



THE MANDALA CONSTRUCTION PROCESS

1. Opening Ceremony

The monks begin by consecrating the site of the mandala sand painting with approximately 30 minutes of chants, music, and mantra recitation. This event is visually and acoustically striking, drawing large audiences and enormous media attention.

2. Drawing of the Lines

Immediately after the Opening Ceremony the monks start drawing the line design for the mandala. This is very exacting work that takes about three hours to complete.

3. Mandala Construction

Throughout its creation, the monks pour millions of grains of sand from traditional metal funnels called *chakpur*. The finished mandala is approximately 5' x 5' in size, and generally requires three to five days of work.

4. Mandala Completion

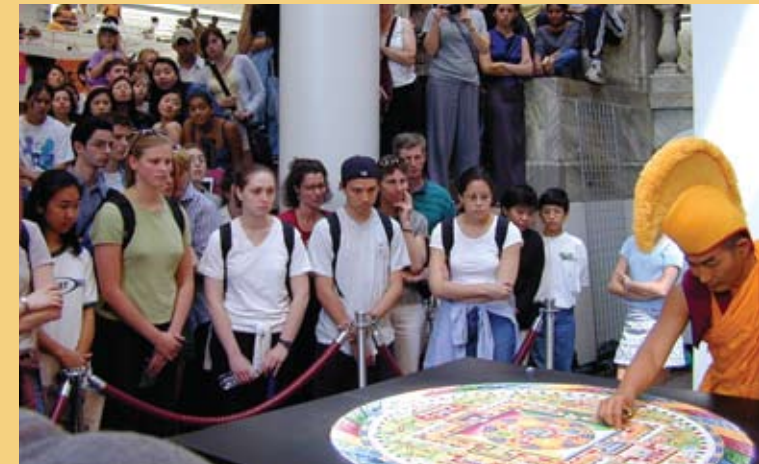
The monks conclude their creation of the mandala with a consecration ceremony. In some cities, several thousand guests have attended this closing ceremony. It is very colorful and of great interest to the media.

5. Dismantling the Mandala

During the closing ceremony, the monks dismantle the mandala, sweeping up the colored sands to symbolize the impermanence of all that exists. When requested, half of the sand is distributed to the audience as blessings for personal health and healing.

6. Dispersal of the Sand

The remaining sand is carried in a procession by the monks, accompanied by guests, to a flowing body of water. Here the sand is ceremonially poured into the water, thus dispersing the healing energies of the mandala throughout the world.



As with the Buddhist tradition as a whole, sand painting has its roots in the tantric legacy of Buddhist India, extending back more than 20,000 years to the time preceding the migration of native North Americans from Central Asia. Thus we see similarities between the Buddhist arts and the sand painting traditions of the natives of the Southwestern United States, such as the Hopi and the Navajo.

There are hundreds of mandalas in the Tibetan tradition. On The Mystical Arts of Tibet tours, the lamas create many different types, including the mandalas of Bhaishjya Guru ("Medicine Buddha"), Amitayus ("The Buddha of Boundless Life"), Yamantaka ("The Opponent of Death"), and Avalokiteshvara ("The Buddha of Compassion"). Mandalas are created for the healing of living beings and the environment. The lamas consider our present age to be one of great need in this respect and therefore construct these mandalas wherever requested.

Every tantric system has its own mandala, each one symbolizing a particular existential and spiritual approach. For example, that of the bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara symbolizes compassion as a central focus of the spiritual experience; that of Manjushri takes wisdom as the central focus; and that of Vajrapani emphasizes the need for courage and strength in the quest for sacred knowledge.

When The Mystical Arts of Tibet was requested to create mandala sand paintings in New York and Washington in the wake of the September 11 tragedies, they approached His Holiness the Dalai Lama for blessing and advice. His Holiness recommended the mandala of Yamantaka ("The Opponent of Death") for New York and the mandala of Buddha Akshobya ("The Unshakable Victor") for Washington, D.C. Both of these mandalas are used in times of great stress and danger.