



Art and Spirituality

*"The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking
new landscapes, but in having new eyes."*

- Marcel Proust

by Gracia Sears, RN, BFA, Assistant Chaplain, Center for Spiritual Care

Are you someone who:

loves discovery and play,
is a dreamer,
a risk taker,
a “mediator” – a silence seeker,
a person who knows there is more than one way.

Then this project may be for you.



“The idea of ‘professional artist’ should be tossed away. Everyone should feel as an artist does. Everyone should be free to let his or her inner mind speak to her. And everyone is an artist when he/she does this.”

– KENJI MIYAZAWA
Zen artist

Foreword

In my visits with patients, I have met many who have been curious about “making art” but have never gotten around to it. If you are one and now find time on your hands and a restlessness because of your need to be in the hospital, then I invite you to join me as I move through the next few pages.

I have chosen simple projects and materials because of the limitations of being in a hospital room. There are many ways you can use the exercises in this little book. Do them in any order that appeals to you. Skip some if you want. If you are flat in bed, then reading and mentally picturing yourself doing one of these exercises may be the only way you can for now. That’s okay; there have been many experiments that have shown the value of focusing on a subject. It is as important as actually doing it. If thinking about doing any creative project gives meaning to the time you spend in the hospital, then it has value.

Should you like a caring presence to accompany you while doing any of these exercises, please call the Center for Spiritual Care at the number listed on this booklet’s cover.

Blessings,
Gracia Sears

Art As Meditation

This little manual is meant to tease and hopefully please some inquisitive part of you. Some call these exercises doodles, some scribbling. Don't be put off. They are warm ups such as artists have used for centuries when they wanted to be open to the creative process.

If you find the exercises (the process) speaking to you, then you might want to explore some of the resources listed in the back.

In these exercises the process is more important than the product. It is in the process of doing that art becomes a form of meditation.

Making Silence

“Silence often brings us the knowledge which we had not fully realized, that we possess within ourselves an interior life.”

— MARIA MONTESSORI



The following exercises are best done when one is in a quiet place. This little manual is a road map for beginning a journey that can be very rewarding. There are many roads to one's interior fire. Some find it by cooking, some by gardening, reading or sewing. In the following pages I offer a visual route to this interior place.

Start “making silence” by breathing deeply and slowly. Concentrate on your breathing until you feel yourself calming down.

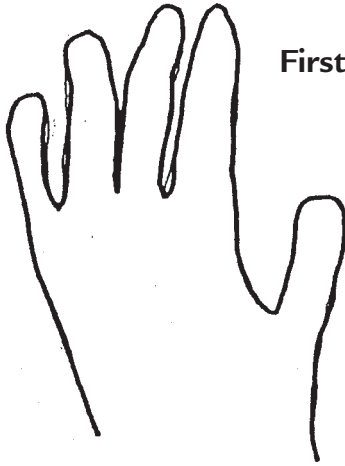
Drawing As Meditation

For this exercise you will need a pencil or pen, some paper and a flat surface to work on. Again, pick a time when you can quiet yourself down – maybe do those breathing exercises I mentioned earlier. If you are right-handed, put your left hand where you can see it. Then draw it on half of the paper. Now do a second version. This time try not to look at the paper, but only at your hand. Let your eye travel very slowly around the contour (edge) of your hand and have your pen draw what you see. Your pen is only to go as fast as your eye. In this exercise the longer you take the better. Note all the little crevices and curves. You have just done a contour drawing. Try more. How about drawing something on your bedside stand or over bed table. Same technique – don't look at the paper but at the object and travel very slowly around the edges.

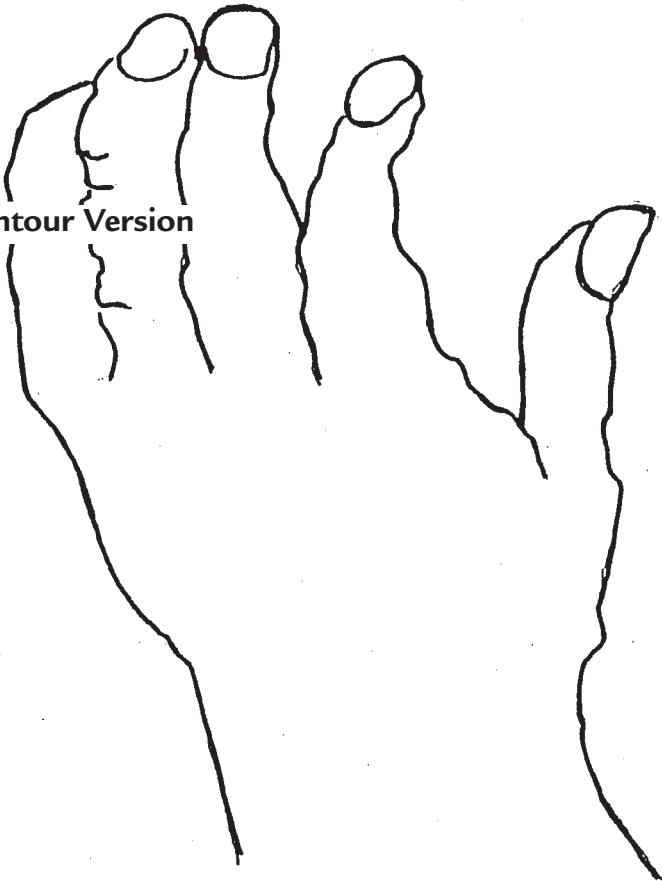
A friend once told me of a ritual she had to pass before going into a temple in Japan. All persons who wanted to enter the temple had to sit quietly and practice making marks with a brush until they reached a calm place within themselves. Then they were deemed ready to enter the temple.

Contour drawing can be the passage to this place. The artist Matisse did contour drawings for hours in the morning before he felt prepared to move into his painting session. I have included some examples of contour drawings to give you an idea of what I mean. If yours don't look like mine remember I have been doing them for many years. The key is being willing to really look and draw one object until you can feel you know all there is to know about it.

First Version



Contour Version

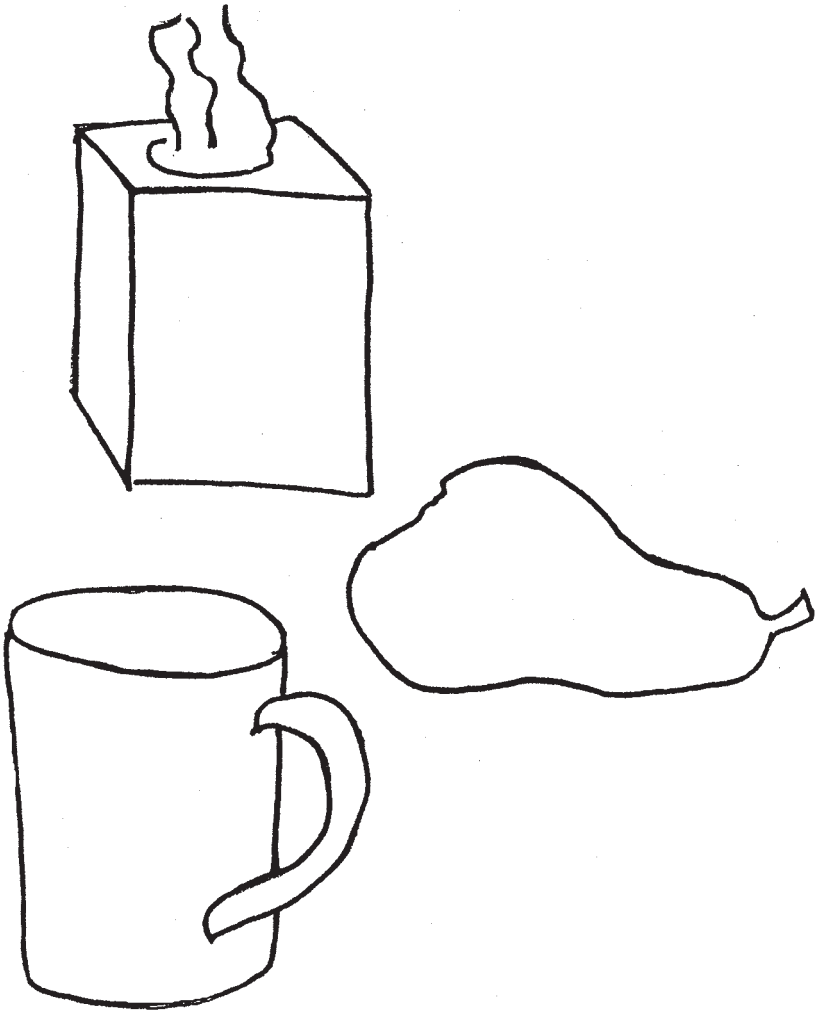


That Inner Critic

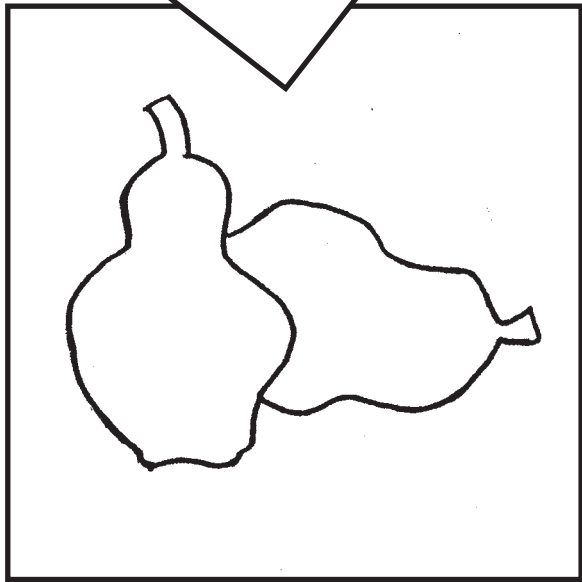
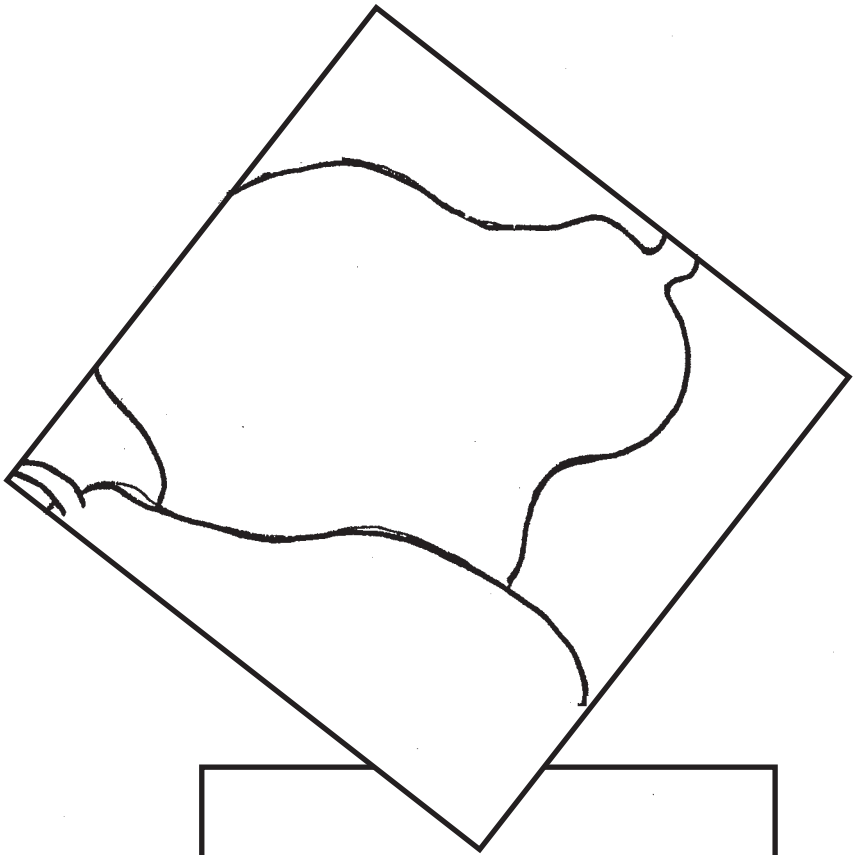
I suspect by now your inner critic has surfaced and is telling you “That stinks” or “I can’t draw a straight line.” I wish I had a nickel for every nervous student who told me they couldn’t draw a straight line. I can’t either. That is why we have rulers. Nearly everyone I meet tells me a tale about a parent or a teacher who didn’t like what they drew and they never tried again. I had that experience and it took me many years to overcome that nasty voice in my head.

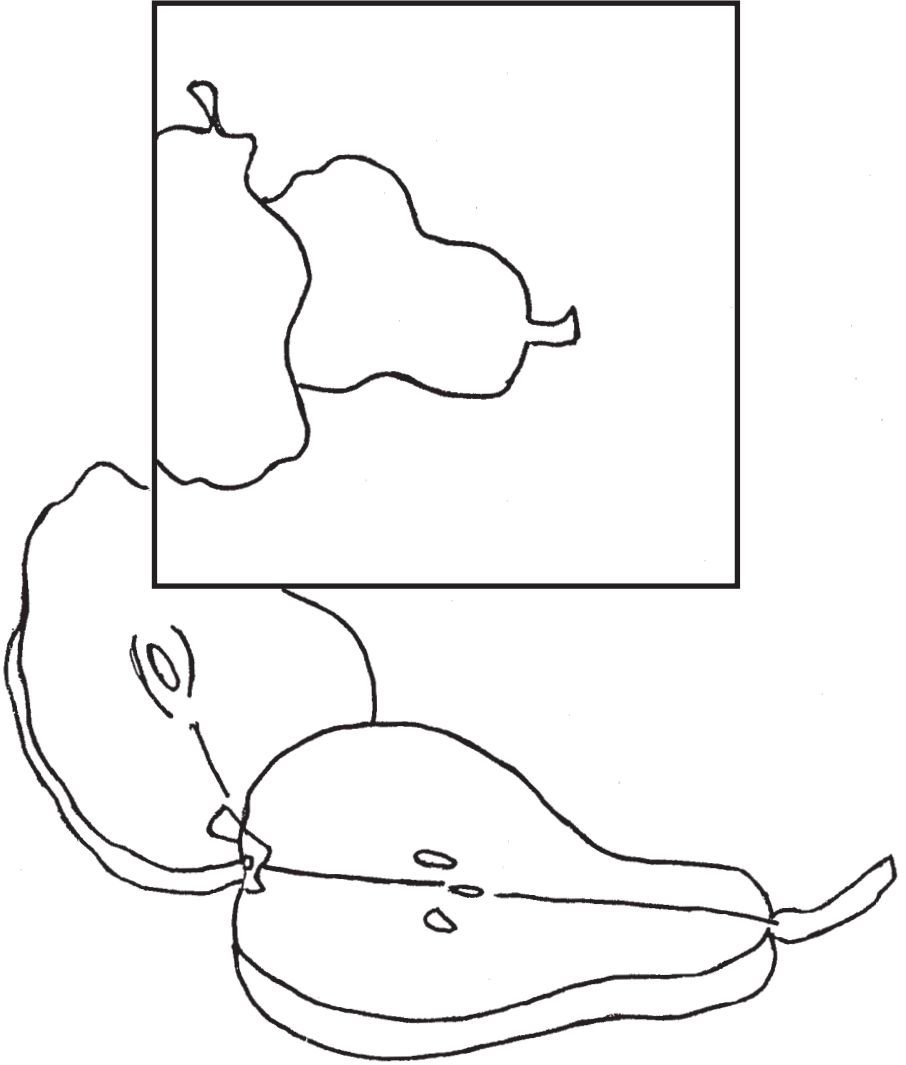
From *Art as a Way of Knowing* by Pat Allen, “The critic holds very valuable information. If we shift our perception (the way we see), our critic can be seen as trying to spare us the pain of change, the shame of fear. Often the inner critic controls and limits our lives.”

Now that we have contained that inner critic, let’s go on to the next exercise.



These are items frequently found on an over bed table. Pick one from your table and do several variations. This is a common practice for artists. On the following page are many variations of two pears as an example of this practice.





Note what happens when you put your object in a box. Try having the object touch sides and some versions without touching sides. Which do you like better?

Color Is Feeling Made Visible

WARM UP

All athletes, performers, and artists do warm ups. Writers sometimes cover sheets of paper with their name or whatever comes into their minds as a warm up to a writing session. Painters will fill pages with doodles as they prepare to paint. M.C. Richards, a noted poet, painter and potter, once wrote that “often images come in the process of working.”

For this exercise, I invite you to fill a sheet of paper with random marks or shapes using colored pencils or oil pastel sticks. See what images present themselves to you.

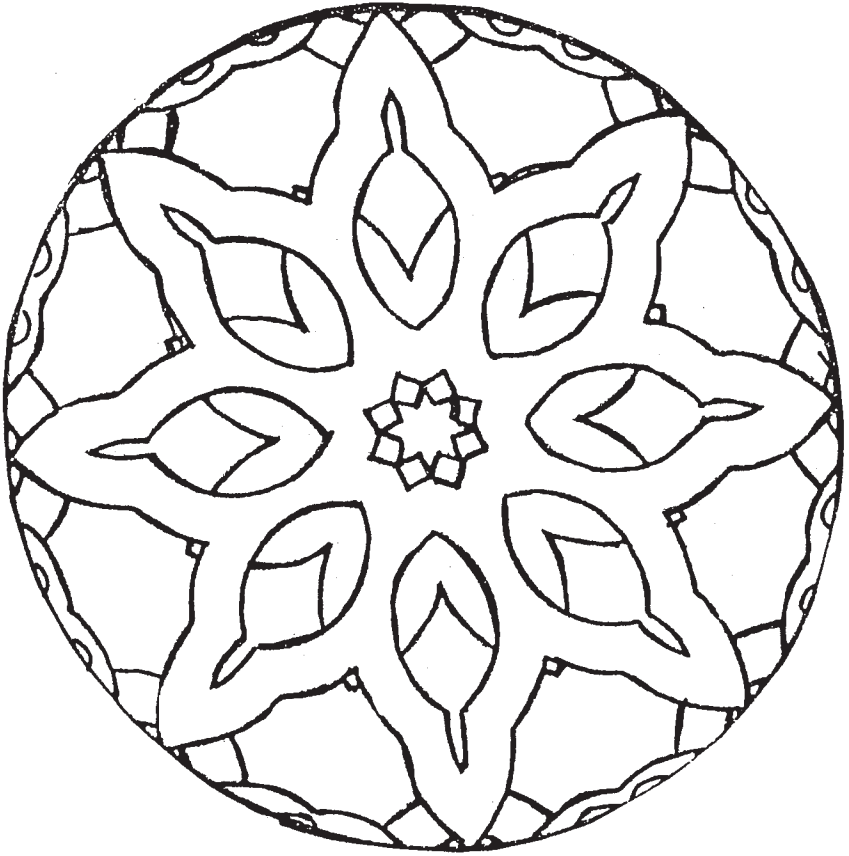
Now comes the most important part – letting the images you made speak to you. You may not understand why I recommend this, but this really is the most important part of the art process. Pick a few of the pencil images and the oil pastel ones. Put them somewhere you can see them during the day. This is where much of the process of image making takes place – under the surface of everyday life. The image brings to consciousness what you know at deeper levels. You can begin to develop a dialogue with your inner self.

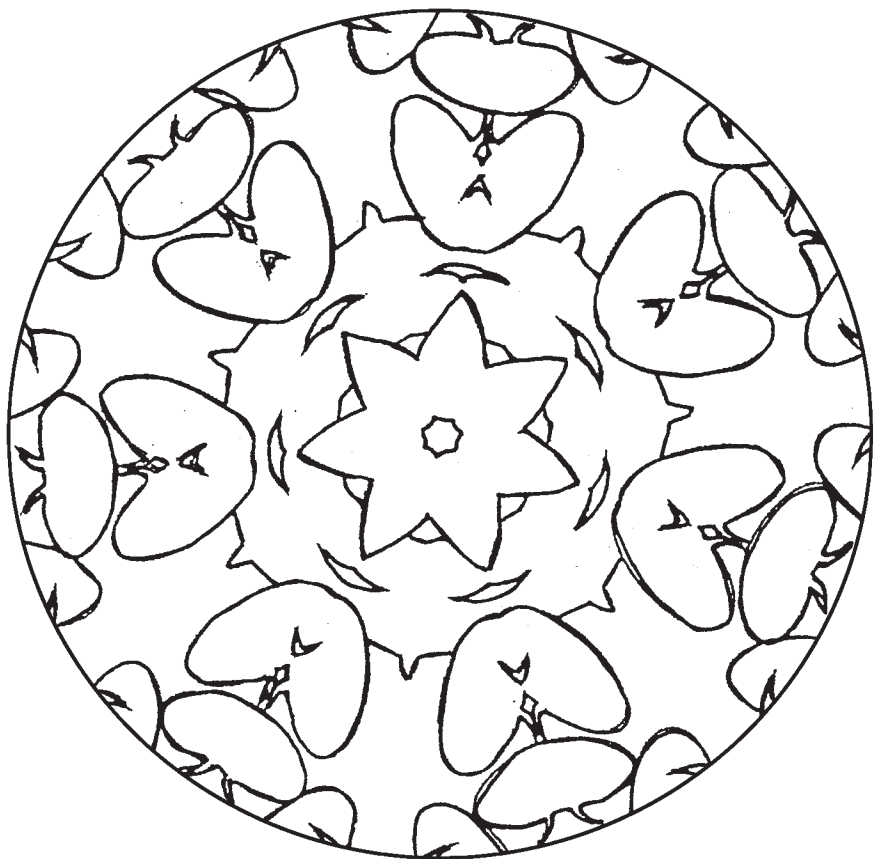
Are you comfortable talking to yourself this way? If so move on to the next exercise – Mandala making – visual meditations.

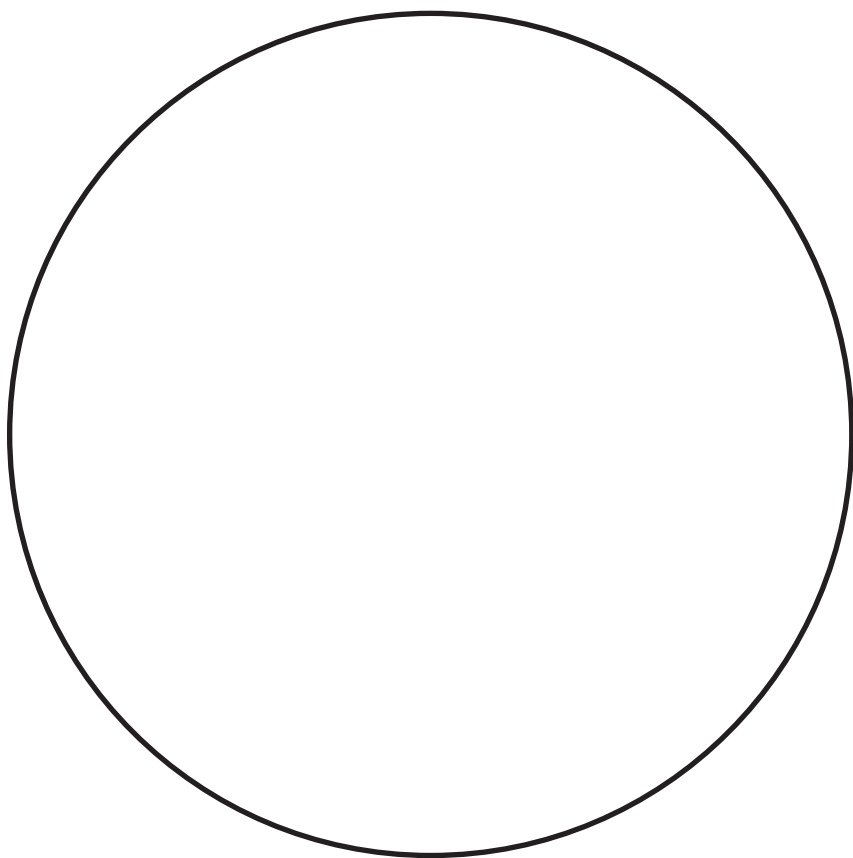
Mandalas

Mandalas, or circle images, are used in many parts of the world as symbols of wholeness. People make them in times of crisis to heal some wound, or they are used to center their being. If you are interested in moving your exercises with random markings to another level, I invite you to consider this practice. Begin by drawing circles on several sheets of paper. Trace the top of the water pitcher if you feel uncomfortable making a circle. Then sit quietly in a meditative way, maybe doing some deep breathing to clear your mind. Lay down one line and add to it as shapes appeal to you. It is important that only you can analyze your mandalas because the shapes you make are your personal language. They can be geometric or free flowing. Go with the flow. Enjoy.

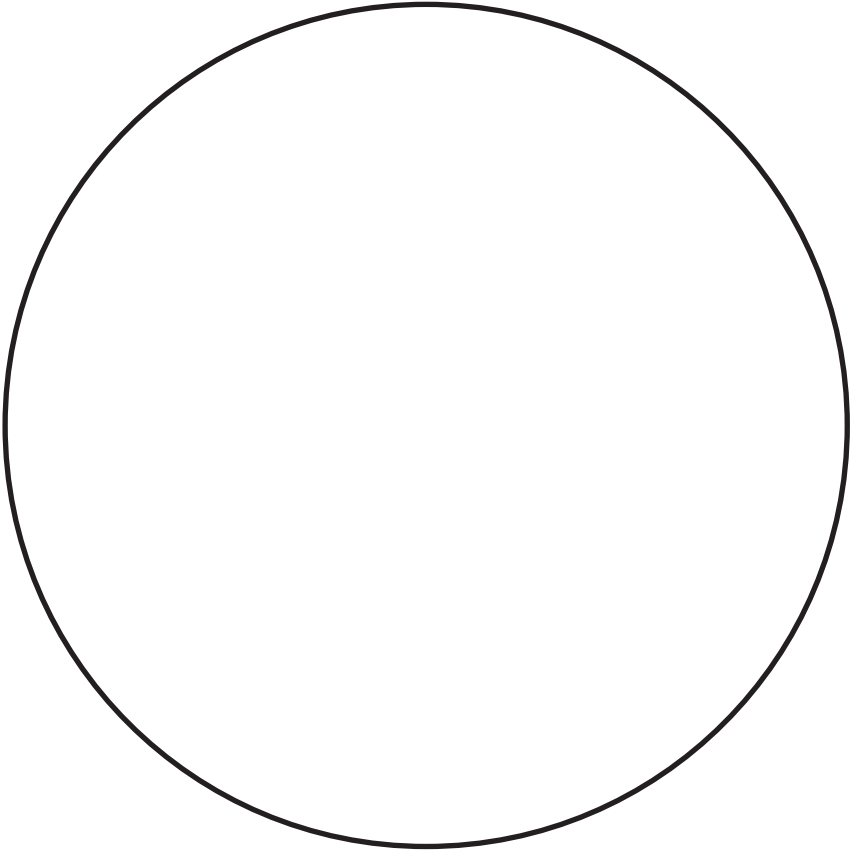
Some people keep Mandala journals when they are going through a major transition in their lives. Again, I write about process. There are some pre-designed mandalas in this manual. You may find coloring them in to be a calming experience. Or you might like to keep a journal of images such as described above. As I have written earlier, the images may surprise and offer new insights.







Now explore doing one with your own ideas. It can be geometric or free form.



Afterword

I hope you have found some nuggets from these pages that gave you moments of pleasure. If so, you may find these nuggets are seeds. You may also be surprised when they germinate and urge you down the path of further creative explorations. If you listen to these urges your life could be greatly enhanced. After all, it is known that a picture is worth a thousand words.

— GHS

“The universe brings with it great joys and great sorrows. Deep heart experiences, such as joy, delight, and ecstasy, on the one hand, and grief, sadness, and loss, on the other, trigger creativity in us.

— Matthew Fox (author of many books including *Creativity—Where the Divine and the Human Meet*)

Mandalas

There are many books on this subject. One I find most enjoyable is:

Mandala – Journey to the Center, by Bailey Cunningham, founder of the Mandala project, a Dorling Kindersley book (www.dk.com)

MANDALA COLORING BOOKS

Dover Coloring Books

Mandala Designs by Martha Bartfield

Everyone's Mandala Coloring Book Vol. 1 & 2. Monique Mondali

UPSTATE

MEDICAL UNIVERSITY



750 East Adams Street, Syracuse, NY 13210
315.464.4236 • www.upstate.edu/uh/spiritualcare

