CIRCLES OF HEALING, CIRCLES OF PEACE

In February/March 2005 Wellesley College, in cooperation with Trinity College, will host eight Tibetan Buddhist nuns including Ani Ngagshung Tendol, their translator and group leader, from the Keydong Thuk-Cher-Chu-Ling Nunnery in Kathmandu, Nepal, in the creation of a sand mandala, the Avalokitesvara mandala of compassion. Over twenty departments, programs and nonprofit institutions have joined together to support this sacred art event at Wellesley College. The Keydong nuns are among the first Tibetan Buddhist women monastics to learn this sacred art practice which was traditionally reserved for men only.

A MANDALA is a graphic representation of the perfected environment of an enlightened being; in this case, Avalokitesvara, the Deity of Compassion. A mandala can be read as a bird’s-eye view of a celestial palace, with a highly complex and beautiful architecture adorned with symbols and images that represent both the nature of reality and the order of an enlightened mind. At a deeper level, a mandala is a visual metaphor for the path to enlightment: its viewers “enter” a world artfully designed to evoke attitudes and understandings of their own deepest nature.

A mandala is both a microcosm and macrocosm and includes the individual and the universe in its transformative power. Upon completion of the intricate designs and complex iconography of the mandala, it is dismantled and the sand is offered back to the earth as a powerful symbol of the transitory nature of life.

The concept of the mandala has, in the twentieth century, found a wide range of correspondences: within Jungian psychology, the mandala represents an inner wholeness which we all seek to restore.

Within modern art, the mandala painting uses geometric shapes to represent a vibrational landscape within the human soul. Within political science and peace studies, the mandala refers to the interpenetration of the personal with the political, of contemplation with action, and the inherent deep connection between mind, body, and spirit.