

MAKING A MANDALA: *A Contemplative Journey into Unity*

Mandala: a Sanskrit word meaning "to have possession of one's essence."

A sacred circle with a centerpoint;
a universal image: a source of oneness and wisdom -
drawing out truth from the unconscious,
connecting our inner to our outer life.

Making a mandala is a search for, and a recording of, our deepest self
at one moment in time
and serves as a container for our deepest emotions.

– Judith Veeder in The Star in My Heart by Joyce Rupp

Making a mandala requires an attitude of receptivity and reverence.

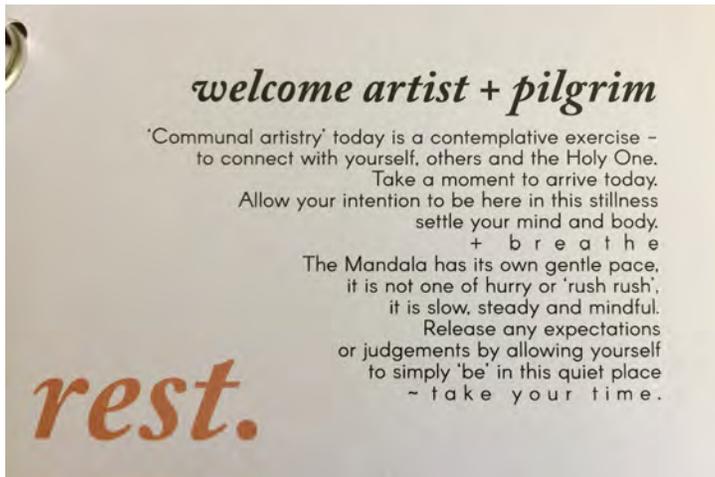
It gives visible expression to breath,
as we move into mindful artistry.
Emerging from the rhythm of contemplative practice,
a Meditative Mandala combines beauty and prayer,
group work and poetic spontaneity.

- *Meeray Ghaly: spiritualitycentre.com.au*

I recently immersed myself in a Mandala project. As my previous experience with mandalas was limited, I had no idea that collaboratively creating in this modality would be an intense spiritual journey: that the progression of its evolution over 5 weeks, outlined below, would so closely mirror the aims of the Contemplative Evolution Network. As we, a small group of relative strangers, sat or stood side by side around a large sheet of paper intersected with spidery lines and embarked on a coloring process for 45 minutes a week for 5 weeks, we bonded into a contemplative team, working towards a common goal. What emerged was an image of beauty, diversity, color, coherence: a unified representation of our unique gifting and intentions, of the way we see Life in all its fullness.

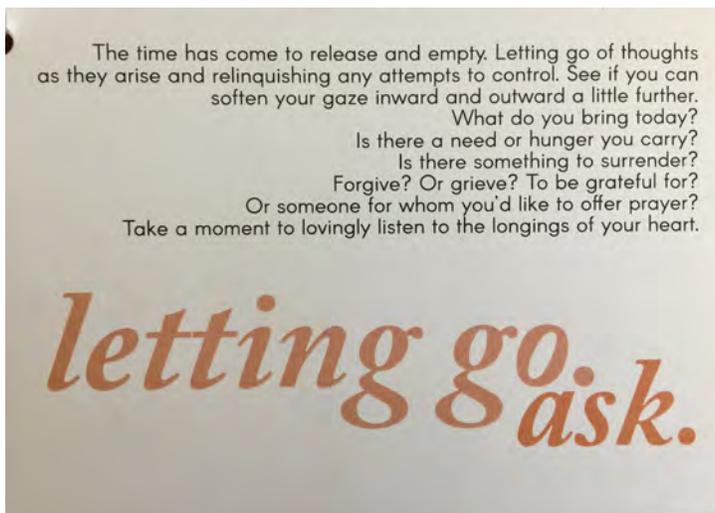
As I met with these new friends each week, I became increasingly aware of the parallel of our project to the intentions of the Contemplative Evolution Network. Through the power and intention of our contemplative time together, we were, like those committed to CEN's regular prayer practice for this hurting world, "helping evolve the world. Through Love." The modality was different, but, as you will discover, the creative process became its own prayer.

Here then, is the story of the creation of this Mandala: a story of cooperation, of creativity, of yielding to the unknown.



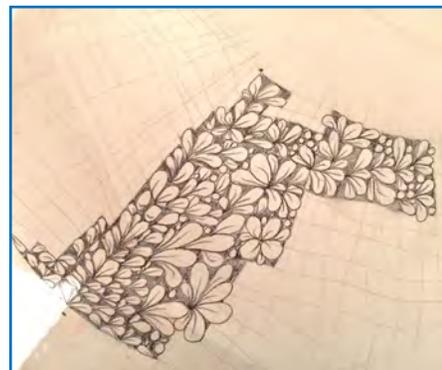
Week 1. The facilitator, Meeray, had prepared a 1 square metre sheet of paper for us to work on collectively: an intricate network of compass and ruler lines. It stretched large and empty on the table in front of us, empty chairs inviting us to sit.

With few words, she gave us an exquisitely prepared booklet for the contemplative component of the evening.

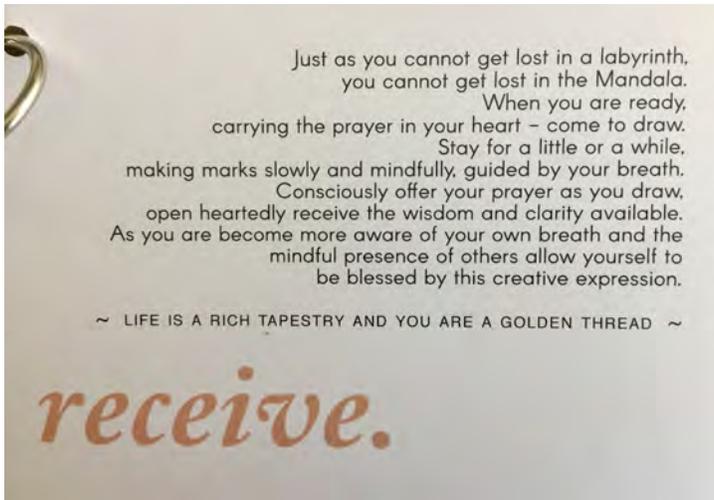


We claimed our chair and our corner of this massive line drawing. How on earth could we complete it in 5 x 45 minute sessions? Our initial hesitation and nervous comments faded into contemplative silence, as we commenced on the outside of this project; carefully shading in the intricate squares and rectangles in 2B pencils, fearful of overstepping boundaries.

Gradually, we relaxed. Someone asked for different grades of pencil. Another asked if we could have colour the next week. A couple experimented with drawing outside the tiny squares.



Until, when the time was up, we stood up, stood back and marvelled at the uniqueness of each person's contribution. It had been a fruitful session: seemingly not a lot done on the paper, but in the cosmic whole, we had moved into a new dimension of creativity and experimentation.



Week 2 saw us gathered again, surveying the array of pencils - and watercolours - Meeray had provided. We were more confident this time, moving, after meditation, to our corners of the previous week, ready to see what emerged. What prayers were being offered, no one shared. It was a space of unity. What was evident however, was the growing confidence in creative expression; in letting go of the fear of what others might think, of comparison.



Not one to let us be complacent, Meeray invited us to stand up, look at the total mandala and move to another pace at the table.

Here was another metaphor for life: learning to see from a different perspective; to be comfortable with our own style while honouring the style of another; fitting in, adapting, compromising.



Week 3. We were growing increasingly confident in our creating; in our use of colour and ignoring the boundaries if something could be gained by so doing. We were moving towards the centre, slowly, inexorably, becoming increasingly excited by what

was emerging; intuitively guided, guided by the Divine artist in a project much much bigger than our finite selves.



Week 4. The enthusiasm was palpable! We had evolved from being a disparate group of people united by a common purpose to a lively tribe of pilgrims, committed to complete this project, come what may. Pens and inks were shared, laughter abounded as people created in their space, knowing too that Meeray would once again ask us to move, to view and add to the evolving form from a different perspective.

Questions flew thick and fast...Is our mandala finished? Is it balanced? Is it OK to leave some unfinished spaces? After all, Life is like that: never complete, often with negative spaces which we can choose to leave for silence, or, more often, fill with doing.... We marveled at the beauty that had

already emerged, not through our trying, but because we had been focused: in the present moment, in the act of creating, in working together....



Week 5. Everyone turned up for this event: two dogs, two grandchildren, new people who had come to be part of the project on this final night. People danced spontaneously, moving around the table to add touches here and there to the mandala.

No longer was the mandala the preserve of each individual. It had become much larger than the sum total of us all: a universal metaphor for wholeness, for what Jack Kornfield calls "the great circle of existence."

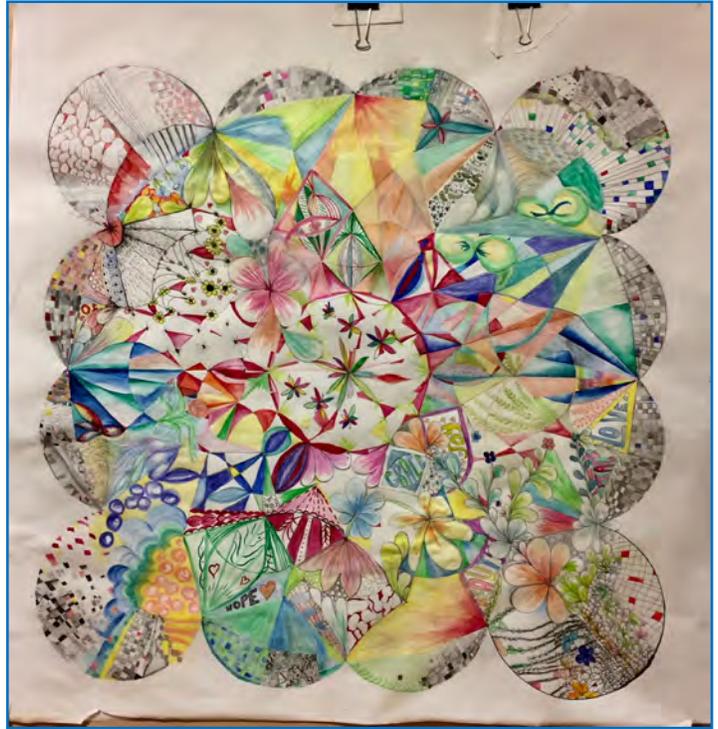
Kornfield continues: "When we accept our place in the mandala of the whole, we come back to just where we are. And in this is found joy, ease, simplicity and courage... a flowering of this wholeness, of coming home to ourselves." *After the Ecstasy: the Laundry.*

And Thomas Keating writes: "The contemplative journey is the most responsible of all responses to God, because so much depends on it - the future of humanity, our own deepest healing.... It's a total acceptance of the human condition in all its ramifications, including its desperate woundedness." - *Heartfulness: Transformation in Christ*.

Our contemplative Mandala Project was all of this. Did we come home to ourselves? For me, it was a resounding Yes. I was healing the broken parts of myself through this contemplative, collaborative act of creation.

And, it was agreed by all of our little band of creative companions, that before any decision be made at political levels, **all parties should be required to undertake a group mandala project.**

This could be a pathway to Peace.... a way for the healing the Planet through Love.



Christine Erskine-Smith

'The Mandala is indeed a wonderful metaphor for Life: so rich, diverse, colourful, swirling and twirling in, on and around itself. Just like Creation'
- Christine

*This project was the initiative of
The Centre for Practical Spirituality in Brisbane.
www.spiritualitycentre.com.au*