

## Chapter 4: The Dynamic Mandala

### What is a Mandala?

'Mandala' is a Sanskrit word meaning circle and completion. Thus, most mandalas are plans, charts, geometric patterns, or all sorts of artistic designs that are circular, although squares and other figures may be incorporated. As far as its meaning is concerned, a mandala is often a symbolic representation of the Kosmos including our self. It has a center that is often meant to be the source of all being, and from this source radiates manifest reality in all its manifoldness. The central source draws our attention towards it, and therefore the mandala can be a tool for centering, focusing and contemplation. It can have a magical force and can provide a sacred space because of its transcendent source. It can remind the viewer of the immanence of sanctity in the Kosmos and in himself or herself. Thus, it can be a tool on the spiritual path: it can aid to end human suffering, can heal, liberate, and even help to attain enlightenment.

Mandalas have played an important role in Hindu and Buddhist Tantrism. And in a general sense, they have been known worldwide in indigenous traditions and many cultures. They are often two-dimensional, painted on paper or cloth, or made of sand, or other materials. But they may also be three-dimensional. Thus, for example, the Buddhist temple of Borobudur in Java represents one huge architectural mandala with a central stupa that encloses a Buddha statue that is surrounded by many other stupas, which surmount square platforms with bas-reliefs depicting the world and the life of the Buddha.

Mandalas often depict the Buddha, or deities, or other figures, but they may also be more or less abstract. The dynamic mandala of this book deviates from the norm of mandalas because, in its initial presentation, it is conceptual in its outer portion. But like other mandalas, it has a center that represents the source of all existence, and from this source radiates the manifoldness of the manifest world, which is represented by concepts. Since, in contrast to the names of the concepts, the source is the unnamable, it is represented by an empty space without any name in it. I also refer to the source as the mystery, again because it is beyond anything that can be talked about. Or I often refer to it as emptiness (in the Buddhist sense) in contrast to the form(s) of the rest of the mandala. "Emptiness does not imply nonexistence; emptiness implies the emptiness of *intrinsic* [independent] existence, which necessarily implies dependent origination [that is, the interconnectedness of everything]" (Tenzin Gyatso, The Fourteenth Dalai Lama 2005: 117). Thus, emptiness is form, but form that lacks independent existence,

which is “the true nature of things and events” (Tenzin Gyatso, The Fourteenth Dalai Lama 2005: 115). This contrasts with our ordinary understanding of form as separate things and events that are defined and named. For a fuller understanding of reality, it is of utmost importance to transcend this restricted view, and therefore, in the mandala of this book, we proceed from the concepts at its periphery to its empty center, from the namable to the unnamable, the mystery, the source of all that can be fragmented into things and events, sensations, emotions, thoughts, and consciousness.

A general characteristic of any mandala is that it serves as a tool for contemplation and meditation. It allows the meditator to approach it in a temporal evolutionary way, thus proceeding from the periphery toward its center, or through involution in time from the center toward the periphery, or through evolution and involution beyond time in the eternal present, which can lead to a recognition of the oneness of the source and its radiance, the unmanifest and the manifest, the One and the Many (see Chapter 3 and below).

Regardless of how mandalas are viewed and used, they facilitate integration in many ways: integration of the conscious and subconscious (as in Jung's psychology), microkosm and makrokosm, the individual and the Kosmos. The mandala of this book also serves this function. Since integration is healing, mandalas have played an important role in healing, healing of the self, relationships, and the world (Cornell, 1994). They have played this role for thousands of years to the present time in many spiritual traditions around the globe.

Wilber's AQAL map of the Kosmos deviates from a typical mandala because the source or spirit is located not in the center but at the periphery of the square four-quadrant map. Since it serves the same purpose as a typical mandala, it could also be considered a mandala in the widest sense of the term. Reynolds (2004: 68) referred to it as a “transcendent Kosmic Mandala.” In his *Integral Psychology* (2000d: 103, Figure 10), Wilber presented the Great Nest of Spirit (from which his map originated) with spirit in the center as in a typical mandala.

Finally, in a rather fuzzy sense, any somewhat centric structure has been considered a mandala by some authors. Thus, a flower, for example, could be seen as a mandala. Although I am not opposed to a wider and looser definition of “mandala”, in this book I generally use the term ‘mandala’ in a strict sense, which means a circular or centric structure (that may incorporate other structures) with a center representing the source,

the unnamable, the mysterious, the formless or emptiness (in the Buddhist sense) from which radiate the manifold manifestations of the Kosmos.

### **The Structure of the Dynamic Mandala**

The dynamic mandala is not just one mandala such as the one presented in Figure 4–1, but includes many interpretations and transformations. Thus, the dynamic mandala is a multitude of mandalas or even the set of all mandalas (see below). Nonetheless, I refer to it simply as the mandala, or the dynamic mandala, or the self-referential dynamic mandala, or the mandala of this book, recognizing that it has many interpretations and transformations or versions. I introduce it with the version of Figure 4–1. To distinguish the mandala of Figure 4–1 from any of its transformations, I either refer to it as the “basic mandala” or the mandala of Figure 4–1. “Basic mandala “ could be misleading because it is only basic in the sense that I arbitrarily take it as the starting point for the transformations. I could have chosen any one of the transformations as the starting point and then this would have been the “basic mandala”. There is no transformation that is privileged, except maybe for practical reasons. Therefore, it may be more appropriate to simply refer to a dynamic relationship between the so-called transformations, each of which is a different mandala.

The mandala of Figure 4–1 consists of an empty center and two circles of concepts, an outer and inner circle. Each concept of the outer circle is paired with a concept of the inner circle. For example, fragmentation is paired with wholeness.

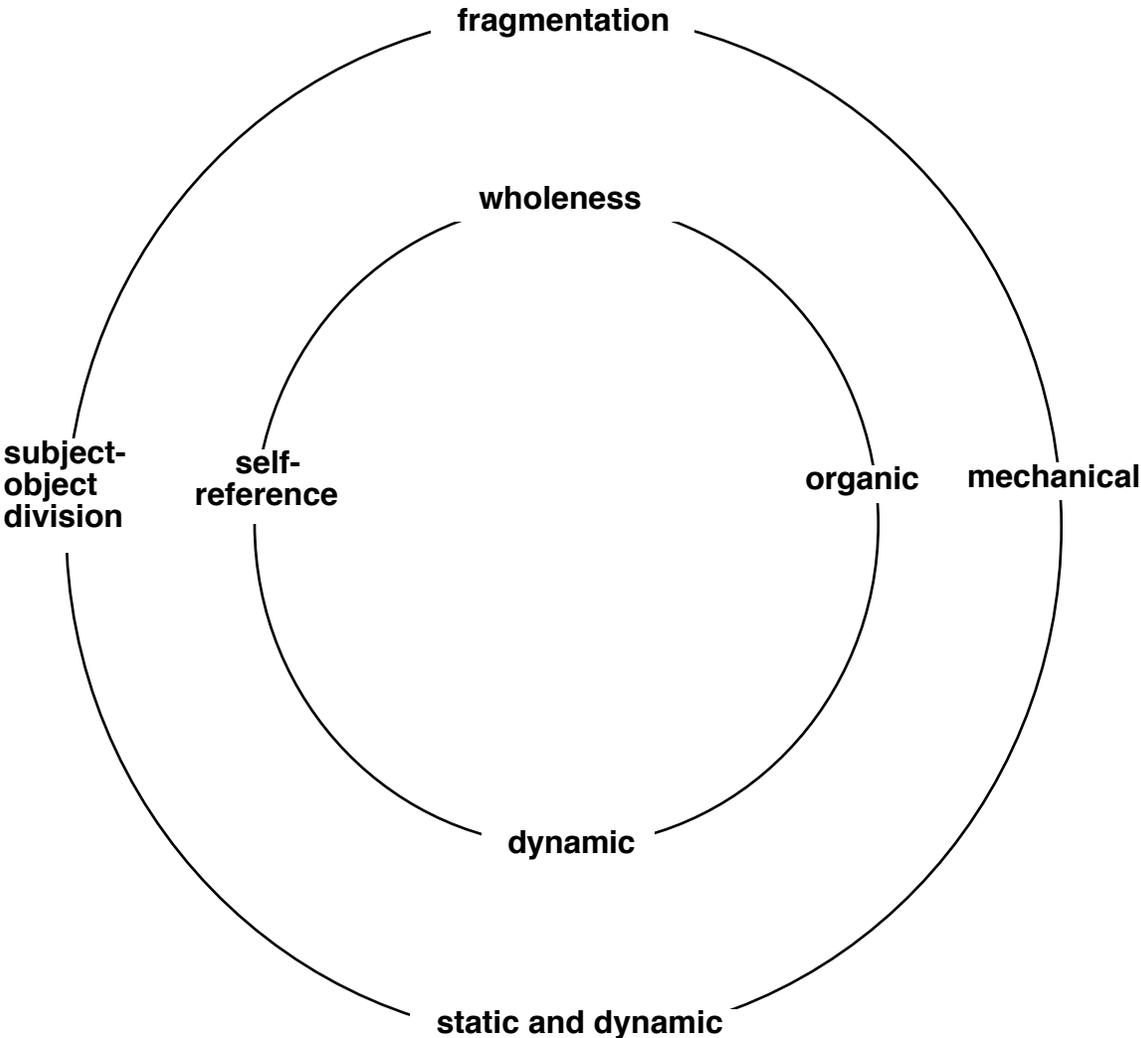


Figure 4–1. A simple version of the dynamic mandala.

What do the circles of concepts and the empty center represent? To begin with the empty center, since it is empty, it is best referred to as emptiness (in the Buddhist sense) or the names I referred to above. The relation between the empty center and the two circles deserves special attention. It is the relation between the unnamable and the namable, emptiness and form (forms having names), the One and the Many, the unmanifest and the manifest, the source and the efflux of the source. As the source and what flows out of it are one, so the center and the circles of concepts are one. Thus, the mandala as a whole represents the nondual ultimate reality, the great Mystery which in the Heart Sutra has been pointed at by the well-known expression: Form is emptiness, and emptiness if form. Note that I distinguish Mystery (with a capital M) of the Nondual, the mandala as a whole, from mystery (with a small m), the formless of the empty center of the mandala.

Form (that which can be named) is represented by the two circles with its names of concepts. The outer circle of concepts indicates the mechanistic worldview that implies also materialism and is still the dominant worldview of Western mainstream society and science, especially the life sciences. In contrast, the inner circle refers to holistic science and the counter culture or alternative society.

According to the mechanistic worldview, the universe and everything in it is a material mechanism. Thus, an organism, for example, is like a machine, although a highly complex machine: it consists of components, each separate from the other. Separateness implies fragmentation. The fragments may change and interact; in that sense there is dynamics. But a fragment remains a fragment; in that sense they are static. The observer himself or herself is a fragment that is separate from whatever (s)he observes. Thus, the division of the observer and the observed is fundamental.

In contrast, according to a holistic worldview, the world is an integrated whole and thus an organism is also integrated. This integration makes it organic and dynamic. It also means the observer and the observed are integrated, and as a result there is self-reference: since the observer is an integral part of the Kosmos, whatever (s)he says about the Kosmos also applies to herself or himself, at least to some extent. It is as if the Kosmos is mirrored in the observer. Whichever way we want to put it, the observer is not just a separate component.

It is very important to note that the concepts of the outer and inner circles and their relationship to each other and the center of the mandala have been defined differently by various authors and thus they can have different meanings. Depending on which meanings are implied, the meaning of the mandala changes. Therefore, the mandala has different interpretations.

### **Different Interpretations of the Dynamic Mandala**

There are three aspects of the mandala that can be interpreted differently: First, the relation between the outer and inner circle; second, the concepts of each circle; and third, the relation between the circles and the empty center.

#### **The relation between the two circles**

Several different relations between the circles can be envisaged:

1. Often the two circles are perceived as being antagonistic to each other. Either mechanism is upheld and holism is condemned or vice versa. Less extreme

positions are to acknowledge that there is at least some limited merit to the circle that one does not favor. Therefore, condemnation is not total.

2. Both circles are recognized and they are seen as complementary to each other. This does not necessarily mean that they are equal. One of them such as the holistic circle could be considered more comprehensive or more adequate than the mechanistic circle.
3. The circles could be seen in terms of Yin-Yang. In general, this means that the outer circle contains a little of the inner circle and vice versa (see Figure 2–4). More specifically, it could mean that the outer circle is more Yang, more masculine, and the inner more Yin, more feminine.
4. The relation between the two circles can be seen as a ranking in a hierarchical fashion. If we look at it in this way, then the inner circle includes and transcends the outer circle just as each level in Wilber's map includes and transcends its predecessor. This hierarchical relation is reflected in each concept pair. For example, wholeness includes and transcends fragmentation; an organism includes cells but transcends them through the emergence of novel properties at the organismal level such as the emergence of a mind that in that form is not present at the cellular level.
5. The two circles are continuous. For example, as there is less fragmentation and increasing integration, one moves from fragmentation in the outer circle to holodynamics in the inner circle. There are, however, several different ways of conceiving this continuum: 1. As in the spectrum of colors, the continuum does not imply any inclusion. For example, as we move from yellow to green, we just move to a color that is different: green does not include yellow. In the same way, holodynamics would not include fragmentation: it is just different from fragmentation according to this conception of the continuum. 2. There is a continuum in which change from one part of the continuum to another implies inclusion and transcendence, which could be total or partial. In that case holodynamics would not only differ from fragmentation, but would also totally or partially include and transcend fragmentation. A simple example of this kind of continuum is the continuum from either/or logic (a two-valued logic) to three-valued logic to many-valued logic to fuzzy logic. In this continuum, logic becomes increasingly comprehensive; and the more comprehensive logic transcends and

includes the preceding logic. This kind of continuum shares the phenomenon of emergence with the hierarchical.

In both the inclusive and non-inclusive continuum one can distinguish a heterogeneous and homogeneous continuum. In the heterogeneous or patterned continuum certain areas of the continuum are more prominent than others (see, e.g., Sattler 1986). An example of such a continuum are water waves: they are continuous, but in the continuity there is a pattern in contrast to the continuum of a flat water surface that has no pattern and therefore is an example of a homogeneous continuum.

Finally, we may see a continuum between all of the above continua. For example, a flat water surface may develop ripples that may become waves, which means that there is a continuum from a homogeneous to a heterogeneous continuum.

Wilber may have a patterned inclusive continuum in mind when he underlines the continuity between the waves or levels of the holarchy. As long as the waves are rather pronounced, one may still refer to holons and a holarchy. However, as the waves become less pronounced, that is, as the continuum becomes more homogeneous, holons and the holarchy gradually vanish.

In any case, waves are not an appropriate analogy for an inclusive continuum because one wave does not include the preceding wave(s): it is only connected to other waves through the underlying water of the ocean as all levels in Wilber's holarchy are connected in Spirit (with a capital S as pointed out in Chapter 1, Fig. 1–2). A more appropriate analogy for an inclusive continuum might be a spiral shell. As it grows from incipient stages, the spirality gradually emerges and any stage in its development includes all the preceding stages.

Wilber recognizes a patterned non-inclusive continuum with regard to transitory moral stages. In these stages, the higher stage replaces the lower one(s), which means that the lower one(s) are not included in the higher one.

6. The concepts of the two circles form a network with each other. The question then is not only how the two circles are interrelated but also how all the concepts of both circles are related to each other and this in turn may affect the relation between the two circles.

Considering all of the principal and subordinate kinds of relations between the two circles, we can list the following possible relations: 1. Total antagonism, 2. Partial antagonism, 3. Equal complementarity, 4. Unequal complementarity, 5. Yin-Yang relation, 6. Hierarchy, 7. Homogeneous continuum without inclusion and transcendence, 8. Homogeneous continuum with total inclusion and transcendence, 9. Homogeneous continuum with partial inclusion and transcendence, 10. Heterogeneous continuum without inclusion and transcendence, 11. Heterogeneous continuum with total inclusion and transcendence, 12. Heterogeneous continuum with partial inclusion and transcendence, 13. Network.

Note that this list of 13 possible relations between the two circles is based on either/or logic. For example, the antagonism is either total or partial. If we look at the relations in terms of fuzzy logic, the number of possibilities is reduced because fuzzy logic is more comprehensive. For example, instead of the two relations of total and partial antagonism, we simply obtain the fuzzy set of antagonism ranging from 100% to 0% membership. If we apply fuzzy logic to all of the above 13 possible relations, we obtain the following fuzzy sets: 1. Antagonism, 2. Complementarity, 3. Yin-Yang relation, 4. Hierarchy, 5. Homogeneous continuum, 6. Heterogeneous continuum, 7. Network. The relation between the homogeneous and heterogeneous continuum may also be seen as fuzzy. Furthermore, at least some of the fuzzy sets could be combined. For example, 0% antagonism may be equivalent to 100% complementarity and vice versa. Therefore, antagonism and complementarity could be seen as one fuzzy set instead of two. Similarly, hierarchy and continuum might be combined: 100% hierarchy, that is, typical hierarchy in the strict sense, could be seen as 0% continuum and 100% continuum as 0% hierarchy, provided that the continuum is without inclusion and transcendence.

The above list may not be complete. There may be still other ways that the two circles can be related to each other. Furthermore, the above relations can be listed and conceptualized differently. But note that in any case hierarchy is only one kind of relation besides several others. Therefore, envisaging the relation between the two circles as only hierarchical deprives us of other ways of understanding their relation. And this applies not only to the two circles but also to the so-called levels in Wilber's map.

The most important general conclusion is that the way we view the relation between the two circles and the concepts affects the meaning of the mandala. Thus, already at

this stage, the mandala reveals itself as a proteus that can accommodate very different interpretations.

### **The concepts of the mandala.**

As I mentioned already, the concepts of the mandala can also have different meanings and this again affects the meaning of the mandala as a whole. It is impossible for me to list all the different meanings of the concepts. There is an enormous literature on this subject. As an example, let us consider different meanings of wholeness. I have already distinguished two or three meanings in the section on holism in Chapter 1. One of these meanings is wholeness in terms of the hierarchical view. According to this view, a whole is always also a part; hence there are only part/wholes (holons). Each part/whole includes but transcends the holons of the lower level. If, however, the whole is seen as a unity, a continuum, then the lower level holons are not included as holons because they no longer exist as holons. If this sounds too abstract, think again of the organismal theory that I explained in Chapter 1. According to this theory, the organism does not consist of cells because there are no cells. Thus fragmentation into cells is transcended and as a result the organism can be seen as a more integral whole than it is possible according to the hierarchical view. Nonetheless, it is important to realize that this more integral wholeness is still relative wholeness. Relative because it shows only one part and only one aspect of absolute wholeness. It shows only one part because an organism is only one part of the Kosmos. Since the organism also forms a continuum with its environment, the part could become much more inclusive. However, this more integral wholeness is also relative because it represents only one *aspect* of absolute wholeness. For example, the organismal theory refers only to the physical aspect of reality. It does not represent its interiority, that is, Wilber's left quadrants. In these quadrants we find other important aspects of absolute wholeness. I shall describe in the next chapter how all of these aspects can be included in the mandala.

Returning to the diversity of different meanings of the concepts in the two circles, let me just emphasize that there is room in the mandala for all of these meanings. As a result the mandala can be interpreted in many different ways.

### **The relation between the circles and the center.**

The relation between the circles and the empty center can be seen temporally in terms of evolution or involution or beyond time in the eternal present as I explained it in Chapter 3. If we take the evolutionary view in time, we can see the evolution from the mechanistic to the holistic worldview and from there to the transpersonal experience of

emptiness, the formless, the One, or whatever we like to call it, that which is unnamable. If we look at the mandala in terms of involution in time, we can see how the unmanifest in the center manifests itself in the holistic and mechanistic worldviews; in other words, how the concepts of the circles arise from the source, from emptiness. Finally, if we experience the relation between the emptiness in the center and form in the circles beyond time in the eternal present, we can see that emptiness is form and form is emptiness.

### **The Dynamic Mandala in Relation to Wilber's Map**

If the mandala of Figure 4–1 is interpreted as a hierarchy of stages in a temporal evolutionary way, it is related to Wilber's map and could even be seen as a version of his map for the following reasons:

1. It comprises four levels: the mechanistic worldview, the holistic world view, the formless and the nondual represented by the whole mandala. These levels correspond to the following levels in Wilber's map: the rational level, vision-logic, the transpersonal causal (formless) level ("overmind" according to Wilber 2006, Fig. 2–4), and the nondual ("supermind" according to Wilber 2006, Fig. 2–4). Evidently, several of Wilber's levels are missing in the mandala of Figure 4–1, especially the psychic and subtle transpersonal levels (both of which are renamed in Wilber 2006) and all of the levels below the rational level. As we shall see in the next chapter, all of these levels can be added in transformations of the mandala of Figure 4–1.
2. The concept pairs correspond to the lines in Wilber's map. Again, more lines can be added and the lines can be extended to comprise more than two concepts. As in Wilber's map, the concept pairs or lines traverse the levels, if the mandala is interpreted in a hierarchical way.
3. The mandala can also be interpreted in terms of states and types. States are temporary changes such as a temporary advance to a more holistic view or experience. Types can occur at any stage or state. For example, the dynamic at the holistic level can be masculine or feminine.
4. Finally, the mandala can also be interpreted in terms of Wilber's four quadrants and this can be done in three different ways: 1. Each concept pair or concept line can be visualized as having four quadrants. 2. The mandala can be divided into four quadrants and each concept pair or line can be put into the appropriate

quadrant(s). Thus, in Fig. 4–1 self-reference/ subject-object division is placed into the upper left quadrant, organic/mechanistic in to the lower left quadrant, and wholeness/fragmentation and dynamic/static and dynamic into the right hand quadrants. 3. The mandala can be drawn only with the circles representing the levels without the concept pairs, and then it can be divided into the four quadrants. This corresponds to the way Wilber constructs the four quadrants, whereas the visualization of four quadrants around each concept pair or line deviates from Wilber's view.

As I mentioned already, one representational difference between the mandala and Wilber's map is that the mandala has the formless in the center, whereas Wilber's map has it at the periphery. As I shall show in the next chapter even this difference can be eliminated through an inversion of center and periphery.

Obviously, the basic mandala of Figure 4–1 is not as comprehensive as Wilber's map. However, as I shall demonstrate in the next chapter, transformations of the mandala of figure 4–1 will make up for this deficiency. On the other hand, in some ways even the mandala of Figure 4–1 surpasses Wilber's map since it can also be interpreted non-hierarchically in several different ways, in terms of temporal involution, and in terms of evolution and involution beyond time in the eternal present.

I introduced the mandala in a very simple and simplified version for at least two reasons: 1. to focus on fundamental features of the mandala without overwhelming the reader, and 2. to address levels and lines that are especially relevant to developed Western and westernized countries. In these countries such as Great Britain, France, and Germany, the majority of the population appears to be more or less at the mechanistic or rational level and the leading edge at the holistic or integral level. If, however, we consider the whole world, the picture changes drastically. According to Wilber (2006: 179) worldwide 50%-70% of the population is still at the mythic (ethnocentric) level or below. "To put it in bluntest terms possible, this means around 70% of the world's population is Nazis" (Wilber 2006: 179). Thus, to represent the worldwide situation, we would have to include in the mandala of Fig. 4–1 at least the mythic level which could be done in two ways: 1. We simply add the mythic level as a third circle outside the mechanistic, rational circle without any concepts in the three circles. If we divide this mandala into four quadrants, we obtain a simplified and inverted version of Wilber's map. 2. We add to each concept pair a third concept outside the outer circle. For example, outside "fragmentation" we add "identification", which implies that at the mythic level people identify with fragments such as beliefs and doctrines. Of

course, they don't perceive their beliefs or doctrines as fragments, but rather as a totality, as absolute truth. It is this presupposition of possessing totality and absolute truth that leads to conflicts and clashes, in the extreme even to war, between groups with contradictory beliefs and doctrines as we can witness in so many parts of the world today. In this respect the mandala is of utmost importance: awareness of the mandala can help to resolve these conflicts because it allows us to re-member the center, the source, the mystery, where we are all united.

### **A Mandala of Mandalas**

As I pointed out already, the dynamic mandala is not just one single mandala. Since it has many interpretations and transformations, it is a whole set of mandalas, or, in other words, a mandala of mandalas. In the widest sense, it is the set of all mandalas, since all mandalas of the past, present, and future can be seen as different interpretations and transformations of the dynamic mandala. However, since already existing mandalas have not been created by an actual transformation of the dynamic mandala, it may be more appropriate to refer to a dynamic relationship between all mandalas, or simply say that as mandalas they are all related to each other—because they may be seen as transformations of each other even when they have been created separately.

### **A Transformative Mandala**

The dynamic mandala is a transformative mandala in a double sense: 1. Since it is dynamic and self-referential, it has transformation built into it and thus can be transformed in many ways. 2. Each transformation can have a transformative effect on the viewer and transformer of the mandala. These transformative effects can be manifold depending on whether the viewer studies the mandalas intellectually, enjoys them as works of design and art, appreciates them as tools for contemplation or meditation, or uses them in still other ways. Fontana (2005) highlights the importance of mandalas for meditation and contemplation.

### **Contemplation of the Mandala**

Contemplating the mandala provides insight—insight into the varied meanings of the concepts and circles of concepts, the many different relations between the outer and inner circles, and between both circles and the empty center. Since the two circles represent materialistic, mechanistic mainstream society and holistic alternative society,

we gain insight into the relation between two major forces that shape our society and existence. And we also gain insight into the relation between materialistic, mechanistic mainstream science and holistic science that is still a fringe phenomenon. Above all, contemplating the mandala helps us to re-member that both materialistic, mechanistic and holistic thinking are different manifestations of the source, the empty center. I intentionally write re-member with a hyphen to indicate that being aware of the relation between the source and its manifestations provides an integration, a re-membering of emptiness, the source, into its manifestations. Such re-membering leads to wholeness (holos), holiness, and health. As I pointed out in Chapter 1, it is no coincidence that these three words have the same etymological root, which indicates that they are intimately related. And it is no coincidence that holiness, the sacred, is implied because total integration with the source bestows holiness on everything there is.

In other words, contemplating the mandala reveals that beyond everything that can be expressed in words is the unnamable mystery. Thus, every word points beyond itself to the unnamable; and, vice versa, the unnamable is the source of all that can be named. It is like the sky in which the clouds (of manifestation) arise (Mathers, 2006). Recognizing the clouds in relation to the sky, the namable in relation to the unnamable, instills mystery into the namable because ultimately the namable and the unnamable, form and emptiness, are one, not two. McFarlane (2003), referring to Franklin Merrell-Wolff, points out how concepts that are designated by words are delimitation from the infinite. For example, a circle draws a limit between what is inside and outside itself. Being aware of the infinity outside the circle means relating the circle to the source.

Contemplating the mandala does not only provide insight into reality, the Kosmos, but also communion with it. As we become aware of the source in the empty center of the mandala, we can realize that this center is the center of the Kosmos and ourselves. Thus, the centers of the mandala, the Kosmos, and we coincide—they are one center, not in a spatial or temporal sense, but in the sense of the unnamable mystery. Awareness of this unity dissolves separation and alienation so widespread in our society that to a great extent is caught in the materialistic, mechanistic circle without recognition of the source.

How do we discover the center of the Kosmos in ourselves? Through meditation we can penetrate into the deepest core of our being and then we realize that we and the Kosmos are one, not two. Furthermore, in nondual awareness we find that the center and the periphery, the source and its manifestations are also one, not two.

### **The Mandala as an Aid to Liberation**

Contemplating the mandala can be liberating in several ways:

1. As we realize that concepts have a variety of meanings, we are no longer caught in only one meaning. We can move from one meaning to another and thus enrich our experience. As this movement becomes free and spontaneous, it becomes a dance (see Chapter 7). Having this freedom is very different from the common state of consciousness in which people are “glued” to only one meaning and believe that this meaning captures reality. Other people may be equally “glued” to different or even opposite meanings and then the stage is set for conflict, violence, and war.
2. As with concepts, so with the circles of concepts. We do not have to be caught in just one way of relating the two circles. We can move freely from one way to another: from hierarchy to Yin-Yang, continuum, and network. Again, such movement is freeing and provides a richer experience.
3. Since the mandala contains the empty center, the source, we can see all manifestation, conceptual and otherwise, in relation to its source: we are no longer stuck solely in manifestation cut off from its source. And since awareness of the source bestows sacredness on everything, we recover sacredness in the Kosmos including ourselves.

### **Mandala: The Architecture of Enlightenment**

“Mandala: The Architecture of Enlightenment” is the title of a chapter by Thurman in a book of the same title by Leidy and Thurman (1998). Focusing mainly on Buddhist mandalas, Thurman describes how a mandala can be the expression of an enlightened state and how it can be used to approach or even attain this enlightened state. “A mandala is a magical and sacred realm, created by the artistry of enlightened compassion in order to nurture beings’ development toward enlightenment. Mandalas are the perfected environments of the buddhas, built upon the foundation of their perfect wisdom, just as the ordinary universe is built upon the foundation of ignorance” (Leidy and Thurman 1998: 168) Since mandalas present an architecture of form around the center of the formless, they lead us from the world of form to the formless. And since the formless, emptiness, is form, as I pointed out above, mandalas also lead us to the nonduality of emptiness and form. If the mandala is a three-dimensional temple such as Borobudur in Java, one can even physically walk from its square terraces that represent

form to its central stupa that encloses a buddha representing the formless, emptiness. From my visit to Borobudur, I vividly remember my ascent from the terraces to the stupas and eventually the central stupa: it was like transcendence and yet immanence at the same time since the terraces and the stupas are connected. I was deeply touched by the sacred, feeling free and blissful. This stayed with me to the present day.

Not all mandalas are equal with regard to their architecture of enlightenment. For example, compared to Tibetan Buddhist mandalas, the conceptual mandalas presented in this and the following chapter, appear rather deficient. Nonetheless, they comprise form and emptiness and therefore can, at least potentially, open the door to the path toward enlightenment. Since they are conceptual and framed in language easily accessible to the post/modern Western mind, they may be even more helpful to Westerners, especially at the initial stages of their spiritual path.

Obviously, any one single mandala, especially if designed by an enlightened master, can be a guide to reaching the formless in the form. However, the form in any single mandala is always limited, even in the most elaborate Tibetan mandalas. The form in the conceptual mandalas of this and the following chapter is even more limited compared to the richness of Tibetan mandalas. Nonetheless, these conceptual mandalas present an aspect of form that is not contained in the Tibetan mandalas. And other mandalas contain yet other aspects of the inexhaustible richness of manifest reality. Therefore, a diversity of mandalas represents form more comprehensively than any single mandala. Since the dynamic mandala allows endless transformations as shall be demonstrated in the next chapter, it mirrors more fully than any single mandala the fluidity and diversity of the manifest Kosmos through its own fluidity and diversity.

### **The Fluid Mandala and the Fluid Kosmos**

The mandala is fluid in at least three ways:

1. Besides the concept of static, it contains the concept of dynamic in both circles, the inner circle being completely dynamic.
2. Since the mandala is self-referential—referring to the Kosmos and itself as a part of the Kosmos—it is itself dynamic, which means that it can be transformed in many ways that will be illustrated in the next chapter.
3. Since the version of the mandala presented in this chapter and all the other transformations of the mandala can be interpreted in many different ways, each version of the mandala is also fluid.

The fluidity of the mandala mirrors the fluidity of the Kosmos: the macrokosm that includes all the galaxies, stars, and planets; and the microkosm of our individual lives. Since microkosm and macrokosm are ultimately one, our “personal” experience can reach macrocosmic dimensions, dimensions that mystics have alluded to, although they all agree that words and language are insufficient to convey the depth and scope of their experience and insight.

### **Healing through the Mandala**

According to Chinese medicine, illness is the result of energy blockage. Healing then means restoring fluidity, removing the blockage so that the energy can move freely. There are many ways to remove blockages and to restore fluidity. It can be done through acupuncture, massage, exercise, and also through mental and emotional transformation. The mandala with its different interpretations and many transformations (that will be introduced in the following chapter) can help to remove mental and emotional blockages because it infuses fluidity—fluidity in the movement from one interpretation to another and from one transformation to another. Whereas the conceptual transformations of the mandala are best suited for the removal of mental blockages, the organic/artistic transformations (that I shall introduce in the next chapter) can help to alleviate emotional blockages. Since mind and body are one, the removal of mental and emotional blockages can also help to alleviate physical blockages. Thus, contemplating the mandala can help to heal mental, emotional, and physical illness.

Creating new mandalas can also be of great importance in the healing process (see, e.g., Cornell 1994). Jung saw the mandala as a representation of the unconscious self and found that the creation of mandalas can heal emotional disorders and help reunify the self.

### **Alleviating Suffering through the Mandala**

According to Buddhism, the cause of suffering is attachment, attachment to desires, aversions, ideas, doctrines, etc. Attachment is fixation and thus it implies static that is so characteristic of the outer circle of the mandala. There are many ways to free ourselves from attachments to ideas and doctrines. One way is through contemplation of the mandala. Such contemplation can lead to the realization that attachment to any one interpretation and transformation of the mandala is limiting us and that this limitation is unnecessary. We can open ourselves to all interpretations and transformations and thus transcend our self-imposed limitation. Such transcendence will be liberating.

Even the contemplation of one single mandala can be liberating because it connects us to the source, the empty center, the mysterious. However, adding the many interpretations and transformations of the mandala of this book can greatly help in creating more fluidity and thus can contribute to loosening our attachments, especially attachments to ideas and doctrines.

### **Transforming and Healing Society through the Mandala**

As we transform and heal ourselves, we also affect the transformation and healing of society since we are inseparably linked with our environment and society. This healing happens by itself in a very subtle way without any activism. There are, however, in addition also active ways to transform and heal society. Active and inactive ways of transformation and healing are not mutually exclusive—they rather reinforce each other.

Activism can work through the transformation of our institutions such as educational institutions from kindergarten to university and adult education. Instilling fluidity and freedom into the educational process (instead of the common indoctrination of fixed concepts and doctrines that are often presented as the truth) can help to overcome much antagonism, conflict, stress, and even war (see also Chapter 6). Furthermore, contemplation of mandalas creates awareness of the source, emptiness, the mystery, where we are all united with one another and the Kosmos.

### **Conclusions**

In this chapter, a simple version of the dynamic mandala has been presented. It consists of two circles of concepts and an empty center. The outer circle represents the materialistic, mechanistic worldview of Western and westernized mainstream society and science, the inner circle the holistic worldview of alternative society and science. The empty center represents the unnamable source of everything that can be named, the mystery of existence. **Depending on the meaning of the concepts, the relation between the two circles, and between the circles and the center, the dynamic mandala can be interpreted in many different ways—the mandala has room for all of these interpretations.** These different interpretations complement each other because each interpretation illuminates a different aspect of reality. Thus, together all these interpretations give us a much richer and more comprehensive view of the Kosmos than any interpretation alone.

**Contemplating the mandala does not only provide insight into reality, the Kosmos, but also communion with it. As we become aware of the source in the empty center of the mandala, we can realize that this center is the center of the Kosmos and ourselves. Thus, the centers of the mandala, the Kosmos, and ourselves coincide—they are one center, not in a spatial or temporal sense, but in the sense of the unnamable mystery that pervades all existence.**

**Contemplating the mandala can also be liberating in several ways:** instead of being caught in only one meaning of the concepts, we can move freely to other complementary meanings; instead of being caught in only one way of relating the circles of concepts, we can entertain other complementary relations; and instead of being caught only in the manifest world cut off from its source, the empty center, we can see everything in relations to the source that bestows sacredness on existence.

**Since the mandala is dynamic, transformational, fluid, it is well suited to mirror the fluidity of the Kosmos:** the macrocosm that includes all the galaxies, stars, and planets; and the microcosm of our individual lives. Since microcosm and macrocosm are ultimately one, our “personal” experience can reach macrocosmic dimensions, dimensions that mystics have alluded to, although they all agree that words and language are insufficient to convey the depth and scope of their experience and insight.

Finally, **contemplation of the mandala can be healing and alleviate suffering individually as well as in society. Practicing contemplation of the mandala in educational institutions could help overcome much antagonism, conflict, stress, and even war.**