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The Mandala: Sacred Circle in Tibetan Buddhism. By Martin Brauen.
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This lavishly illustrated book is a translation of the author's German original entitled *Das Mandala: Der Heilige Kreis im tantrischen Buddhismus*, which was published in 1992 by DuMont. The volume, released as a companion publication to an exhibition at the Ethnographic Museum of the University of Zurich bearing the same title, is not simply a catalogue of the objects displayed in the show. Instead, Brauen provides us with the most detailed study of the mandala form's conceptual basis, its visual representations in a number of media, and its ritual usages. There is also a useful conclusion drawing on universal notions of the mandala developed by such noted Europeans as Carl Gustav Jung. The English edition is also slightly different in format and presentation from the German original. It therefore deserves to be reviewed in this newest incarnation.

Brauen begins with the idea of the "picture-friendliness" of Tibetan Buddhism, linking it with the practice of visualizing deities as a form of meditation. As he states: "To impart the most profound religious truths, Tantric Buddhism employs pictorial representations with an intensity found in no other form of Buddhism and scarcely in any other religion" (p. 9). While the latter portion of his statement needs to be qualified to a certain degree in light of the fact that many non-literate religious traditions rely heavily on visual images for religious and healing experiences (e.g., Australian Aborigine or Navajo), his claim is certainly true within the galaxy of the world religions. Given the extremely esoteric nature of Tibetan mandala practice, Brauen seeks to make the esoteric comprehensible to a Western audience by using modern visual conventions by utilizing cutting-edge computer technology to depict pictorially the fundamentally three-dimensional reality of mandalas. By doing so, he is essentially explicating "something that cannot be grasped in words" (p. 10). Brauen notes that many previous writers, including the well-known Tibetologist Giuseppe Tucci in *The Theory and Practice of the Mandala* (London : Rider and Company, 1961), attempted to understand, in the spirit of Jung, the universality of the mandala. His well-taken cue that we must first understand the Tibetan mandala on its own terms is the starting point for any analysis.

Rather than focusing broadly on mandalas in general, he focuses on the *kālacakra* mandala (*dus kyi 'khor lo*) specifically, not only because it was the one constructed at his museum, but also because it is one of the most important in the tradition, belonging as it does to the Anuttarayoga Tantra. But this raises an important ethical dilemma for Brauen. How does an objective author convey something intended to be secret, meant for the initiate only, to a general audience? His answer is to draw on a methodology that incorporates only work already sanctioned and published. This is

sound, since the literature on the philosophy and ritual practice of the kālacakra mandala is quite immense, given the fact that it has become the most popular initiatory ritual among Westerners since the beginning of the Tibetan diaspora in 1959. Brauen’s work thus deftly distills this vast corpus of technical and popular literature, while also adding his own observations as an ethnographer of religion. The result is a very readable volume that will be of use to both the specialist and the non-specialist.

The book covers all of the numerous angles from which to interpret the kālacakra mandala. Chapter three initiates the technical discussion by explicating the meaning of the “outer mandala.” As with Tantric Hindu theories of the relationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm, Tibetan Buddhism also posits an inviolable homology between the world and the human body. Brauen depicts the “outer” dimension of the mandala by drawing in words, diagrams, and illustrations the cylindrical world of the Abhidharmakośa, which places the gods at the center of the cosmos and humans on the periphery. Thus, because the aforementioned text makes a strong connection between the cosmos, the person, and the mandala, the entire ritual process of mandala meditation can be understood metaphorically as a journey to the center, since the meditating individual strives to become the deity depicted at the center of the geometric pattern. Moreover, Brauen discusses the relationship of the sacred architecture of the stūpa (mchod rten) with the mandala form, stating that both are replications of the cosmos in structured space. By making a correlation between physical movement around the stūpa towards the center with spiritual movement during the “meditative walk” (p. 29) to the center of the mandala palace, Brauen is able to complete his integrated model of the mandala as a blueprint of the natural and spiritual worlds.

In Chapter four, the “inner mandala” is described by the author. Because the human body is understood to be a mandala in the Kālacakra Tantra, Brauen devotes a whole chapter to the theory of cakras and the other elements of the subtle and physical body, such as the ten winds and their directional orientation. Using diagrams and drawings of the body and its composite parts, Brauen aids the reader in visualizing and spatializing the numerous correlates that comprise the human-cosmic connection, which in turn allows him to move easily into a discussion of the “other mandala,” the method of tantric meditation. In order to realize emptiness, the meditator creates a mental mandala which enables him to understand the correlation between the adept’s body and the universe through a process of analogy. As Brauen states, “The inner kinship of all beings forms the basis for the complicated Tantric system of analogies and correlations, and through ōthought and action by analogy’ death and rebirth eventually lead to an

awareness of blissful emptiness and the attainment of an (immaterial) divine body” (p. 61). Brauen argues convincingly that central to this process of realization is the cleansing of the body’s winds, which allows the adept to visualize the deities during mandala meditation. These are, perhaps, the most unique features of Tantric Buddhism, but the author is quick to point out that while the utilization of the subtle energies and the visualization of deities may be peculiar to this method, the final Buddhist goal remains the same: realizing that nothing exists in and of itself. Thus, to realize this fundamental truth, the meditator must pass through two phases of experience, that of generation and completion. The generation phase occurs as the adept visualizes the deity, and the completion phase occurs when he or she becomes the deity, described as “water in water” (p. 64).

Having described the practice of mandala meditation, Brauen moves on to a detailed discussion of the making of a particular mandala of the *kālacakra*. As with the homologies drawn in the previous chapters, he points out that the *kālacakra* palace at the center of the mandala symbolizes the relationship between body and universe, for it is constructed around three principal regions representing the body, speech, and mind of the Buddha. As he suggests, the entire mandala is regarded as an emanation of the Buddha, and its various regions are considered to be different facets of the enlightened Buddha. Just as with the physical journey around a *stūpa*, the mandala meditator approaches the sacred center from without. The preparatory rites for the construction of the form are thus focused on the center because the deity’s throne is placed there.

Brauen’s brief, concluding chapter explores the way that the mandala has been understood by Western analysts. He dismisses some early theories by Camman and Hummel that suggest a Chinese origin for the mandala and cautions the reader against accepting Jung’s interpretation of individual elements of the form. However, he does note that although Jung’s knowledge of Tibetan Buddhism was severely limited due to the paucity of reliable texts available during his lifetime, he did grasp intuitively much of the esoteric meaning of the mandala’s psychology. For example, Jung realized that the deeper meaning of the mandala had to do with becoming “inwardly aware” of the deity in order to break the bonds of illusion for the purpose of merging “individual existence” with the “universal totality of the divine state” (p. 121, Jung’s words). Brauen accepts this basic premise “as long as by *ōdivine state*’ is meant not an image of the divine shaped by Christianity, but Buddhahood” (ibid.).

On a concluding note, Brauen states that there is a danger in Western understandings and practices of mandala rites because of the West’s preconceived notions of individualism; that is, because visualization is a proc-

ess of finding—and situating oneself at—the center, the entire process can become an egocentric one. This, he points out, goes against the compassionate reasoning underlying mandala practice in Tibetan Buddhism. He thus sums up by stating that Buddhism’s view of the interconnectedness of all things is fundamentally different from our “technologically-oriented and consumerist world, and the attitude that the universe—with man at the centre—belongs only to us and is our rightful property” (p. 124). True enough, but we might still ask what role mandala initiation can play in a diasporic world fraught with decentering tendencies.

Brauen’s book is one of the clearest and most lucid expositions of mandala theory and practice to appear in recent years. His use of computer-generated images as an aid to understanding mandala form will assist Western students in grasping the subtleties of Tibetan philosophy and spirituality. As such, it is destined to become a classic both in the classroom and in the public reader’s library.