright places where Boom Bands are playing

21. **Fame:** where you're the winning-est winner of all

22. **Solitude:** The lonely games - where your enemies prowl

23. **Confusion:** The mixed up place - where you're mixed up with strange birds

24. **Success:** You'll move mountains!

## Wheel of Life Mandala

Create a mandala using either the Buddhist Wheel of Life or "Oh the Places You'll Go" as your frame of reference.

Draw a circle on a large piece of paper - ie. poster board

Divide the circle into 12 equal parts. Label the parts with either of the following:

- The 12 phases of human consciousness from the wheel of life: ignorance, karma, consciousness, name & form, six senses, contact, sensations, craving, clinging or grasping, becoming, birth, old age and death
- The 12 places in Dr. Seuss' journey: beginning, action, highs, struggles, lows, lost, pause, celebration, fame, solitude, confusion, and success.



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By Heather Plett

Add some representation to each of the 12 places - images cut from a magazine, sketches, or words.

*Note: These samples were created by the participants of a recent retreat I facilitated.*





# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

## LESSON 12 - COMMUNITY

community [kuh-myoo-ni-tee] (noun)

1. a social group of any size whose members reside in a specific locality, share government, and often have a common cultural and historical heritage.
2. a social, religious, occupational, or other group sharing common characteristics or interests and perceived or perceiving itself as distinct in some respect from the larger society within which it exists

### The Strength of Community

Last year I invited a few friends to join me at the centre of the labyrinth to ring in the New Year. It was a spectacular winter night, with the kind of weather that we in the Northern hemisphere long for in the dead of winter. It was pleasantly warm and a low cloud cover reflected back the city lights, making the snow glow.

I invited the women to walk to the centre of the labyrinth, releasing what they wished to leave behind in 2011. We each carried candles, and when we got to the centre at a few minutes before midnight, we stood in a circle, ready to receive what the new year had to give.

A slight wind blew into the labyrinth, snuffing out some of the candles. We re-lit them, and then huddled closer, using our shoulders to keep out the wind. When the wind persisted in snuffing out the flames, we held the flames together to make one strong flame in the centre. This flame the wind could not blow out.

When we stand in community, our shoulders touching and our flames feeding off each other's flames, we are stronger against the wind. Our own gifts shine more brightly when we share them and receive them from each other.

*"To have a real life, people must participate in real community. In fact, a new cultural definition of wealth could be not the GNP, but how many people truly know and care about each other." ~ Mary Pipher*



# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

## Community Mandala

Before you begin your mandala, consider the people you most value as your community members. Write a list of the people with whom you have a reciprocal relationship - you help their flame burn more brightly and they help yours.

If your list is shorter than you'd like, consider the kinds of people you'd like to invite into your community. What will they bring to your life? What can you offer them? What will you offer them? What intentions can you set that will help you grow your community?

When you're ready to make your mandala, begin by drawing a flame at the centre of a large circle. Extending out from that flame, draw the candles that represent the people who support you and who help your flame to burn more brightly. You may wish to write the names of the people on your list - one on each candle. Or you may want to write the qualities you see in community members on the candles.

Decorate the mandala as you wish, remembering that the area around the candle will be lighter because the flame has given its light. Around the outer circle, write words and statements about what community brings to your life.







# Mandala Discovery

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## LESSON 13 - DISCOVER

dis-cover [dih-skuhv-er] (verb)

1. to see, get knowledge of, learn of, find, or find out; gain sight or knowledge of (something previously unseen or unknown)
2. to detect, espy, descry, discern, ascertain, unearth, ferret out, notice.
3. to notice or realize
4. to make known;

### Open to discovery

***It was early*** - by Mary Oliver

*It was early, which has always been my hour to begin looking at the world and of course, even in the darkness, to begin listening into it, especially under the pines where the owl lives and sometimes calls out as I walk by, as he did on this morning. So many gifts!*

*What do they mean? In the marshes where the pink light was just arriving the mink with his bristle tail was stalking the soft-eared mice, and in the pines the cones were heavy, each one ordained to open.*

*Sometimes I need only to stand wherever I am to be blessed.*

*Little mink, let me watch you.*

*Little mice, run and run.*

*Dear pine cone, let me hold you as you open.*

What if you lived your life like an explorer, always eager with anticipate for the next thing that would appear on your horizon?

Though I don't specifically do business coaching, sometimes my clients are new entrepreneurs who are seeking their paths into their true work. One such client was struggling with the weightiness of owning a business and feeling the need to "get it right" with what she offered the world.



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“What if you think of yourself as an explorer instead of a business person?” I offered. “What if you stop trying to figure out the perfect way to define what you do, the perfect offering, the perfect sales page, and you simply set out in search of the thing that delights your senses?”

The light went on for her. By reframing what she was doing, she was able to release the pressures of being perfect and getting it right the first time. Suddenly she had permission to explore and play and **discover** what was nudging at her heart. Since that time, that client has been on a beautiful journey of discovery into a profound place where she is able to offer much to the world.

## Discover Mandala

What would happen if you gave yourself permission to **discover** what is nudging at YOUR heart? What if you could let go of some of the “shoulds”, and the need to get it right the first time, and you simply walked through life like a person whose JOB it is to explore new lands and find out what’s on the horizon?

Today’s mandala will be about discovery. Begin by drawing circles of various sizes inside your larger circle. (You can either use a circle stencil, or find lids of various sizes in your kitchen.)

In a circle near the centre, write a word that reflects your intention to be an explorer in the world - discover, explore, curious, etc. In the other circles, write words or phrases that reflect the following:

- what it means to be an explorer
- what things you delight in exploring
- what might change in your life if you gave yourself permission to explore

Like an explorer playing with colour, discover what colours work together by playing with the spaces in between the circles.





# Mandala Discovery

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## LESSON 14 - GRACE

grace [greys] (verb)

1. elegance or beauty of form, manner, motion, or action
2. a pleasing or attractive quality or endowment
3. favor or goodwill
4. mercy; clemency; pardon
5. the free and unmerited favor of God, as manifested in the bestowal of blessings.

### Moments of Grace

*The Peace of Wild Things* - by Wendell Berry

*When despair for the world grows in me  
and I wake in the night at the least sound  
in fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,  
I go and lie down where the wood drake  
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.  
I come into the peace of wild things  
who do not tax their lives with forethought  
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.  
And I feel above me the day-blind stars  
waiting with their light. For a time  
I rest in the **grace** of the world, and am free.*

I don't know how to define grace. Even when I looked it up in dictionary.com for that little index card at the top of the page, I knew that something was missing. I looked it up in a couple of other sources, and consequently added that one about "the free and unmerited favour of God", but I'm still not sure it's sufficient. I think the clue, however, is in the word "**unmerited**". We never **deserve** grace, it just shows up.

Grace is one of those words where nothing but the experience of it can fully inhabit its complex meaning.

Grace is the woodpecker that arrives at the bird feeder moments after your mom died reminding you that the world is still beautiful in the midst of pain.



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Grace is the soup your friend brings to your sickbed.  
Grace is your daughter offering to do the dishes even though it's not her turn.  
Grace is the father who lets his son move back home after he's messed up his life.  
Grace is that quiet moment in the woods when a deer stops to look deeply into your eyes.  
Grace is the realization that you are beautiful despite your wounds.  
Grace is the friend who sits down on the floor with you when you're too weary to stand up.

**Grace is all around us.** It is offered to us as unexpected blessings, tiny miracles, moments of mercy, and undeserved kindness.

Today, I invite you to pay attention to those moments of grace that you might normally miss. Does someone let you cut in line at the grocery store? Does a friend forgive you for missing a coffee date? Does the light slant through your window offering you a momentary break from the shadows? Pay attention, and bring them to your mandala.

## Grace Mandala

What are the moments of grace you witnessed in your day? Consider each of those moments to be *"the day-blind stars waiting with their light"* and rest in their grace.

Today's mandala will be a representation of those stars of grace that light up your sky. For each of the moments of grace you experienced today, draw a star inside the circle of your mandala. You can write words that represent that story inside the star, or shade the stars with different colours of pencil crayon. Some might be bigger stars (the really big moments of grace that shifted your day) and some might be smaller stars (the tiny moments when you felt held by the Divine.)

Shade the rest of the circle with a blue pencil crayon.





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## LESSON 15 - SHADOW

shad·ow [shad-oh]

(noun)

1. a dark figure or image cast on the ground or some surface by a body intercepting light.
2. shade or comparative darkness, as in an area.

(verb)

1. to screen or protect from light, heat, etc.; shade.



### Learning to Dance with the Shadow

According to Jung, the shadow is full of all those things we have no wish to be, and certainly no wish to present to others; our fears, our insecurities, our anxieties. It's the part of ourselves that we are often not in touch with or have possibly disowned.

The shadow isn't necessarily our dark side. It's the side of us that is actually **in the dark**. In other words it hasn't come into the light as yet. It's almost like our personal blind spots. And it can possess both positive qualities and lessons about ourselves that we haven't yet found, often called our "gifts", and also the "negative qualities" about ourselves that we just don't want to know about.

The shadow can show up in many ways. Think about those little secrets that you hide in your conversations with friends - the things that make you feel like "if only they knew the truth about me, they wouldn't really like me". Are you afraid to tell your friends that you're the daughter of an alcoholic? Are you hoping your co-workers don't find out that you're going for marriage counseling because your marriage has hit a rocky spot? Are you a closet binge-eater or a secret trashy-romance reader? Do you try to hide the fact that you're living paycheck to paycheck and never know when the money will run out?

All of these things are elements of the shadow - the things we keep in the dark.

The problem is, the more we try to keep our secrets in the dark the larger the shadow grows and the less energy we have for spreading light into the world. The only way we can live a wholehearted, undivided life is to address the shadow and to bring it into the light.

How do you bring it into the light? To start with, you acknowledge that it exists. Once we are honest with ourselves that there are things in our lives that we don't want the world to know and



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that we prefer to keep hidden even from ourselves, we can begin to allow the light to shine into our dark places.

*“Your character defects are not where you’re bad, but where you’re wounded. But no matter who or what causes the wound, it’s yours now and you’re responsible for it.” - Marianne Williamson*

As Marianne Williamson says, we are not bad, we are simply wounded. When we hide those wounds, we keep them in the shadows and they don’t have a chance to heal. Instead they fester, get infected, and start to take over our lives.

A mandala practice can help us bring light to the shadowy places in our lives and begin the process of healing.

*“I wear my shadows where they’re harder to see, but they follow me everywhere. I guess that should tell me I’m traveling toward light.” - Bruce Cockburn*

## Shadow Mandala

Begin by drawing a straight line through the centre of a large circle. On one side of the line, write the word “Light” and on the other side “Shadow”. Shade the halves of the circle accordingly.

In the shadow half of the circle, write down the little secrets you hide - the things you don’t want others to find out about. Some may be questions that arise from your deepest fears - eg. “what if I am rejected?”

In the light half of the circle, write down the questions and thoughts you have about bringing the shadow bits into the light - eg. “If I am rejected, I believe that I have the courage to face it.”





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## LESSON 16 - DOODLE

Doodle [dood-1]

(verb)

1. to draw or scribble idly
2. to waste (time) in aimless or foolish activity.

(noun)

1. a design, figure, or the like, made by idle scribbling



### Doodle your way to mindfulness

What do you think of when you hear the word “doodle”? Does it fill you with a bit of fear, remembering how a strict school teacher reprimanded you for doodling in your notebook? Does it give you some pleasure, maybe mixed with a bit of guilt? Does it feel like a waste of time and you’d never consider it?

I used to spend a lot of time doodling at board meetings when I worked in management at a non-profit. The meetings took two days and a lot of the content didn’t impact me or my team, but I was expected to be present, so I doodled. Originally, I felt a little guilty about it, and would try to hide it behind my books or water glass (I wanted to protect my professional persona, after all), but then I discovered that doodling is good for the brain.

According to a study published in the journal Applied Cognitive Psychology, subjects given a doodling task while listening to a dull phone message had a 29% improved recall compared to their non-doodling counterparts.

"If someone is doing a boring task, like listening to a dull telephone conversation, they may start to daydream," said study researcher Professor Jackie Andrade, Ph.D., of the School of Psychology, University of Plymouth. "Daydreaming distracts them from the task, resulting in poorer performance. A simple task, like doodling, may be sufficient to stop daydreaming without affecting performance on the main task."

Doodling isn’t just good for recall, it helps us enter a state of mindfulness. Recent studies of zentangle, a mindfulness doodling process, revealed that “when comparing a group of post test scores after 1 hour of Zentangle instruction, including 10 minutes of independent practice, the



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participants experienced mindfulness process post test scores equivalent to a group who participated in a 1 hour a week 16 week mindfulness focused treatment.”

In addition, the hosts of zentangle.com suggest that other benefits include stress reduction, overcoming insomnia, modifying behaviour, brainstorming, problems solving, design inspiration, warm-up for artists, anger management, etc.

## Doodle Mandala

Bring your doodling into the circle. Simply start with a large circle and fill it with doodling.

There are no rules to doodling - otherwise it wouldn't be defined as “drawing or scribbling idly”. Simply start filling the circle with random marks, shapes, lines, and even words if you wish.

In case that feels a little too undirected, however, here's a place to start...

Pick two Sharpies (one with a fine point and one with a heavier point) of the same colour.

With the heavier point, draw a variety of random connecting lines across the circle, creating empty spaces between the lines that you can fill with doodling.

In the first space, start simply by drawing straight lines across the shape. Add dots between the lines, or make some lines thicker than other lines.

In the next empty space, draw curvy lines, building one on top of the other. Use the two different markers to make some lines thicker or thinner than others.







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## LESSON 17 - INTENTION

intention [in-ten-shuhn] (noun)

1. an act or instance of determining mentally upon some action or result.
2. the end or object intended; purpose.



### Setting Intentions

In an earlier lesson (on the theme of “question”) we talked about the research that shows that asking questions about the future leads to greater success than setting goals. Setting goals creates a win-lose situation that often ends up frustrating us with how definitive it is. If we don’t succeed in meeting the specific goal we set, and instead veer off into another path, we assume we have failed.

When we ask a question, on the other hand, we open up the possibilities for the future. We create open space, where our hearts can follow our evolving passions and callings, rather than closed space where we feel restricted to the path we chose months ago before we grew and changed.

When you set intentions - whether they are simply for how you will spend this day or how you want the upcoming year to unfold - consider what your intention would look like if it were shaped in the form of a question instead of a statement. What if, instead of “I will go back to school before 2014,” for example, you asked yourself “what if I open myself to the possibility that I’ll be in school next year?” Or “What will my life look like next year?”

My friend Marianne Knuth, who co-founded a learning village in Zimbabwe, says that she simply followed the questions into the place her heart was calling her. She didn’t know what she was doing, and she still doesn’t, and yet her work is touching many people in her country and around the world. “*Questions point to the future, answers point to the past,*” she said in her [TEDx talk](#).



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Questions and mandalas go beautifully hand in hand. Like questions, mandalas invite us into possibilities, intuition, and our truest hearts.

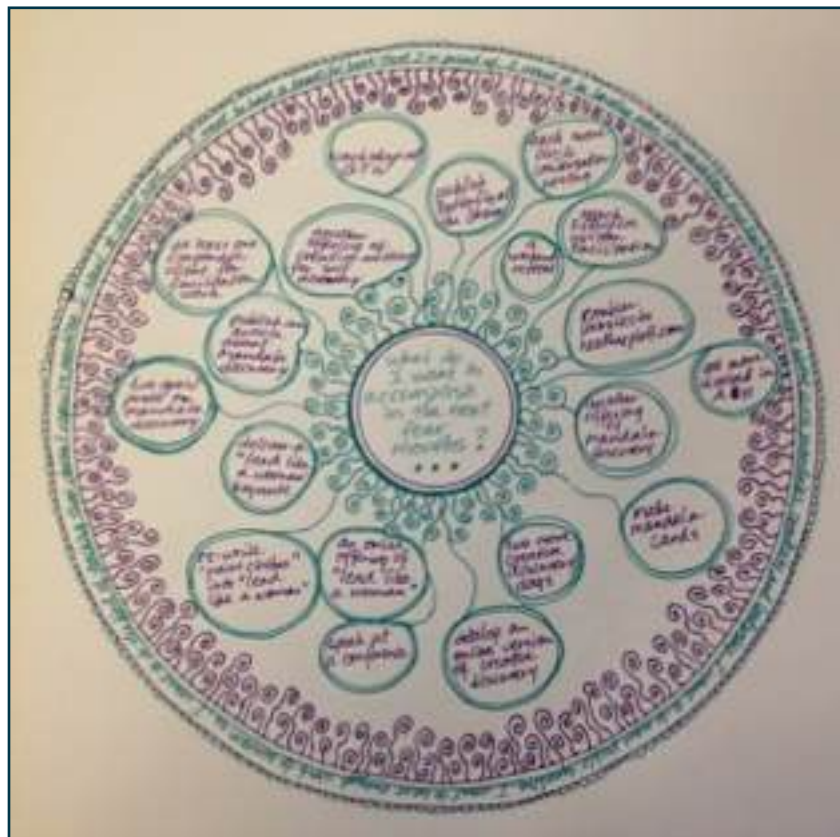
For a lovely little illustrated story about the value of questions, follow [this link](#).

## Intentions Mandala

Begin at the centre of your mandala with a question. It could be as simple as “What do I hope to do tomorrow?” or as complex as “What direction is my heart calling me?” Draw a circle around the question. Begin by drawing spiraling lines reaching out from the centre circle.

With some of the lines that spiral out from circle, draw a loop (like a conversation bubble in a cartoon). Inside that loop, write the things that come to mind in response to the question. They could be answers, or they could be more questions.

In the outer ring of the circle, you could draw more spirals coming in toward the circle, and/or you could write a ring of words that speak to your intentions related to the question at the centre. Think about the words that come to mind. For example, if your question is about what your heart is calling you toward, your words might be “peace, community, abundance, trust, etc.”





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## LESSON 18 - VOCATION

vocation [voh-key-shuhn] (noun)

1. a particular occupation, business, or profession; calling.
2. a strong impulse or inclination to follow a particular activity or career.
3. a divine call to God's service or to the Spiritual life.

### The journey toward your Vocation

Although we often think of our vocation as our “career” or “that thing we do to earn an income”, I much prefer the definition that speaks to a “divine calling”. A divine calling may or may not pay the bills, but it will **always** feed our passion and make us feel alive, and it will **never** leave us alone until we follow it.

There are two important things I’ve learned from the work of Parker Palmer (in books like [Let Your Life Speak: Listening for the Voice of Vocation](#) and [The Courage to Teach](#)).

#### **1. Your vocation shows up as an internal voice, calling you toward your purpose.**

*“Vocation does not come from a voice ‘out there’ calling me to become something I am not. It comes from a voice ‘in here’ calling me to be the person I was born to be, to fulfill the original selfhood given me at birth by God.” - Parker Palmer*

#### **2. Your vocation will become clear only after a long pilgrimage, full of rocks and detours.**

*“Most of us arrive at a sense of self and vocation only after a long journey through alien lands. But this journey bears no resemblance to the trouble-free “travel packages” sold by the tourism industry. It is more akin to the ancient tradition of pilgrimage - ‘a transformative journey to a sacred centre’ full of hardships, darkness, and peril.” - Parker Palmer*

I have two teenage daughters who are nearing the end of high school and both are beginning to feel the pressure to decide what career they want, what university they should attend, and “what they should be when they grow up”. Though I encourage them in their interests and choices, I remind them that it is unrealistic, as a 16 or 17 year old, to know where the pilgrimage is calling them. They have a long journey ahead of them, and all I can do is stand beside them and support them.



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If you are feeling restless, trying to understand what vocation is calling you, remember that these things don't happen overnight and confusion is just part of the journey.

The best you can do is pay attention to that still small voice inside you that nudges you toward something. It's always been there, and even though it often takes many years to learn to listen to it, there have been clues throughout your life pointing you in the direction your heart wants to go.

## Vocation Mandala

For today's mandala, let's practice listening to that still small voice inside. Setting aside all of the trappings of your career, your education, or what other people think about you, dig deep into your heart for those things that you've always known you were meant to share with the world.

What is the common thread running through your interests, your desires, and your skills? What kinds of topics fill your bookshelves? What tasks make you come alive?

If you just can't find clarity, don't worry about it. It has taken me many years to understand what it is I'm meant to offer the world, and even now I still face doubts. For example, when I tell people what I "do for a living", I always end up giving them the list of things people pay me for - writer, teacher, facilitator, coach. And yet... When I boil those things down to their essence, I know that everything I do is related to mentoring people into leadership (using Margaret Wheatley's definition as a leader being "anyone willing to help").

If you have some clarity, or even if you just want to explore an idea about something that's been tugging at your heart, write that word in the centre of the mandala. *(Feel free to create multiple versions to play with different words.)*

Extending out from that word, draw loops, and inside those loops write the words and phrases that represent how you feel called to serve, or what values you hold dear, in that vocation.





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## LESSON 19 - PASSION

passion [pash-uhn] (noun)

1. any powerful or compelling emotion or feeling, as love or hate.
2. strong amorous feeling or desire; love; ardor.
3. strong sexual desire; lust.
4. an instance or experience of strong love or sexual desire.

### Following the Thread of your Passion

***The Way It Is*** - by William Stafford

*There's a thread you follow. It goes among  
things that change. But it doesn't change.  
People wonder about what you are pursuing.  
You have to explain about the thread.  
But it is hard for others to see.  
While you hold it you can't get lost.  
Tragedies happen; people get hurt  
or die; and you suffer and get old.  
Nothing you do can stop time's unfolding.  
You don't ever let go of the thread.*

In the early days of my self-discovery journey, I did one of those personality tests that help you understand the gifts you offer the world. One of the questions was related to things that I am passionate about. The list was a little limiting (as personality tests often are), but that question has stuck with me ever since... **What are you passionate about?**

Are you passionate about growing your own food? Climbing mountains? Making children laugh? Tasting good wine? Traveling to far-off places? Being in deep conversation with interesting people? Making movies? Taking pictures? Helping people heal? Saving the planet?

Passion is one of those words that often scares people. Passion can have a shadow side (when it leads to abuse of other people for the sake of our own passion, for example), and it's sometimes overwhelming (when it begins to control our lives at the risk of our own health or



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well-being). For those reasons, your passions may not be easily understood and even feared by the people who love you.

Like the Stafford poem says *"People wonder about what you are pursuing. You have to explain about the thread."* You alone can see and understand the thread of passion in your life, and sometimes it's hard to understand or explain. **BUT YOU KNOW THAT YOU MUST FOLLOW!**

There is a thread, and even if it feels like there are a hundred threads going in different directions, gradually you will grow to understand how those threads weave together. I, for example, am passionate about wandering in the woods, traveling, taking pictures, being in deep conversations, reading, writing, making art, etc., and all of those things are now incorporated into the work that I do. It's taken a long time to get here, but it's all starting to make sense.

*"If I were to wish for anything, I should not wish for wealth and power, but for the passionate sense of the potential, for the eye which, ever young and ardent, sees the possible. Pleasure disappoints, possibility never." - Kierkegaard*

## Passion Mandala

Pick the most juicy, passionate colours out of your set of markers. Begin by drawing a wild, swirly line, criss-crossing from one side of the circle to another, crossing over the line, looping back and a round, until your circle is full of smaller, randomly sized shapes. Imagine that is the thread in your life, leading you on a crazy journey to your heart of hearts.

Begin filling some of the shapes the criss-crossing thread makes with juicy colours. In a few of the shapes, write some of the words and phrases you associate with passion. In other shapes, write the things that you are most passionate about. In one of the shapes, write this (or a similar phrase): "I give myself permission to be passionate!"

*Note: I dare you to do this on BIG paper and hang it on your wall! Be bold, be PASSIONATE! Be JUICY! And trust the winding thread where it leads.*





# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

## LESSON 20 - LOVE

Love [luhv]

(noun)

1. a profoundly tender, passionate affection for another person.

(verb)

1. to have a profoundly tender, passionate affection for

2. to have a strong liking for; take great pleasure in:



### At the centre is Love

The centre of the mandala in the buddhist tradition represents the place where the deity resides. It's the God-space, the Source, the True Self. As we learned in the introductory lesson, the sand mandalas that Zen Buddhist Monks make have a square temple with four gates that surround the deity. We enter the temple through the gates so that we can be in the presence of the Divine.

**The purest expression of the Divine is Love. God is Love, pure and simple.**

What happens when we put love in the centre of our lives? What shifts in our lives if everything grows out of love instead of fear, hatred, distrust, or self-preservation? Do we treat people differently? Do we make different decisions? Do we treat ourselves differently? Do we display more courage?

Closely intertwined with my mandala practice is my circle practice. By circle practice I mean the practice of gathering people into circle for storytelling and connection. Both of these practices have love at their centre. When we gather people in a circle, we create a space of trust and wholeness - a place where our true selves can show up.

How is circle showing up in your life? Do you have a community that has love at its centre? Do you create space where fear is left outside of the circle and love is welcomed in?

I encourage you to begin to expand your mandala practice outside of yourself. Begin to imagine how the circle manifests itself in larger ways that include other people and their truest selves.



# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

## Mandala - a space for love

In this week's mandala, we will begin by placing love at the centre.

Draw a large circle, and in the centre, draw a smaller circle. Within that smaller circle, place some representation of love - the word itself, an image that represents the word (cut from a magazine or drawn), a photo of people you love or who exude love in your life, etc.

Around that circle of love, draw a circle of people holding hands around the circle. You could do this freehand, or cut out a small template and trace it repeatedly around the circle.

Emerging from each of the people in the circle, draw a speech bubble (like the one in the sample below). Imagine what the people in a circle of love would be saying or questions they would be asking. What does it mean to be loved? What do you want the people who love you to know about you?

In each of the bubbles, write some kind of expression of love or question you have about what it means to live with love in the centre of your life.

Complete the circle however you want - expanding beyond the speech bubbles, or ending it there.







# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

## LESSON 21 - PRESENCE

presence [prez-uhns] (noun)

1. the state or fact of being present, as with others or in a place.
2. attendance or company: eg. Your presence is requested.
3. immediate vicinity; proximity: eg. in the presence of witnesses.

### Being Present for What Is

Today's lesson is a simple one. We are going to simply be present to what is, witnessing it in a deeper way than we normally would.

As soon as we get up in the morning, our minds fill with the myriad of things we need to do, places we need to go, people we need to help, and all of the other things that make us feel important or stress us out. If you're anything like me, your first temptation is to grab the phone beside your bed, and start surfing through emails and other electronic distractions. We fail to notice the light as it slants across our bedspread. We don't really pay attention to the sounds of the morning - the birds outside the window, the breathing of our sleeping family, the rain drops on the roof.

Today I want you to pay attention. Be present. Bring your mind back to what **is**, not what **will be** an hour from now or what **was** last night. Is there a unique pattern in the light reflected on your wall? Does the angle of the mirror make an interesting contrast against the wall? Do the rustling leaves sound like laughter? Is that bird singing an invitation?

Pause in whatever you're doing.

**Listen.** What do you hear? What sounds might you have missed before when your mind was going a hundred miles an hour? What sound intrigues you and makes you want to follow your curiosity to its source?

**Look.** Look around you. Notice the colours, the light, the shadows, the curves, the dust. Just look - don't judge and don't try to explain. Don't see the mess, just see the beauty. Now cross your eyes slightly so that everything is a little blurry. How do the shapes and lines change when



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you're not really seeing the object but a vague shape? What if what you see were a painting in the French impressionism style, with no clear lines, just dots?

**Feel.** Close your eyes and reach out and touch whatever is in close proximity to you. How does it feel under your hand? Rough, smooth, cold, hard, wet, dusty? Touch it lightly and then heavily. How does the weight of your hand on the object change how it feels to your fingers?

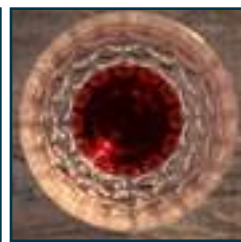
**Smell.** Close your eyes again and notice whether there are any smells in the air. A hint of your leftover lunch? A touch of perfume? Your own body odour?

**Taste.** Put a piece of food in your mouth and simply savour the taste as it sits on your tongue. How would you describe the flavours? If flavour had a colour, what colour would this taste like?

## Presence Mandala

You can do one of two things today:

1. Make a mandala out of found objects (eg. Leaves, twigs, pencil shavings, sugar cubes, pencils, feathers, pieces of fruit, etc.)
2. Look for naturally-appearing mandalas around you and photograph them. If you have time, go for a walk in a park and see how many mandalas you can find in nature. Remember - anything in a circle can be a mandala. (This is about noticing, not judging.)





# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

## LESSON 22 - TRANSFORMATION

trans·for·ma·tion [trans-fer-mey-shuhn]

(noun)

1. the act or process of transforming.
2. the state of being transformed.
3. change in form, appearance, nature, or character.

### Letting Transformation Happen

*"How do you get to be so free?" Caterpillar asks wistfully of Butterfly.*

*"Surrender," Butterfly whispers as she flutters by.*

*"But... I've read all the books, taken all the classes, and I just can't seem to get off the ground."*

*"Surrender."*

*"What do you mean - surrender? Surrender to what?"*

*"To the Mystery. To your Creator. To your own DNA."*

*"How do I do that?" Caterpillar frowns.*

*"Climb up in that tree, let go of the branch, and spin."*

*"Spin?"*

*"Yes, spin."*

*"But I don't know how to spin. Do I need to take a course? Is there a manual?"*

*"You'll know. Once you're up there on the branch."*

*"I'll know? How will I know?"*

*"It's written in your DNA."*

*"What happens next? Do I have to spin my own wings?"*

*"No, silly," Butterfly giggles. "You spin a cocoon."*

*"A cocoon? I've never heard of that before. What do I do with it once I've spun it?"*

*"You don't do anything. You just wait. Inside the cocoon."*

*"What good does waiting do? I have too much work to do to sit around waiting in a cocoon. I have housework to do and children to feed and... well, that's just ridiculous." Caterpillar turns away, her eyes back on the ground.*

*"Well, then you'd better give up your dream of flying, because that's the only way to get up here." Butterfly's wings carry her a little higher.*

*Caterpillar glances back at the sky. Her eyes fill with tears. "But... I really want to fly. Can you tell me a little more? Please. What comes next?"*

*"The hard part. The surrender."*

*"So we're back to surrender again. That doesn't seem very helpful. And it's kind of confusing. What am I surrendering?"*



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*"Everything you ever knew. Every cell of your body. Every story you've ever told yourself."*

*"I have to give up EVERYTHING?! Isn't that asking a bit much?"*

*"Yes, but it's worth it."*

*"Does it hurt?"*

*"Oh yes. It hurts."*

*"How do you handle the pain?"*

*"You won't like the answer."*

*"Tell me anyway."*

*"Surrender. And trust. You have to surrender to the pain and trust the process. You have to give up control and let your body turn to an ugly gooey mushy substance while you wait for transformation to happen. Your friends - those who haven't learned to spin yet - will turn away because they won't recognize you. It will be the hardest thing you'll ever have to do."*

*"I don't know if I can do it. I can't handle that much pain."*

*"You can."*

*"But..."*

*"Do you want to taste the sky?"*

*"Oh yes. I really, really do."*

*"Then you have to let go of the ground."*

## Transformation Mandala

Begin this mandala with a simple butterfly at the centre. Expanding out from the butterfly, add design and colour in whatever form you wish.

Once you have a few layers of design, begin to journal, spiraling out from the centre. Write intuitively, focused on the question "what does transformation mean to me?" Once you have a few rounds of words, add more design & colour. Add another round or two of journaling focused on the question "what is transforming in me right now?"





# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

## LESSON 23 - TRUST

trust [truhst] (noun)

1. reliance on the integrity, strength, ability, surety, etc., of a person or thing; confidence.
2. confident expectation of something; hope.

### A Bowl of Trust

In the Buddhist tradition, monks carry their begging bowls into the village each morning to be filled by local villagers. Whatever they receive in their bowls (rice, beans, etc.) is meant to sustain them for that day. The begging bowl represents their lack of attachment to earthly possessions and their faith that the universe will provide **just enough** for them each day.

There is a benevolent Source available to us that wants good things for us. Each day, again and again, we need to place before that Source our figurative begging bowl and trust that we will receive what we need to sustain us. That Source often looks like our community, or people we haven't even met.

The thing I like about the God that I trust is that often, like a benevolent parent, s/he fills our begging bowls to overflowing. Sometimes - especially when we don't ask for it - we receive more than enough, and that is our special gift for the day.

I'm not talking about earthly possessions – I'm talking about everyday extraordinary "overflowing cup" moments. Like the moment your four-year-old daughter sneaks up behind you, plants a kiss on your cheek, and proclaims her love for you. Or the moment you catch a glimpse of an awe-inspiring sunset over the water. Those are the extra little nuggets God tosses in your begging bowl. How often, though, do we fail to notice them?

There is much in the world for us to worry about - whether we'll end up in the hospital for a serious illness, whether we'll be able to make the payments this month, whether our country will go to war again, or whether our families will reject us and we'll end up alone. None of these worries will magically go away. **The best we can do is start each day with a simple commitment to trust that the Source of all that is good will provide what we need.**



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## Begging Bowl Mandala

Imagine you are a Buddhist monk, going into the village with your begging bowl, trusting that it will be filled with what you need for the day. When you extend your begging bowl, you are not asking for tomorrow's blessing, or next year's, you are asking only for what you need TODAY. For those of us who live in cultures accustomed to hoarding - we save our money in retirement savings plans, we stock up on food, and we rent storage units that let us cling to the things we "might need some day" - it's a novel concept to simply trust that we will receive enough for today, and that tomorrow will look after itself.

Today's mandala will be a begging bowl. Start by shading the bowl with a pencil crayon, with a lighter shade at the centre to represent the bottom of the bowl.

Once your bowl is ready, start tossing in the areas in your life that you need to increase your trust in. Do you need to trust that you will get a job that will pay your bills? Or that you'll have enough to eat? Or that you will BE enough? Write those things in your bowl. What are you open to receiving from the universe?

You can also write the questions you have about trust... Like "what will happen if I let go of the need to control the outcome?" or "What if I don't have enough money to pay the rent this month?"





# Mandala Discovery

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## LESSON 24 - DESIRE

Desire [dih-zahyuhr]

(verb)

1. to wish or long for; crave; want.
2. to express a wish to obtain; ask for; request

(noun)

3. a longing or craving, as for something that brings satisfaction or enjoyment:
4. an expressed wish; request.



### Follow your Desire

**Wild Geese** – by Mary Oliver

You do not have to be good.  
You do not have to walk on your knees  
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.  
**You only have to let the soft animal of your body  
love what it loves.**  
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.  
Meanwhile the world goes on.  
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain  
are moving across the landscapes,  
over the prairies and the deep trees,  
the mountains and the rivers.  
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,  
are heading home again.  
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,  
the world offers itself to your imagination,  
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—  
over and over announcing your place  
in the family of things.

**“You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves.”** That is my favourite line of poetry of all time. Some day I will have it tattooed on my arm as a reminder to follow my desire where it leads.



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What does that line of poetry mean to you? What is the “soft animal of your body” longing for? What desires are you denying it? What will feed its hunger?

Many of us were raised with healthy distrust for our desires. In my upbringing, desires were considered essentially the same thing as temptations, and we were to avoid temptation lest it lead to sin. But what if we flip that belief on its head? What if we believe that our desires are the voices of our truest hearts calling us back to ourselves? What if our desires lead us to the Divine?

*"Let yourself feel your deep desire right now. Desire is the call of your incarnate soul, and a messenger of your Sacred self." ~Hiro Boga*

## Desire Mandala

Consider those things you most desire. What lights you up? What gives you energy? What are you most longing for?

At the centre of your circle, draw a series of spirals that circle tightly in the centre and then reach out to the edges. The lines should divide the circle into pie pieces that twist into the centre.

That swirling vortex in the centre is your heart . Your desires, like the vortex, are drawn to you by a powerful, invisible forcefield. What are those desires? Write the words on the lines reaching out toward the edges, or fill each wedge with images that represent those desires.







# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

## LESSON 25 - RESISTANCE

resistance [ri-zis-tuhns] (noun)

1. the act or power of resisting, opposing, or withstanding
2. the opposition offered by one thing, force, etc., to another
3. opposition to an attempt to bring repressed thoughts or feelings into consciousness

### When resistance shows up

*“Rule of thumb: The more important a call or action is to our soul’s evolution, the more Resistance we will feel toward pursuing it. - Steven Pressfield, Art of War*

Years ago, when I had graduated from university with a degree in literature and theatre, I was contemplating what I should do with my life. I came home one day and my roommate said “your dad called.”

“What the...?!? My DAD called?” I answered in disbelief. The only time my Dad ever called me was on Christmas Eve when it suddenly dawned on him that he hadn’t bought a gift for Mom and couldn’t get to a store in time. He just wasn’t a phone person.

I called him back, worried that something might be wrong. “I know that you’ve been contemplating what career you should pursue,” he said. “I think you should be a teacher. You’d be good at it.” Wow. That was pretty far from what I expected.

A teacher?! Truthfully, I’d never really entertained that possibility. I’d worked in a day care in my high school years and that experience had taught me that I really had no patience for kids. I didn’t even consider that a teacher could work anywhere other than within a traditional school system.

I spent the next fifteen years or so running from my dad’s suggestion. I just couldn’t see “teacher” in what I understood about myself. **I was in huge resistance mode.**

And then one day, a few years after my dad died, I started feeling the tug toward being a teacher. I still didn’t want to work with kids, and I knew I couldn’t be a conventional teacher, but I



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had a growing need to share my gift for creating safe space that is conducive for deep learning and growth. And teach I did - first with small workshops where I invited my friends, then in more formal settings like the university, and now online and in retreats and workshops wherever people are interested.

I visited my dad's grave one day and wrote him a letter, thanking him for seeing something in me that I was afraid to see in myself.

*"If you find yourself asking yourself (and your friends), 'Am I really a writer? Am I really an artist?' chances are you are. The counterfeit innovator is wildly self-confident. The real one is scared to death." - Steven Pressfield*

*"Are you paralyzed with fear? That's a good sign. Fear is good. Like self-doubt, fear is an indicator. Fear tells us what we have to do. Remember one rule of thumb: the more scared we are of a work or calling, the more sure we can be that we have to do it." - Steven Pressfield*

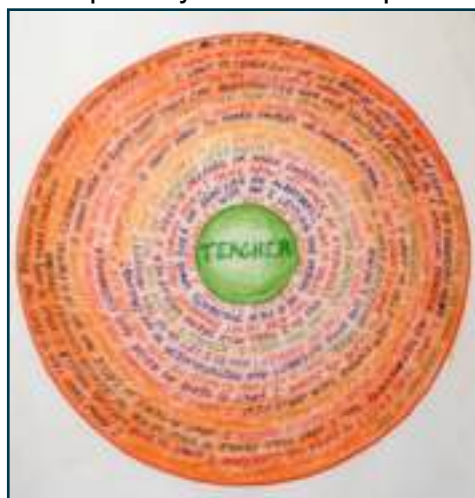
## Resistance Mandala

What are you resisting? What's been nudging at you for years, but you've plugged your ears and walked the other way whenever it showed up?

Write that thing in the centre of your mandala as I wrote the word "Teacher". Begin to journal intuitively, spiraling out from centre until you reach the outer edge. Using different colours as you write helps open the creative pathways in your mind. Feel free to add colour to your circle after the journaling is complete.

Some journal prompts are:

- Why am I resisting this?
- What is at the heart of my fear?
- What would change in my life if I stopped resisting?
- What small step can I take to open myself to a new possibility?





# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

## LESSON 26 - RELEASE

release [ri-lees] (verb)

1. to free from confinement, bondage, obligation, pain, etc.; let go: to release a prisoner; to release someone from a debt
2. to free from anything that restrains, fastens, etc.: to release a catapult
3. to allow to be known, issued, done, or exhibited

### Releasing what we cling to

*"If we can just let go and trust that things will work out the way they're supposed to, without trying to control the outcome, then we can begin to enjoy the moment more fully. The joy of the freedom it brings becomes more pleasurable than the experience itself." - Goldie Hawn*

*"It takes a lot of courage to release the familiar and seemingly secure, to embrace the new. But there is no real security in what is no longer meaningful. There is more security in the adventurous and exciting, for in movement there is life, and in change there is power." - Alan Cohen*

If you block a streaming flow of water to create a pond, that water will soon become stagnant, and what was once living in it will soon die. **Water needs to flow in order to sustain life.**

You are the same as water. When you hang onto old stories, possessions that no longer serve you, or relationships that are not healthy, you become stagnant and your life force begins to drain out of you. You cannot sustain life if you are not willing to let life flow through you.

I once had a coaching client who was dealing with some deep grief over the loss of two children. She said "it feels like there is an ocean locked inside me and if I begin to cry, I will cry so much that I will drown." But then, after some thought and conversation, she said "OH - I just realized... I am actually drowning myself by holding it in. If I release it, then perhaps I'll be able to rise to the top and float."

**The things that you cling to or bottle up inside do not serve you - they keep you trapped.**



# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

## Release Mandala

What do you need to release?

- an old career that doesn't fit your new sense of calling?
- a story about yourself that you're not smart enough or pretty enough?
- what feels like security but is actually your own self-imposed prison?
- your need to control the outcome?
- old hurts you've been harbouring that keep you from growing?

Close your hand into a tight fist. Imagine there is a tiny bird inside that is longing for freedom, but you are hanging on for dear life. That little bird is you. When you live your life with a clenched fist, refusing to release your grasp, you keep yourself trapped.

Now open your hand and release that imaginary bird. Blow a kiss as it flutters away into freedom.

Place your open hand on your page in the centre of the circle. Draw an outline of your open hand. This is the hand that releases the bird into freedom. As you draw, consider what it is you're releasing.

Inside your hand, draw, write, doodle, or glue images that represent those things that you need to release. It's your choice whether to do this as a journaling exercise or a wordless creative exercise.

Fill the hand and the spaces around it with colour. And make a commitment to yourself that you will take at least one small step toward releasing one of the things on your list.





# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

## LESSON 27 - UNFURL

un:furl [uhn-furl] (verb)

1. to spread or shake out from a furled state, as a sail or a flag; unfold.
2. to unroll, unfold, or spread out or be unrolled, unfolded

### Daring to unfurl

*“And the day came when the risk to remain tight in a bud was more painful than the risk it took to blossom.” - Anais Nin*

“Tight in a bud” is often where we get stuck. We long for openness, for the fulfillment of our dreams, and for the flowering of our potential, and yet we resist the unfurling.

***What if I get hurt?***

***What if nobody notices me?***

***What if I don't look as beautiful as the other flowers in the garden?***

***What if I fail?***

***What if I'm not good enough?***

***What if others think I'm an impostor - a petunia masquerading as a rose?***

***What if I'm lonely?***

The list of “what ifs” is endless, and they all have this in common - they are ALL based in fear.

Fear is at the heart of all that blocks us - because we've been hurt before, because we've watched others get hurt, or because our parents have carried their hurts like badges that cast a shadow on our desires.

But, like the bud, we were meant to unfurl, and we can only know freedom and joy when we give in to our natural urges. Though we fear the hurt that the unfurling might cost, the hurt will be much greater if we resist.

YES, we ***might*** fail. We ***might*** look like a fool. We ***might*** get hurt. All of those things are possibilities. BUT there is a greater possibility that we will **SHINE!**



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## Unfurling Mandala

What does it mean to unfurl in your life? Does it mean taking that new job you're afraid to take? Does it mean finally standing up to bullies in your life? Does it mean taking a long-desired art class? Does it mean telling the truth about who you are?

Today's mandala is an unfurling flower.

At the centre of the mandala, draw a shape that represents the centre of a flower. (As you can see in mine, I chose to make it look somewhat like a flame reaching out with its fierce heat.) In that centre, you may wish to write the words "I am unfurling". Or simply work on the images without the words this time.

Build the flower by drawing one set of petals at a time, until you've filled the circle with unfurled petals.

The journaling you do (or don't do) is up to you with this one. You may wish for it to simply remain symbolic, or you may wish to write words on the petals that represent the areas in your life in which you are unfurling. (When I did mine, I focused simply on the energy and beauty that were being released by my unfurling.)

*Note: The lines in mine were done with a Sharpie marker, while the shading was done with a pencil crayon.*





# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

## LESSON 28 - GROWTH

growth [grohth] (noun)

1. the act or process, or a manner of growing; development; gradual increase.
2. size or stage of development
3. development from a simpler to a more complex stage:

### Seasons of Growth

*“Seasons is a wise metaphor for the movement of life, I think. It suggests that life is neither a battlefield nor a game of chance but something infinitely richer, more promising, more real. The notion that our lives are like the eternal cycle of the seasons does not deny the struggle or the joy, the loss or the gain, the darkness or the light, but encourages us to embrace it all - and to find in all of it opportunities for growth.” - Parker Palmer*

In the lesson on “journey” we talked about how life is like a labyrinth - even though we are always heading toward centre, we have to accept the twists and turns in the journey that take us out to the edge again.

Personal growth is similar. We don't simply grow along a linear timeline, inching daily forward. Instead, we grow as a tree, through the seasons of our life. In the Spring, we stretch out our branches and reach our tender new leaves and buds toward the sky. It is a time of exponential growth - each day, progress can be seen. In Summer, we see the maturing of that growth. The greens get richer, the blossoms fall and the fruit begins to grow. In the Fall, we begin the slow decay that begins with the harvest of our ripened fruit, transitions into the yellowing of our leaves, and ending when the leaves all fall to the ground. In Winter, we lie dormant, silently preparing ourselves for the next season of growth.

When you travel to tropical locations, you'll see that the trees are different there. (Or perhaps you live there and you see the difference when you visit other places.) A tree that is used to four distinct seasons cannot survive in a place where there is no winter. We are the same - we need the winter time of rest, contemplation, and silence if we are to sustain the growth that Spring demands of us.



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If you are in a time of grief or silence, you can't rush through to the Spring. If you are in a time of maturing and harvest, you can't expect the growth of Spring to happen. You must accept the season you are in, and continue to trust that, like the seasons, your life will shift again some day.

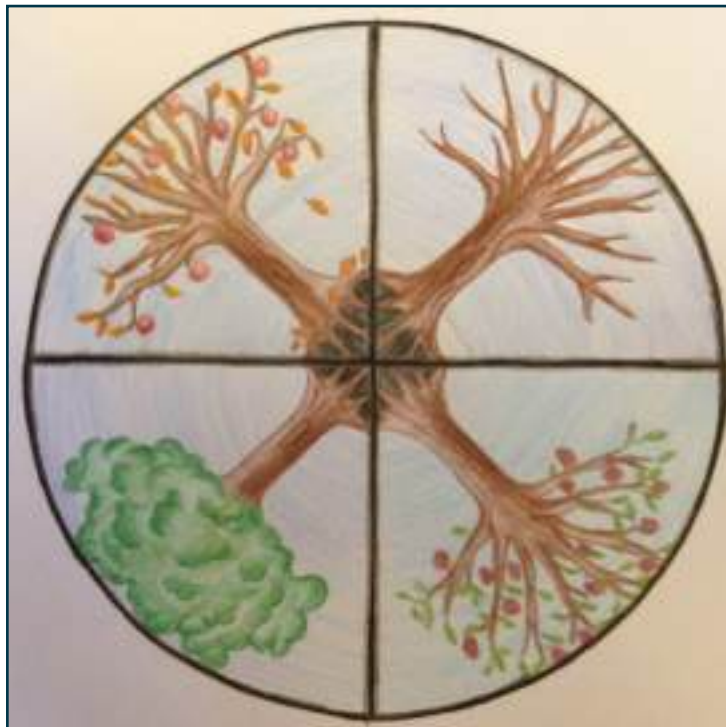
This past winter, when my mom died, I found myself feeling resentful that I was pushed into a period of grief when what I really wanted to do was expand my business. But I knew that the best course through it was to accept it and trust that growth would come again some day. Now, nine months later, growth is happening again - all in its perfect timing.

## Growth Mandala

Divide your circle into four quadrants - marking one for each of the seasons. In each quadrant, draw a tree that represents that season - with a dormant tree in Winter, a sprouting tree in Spring, a maturing tree in Summer, and a decaying tree in Fall.

In the spaces around the trees, write the words and phrases that represent that season of your life. How does it feel to be in a season of dormancy, for example? What strengths do you need to rely on to get you through the season of growth? What regrets do you have in the season of decay?

You may wish to indicate which season you are currently in (by highlighting it, or writing your name in it). A few months from now, you can revisit it and consider whether you have shifted to a new season.







# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

## LESSON 29 - SHADOW

in·vi·ta·tion [in-vi-tey-shuhn] (noun)

1. the act of inviting
2. the written or spoken form with which a person is invited
3. something offered as a suggestion: an invitation to consider a business merger.
4. attraction or incentive; allurement
5. a provocation

### Accepting and extending the Invitation

In today's lesson, I want to invite you into a guided visualization exercise that will lead you to the content of today's mandala.

[The visualization is available on an audio recording here.](#)

*Imagine you are on a boat adrift at sea. Though you cannot see the land, you do not feel anxious. The sea is gentle, the sun is shining, and you feel relaxed and calm, trusting the boat to take you to where you need to go.*

*Slowly, on the horizon, land begins to appear. As you draw closer, you can see that it is a lush, beautiful island. Your boat drifts up onto the sandy beach, and you step out onto the land. There is nothing fearful about this island. Once again, you trust that you have been brought to the place where you are meant to be.*

*You begin to explore the island. You leave the beach and walk down a trail in the jungle. The greenery closes in on you and the trees begin to block out the sun. For the first time on this journey, you become fearful. You wonder if you've made a mistake coming here. You let the shadows play tricks with your mind. You're not sure you can trust yourself to find the right path.*

*But then the light begins to appear again and you realize you have survived the worst of the journey and have arrived at the place you're meant to be. As you step into a clearing in the jungle, you see a beautiful, peaceful retreat space laid out in front of you. Everything you see delights you. As you explore, you realize that everything you need for a full and happy life are on the island - plenty of food, water and healing plants, places to rest and rejuvenate, places to*



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*engage in the things you enjoy, things that support your spiritual practices, learning spaces, reading spaces, etc. It also has space for you to do the work that you love - clearly it was designed with your own unique heart in mind.*

*Look around you. What do you see? What have you been longing for that is here in this imaginary place? What makes it unique to your own personal longings?*

*On this island is your teacher, someone who is wise and compassionate and who guides you on the paths that you need to take in your spiritual journey. You spend time with your teacher daily and you know that you are growing and learning. You are very happy on this island.*

*One day though, you begin to feel a restlessness for something more. This surprises you because you believe you have everything you need on this island. You ask your teacher about what this means, and your teacher says "This longing is pointing you to the next step in your journey. You are now being asked to share what you have been given here. It's time to host other people on your island. This gift is not for you alone."*

***"Now go," the teacher says. "There are people who need this island. Issue the invitation and wait for them to come. You are their leader, their host."***

*You go back to your resting place and you sit with what your teacher tells you. Some fear shows up because you're not sure that what you have to offer is good enough, you think that people may reject the invitation, and you don't want to fail or make a fool of yourself. But because you trust the teacher and you know that the restlessness is trying to teach you something, you begin to work on your invitation.*

*You give great thought to what you are inviting people to. You craft the invitations carefully, sharing the stories of what people can expect to receive on your island and what you will teach them when they arrive.*

*Finally, you send out the invitations. Some people ignore the invitation and you never hear from them again. Some people laugh at what you sent because they don't understand it. Some people look with longing at the invitation but say that the timing isn't right for them or they have too much fear to leave what they know.*

***A few people - just the right people - respond to your invitation.*** *They know that this is right for them and they know that you are the host they need. They pack their bags with great anticipation and they set sail for your island.*

*You receive them with much gratitude. You host a feast and invite them to sit in circle and share their stories, their courage, and their longing.*



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*You know that you have found the right place to be, at least for now. The longing will show up again, when you're ready for the next island, but for now, this is the place you're meant to be.*

*Now... return to the present and witness the journey you've just been on. What things were on the island that helped sustain you and heal you? What makes you feel whole and rested? What do you need to support your spiritual practice? What support do you need from a teacher? Who is your teacher in real life who will nurture you and then nudge you into the direction of your calling?*

*Now consider your invitation. What restlessness is letting you know that it's time to step into the role of host and leader? What are you inviting people to? What would you say on the invitation to let people know what gifts they will receive? How do you feel when people reject the invitation? How do you feel when they respond and begin to show up?*

## The Invitation Mandala

This week, your mandala will hold the clues for the island invitation. Find images (in magazines, online, or by drawing them yourself) that reflect all of the things that you need on your island. Try not to leave anything out, even if it feels frivolous or foolish. Turn off your judging brain and just be honest about what you need and what sustains you.

Glue those things inside a large circle. Feel free to add embellishments and words if you like, either on top of the images, or around the edge of the circle.

You may wish to hang this mandala in a place where it will remind you of the things you seek and want to create more of in the world.





# Mandala Discovery

By Heather Plett

## LESSON 30 - AUTHENTICITY

authentic [aw-then-tik] (adjective)

1. not false or copied; genuine; real
2. having the origin supported by unquestionable evidence; authenticated; verified
3. entitled to acceptance or belief because of agreement with known facts or experience; reliable; trustworthy

### The Authentic You

**The Invitation** - by Oriah Mountain Dreamer

*It doesn't interest me what you do for a living.  
I want to know what you ache for,  
And if you dare to dream of meeting your heart's longing.*

*It doesn't interest me how old you are.  
I want to know if you will risk looking like a fool for love,  
For your dreams, for the adventure of being alive.*

*It doesn't interest me what planets are squaring your moon.  
I want to know if you have touched the center of your own sorrow,  
If you have been opened by life's betrayals or  
Have become shriveled and closed from fear of further pain!*

*I want to know if you can sit with pain, mine or your own;  
If you can dance with wildness and let the ecstasy fill you  
To the tips of your fingers and toes without cautioning us to be careful,  
Be realistic, or to remember the limitations of being human.*

*It doesn't interest me if the story you're telling me is true.  
I want to know if you can disappoint another to be true to yourself,  
If you can bear the accusation of betrayal and not betray your own soul.*

*I want to know if you can see beauty  
Even when it is not pretty every day,  
And if you can source your life from God's presence.*



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*I want to know if you can live with failure, yours and mine,  
And still stand on the edge of a lake and shout to the silver of the full moon, "Yes!"*

*It doesn't interest me to know where you live or how much money you have,  
I want to know if you can get up after the night of grief and despair,  
Weary and bruised to the bone, and do what needs to be done for the children.*

*It doesn't interest me who you are, how you came here,  
I want to know if you will stand in the center of the Fire with me and not shrink back.*

*It doesn't interest me where or what or with whom you have studied.  
I want to know what sustains you from the inside when all else falls away,  
I want to know if you can be alone with yourself, And if you truly like the company you keep in  
the empty moments.*

Who are you, when all the masks, the titles, the trappings, the stories, and the pretenses are stripped away? Who are you when you stand naked in front of a mirror and whisper "hello" to your reflection?

Do you "truly like the company you keep in the empty moments"? I hope the answer is "yes" and if isn't yet, I hope that you are growing into that "YES!" Because I know that you are beautiful.

## Authenticity Mandala

You have gone through a multi-layered journey in these 30 days of Mandala Journaling. Like peeling an onion, each mandala practice has brought you closer and closer to YOU.

As a final mandala, I invite you to go BIG. Lay out large poster paper on the floor or tape it on the wall. Draw a large flower - as big as you can make it. You are a flower that is opening to the world. Fill each of the petals with images (cut from magazines or drawn) that represent the authentic you that you are beginning to understand and love more deeply. At the centre, place a picture of yourself.

