Looking Beyond the Self: Tibetan Buddhist and Navajo Transformation Ceremonies

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Looking Beyond the Self:
Tibetan Buddhist and Navajo Transformation Ceremonies

Kathryn McIntosh
Religious Studies Senior Seminar
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Introduction

Sandpaintings are tools used by many cultures to convey a message of religious teaching, universal balance and visual beauty. Through the process of teaching and visualization, the *mandala* or sandpainting ceremony is of singular importance to the Tibetan Buddhists of Central Asia and to the Navajo people of North America as well. Although sandpaintings provide a visual rendition of a specific teaching or story, and may take many forms, they must be understood as only one component of a much larger ritual event.¹

The *mandala* constructed in the Kalachakra Initiation Rite by Tibetan Buddhists and the multiple sandpaintings created in the Navajo Nightway Rite demonstrate the importance of transformation through ritual performance in both cultures. In the Kalachakra Initiation Rite, a direct spiritual transformation occurs in which the individual becomes a bodhisattva (disciple or student). In the Nightway Rite, a healing transformation occurs that enables the individual (patient or suffer) to return to the desired state of health after experiencing the imbalance of illness (physical or mental).

The importance of these two ceremonies extends beyond the ritual and religious world because it relates to the secular modern world as well. By doing so, the rites enable different types of audiences to understand how the Kalachakra Initiation and the Nightway Rites can produce transformation. However, the classification of these two rituals and use of sandpaintings in these ceremonies are not straightforward and can be controversial.

¹ In this paper, the terms *mandala* and sandpainting are used interchangeably when referring to works created by Tibetan Buddhists.
The physical construction of the sandpaintings used in ritual ceremonies enables the teachings to be represented visually and directly connected to the transformation process. As such, sandpaintings are essential to the ritual process. Moreover, the metaphysical aspects of these sandpaintings signify wholeness within the body and cosmos as expressed in the ritual process. In these ways, sandpaintings are an integral part of the highly complex ritual practices of the Tibetan Buddhists and Navajo people. Finally, after the sandpaintings are completed they are swept away, thereby allowing their full meaning to exist only in the minds and consciousness of those who participated in the rituals.²

In this paper, I will examine the common practices and complexities of Tibetan Buddhist and Navajo Indian use of sandpaintings. This will include presenting detailed descriptions of both rites, discussing the shared mandala and sandpainting traditions and describing the composition of the mandala used in Kalachakra Rite and four of the sandpaintings used in the Nightway Rite. And finally, to conclude, I will include my thoughts and experience in witnessing construction of the Mandala of Compassion by the monks of the Drepung Loseling Monastery.

² In this paper, the term ‘mind’ refers to both the spiritual and conscious mind used in the Tantric practices of visualization and meditation.
Part 1: Organization of the Paper

Considerable similarities are recognizable between the two cultures through the transformations undergone during the ceremonies, the history, cosmology, religious beliefs, and practices of both cultures. These topics are described with key terms defined in Parts 2-4. Part 5.1 provides the common foundation of both rituals. According to Tom Anderson and Jose and Miriam Arguelles, it is through the shared eight-step process of constructing a *mandala* or sandpainting that the common foundation is explained. The eight steps breakdown the overall process and explain the importance of each component with regards to its role in both rituals. The eight steps also highlight how the Buddhist and Navajo practices follow a very similar set of actions that make up the complexities within each rite.

In Part 6 of the paper, construction of the Buddhist *mandala* used in the Kalachakra Initiation is described in detail while the steps, visualization and process of conducting the ritual are detailed in Part 7. Part 8 examines the Navajo Nightway Rite, which includes the construction and use of multiple sandpaintings. Lastly, in Part 9, the construction of the University of Redlands *mandala* by monks from the Drepung Loseling Monastery is described.
Part 2: Tibet and the Navajo Nation

Originally found in the snow-capped mountains and high plateaus of Central Asia, Tibetan Buddhists can now be found almost anywhere on the planet. The Chinese occupation in 1950 forced many Tibetan Buddhists into exile, thus leaving Tibet for their personal safety. Fortunately, Tibetan Buddhism continues to flourish thanks to the work of its religious leader, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso. From the Tibetan Buddhist community in Dharmsala in northern India, the teachings of the Buddha continue to pass from teacher to student. Because Buddhism is not just a religion, but also a way of life, it is important to understand the foundation of the practices, the teachings and the ways in which Buddhism is implemented in daily life.

Like many of the native cultures that populated North America, the Navajo have been displaced since the Europeans invaded the continent. Originally from the southwestern part of the United States, the Dine (the traditional Navajo name for themselves), were known as the Navajo Indians to the Spanish settlers in the region. Currently, the Navajo live and work within the boundary of one of the greatest American Indian land reservations, known collectively as the Navajo Nation. The Nation spans northeastern Arizona, northwestern New Mexico and parts of southeastern Utah, and it encompasses roughly fifteen thousand square miles of open land. The weather in this part of the country ranges from blistering heat in the summer to bitter cold in the winter. The Navajo have claimed this land as their own, making the best of the situation they have been granted by external forces.

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4 Lipps, 22.
Throughout the development of the Navajo culture, medicine people have worked to ensure that the religion and its practices remain true to tradition without being influenced by other religions. This was made possible through the highly dynamic and demanding nature of the Navajo religion. For the Navajo, just as the Tibetan Buddhists, religion is not just a system of beliefs; it is the physical application of myths and stories used in daily life by the community. For both cultures, the fundamental understanding of the universe, people and gods are essential to maintaining the community's structure and cohesion.
Part 3: Buddhism

Both Buddhism and the Navajo religion have specific teachings that relate directly to their understanding of ceremonial rituals. Understanding the specifics of the Kalachakra Initiation and Nightway Rites, knowing the history of the respective religions is essential for the continuation of these highly developed practices. For example, it is through the relationship between teacher (guru or lama) and student (disciple) that the teachings and trainings of Buddhism have been passed down. The relationship between teacher and student provides the necessary training needed for monks to participate in tantric rituals and mandala constructions.

3.1 Tibetan Buddhism

The form of Buddhism that took hold in Tibet was Vajrayana, or Tantra, a branch of Mahayana Buddhism. Buddhist history, schools and key teachings of Tibetan Buddhism are the foundations to understanding the Kalachakra Tantra and its performance.

Buddhism is a religion created by the Buddha or the Awakened One. The Buddha was a historical person, known in his pre-enlightenment life as Siddhartha Gautama, who was a prince in an Indian kingdom. During his life as a prince, Siddhartha’s father kept him separated from the realities of the world—sickness, old age, death and all forms of suffering. However, upon learning of these realities of the world, Siddhartha set off to find the causes of suffering. Through years of study, he became the enlightened Buddha, the figure known as Sakyamuni.

Sakyamuni traveled throughout India teaching people about the causes of suffering and how to find enlightenment in the Four Noble Truths and the Eight-Fold
Path. Following the death of Sakyamuni, his sangha, or community, continued to spread his teachings as they traveled across Asia. Because Sakyamuni left no written texts of his teachings, the original teachings in their true form are not available. In the centuries that followed, students of the Buddha produced some of the first recorded teachings. However, this did not occur until about seven hundred years after the life of Sakyamuni. In determining authenticity of the many teachings, Buddhist tradition holds that if a teaching follows the Buddhist principles and leads towards the state of nirvana and lessening of suffering, then it is Buddhavacana, the word of the Buddha, and can be accepted as a legitimate teaching.

3.2 Mahayana Buddhism

Mahayana Buddhism came to Tibet during the eighth century CE through the support of royal patrons. Because Buddhism held an elevated status in India, this influenced Tibetan royals to adopt Buddhism as their religion. The sacred texts, rituals and advanced ideas all came from India. These documents were translated into Tibetan and provided the public with much needed information regarding Buddhism.

With all forms of Buddhism following many of the same basic ideas, it is significant to point out a few of the differences in Mahayana practice. One of the most important is the figure of the bodhisattva. A bodhisattva in Mahayana is a student (disciple) working towards the awakened state of a buddha. The bodhisattva's power or ability is linked to the initial and later construction of the universe and multiple worlds

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found in Buddhist cosmology. The bodhisattva is essential to Mahayana because it is a figure of great compassion that seeks to liberate all beings from their suffering.  

3.3 **Tantra**

*Tantra*, or Vajrayana Buddhism, is an esoteric system of practices and meditations that bring about transformation by the use of symbols, ritual and visualization. These focal points help create a rapid progression towards buddhahood. The way in which *Tantra* differs from Mahayana, its source, comes in the tantric texts and techniques described and used, many of which are absent in Mahayana tradition. One of the major distinctions between Mahayana and *Tantra* is whether desire and pleasure have a place in Buddhism. For the *Tantra* follower, it is understood that these emotional responses are acceptable as long as they are used in meditative practice that relates to teachings and towards the goal of buddhahood.  

The highly challenging and demanding practices of meditation make *Tantra* one of the most direct and effective ways to attain the state of buddhahood. Like all forms of Buddhism, there remains the goal of becoming enlightened. Through the ritual and meditation practices of *Tantra*, Tibetan Buddhists believe that they are able to ascend to buddhahood faster because of the more intense pathway.  

Tantric meditation uses symbols depicting religious goals. These symbols enable the 'mind's eye' (meditational or spiritual) of the practitioner to focus on wisdom and compassion in a meditative state. Meditation (*bsgom pa*) has many goals and depends

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8 Powers, 106.
9 Ibid., 250.
10 Ibid., 260.
11 Ibid., 24.
on the needs of the practitioner.\textsuperscript{12} Some meditations make the mind still while others focus on specific \textit{tantras} or teachings of the Buddha and buddha-figures, such as the deity Kalachakra.

Deity yoga, the visualization practice of a practitioner attaining the physical form of the deity with the pure awareness, is also an important part of \textit{Tantra}. This practice requires conscious action using the teachings of emptiness to initiate visualization on the form of the deity.\textsuperscript{13} The development of the advanced meditation and visualization can only be possible through the knowledge passed from teacher to student. The ultimate goal, which exists in Mahayana Buddhism and its branches, is to achieve buddhahood for the betterment of all beings and to return to the Buddha’s pure land of Shambhala.

\subsection*{3.4 Key Concepts and Terms}

Mahayana Buddhists understand the universe to be made of an infinite number of worlds which coexist together. These worlds follow cycles of creation and destruction. In Buddhism, the cosmos is a collection of uncountable worlds composed in a celestial universe. Created from the remaining \textit{karma} of a previous universe, the cosmos continues as drifting particles that are brought back together by the push and pull of \textit{karma}. To many, \textit{karma} develops throughout a lifetime as the collected effects of good and bad actions of an individual and can be the cause of later good or bad events. The events in an individual’s life all depend on the previous actions of the individual in relation to their future. Thus, \textit{karma} remains a product of cause and effect.

\textsuperscript{12} Powers, 81.
In constructing the Buddhist cosmos, the pull of the remaining *karma* created wind.\(^\text{14}\) The ultimate geometric form of a world, created by the mixing of wind, water and land, is represented as a cylindrical platform in which the water and mountains developed on its surface. The force of *karma* molded and shaped this platform or model of the world. Through the constant disturbances caused by wind and water, mountains and other geographic structures were formed. The cylindrical platform remains understood as the basis for all the constructed worlds in the Buddhist universe.

In the history of the cosmos, Tibetan Buddhists believe that there have been three previous worlds before the current world. In these worlds, each person will experience the cycle of birth, development and death. Like the current world where individuals work to find enlightenment and to relieve suffering, some individuals do succeed. Yet, the vast majority does not, and thus, the need for the continued cycle of *samsara*. In creating these worlds, a buddha figure brings about its initial construction, which is why the *bodhisattva* remains so important.

The fourth and current world came from the mind of the *bodhisattva* 'Boundless Love,' a student of a buddha known as 'Boundless Light'.\(^\text{15}\) As each person passes through the cycle of birth and death, a celestial figure with great teaching ability leaves his own perfect world to come to the aid of the suffering. Recognized as the current great teacher, Gautama Siddhartha became Sakyamuni Buddha after achieving enlightenment.\(^\text{16}\) Although Sakyamuni Buddha died almost 2,500 years ago, his teachings still remain and continue to be the guide for Buddhist practitioners as their own cycle of rebirth continues through the power of *samsara*.

\(^{16}\) Gold, 26.
Samsara, or the conventional reality, is the way in which the many worlds and beings of the Buddhist cosmology continue to cycle through birth, death and rebirth.\textsuperscript{17} In understanding the Kalachakra teaching of the cosmic universe, worlds come into being, die out and then rise again based on the karmic actions of the past worlds.\textsuperscript{18} According to the Kalachakra tradition:

According to the Kalacakra tradition...not all the atoms of the five elements disappear at the end of an epoch; they simply fall apart and become separated from each other by space atoms. As a result of the 'stockpile' of collective karma from earlier ages of the world the atoms again enter new combinations.\textsuperscript{19}

Thus, the cycle of continuation found in the Kalachakra ritual follows the same understanding of the creation of the cosmos.

Through the foundational knowledge of the cosmos, karma and samsara, the important teaching of emptiness can be understood. Emptiness, or sunyata, does not refer to a void in space, but one achieved in the active spiritual mind. Simply put, sunyata is the realization of the self as non-existent in the ultimate sense.

Based on the Tantric practice, there are three levels of development known as the Three Bodies: the Truth Body, the Adorned Body and the Emanation Body. Peter Gold explains that the union of male and female deities depicts the oneness of universal opposites and embodies the first level of emptiness.\textsuperscript{20} Through the power of visualization, students come to recognize these forms in their true meaning.

The second, Adorned Body level, is created from the interaction between the imagination and the body. Visualization, a key practice to any mandala construction, is

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Sadakata, \textit{Buddhist Cosmology: Philosophy and Origins}, 69.
\item Brauen, (1997), 22.
\item Gold, 50.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
fundamental to the understanding of emptiness. As the student moves deeper into the visualization of a buddha figure, the ideal disciple becomes more adapt in recognizing the qualities needed to focus on meditation. Finally, the third level, the Emanation Body, focuses on the human form of the Buddha as a visualization aid to enlightenment.21

Taken together these three Tantric forms represent the teachings of Buddhism. Tibetans have shown through the Three Bodies that in all beings there is a connection between the body and mind through energy and attentiveness. From the Three Bodies, the importance of imagination and visualization are recognized to introduce deity mediation, which is essential to the Kalachakra mandala practice. The spiritual mind remains the most important creative power in the construction of the universe. When the subconscious mind has reached the realization of the emptiness in all things, the yearning for the self no longer remains, thereby removing the mechanism of rebirth in the cycle of samsara.22

21 Gold, 52.
22 Jackson, 11.
Part 4: The Navajo Nation

4.1 Navajo People

According to Navajo origin stories, the Navajo people came into being after traveling through many worlds until finally finding a place in the current world (Figure 1). The stories explain:

the Navajos emerged into this world after a long, difficult journey that took them from the First World (the Black World) to the Second World (the Blue World) to the Third World (the Yellow World) to the Fourth World (the Glittering World). First Man (Altse Hastiin) and First Woman (Altse Asdzaa) are formed in the Black World, which also contained various Insect Beings.\textsuperscript{23}

Quarrelling in the Black World among the Insect Beings forced the Navajos to leave and travel upwards to the Blue World. Thus, the first great migration of the Navajo people occurred. Moving to the Blue World required the Navajo to climb to a different world. In the Blue World, there were other animals present that First Man and First Woman encountered along with more Insect Beings.\textsuperscript{24} Subsequently, the Navajo people were forced to leave this world because of the fighting between the animals present in this world. The next migration placed the Navajo in the Yellow World. In the Yellow World, the coyote caused problems for both the Navajo people and other animals. The mischievous behavior of the coyote led to a flood that carried everyone (Navajo and animals) into the Glittering World.\textsuperscript{25} The flood placed the Navajo people in the six-mountain area, which is considered to be the fourth and current world.

\textsuperscript{24} Iverson, 8.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid., 8.
4.2 Navajo Religion

To the Navajo, their religion is better understood as ceremonialism, than the western conception of the term. The Navajo term, *dine binahagha*, translates in most cases as Navajo religion. But as one Nightway chanter pointed out, the translation lacks full meaning. *Dine binahagha* more closely translates to ‘moving about ceremonially’ and means that life is about working with ceremony through the earth and deities. The traditional Navajo understands that beauty, harmony, health and spirituality are inseparable terms because they are all seen as one state of being. It is through the understanding of the world as residing in states of alternating Beauty and disorder (*hothq* and *hochxq*) that compel the Navajo to perform chantways and re-balancing rituals.

The *hatali* is the singer, chanter or medicine person who acts as the leader of all religious ceremonies and rites within the Navajo world. It is the chanter’s responsibility to bring songs, prayers and ritual acts into the lives of individuals who have lost the way of Beauty. They must be brought back to Beauty visually in order to help heal the mind (physically and spiritually).

Few songs or prayers have ever been recorded because of the sacred words that reside in them, making the sacred words unsafe for untrained individuals to use. The trained chanter explains that, when performing songs or chants, there is a direct link to the Holy People through these sacred words. Through the connection between the chanter and the Holy People, the patient physically experiences the transformation.

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27 Griffin-Pierce, 29.
28 Alfred Marston Tozzer, *Notes on Religious Ceremonies of the Navaho*, (Cedar Rapids, Iowa: 1902), 305.
29 Gold, 187.
30 Ibid., 189.
31 Ibid., 190.
Leading the Nightway Rite is considered to be one of the highest honors a medicine person can achieve. The knowledge and training required of the medicine person makes performance of a full nine night and day Nightway Rite a true achievement. There are hundreds of songs and prayers to be sung or chanted as well as performances of god impersonations, the correct method of using the medicine bundle and the making of the six sandpaintings. In addition, many behavioral restrictions need to be maintained by the medicine person who is also responsible for directing his/her assistants and the other members of the community who help in the ceremony. Because the Nightway is an extremely powerful ceremony, the medicine person has a great responsibility to see that the rite is not misused.\textsuperscript{32} As a result, most medicine people choose to specialize in only one ceremony, with few practicing more than one.

To lead or perform the Nightway, each medicine person must complete an apprenticeship with a practicing Nightway medicine person. Most medicine people learn the Nightway from a medicine person in their own family. The passing down of the Nightway from generation to generation creates family lines of the Nightway performance.

The apprentice helps with the sandpaintings, acts as a dancer and god impersonator while wearing masks, and serves as an additional singer.\textsuperscript{33} The normal duration of an apprenticeship is between three and fifteen years with seven years being the average duration. Because of the complexity and multiple responsibilities a Nightway medicine person has, the apprenticeship can be considerably longer.

\begin{footnotesize}
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\item\textsuperscript{32} James C. Faris, \textit{The Nightway: A History and History of Documentation of a Navajo Ceremonial}, (Albuquerque: 1990), 79.
\item\textsuperscript{33} Faris, 95.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
The medicine bundle, known as the *jish*, is an important component of any ritual or ceremony that a medicine person performs. The *jish* is comprised of a combination of sacred objects and equipment used in curing and preventing ceremonies. The medicine bundle is not something easily collected. It requires time, effort and, in some cases, considerable expense. The actual bag is composed of materials that relate to the specific ceremony for which the *jish* is to be used.

The training for both medicine people and Tibetan monks requires significant time and dedication in order to become a teacher. In both traditions, the teacher provides the environment needed to learn the practices and to insure that the traditions are respected and used with the correct intentions. The Navajo rites and Tibetan tantric practices are incredibly powerful and use objects that hold and conduct power. In both religions, these teachings are not shared publicly so that they are kept safe from abuse by outsiders.

### 4.3 Navajo Spiritual Practices

In the religious traditions of the Navajo people, there are many complex and multifaceted ceremonies. The longest and most complicated ones consist of a nine-night and day event. In these ceremonies, each one of which can consist of multiple chants and rites, must be performed perfectly for the ceremony to be considered successfully performed. One small mistake, or even the slightest hesitation, can turn the ceremony into a complete failure.

In the Navajo classification, there are two primary types of ceremonies performed by the Navajo singer. The ceremonies are either major or minor, depending on the

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duration (nine-day vs. shorter) and the importance of the event in which they are being preformed. In each ceremony, be it a major or minor one, there are similar components of prayer, dancing and sacrifice. Preformed in varying amounts of intensity, these ceremonial actions are done in order to appease gods who are being called upon in order to perform the healing.

4.4 Rites of Transformation and Other Rites

Navajo rites of transformation have many names. Navajo transformation rites are known as chantways or as sings because of the many songs performed. The Nightway Rite is a transformation rite so it is both a chantway and a sing. The reason these transformation rites are called a sing is because of breath. Breath is the transmission of sacred words from the chanter who holds them secret to the sick individual. In using breath, the chanter lets the word resonate in the minds of those who listen. The words become implanted in the listener’s mind and influence their thoughts. This is the beginning of transformation.

Another rite is the Blessingway, which is a foundational rite and belief ritual that provides understanding of the cosmos. There are many reasons why the Blessingway is performed (e.g., for a puberty ceremony or marriage), but it is the desire for health, long life, happiness and good fortune that unites these different causes.

The Blessingway illustrates the creation of the world and is part of many other chantways. Because it functions as a blessing, it is used as a preventative rite in other ceremonies. This means that during other chantway rituals, such as the Nightway Rite,

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35 Tozzer, 309.
36 Ibid., 309.
37 Gold, 192.
the use of the Blessingway ensures that the chantway is both blessed and protected from external influences.

4.5 Cosmos and Creation

The creation and the structure of the cosmos are defined in the Blessingway. It provides a way to establish holiness and to maintain the status of Beauty in Navajo life known as *Hozhooji*. The structuring rite of the cosmos focuses on the Holy People: Changing Woman and Sun Bearer. As explained in the migrations from the lower worlds to the current world, the Navajo universe was one of constant development that has become stable for the most part. The Holy People helped establish the world for man. The reestablishment of Beauty by the Navajo enables the universe to continue in the natural and desired course.

The Navajo concept of wholeness and understanding remains fundamental to the teachings of the cosmos based on the belief that each part of the universe is unified equally. It is through the completed whole that power and creation can be established. Everything in this universe relates to human beings and their subsequent interactions with the other parts. There is also the assumption that because everything relates back to human beings, construction of the world happened so that humans could exist. From this, it follows that it is the responsibility of both women and men to continue to reestablish Beauty whenever there is an imbalance.

4.6 States of Being: *Hozhq* and *Hochxq*

Two important words characterize the Navajo religion. As previously mentioned, *hozhq* is the desired state of Beauty or the desired life for the Navajo. By contrast, *hochxq*

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38 Gold, 192.
39 Griffin-Pierce, 65.
is the alternate state to Beauty, referring to all things bad in this world (chaos). The relationship between the two states of being is expected to shift and alter throughout an individual’s life. When the world is altered from the desired path of hozhq (Beauty), the Navajo are required to bring the world, or an individual’s world, out of this state and back into Beauty. Trudy Griffin-Pierce explains the relationship between the two states as:

The pairing of hozhq, all that is good, beautiful, and harmonious, with hochxq, that which is evil, ugly, and worthless, could be considered to be a reflection of sociological order at a very abstract level...these terms are better conceptualized as temporary, although cyclically reappearing, points in an ongoing process.⁴¹

The ongoing process is best understood once both states of being have been defined. Hozhq is that which a proper life embodies and is understood as living in Beauty. Hozhq does not just apply to the Navajo but to all people. It encompasses good health, harmony, good fortune, balance, peace and positive events in the lives of the individual.⁴² Hozhq relates to the ideal environment in both the physical world and the spiritual world the Navajo occupy. This relationship depends on the Navajo’s active involvement in maintaining the balance and established state of Beauty.⁴³ When this state is out of balance, either by sickness or by ill events, the state of the world becomes hochxq.

Hochxq is the state that makes up anything ugly, disharmonious or unhappy in the environment.⁴⁴ Although it is a part of the natural environment, hochxq is not a state that the Navajo want to be in permanently. It is supposed to be impermanent and changed back to the state of hozhq through ceremonies and chantways. From the required ritual

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⁴¹ Griffin-Pierce, 66.
⁴³ Witherspoon, 25.
⁴⁴ Ibid., 25.
actions of the Navajo people to reestablish the proper state of the world leads to the necessary production of ceremonies and rites such as the Nightway.
Part 5: Shared *Mandala* and Sandpainting Traditions

The importance of the *mandala* in the Kalachakra and sandpaintings in the Nightway Rite, can be better understood through the eight steps identified in both sandpaintings construction ceremonies. These will be described before examining the rituals and actual construction of each image. In understanding these eight steps, the many components of the two rituals become recognized through a clearer pattern or order of events performed in both of the complex rites.

Sandpaintings are created for healing or to address an imbalance in the world. This imbalance is essential to the understanding of the sandpainting used in both Navajo and Tibetan Buddhist traditions. From the need and desire to restore balance back to the world leads individuals to create these magnificent artworks. The process of creating a sandpainting is also a teaching tool, used with the understanding that if you are to *see* then you are able to *know*.\(^45\) Because the mind (meditational or spiritual) is able to hold onto these images, the mind will internalize the importance of the sandpainting. Being able to hold on to the image of a sandpainting – be it a simple circle with a painted black dot in the center or a complicated painting with many colors – takes time in order to hold the image effectively in the mind’s eye.

For Tibetan Buddhists, the creation of the *mandala* is a step in a larger and very complex ritual process. The use of the sandpaintings constructed by the Navajo medicine person is similarly important as a healing tool in ritual ceremonies. Both cultures use sandpaintings as important components in their individual ritual processes. In the Kalachakra Initiation, the *mandala* provides the focus for deity meditation, visualization

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practices and as a guide through the initiation process to establish transformation and spiritual advancement. For the Nightway Rite, the sandpaintings are used as healing tools in which the power of the Holy People are absorbed by the sick individual to help reestablish harmony and the previous state of Beauty.

5.1 Eight-Step Process

There are eight steps common to both the Tibetan and Navajo sandpaintings. In each of these steps, a physical action must be completed as explained in Tom Anderson’s article, “Mandala: Constructing Peace Through Art,” and Jose and Miriam Arguelles book, Mandalas. The rituals of the Tibetan Buddhist monks and Navajo medicine people are examined through an eight-step process that clarifies the importance of each component of the ritual practices.

Step 1. Purification

The idea of purifying the physical form in ritual practice is common and can be found in many different religions and cultures all over the world. Just as a doctor scrubs in for surgery, religious figures cleanse the body for ritual practice. The purification does not just require the body to be clean externally but also internally. Practitioners will spend significant time fasting (refraining from taking in nourishment for a set period of time) in order to stimulate the body and to make the senses more responsive during a ritual.46 Tibetan Buddhist monks also fast before performing their rituals. The reason for fasting is so that the spiritual and meditative mind can be separated from the demands of the body. Consciousness is then free to focus on the sandpainting.47 The importance of

46 Arguelles and Arguelles, 85.
purification is a prerequisite for the second ritual step because it allows the contemplative mind to become the focus, not the body.

**Step 2. Centering or Meditation**

The second step in the process is to focus the individual’s thoughts to the actions and directions of the spiritual mind. The process of meditation or centering is necessary to make the spiritual mind realize its natural state and not to be influenced by the external world. Becoming spiritually centered through meditation, the Tibetan monk is able to move onto the next step in the ritual process. Medicine people also use meditation to create focused attention needed for the rituals practiced of the sweat lodge ceremonies. As the sweat purifies the body, the individual looks internally to find focus.

**Step 3. Orientation**

While the first two steps focus on the internal activities of the body, orientation brings the external world into the body. In the sandpainting process of both the Tibetan Buddhists and Navajo, orientation is connected with the chanting, singing, dancing and prayer activities required by the ritual. The focus of this attention is directed at the object or person needing to be healed or rebalanced, located at the center of these activities. The reason for this step is to ensure that all participating members of the ritual are brought together so that their energies are in psychic harmony with each other.

Orientation of the senses is also an important step in the preparation stages of the sandpainting process. For the Navajo ritual, an important part of the ritual process is devoted to the sings (prayer chanting). Continual chanting creates a foundation for the overall ritual and brings into focus the sense of hearing. This is similar to the Tibetan

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48 Arguelles and Arguelles, 86.
49 Anderson, 35.
ritual *mantras* (prayers) that involve the use of traditional bells, drums and flutes. The sense of smell is also stimulated through the burning of incense. With hearing and smelling addressed in the orientation step, the other senses are heightened during the physical construction steps of the *mandala* or sandpainting.

**Step 4. Construction**

The fourth step is the physical construction of the sandpainting. Two types of sandpaintings will be discussed. The first type is constructed to transform demonic forces in the world and the second is constructed to create a cosmic fortress. Sandpaintings depicting demonic forces are constructed to help an individual recognize the negative forces that are found within oneself. This is the classification of the sandpaintings used in the Nightway. Unlike Tibetan *mandalas*, however, Navajo sandpainting classification relates directly to the ritual for which the sandpainting is being constructed. Navajo medicine people make sandpaintings depicting images of the specific gods who relate directly to the ritual. As a possible example, the use of the deity First Woman in a sandpainting constructed for a Blessingway ceremony can have a different meaning and intention than an image of First Woman used in a Holyway sandpainting. From the ‘how’ and ‘why’ a god is being incorporated into the specific chantway gives the sandpainting figure (deity) its level of power. The use of sandpaintings in the Navajo rites and rituals depends on the medicine person performing the rite and the context of the issue regarding the imbalanced state being addressed through ritual blessings, initiations or transformations. The Navajo have several types of sandpaintings that are used in their

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50 Anderson, 35.
various rites. These descriptions only touch the surface of uses that sandpaintings have in Navajo ritual practices.

Through the construction of a mandala by a monk or a sandpainting by a medicine person, the sick individual uses visualization of the image to return negative forces back into balance. The second type of sandpainting is one that creates a type of map of the cosmic universe that demonstrates the full cycle of the universe including the seasons or the hierarchies of the human and god realms. For the Tibetans, the cosmic map mandala commonly represents a fortress or celestial palace. In these mandalas, the homes of many Tibetan deities are shown. The Kalachakra mandala is this kind of cosmic sandpainting.

In the physical construction of the sandpainting, two other senses are heightened. The visual sense is enhanced through the use of color and line in creating a mandala or sandpainting, while the sense of touch is addressed through placement of the sand. Each color has a corresponding direction that helps ensure the proper orientation of the mandala. Color is used both as a directional tool and as a visual stimulant in the Kalachakra and Nightway sandpaintings. When all the senses become highly active, the monks or medicine person who constructed the sandpainting are able to be in a state of pure awareness and physical harmony.

In both Tibetan Buddhist mandala and Navajo sandpainting practices there is a great risk in making the sandpainting incorrectly. If performed incorrectly, the deities residing in either the mandala or sandpainting can be offended. This can lead to negative events in both religious traditions. Tibetan monks become qualified to create mandalas.

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51 Arguelles and Arguelles, 92.
52 Ibid., 89.
only after years of studying the *tantra* with a lama that relates to the *mandala*. In the Navajo tradition, only trained medicine people who have fulfilled long apprenticeships are able to perform the complex task of conducting a sandpainting ritual. Even then, these positions are only obtained after the individual is tested by higher-ranking monks or by the medicine person's teacher.

**Step 5. Absorption**

Once the sandpainting is completed, an important step in creating order from chaos is established in the contemplative mind. It is achieved through intense concentration and meditation placed on the finished sandpainting. Through this work, the viewer can identify body and mind with the world around him or her.\(^{53}\) It is also important for the viewer (student or patient) to realize that his or her own levels of conscious life are reflected in the completed *mandala*. By identifying with the completed sandpainting and the physical body, the inner absorption of realized order can come to the viewer's full attention and mental focus. For example, the one-sung-over (patient or sufferer in the Nightway Rite) actually sits in the center of the sandpainting in order to absorb the power. On the other hand, students in the Kalachakra *mandala* travel through the completed *mandala* by visualizing themselves placed inside the celestial palace. The stronger the sense of connected identification with the *mandala* or sandpainting, the stronger the realization of order from chaos the viewer can experience.\(^{54}\)

**Step 6. Destruction**

After constructing the sandpainting, its significance as an object quickly changes. Through absorption, all good that came from the sandpainting has entered the viewers

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\(^{53}\) Anderson, 35.

\(^{54}\) Arguelles and Arguelles, 96.
mind, leaving the physical sand to serve as a symbol of sacredness. As such, the sandpainting now needs to be deconstructed ritually. Through the process of deconstruction, the dismantled sandpainting serves as the ultimate symbol of detachment from the physical and material world. By keeping the sandpainting whole or left to remain, the sacredness it represents becomes overused and potentially dangerous. Impermanence is one of the most important lessons in Buddhism, and the deconstruction of the *mandala* represents this teaching.

For the Navajo, keeping a sandpainting whole after it has been used in a ritual can be dangerous because it continues to attract the attention of the deity it represents. This can potentially alter *hozhq* and let *hochxq* become established. Construction of a physical sandpainting is only meant to be a temporary tool used during the ritual. By allowing it to exist, the teaching or lesson the sandpainting represents cannot be fully actualized. Thus, both *mandala* and sandpainting must be swept away following specific guidelines at the end of the Tibetan initiation or at the end of a Navajo ceremony, and its materials are returned to the earth.

*Step 7. Reintegration*

With the sandpainting deconstructed, the next step of reintegration can begin. Through the construction of the sandpainting, the world has been transformed and the viewer is then able to experience the self in a world resting in its natural balance. The viewer previously understands the world as being broken into inner and outer parts, but brought together again through the construction of the sandpainting. The reason as to why the sandpainting was needed ensures that the viewer recognizes the separation or

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55 Anderson, 36.
56 Arguelles and Arguelles, 97.
imbalance in the world. Once the sandpainting has been absorbed and deconstructed, the viewer is free from the form of the physical sandpainting and is open to its lessons or healings.  

**Step 8. Actualization**

Actualization, the final step in the sandpainting process, remains the most important. Whether it is a sand *mandala* or sandpainting, the image was created to assist a visualization of the teachings or healings and to represent every individual’s ability to obtain them. The process of renewing life brings order from chaos by presenting a visual image of a wholly connected universe of life forms. The balance that controls the world can be restored into every being through the truth that the sandpainting makes the viewer actualize.  

Through the understanding of these eight steps, the two sandpainting constructions can now be examined. The first is the Kalachakra Initiation Rite sand *mandala* created by Tibetan Buddhists, while the second is the ritual of the Navajo Nightway Rite and its accompanying sandpaintings.  

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57 Arguelles and Arguelles, 98.  
58 Ibid., 99.  
59 Anderson, 37.
Part 6: The Kalachakra Initiation Rite

The Tibetan sand *mandala* for the deity Kalachakra, explained in its most simple form, provides a visual aid for the Kalachakra *Tantra* (Figure 2). Like all Tibetan Buddhist *mandalas*, the Kalachakra *mandala* is the teaching (*tantra*) of the deity Kalachakra. The Sanskrit translation of Kalachakra literally means “wheel of time.” The wheel represents the continued cycle of *tantra* (teachings) which plays a very important role in the overall teachings of the deity Kalachakra. Nevertheless, this is not the only deity present in the *mandala*. Seven hundred and twenty-two individual deities are summoned to the constructed sand palace in order to initiate a blessing upon the practitioners present for the initiations that accompany the *mandala* construction. The blessing epitomizes the Buddhist teaching of *sunyata*, or emptiness.

In the completed *mandala*, there are five different *mandalas* housing the seven hundred and twenty-two individual deities. Each individual *mandala* represents one of the five levels of Kalachakra’s celestial palace. The imagery used in many of the sand *mandalas* creates a blueprint of a chosen deity’s home or palace. For example, in the *mandala*, the celestial palace of Kalachakra is composed of the Mandala of the Enlightened Body (outer most square) and the Mandala of Enlightened Speech that encircles the Mandala of Enlightened Mind with the Mandala of Enlightened Wisdom inside. The center most *mandala* is the Mandala of Enlightened Bliss where the principal deity Kalachakra and his consort Vishvamata reside on a green, eight-petaled lotus flower. With the image of the *mandala* composed, the teachings and initiations found in the Kalachakra *Tantra* can now be shared.

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61 Bryant in Cooperation with Namgyal Monastery, 155.
6.1  The Kalachakra Tantra

In Vajrayana Buddhism, the principal form of tantra is Anuttara Yoga Tantra. These are some of the highest levels of tantra and are among the most advanced meditation practices in Buddhism.62 This tantra is broken down into three sub-classifications: father, mother and non-dual tantras. The Kalachakra is a mother tantra and involves practices that lead towards the attainment of buddhahood in a single lifetime.63 In learning the Kalachakra tantra, students participate in eleven initiations. The initiations are the structure of the teachings and are composed of seven initiations that relate to childhood events followed by four advanced initiations. Explanations of the seven childhood initiations will be discussed, but out of respect for the teachings and the secrecy that accompanies a tantric initiation, the four higher initiations will be excluded.

The status of high tantra comes from the three levels of time and the outer, inner and alternative wheels that the Kalachakra represents. As Martin Brauen explains,

The Kalacakra Tantra...speaks of three closely interwoven levels, the so-called 'outer', 'inner' and 'alternative' or 'other' wheels of time. The 'outer wheel of time' comprises the outward appearances of the whole human environment...The 'inner' Kalacakra' is made up of what lives in this environment...The 'other Kalacakra', finally, is the teaching of these analogies and correlations, as well as the resulting yoga practice.64

These three wheels work together to specifically present aspects of the teaching.

The external cycle of the Kalachakra refers to the system of astrology related to Buddhism and the construction and destruction of the universe. Seven heavenly bodies are made visible in this system: the sun, moon and the planets Mercury, Venus, Mars,

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63 Jackson, 31.
64 Brauen, (1997), 51.
Jupiter and Saturn. In the Kalachakra sand mandala, the moon and sun are found in the Mandala of Enlightened Body. The internal cycle of the Kalachakra places an emphasis on the human body and mind. Knowing how the body works and functions is very important just as knowing how the sun and moon function. In the mandala, the figure of Kalachakra represents the moon while his consort Vishvamata represents the sun. The union found between the two deities is the purpose of the Kalachakra practice. To “achieve the purified mind of the deity requires harmonizing one’s inner being with the structure of the cosmos.” The human body corresponds to the teaching as the channels on the right and left sides of the body relate to the sun and the moon. The left side of the body, like the sun, is female, while the right, like the moon side, is male. Just as the oceans and planets are affected by the moon and sun, the body is also affected by the polarity of the two forces. Through the Kalachakra Initiation ritual, a student (disciple) is offered the power to bring these two sides together into the central channel of the body and find balance between the push and pull.

In the Kalachakra there is the path of transformation as the student passes through the stages of initiation, generation and completion. Through the three stages, the student is able to develop a firm visualization of the self as Kalachakra. The development of the transformation does not only affect the individual, but produces an effect on every part of the connected universe.

In Tibet, the teachings of Kalachakra are understood in seemingly contradictory ways. It represents,

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65 Bryant in Cooperation with Namgyal Monastery, 240.
66 Ibid., 241.
67 Ibid., 242.
68 Ibid., 243.
the very pinnacle of Buddhist esoterism. The Kalachakra presents the Buddha’s most profound and complex statement on matters both worldly and religious, and its intricacies have placed it beyond the ken of all but a specialized few scholars and practitioners who can master it only by understanding a vast range of traditional ideas and practices. On the other hand, initiations into the meditational practice of Kalachakra are the only Anuttara Yoga tantra initiations that are offered to the general public. 

The Kalachakra practice has two stages. The first is a generated state that focuses on visualizing the practitioner within the mandala as a deity. The second stage, which is concerned with purification, concludes with the attainment of buddhahood. In the present time, tantra is open to non-practitioners. The Dalai Lama explains, “the mandala is made as an offering to the community and from its teachings any one should be able to learn.”

6.2 Kalachakra Rituals and Initiation Rites

With the many rituals and initiations that are part of the complete Kalachakra ritual, students witnessing the mandala receive the opportunity to hear and learn the tantra, to practice its path and to understand the wisdom it holds. The overall goal in witnessing the Kalachakra mandala is to learn its specific path so that the mental and physical teachings of the deity can lead the student to attaining a state of consciousness attuned with bliss. Part of this teaching comes before and after the completed construction of the sand mandala.

In the Kalachakra Initiation Rite, eleven individual initiations take place over a twelve/thirteen-day period. The first seven initiations are connections to childhood events that make up the first stage of the Kalachakra tantra known as the generation stage. The generation state is called childhood initiations because they are reference points in the

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69 Sopa, 91.
70 Ibid., 94.
71 Bryant in Cooperation with Namgyal Monastery, 134.
development of an individual's life; the first seven initiations are building blocks for the later, higher initiations. In the second stage there are four additional higher-level initiations known as the completion stage.\(^{72}\) The four advanced initiations are not for public purposes but only for students experiencing the full initiation process. In completing the full initiation process, students work not just to advance themselves towards enlightenment but also to bring all beings closer to enlightenment. The first seven initiations normally take place on a single day.

The seven childhood initiations are "water, crown, crown pendant [silk ribbon], vajra [a handheld ritual object that represents the Vajrayana school] and bell, conduct, name and permission."\(^{73}\) By participating in these initiations, students are able to practice in the first stage (generation). The initiations depend on the construction of a sand mandala during the first eight or nine days of the ritual. That is why the initiations come during the later part of the twelve to thirteen-day ceremony. The mandala takes significant preparation and construction time and must be completed before the disciples begin their first initiation.

6.3 Rituals of the Mandala Site

The first step that a disciple (or student) must take is to make a request to the vajra master or vajraguru for the initiation to take place. The vajra master is a monk who has taken it upon himself to be the leader of the entire ritual because he has the highest status of knowledge regarding a specific tantra and has received additional training in performing it.\(^{74}\) In addition, the vajra master has already established the empowerment

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\(^{72}\) Sopa, 95.
\(^{73}\) Ibid., 95.
\(^{74}\) Bryant in Cooperation with Namgyal Monastery, 135.
that is received through this initiation. Once students make this request for the teachings, the initiation process can begin.

The Rituals of the Site are the next series of preparations. When completed, the location for construction of the Kalachakra mandala is ensured. In order to prepare the site, the monks recite special prayers, ask deities for permission to use the site and performing purification over the site. Purification of the site involves the physical clearing of the area, then purifying it by creating a protection circle and finally placing knives around the circle that will enclose the mandala. These acts ensure that the site is protected, thereby preventing any bad spirits to return.

6.4 Rituals of Preparation of the Site

The Rituals of Preparation of the Site are a series of activities whose purpose is to guarantee that the location and the materials used in the mandala construction are ready. Preparation includes visualizing the power of the earth goddesses instilling their power into the site as well as blessing the many ritual objects used by the monks and materials needed for the mandala. These materials include: vases filled with purified water, chalked strings so that the lines of the mandala can be laid down, sand with which the monks will create the mandala and finally a bell, dorje, that represents the teachings on emptiness. Preparation of the disciples is also a component of the process. The monks examine the readiness of the students by performing dream analysis, which requires each student to present their dreams to the vajra master to ensure that they are in the correct state to become a vehicle of this teaching. Another activity is laying down the major

75 Sopa, 96.
76 Ibid., 96.
77 Bryant in Cooperation with Namgyal Monastery,138.
78 Sopa, 97,
lines of the *mandala* using the chalked strings. These are the lines the monks will eventually use, along with many more lines, to guide the placement of the sand. In addition, the locations of the deities present are marked on the *mandala* site using small piles of sand. Finally, the deities who will be represented in the *mandala* are called from their celestial homes to come and be a part of the Kalachakra *mandala*. With the completion of this act, construction of the sand *mandala* can now begin.

### 6.5 Construction of the *Mandala* (Drawing the Lines and Making Measurements)

Tibetan Buddhist monks have documented all actions regarding the preparation, construction and use of the Kalachakra *mandala* over time. Documentation ensures that every part of the Kalachakra Initiation Rite is performed exactly the same way every time it is done. The exactness is astounding. For example, construction of the *mandala* is always the same because the constructed *mandala* is based on a specific formula. The lines, like other *mandala* forms in Tibetan religious art, are the product of a basic grid. The lines are laid down (Figure 3) by using strings that have been dipped in water and then covered in chalk. This creates a white line on the *mandala* surface when the strings are plucked. The *mandala* grid begins by laying down eight initial lines that are created directionally along east/west and north/south axes. In the preparation rituals, some of the lines are marked ceremonially, but these new lines are created to make the actual working grid.

From the construction of the initial lines, the special measurements of the center most mandala are taken and used as the measurement key for the construction of the rest

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79 Sopa, 97.
80 Brauen, (1997), 104.
of the *mandala*. Following construction of the working lines of the *mandala* (Figure 4), the monks begin preparation for the seats of the deities. It is required that each seat is mapped out with saffron water to purify the seat. Then the monks recite *mantras* for each deity and place a piece of barley seed to mark each deity’s seat.

6.6 Constructing of the Mandala Palace

The final stage is the construction of Kalachakra’s five-story palace in a two-dimensional sand representation. The constructed palace hosts the seven hundred and twenty deities in addition to *Kalachakra* and his consort, Vishvamata, who are both present in the center of the *mandala* in a state of everlasting bliss. Lama Thubten Yeshe explains that in achieving the state of bliss is a goal of practicing *tantra* as,

> to transform all pleasures into the transcendental experience of deep penetrative awareness...*tantra* emphasizes that it is much more effective for human beings to enjoy themselves and channel the energy of their enjoyments into a quick and powerful path to fulfillment and awakening.

In constructing the *mandala*, monks are required to have both artistic skill and understanding of the Kalachakra *Tantra*.

To begin the construction, the snapping of the Wisdom Thread is performed. The act brings forth the deities and consorts into the string through the sound it makes. The cord, made of five colored threads, symbolizes the wisdom and knowledge of each of the five Tathagata-Buddhas, which are beings that represent different teachings of the Buddha as buddha-like forms. The cord is constructed by twisting the five threads together, symbolically referencing the unity of the teachings of the Buddha. The Wisdom

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81 Brauen, (1997), 104.
82 Ibid., 104.
83 Bryant in Cooperation with Namgyal Monastery, 24.
84 Powers, 261.
85 Brauen, (1997), 104.
Thread, with the combined blessings of the buddha like figures is placed over all the chalk lines on the mandala map to instill a blessing.

At this point, the sanding of the mandala can now officially begin. The vajra master begins the process by starting at the eastern wall of the Mandala of Enlightened Mind (Figure 5). Then the other monks begin working from the middle out once the eastern wall is complete. Through the aid of special handbooks, the monks are able to construct the symbolic figures of the tantra in the sand. The monks that create the mandala place themselves in a complicated visualization of being inside the mandala and within the realm of Kalachakra. Through visualization, the monks explain that they are not creating anything but simply reconstructing the already existing palace. Visualization helps the monks in perfecting the awakened state of mind known as sunyata, which allows them to benefit the lives of others through the physically demanding construction process. 86

Working slowly and deliberately, the monks use specially created tools to help with the placement of the sand. Although monks undergo training and advanced memorization practices in order to be qualified artistically and to have the correct knowledge to create the mandala, sometimes mistakes happen. In these rare cases, a tool called a shinga is used to help correct the mistake. This tool is a wooden scraper used to straighten lines and adjust the decorations. 87 Although in other forms of ritual art, such as in painted mandalas, the deities are produced in minute detail, in this sand mandalas the deities are represented as colorful dots. By making the deity a dot, the possibility of offending the deity is limited. However, it requires that the monks making the mandala

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86 Bryant in Cooperation with Namgyal Monastery, 25.
87 Ibid., 196.
have the knowledge to know which dot represents each of the seven hundred and twenty-two deities.

6.7 *Five Mandalas of the Kalachakra Tantra*

The entire *mandala* of the Kalachakra *Tantra* is composed of five *mandalas* that represent the five levels of Kalachakra’s celestial palace. From the center out, the *mandalas* are: Enlightened Great Bliss, Enlightened Wisdom, Enlightened Mind, Enlightened Speech and Enlightened Body. The *mandalas* individually have their own meanings that are important to the location of the other deities present and to the overall meaning of the Kalachakra teachings. Encircling all of the *mandalas* are six outer circles, which are placed as protective boundaries.

The Mandala of Enlightened Great Bliss (Figure 6) represents the awe-inspiring experience of the enlightened state of awareness through the union of Kalachakra and Vishvamata. In Tibetan Buddhism, the union of male and the female represents the union of compassion (male) and wisdom (female). The eight-petaled lotus flower resting at the very center represents the union visually. Lotus flowers in the sand *mandala* represent the seat of the deities. Layered on top of the center of this green lotus is a blue *vajra* representing Kalachakra and a yellow-orange dot representing Vishvamata. The image of Kalachakra as the blue *vajra* symbolizes the mind of the Buddha. Vishvamata’s coloration symbolizes the eventual fulfillment of a student’s potential established by his or her spiritual performance. Together inside the Mandala of Enlightened Great Bliss, Kalachakra and Vishvamata represent the themes of “renunciation, bodhicitta

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88 Bryant in Cooperation with Namgyal Monastery, 198.
and the realization of emptiness in Buddhism. Renunciation is one of the first steps towards enlightenment as Lama Thubten Yeshe explains,

renunciation is the feeling of being so completely fed up with our [peoples] recurring problems that we are finally ready to turn away from our attachments to this and that and bring searching for another way to make our life satisfying and meaningful.90

As previously explained, the bodhisattva is a student (disciple) figure who has the ability to attain enlightenment. Instead of continuing beyond this (real world) reality, however, he or she stays behind to help others fulfill their own enlightenment. Finally, this mandala represents the mental state of emptiness (sunyata) that is the desired state of the mind in bliss.

Encircling the first mandala is the Mandala of Enlightened Wisdom (Figure 7). The mandala contains sixteen black pillars that are symbolic references of the sixteen forms of emptiness. Decorated to correspond to the primary directions, each row holds a different meaning (i.e., east as black swords, south as red jewels, west as yellow dharma wheels and north as white lotus flowers).91 These four objects correlate with the original objects used to bless the mandala table. The sixteen pillars create sixteen chambers filled with eight-petaled lotus flowers making seats for sixteen deities, known as the ‘Ones Gone Thus’.92 This mandala symbolically references the importance of developing all levels of emptiness, similar to that in the development of becoming a bodhisattva.

The Mandala of Enlightened Mind (Figure 8) pays tribute to the figure of the bodhisattva by incorporating many elements and objects that represent the symbolic importance of the bodhisattva’s creative mental power as explained in the cosmos.

89 Bryant in Cooperation with Namgyal Monastery, 197.
90 Powers, 64-65.
91 Bryant in Cooperation with Namgyal Monastery, 201.
92 Ibid., 202.
Unlike the two previous mandalas, the Mandala of the Enlightened Mind has four gates, one on each side of the mandala. These gates are composed of eleven levels, each having a beam, fence, nine chambers with a roof and support beam. Like the eleven initiations that a disciple must complete to be able to reach enlightenment, these eleven levels correlate with the teachings and the offerings made.\textsuperscript{93}

In this mandala there are four trapezoids placed around the border called color space that correspond to the cardinal directions.\textsuperscript{94} Orientation (Step 3 above in Part 5) plays an important factor in the construction of the mandala, not just in its preparation but also in its construction. Surrounding these spaces of color are the areas in which the deities reside called lhanam.\textsuperscript{95} Twenty-four bodhisattvas reside in the mandala and their placement in the mandala reestablishes the importance of the bodhisattva figure in Tibetan Buddhism.

Behind the seating area of the bodhisattvas there is a passageway that leads to three foundation walls known as dhoenam. Each wall represents the three paths of Buddhism: Theravada, Mahayana and Vajrayana.\textsuperscript{96} There are pairs of deities on guard at each of the four gates making a total of ten deities guarding the entrances. In the corners are areas that represent the compassion a bodhisattva must have towards students and all beings.\textsuperscript{97}

The Mandala of Enlightened Speech (Figure 9) represents the pure qualities found in the Buddha’s speech.\textsuperscript{98} This mandala points to the importance of speech because it

\textsuperscript{93} Bryant in Cooperation with Namgyal Monastery, 205.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid., 202.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid., 203.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 202.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 204.
\textsuperscript{98} Ibid., 206.
allowed the Buddha to enlighten his students through the teachings. In the white lhanam there are eighty deities present known as yoginis with ten sitting on each of the eight lotus flowers. Like the lotus flower that holds Kalachakra and his consort, there is a pair of deities in union with a female deity resting on each of the petals of the lotus flowers.

The first floor of Kalachakra’s palace is made of the Mandala of Enlightened Body (Figure 10). This outermost mandala holds the remaining 536 deities assembled in the mandala. In the lhanam section, 360 deities resting on 28 lotus flower cushions symbolically represent the 360-day calendar that Tibetan Buddhists follow. In addition, twelve animals are present that represent the Tibetan zodiac as well as the months of the year. The passageway areas are filled with Sanskrit seed symbols and geometric shapes. Seed symbols are the symbolic form of seed syllables that, when spoken by the monks in the ceremony, evoke the qualities of the deities present and resonate in the minds of those who hear them. The seed syllables are similar to the sacred words found in Navajo songs and prayers. The inclusion of these symbols connects the mantras (prayers) to the physical form of the mandala. The two symbol systems (Sanskrit seed and geometric shape symbols Figure 11) represent the six elements: air, earth, fire, water, space and wisdom. These symbols are located on the sides of the entrances. Offerings to Kalachakra are also present in the outer layers of this mandala. These offerings, unlike those in the inner mandalas, are noticeably different. They are highly embellished, most likely because of the availability of extra space in the outer mandalas.

At the entrances to the Mandala of Enlightened Body, seven protective deities are present. These deities are seated on chariots that symbolically represent the conceptual

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99 Bryant in Cooperation with Namgyal Monastery, 208.
100 Ibid., 210.
mind and the realization of emptiness.\textsuperscript{101} The four sets of seven refer back to Tibetan astrology and the outer Kalachakra.

6.8 Six Outer Circles

Although the mandala palace is in the squared center part of the whole mandala, the surrounding circles represent six elements through color and geometric shapes (Figure 11). The first inner (yellow) circle represents earth and its stability through the geometric shape of the swastika. An element of the cosmos is also present in the form of a rising moon in the northeast and a setting moon in the southwest. The next circle (moving outward) is for water. The white circle has wave-like shapes and has two chariots pulled by two mystical animals, namely the king of birds and the eight-legged lion. Seated on the white lotus in the chariots are wrathful and protective deities.\textsuperscript{102}

The third circle represents both wind and fire and is known as the cemetery ground. There are ten wheels represented in this space with one red wheel in each of the cardinal directions, a white wheel in each corner and one additional red wheel on the east and west sides. Also in the circle are eighty-eight seed Sanskrit syllables.\textsuperscript{103} On the outside of this circle there is a green circle with a chain of linked vajras that represents the element of space. The chain creates a protective circle embracing every circle and mandala within it. The final (sixth) circle is another circle of protection. It is symbolic of the element of wisdom through its design, which consists of thirty-two sections that change color as the circle comes around.\textsuperscript{104}

\textsuperscript{101} Bryant in Cooperation with Namgyal Monastery, 215.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 224.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 226.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 227.
defense. It protects everything within from any disturbances and keeps all of the deities protected while in residence at the celestial palace of Kalachakra.
Part 7: Conducting the Kalachakra Initiation and Transformation Rite

During the final days of the rite when the mandala is nearly completed, the Kalachakra Initiation can begin. The rite begins with a purification of the self through bathing. Before bathing, the disciple (or student) takes instructions from the guru (teacher) to ensure that the disciple has the correct motivation:

all physical forms and perceptions are constantly shifting in shape because form is impermanent, not existing under its own power...conceal[ing] that form's ultimate source is the emptiness of the Void.\textsuperscript{105}

Students must take in the information and let it take over their understanding of the self in order to establish an empty state of being before beginning the transformation of the self-image. This first task is the internal initiation. Through the already transformed mind of the guru, the minds of the disciples (students) journey through a meditative and visual passage of rebirth in the Kalachakra system. Here, the skill of visualization, so important to tantric meditation and practice, comes into play. Students are required to wear a blindfold during their preparation rites before the actual initiations, as it is an important part of the mental transformation. With blindfolds tied, the initiates are preparing mentally to enter the mandala. Just before starting, the disciples establish a divine identity with Kalachakra and his consort Vishvamata. The vision, in addition to the self, is the way the disciple should see the guru who is leading them through the mandala. Disciples then take the tantric and bodhisattva vows. At this stage, the mandala is revealed to the student only through visualization in accordance with the initiations.\textsuperscript{106}

Students journey through each of the five mandalas that make up the completed Kalachakra mandala to meet all seven hundred and twenty-two deities. The actual sand

\textsuperscript{105} Gold, 223.
\textsuperscript{106} Bryant in Cooperation with Namgyal Monastery, 153.
mandala is not revealed to the student until the visualization is completed and they have received a tantric name. The following day, the disciple may begin the Seven Initiations.

7.1 Seven Initiations

The Seven Initiations introduce the disciple (student) to the first seven levels of the bodhisattva. John Powers explains that the bodhisattva levels, bodhisattva-bhumi, is the hierarchy of steps that bodhisattvas progress through as they work to achieve the state of buddhahood. There are eleven levels and each step represents the attainment of a new level and is the basis for the next level. Through the accomplishment of each level, the bodhisattva no longer has the driving need to help and work for the betterment of others but remains only to manifest boundless compassion.107

During the Seven Initiations, students progress through the first seven-bodhisattva levels which reference the fundamental moments of growth and development from childhood to adulthood. One of the most important aspects of these Seven Initiations is that the disciple must be purified to ensure his or her appropriateness as a vehicle for the Tantric practices.108 The student is reborn four times throughout the initiations, each time before one of the faces of Kalachakra (four sides of the mandala). Through the rebirth that comes from the initiations, the student travels through the mandala meeting the deities of each part and finally enters the heart of Kalachakra.

The first initiation is the Water Initiation, performed to purify the student’s five elements thereby allowing the student to have the realization of the five consorts and enter the first bodhisattva stage.109 The bodhisattva stages (or levels) refer to the foundational development of levels of attainment through which Buddhist disciples

107 Powers, 129-130.
progress. The achievement of each level represents the disciple’s further progression towards wisdom and compassion. These five elements are water, fire, earth, wind and space. Through internal transformation in visualization, the student is able to change the vases containing the five elements and the water into gods. Accomplishing the visualization provides purification for the student’s five elements.

Like the first initiation, the Crown Initiation takes place at the northern door of the mandala palace. This initiation purifies the five aggregates: compositional factor, consciousness, discrimination, feeling and form. These five aggregates make the student want to hold on to the self. In purification, the student is able to let go of the self. The student makes these aggregates dissolve into emptiness, thereby freeing the individual from the self. This is the second level of the bodhisattva. Both of the first two initiations focus on the body, internal and external, and its necessary purifications. The two initiations establish seeds for the student to have the vajra body while traveling visually through the Mandala of Enlightened Body.

In the third initiation, the Silk Ribbon Initiation, the student must purify the ten winds that make up the speech component of the body. By performing the visualization of the ten sacred forces of cosmic energy, the ten winds become pure. In the fourth initiation, the Vajra and Bell Initiation, the union of these two objects and how they are used together for purification is mastered. The vajra represents the male aspects of Buddhism (compassion) while the bell, dorje, (female) is wisdom. In using both objects together the symbolic union of wisdom and compassion in the Buddhist universe is

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110 Powers, 121.
111 Bryant in Cooperation with Namgyal Monastery, 159.
112 Sopa, 102.
113 Bryant in Cooperation with Namgyal Monastery, 160.
represented. An advanced visualization accompanies the use of the vajra and dorje leading to the attainment of the fourth bodhisattva level.

At the eastern gate of the Mandala of the Enlightened Mind, before the black face of Kalachakra, the student now undergoes the fifth initiation, the Conduct Initiation. The teacher reminds the student of the importance of his or her knowledge and not to become distracted by external factors that take away from the tantra. (All practitioners who have taken the Kalachakra vows are required to uphold this conduct). In accepting the reminder to not let their senses distract them from the emptiness found in all objects, the fifth bodhisattva level is achieved.

To receive the Name Initiation, the student makes an initial offering to the vajra master. The purpose of the offering, the sixth initiation, is to purify the arms, legs, mouth and reproductive, urinary and defecatory organs. To accomplish purification, the students perform a visualization of flowers falling down on themselves and the vajra master. After reviewing the visualization, the vajra master gives each student a name derived from the buddha families. When the student hears the new name, he or she creates a visualization of becoming enlightened. Through this new name, a disciple now knows that in the future his or her status as a Buddha will be recognized and identified. Thus, the sixth level of bodhisattva gained.

For the seventh initiation, which takes place in the Mandala of Enlightened Great Bliss, the student examines the yellow face of the Kalachakra which represents the pristine vajra consciousness of the deity. Students purify the abuse of wisdom in the

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114 Bryant in Cooperation with Namgyal Monastery, 161.
115 Ibid., 162.
116 Ibid., 163.
117 Ibid., 163.
world by demonstrating five-hand symbols: the jewel, lotus, sword, wheel and vajra. Armed with the five hand symbols and visualization, the student becomes a deity who now resides in the center of the mandala. The transformation is important because, through it, the disciple is now able to teach the tantra to future students.

Before completing the seventh initiation, the student makes a number of additional visualizations. In performing the Permission Initiation, a student purifies all bad actions and lets the wisdom of the deity Vajrasattva (a buddha connected with the purification of the mind) become prominent in his or her body and mind. By completing the final purification, the student has achieved the seventh bodhisattva stage and is now able to advance to the four secret initiations.

Throughout the initiation process, the mandala of Kalachakra is used as a guide and reference point for the students. Each initiation corresponds closely with the deities in the mandala and their specific location. The importance of these seven initiations points out that the entire mandala ritual is something that must be understood as a natural process. This highly complex process is based on rules of the universe and through the knowledge of the rules, the universe can be consciously experienced.

Concluding rites follow the last initiation and an offering mandala is constructed. The vajra master then announces the date of the initiation in the buddha era, giving the astrological month of the year during the ruling of a king from Shamabhala. The final act of the ceremony is the ritual dismantling of the mandala.

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118 Bryant in Cooperation with Namgyal Monastery, 164.
119 Ibid., 166.
120 Brauen, (1997), 117.
121 Sopa, 113.
7.2 Dismantling the Mandala

The dismantling ceremony of the mandala is rather basic when compared to its construction (Figure 12). The sands are swept into the center of the mandala area, gathered up, placed inside a vase to be taken to the closest body of water. At the water’s edge, the sand is poured into the moving water thereby returning it to the earth.\textsuperscript{122} The dismantling of the mandala represents a primary teaching of Buddhism, namely, impermanence. Although once the mandala has been viewed, it can never be fully destroyed because it will continue to exist in the spiritual mind and in the heart.\textsuperscript{123}

The purpose or goal of practicing and constructing these rites of transformation is to establish an individual on the path to becoming the best and most desired version of him or herself. The transformation begins this process. By achieving these characteristics, the desired version of the self can be realized and the process of working towards the goal is started.\textsuperscript{124} Although the ceremony of the Kalachakra helps a person begin the process of transformation, it takes the energy and perseverance of the person to bring forth the goal of enlightenment. The transformation process is also found in Navajo ritual ceremonies, such as the Nightway Rite, that works towards the achievement of Beauty.

\textsuperscript{122} Sopa, 113.
\textsuperscript{124} Gold, 227.
Part 8: Navajo Nightway Rite

Like the Kalachakra Initiation Rite, the Navajo Nightway Rite is a healing rite performed for spiritual and physical empowerment. In the Nightway Rite, a sick individual is sung back into the desired Navajo state of Beauty. Songs and prayers are fundamental to the ritual process that a Navajo chanter performs over the sick. Through the pattern that develops over the duration of the rite, the transformation is delivered visually, verbally and physically. The Nightway Rite can be performed in different ways depending on whom the chanter is and to which clan the chanter belongs. While there are specific steps that are universal to the Nightway, each chanter does have his or her own way of performing the rite. Also, like the Kalachakra, the Nightway has components that are kept secret to the uninitiated. The powers of the chants come from their sacred words. Few chants have been recorded, because of the chanter’s fear that the sacred words will be used incorrectly and bad things will happen as a result.

The Nightway Rite is classified as a chantway in the Navajo system of rites. The chantways are means of guiding and reinforcing the process of healing or becoming reestablished as whole. This rite is used not just for a physical sickness, but also for the spiritual self as well because an individual cannot live in Beauty without a healthy spiritual self. The importance of spiritual healing is based on the Navajo belief that through thought (the formation of ideas in the mind) the universe was created. As such, something can only exist once it has been created mentally.

8.1 Preparation for Conducting the Nightway Rite

125 Witherspoon, 29.
Performed over a nine-night and day period (the ceremony is measured and begins with the nights), the Nightway requires considerable help from external sources as well as a large fee (money) in order to supply all the necessary materials. To perform the rite, the chanter or medicine person requires the help of apprentices and assistants to meet the requirements of the rituals. The apprentices, sometimes sons, nieces or other family members, work an average of seven years with the chanter to learn all of the complex and intricate details of the Nightway. Preparation includes acting out the roles of the Holy People and performing songs and chants while also making the needed ritual objects. There also needs to be a ceremonial hogan (house where the ritual takes place) that is built sometimes specifically for the event, which includes cookhouse, sweat lodges and a dancing ground. The cookhouse and dancing ground need to be large enough to accommodate the many people who will come to watch the last day of the rite. Because the rite is performed for an individual (one-sung-over), there are many expenses that the family is required to pay.

Individuals suffering from sensory disorders or nervous system complications such as confusion, vision problems, epilepsy or paralysis are considered the most suitable patients for the Nightway. The Navajo Indians believe that the cause of these sicknesses derive from the deconstruction of the patient’s spiritual mind, the part of the self that is connected with the world and the Holy People. Performance of this rite is an attempt to regain harmony, order and reestablish the self (spiritual).

126 Gold, 195.
127 Faris, 235.
8.2 Cure of an Affected Person

The Nightway is a ritual transformation performed to alter and return (cure) the sufferer’s state of balance from non-Beauty to Beauty. Accomplishing the transformation, however, requires a reorganization of the cosmos within the individual that is the one-sung-over. In creating a cure, the individual must immerse him or herself completely with the power beings of the Nightway by becoming one of the Holy People.\textsuperscript{128} These power beings are the selected Holy People who are called forth through prayers and songs as well as in the dances that accompany the rite. The power is brought into the one-sung-over through a number of sandpaintings. By filling the spiritual mind with the presence and power of the gods, the one-sung-over emulates the gods by spiritually becoming them. Thus, in the Nightway Rite, the individual takes on the powers of the gods in order to cure him or herself (i.e., transformation) much like in the Kalachakra Initiation Rite where the student (disciple) is transformed into a bodhisattva.

To the Navajo, the songs and prayers that make up the Nightway chantway are the most important part of the healing process in the ceremony. They attract the Holy People to the hogan and bless the healing done by the medicine person to the one-sung-over.\textsuperscript{129}

8.3 Performing the Rite

The Nightway, a nine-night and day ritual, it is split into three sections. There are two four-night and days sessions with the last day being the final initiation process. During the first section of four nights and days, the nights are spent performing rituals while the days are filled with sweats lodge ceremonies and making offerings to the Holy

\textsuperscript{128} Faris, 235.
\textsuperscript{129} Ibid., 57.
People. The purpose of these sessions directs to the purification and restoration of reality in the mind of the individual. The ceremony becomes divided by the ritual of the Communion Night, which calls on the power of the Holy People through a feast celebrating the midpoint of the rite. The Communion Night unifies the real world people and the ideal world of the Holy People.

The second section of nights and days sessions involves construction of sandpaintings and rituals during the day and initiations at night with drums, songs and dancing. Long prayer sessions in the hogan involve the chanter, the one-sung-over and participating apprentices who perform the roles of the Holy People through dance and use of masks. Finally, on the morning of the ninth day, there is a ceremony to greet the dawn and fulfill the final initiation in which the one-sung over becomes part of the Holy People while those who performed the Nightway Rite witness the transformation.

8.4 First Four Nights and Days

During the first set of four nights, purifying the state of the mind is essential. During the nights, rituals are performed to remove the patient from the disorder that has altered his or her internal cosmos. The combined effort of visualization and performance, the medicine person’s apprentices, help the spiritual mind of one-sung-over become restored. In these sessions, the assistants paint themselves with white clay and wear buckskin masks with the face of specific Holy People painted on it. These masks are an important component of the ceremonies and performances that happen during the evenings throughout the Nightway Rite. At first the apprentices and assistants wear these masks to imitate the Holy People and is one of the ways in which the Holy People are

\[130\text{ Gold, 200.}\]
invited to the Nightway Rite. In the later days, after the one-sung-over becomes the
Dreamer, the mask-wearing apprentices and assistants also become possessed by the
Holy People they represent. In doing so, they take in Holy Peoples' energy and power in
order to help the Dreamer become re-orientated with Beauty.  

To be eligible to participate in the rite, an apprentice must have already
participated in the Nightway Rite four times under the guidance of the medicine person.
This ensures that he or she can properly personify the deities and be able to assist the
chanter while performing the ritual. The Holy People become involved to the Nightway
through their representations in sandpaintings and impersonations. By impersonating the
deity, an apprentice helps bring the Holy People to the rite. Impersonation places each
apprentice in a dangerous position because it is through the apprentice that the Holy
People first come to the rite. If the apprentice does not hold the correct state of mind
(Beauty), he or she can cause harm and insult by incorrectly impersonating the deity. Any
insult must be avoided because it could directly cause failure of the rite. Through the
intense training, which the apprentices receive over an average of seven years under a
medicine person, prepares them to fulfill their responsibilities.

Once correctly dressed and masked, they enter the hogan shouting and holding
power wands and the chanting begins. The power wands are hoops made out of sumac
branches and herbs tied together with a cotton thread. These wands serve as the means
of deconstructing the chaos that is afflicting the patient. Dancing over to the patient, they
put the power wands on specific parts of the patient's body. Then they put a wand in the
mouth of the patient and break the thread holding the wand together. This serves as the

131 Faris, 159.
132 Gold, 197.
symbolic act of pulling the mental disorder from the patient. The same ritual is performed each night over the first four nights to ensure that all disorder has been removed from the patient.

In a second ritual performed at night, an assistant dressed as Talking God provides protection over the one-sung-over. The Talking God figure slowly lifts a constructed talisman over the head of the patient, thereby placing the patient in a space of protection. The ritual serves to pull the imbalance of the cosmos away from the patient in order to continue the healing process.

8.5 Purpose of the Sweat lodge

With the nights focusing on the purification of the spiritual mind, the first four days are spent purifying the body through use of sweat lodges. A sweat lodge is an earthen structure made specifically for conducting the sweat ritual each day and is destroyed after being used. The lodge is then rebuilt again the following morning for the next sweat session. Sweat lodges are orientated directionally in order to help center the patient. Each sweat lodge has the images of Holy People painted on it and is enclosed in a circle of varying numbers of prayer plumes providing each lodge with a ring of protection.

The purpose of the sweat lodges is to remove all impure elements from the body, which is not an easy task. With the chanter as a guide, the patient enters the sweat lodge and the chanting begins. Inside the lodge, the dry heat produced by red-hot rocks purifies the patient. The heat creates an inspiring and altered state of mind and when combined with the chanting helps the patient identify with the specific deities that relate to the

133 Gold, 198.
134 Faris, 211-212.
Nightway. In some Nightway Rites, when the patient exits the sweat lodge, masked deities perform another ritual that symbolically pulls away the anti-Beauty from the mind. The patient is also adorned with pollen as a blessing when leaving the sweat lodge. On completing the fourth day of spiritual and physical purification, the patient is now ready to become fully merged with the ideal reality of the Holy People and become empowered. To accomplish the goal of the rite, the patient must now become the Dreamer, the individual who absorbs and gains the identity of the deities depicted in the sandpaintings.

8.6 No Sleep Communion

To break up the two sets of the four-night and day periods, a ritual feast is conducted on the fifth day. The feast is called the No Sleep Communion because it goes on from the conclusion of the night ritual until dawn of the next morning. The feast is critical for calling in the presence of the Holy People.

The No Sleep Communion marks the beginning of the entrance of the Holy People into the one-sung-over's life and reminds the chanter and community that the gods are still not fully present. This also means that the one-sung-over, the chanter, and the apprentices are also not in the world of the Holy People fully. The feast marks the in-between time, where the earth walkers (the Navajo) and the Holy People are beginning to come together. The coming together of the Navajo and the Holy People is important because, by the end of the ninth night, the one-sung-over will have fully obtained the power of the Holy People. In addition, the chanter and apprentices will have acquired new power and knowledge from the experience of restoring Beauty back into the one-

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135 Faris, 212.
sung-over. Most importantly, by reestablishing Beauty in the one-sung-over, the Navajo honor their responsibility to the Holy People to ensure the balance of the world.

8.7 Night Five through Day Nine

During the evenings of these days six through nine, the chanter leads the one-sung-over and apprentices through several initiations. These are rites of empowerment done to continue the transformation of the one-sung-over into a highly powerful and healed holy being (the Dreamer). The rites take place in the ritual hogan that now has become a holy place because of the rituals performed during the first five nights. In the later nights of the second session, the apprentices who have impersonated the Holy People remove their masks and place them over the faces of younger apprentices (i.e., those who have yet to assist in four or more Nightway Rites). The reason for placing the masks on the faces of the younger apprentices is so that they can ‘see’ through the eyes of the Holy People. It is an important event for the younger apprentices because it allows them to see the world as Beauty and to take on the mind of the Holy People.\textsuperscript{137} By the end of the nightly rituals and daily sandpaintings ceremonies during this period, the one-sung-over has achieved a state of health and holiness that has brought him or her to the realm of the Holy People.

Unlike the Kalachakra Initiation Rite, the Navajo Nightway Rite is subject to change and innovation based on the training of the chanter. Because the Nightway is practiced throughout the Navajo Nation, many tribes have developed their own particular way of performing the ceremony through their respective chanters. These rites all follow the same nine-night and day format, including the timing of the No Sleep Communion on

\textsuperscript{137} Gold, 206.
day five and making sandpaintings on the later days. One example of a difference involves the way the chanter teaches the apprentice and assistants. Because there are few, if any, texts of the songs or prayers that make up the Nightway, the chanters must commit them to memory. Therefore, slight differences in the text of the songs and prayers occur as they are passed on from generation to generation. This allows for the continued evolution of the rite. In addition, because the chanter is not tied to a previously fixed practice, as is the case for the ritual officiates in Tibetan Buddhist rites, each Nightway is to be specifically tailored to the needs of the patient.138

The culmination in the transformation of the one-sung-over to become the Dreamer happens on the evening of the ninth day. While guided by the chanter, the one-sung-over encounters four masked dancers who sing a song of transformation over him or her. At the end of the song, the chanter directs the one-sung-over to recite the prayer of returned Beauty and transformation.139 Then another prayer is recited, which directs the one-sung-over to visualize the mind returned to a state of hozhq (Beauty). Through the mental transformation of the mind into Beauty, the one-sung-over has now become one of the Holy People.140 The following night, a nightlong dance is held. In the dance, the apprentices pretending to be god figures invite many of the Holy People to be present at the end of the ceremony. The family and community members, who have witnessed the rite, can now be included in the dancing and by association receive some of the power of the Holy People. At end of the ninth evening as the sun begins to rise, the ritual is over. The one-sung-over is now able to reintegrate and return to the ordinary world. The world

138 Faris, 103.
139 Gold, 209.
140 Ibid., 211.
has not changed, but the one-sung-over has. It is now his or her responsibility to maintain hozhó. The Nightway Rite has now ended.

8.8 Navajo Sandpaintings

Creating sandpaintings is a key aspect of the Nightway ceremony. The actual creation of the sandpainting, however, is not the focus of the ceremony. Instead, it is a component or piece of the whole ceremony just as the sand mandala is in the Kalachakra. The Navajo people use sandpaintings as a tool in order to bring a person and or the universe back into the natural balance. When a ritual is performed for the individual, it is recognized that the patient's world has been altered but that there has been a change in the universe as well. By re-establishing the desired balance, the sick or injured individual will be healed.¹⁴¹ As such, sandpaintings are the primary way of bringing the Holy People to the ritual. It is through Beauty, correctness and use of the Nightway ritual and sandpaintings which attracts the attention of the Holy People.¹⁴² Moreover, it is by enabling the one-sung-over to travel through the sandpainting to find identity in a specific deity that he or she becomes the Dreamer.¹⁴³

There are multiple sandpaintings created during the Nightway Rite, which is different from the singular mandala made during the Kalachakra Initiation. The construction of the sandpaintings is also different. Unlike the Tibetan monks, who have guidebooks that must be carefully followed in order to ensure that each Kalachakra mandala remains the same, Navajo medicine people construct sandpaintings from memory. Thus, learning to construct the various sandpaintings used in the Nightway is an

¹⁴² Faris, 109.
¹⁴³ Gold, 205.
important part of the apprentice’s training because it ensures that a potential medicine person can make the sandpaintings perfectly from memory.

It is during the second half of the Nightway Rite that construction of sandpaintings and their blessings become the primary focus of the day sessions. One painting is made each day in the hogan while two other possible paintings may be made in the sweat lodge. The two extra paintings are done at the discretion of the chanter and the family of the one-sung-over.

After the completion of the No Sleep Communion (day five), the chanter brings the one-sung-over to a state of deep identification and transformation through construction of several sandpaintings prepared over several days. The number of sandpaintings made during the second half of the Nightway depends on the specific chanter and the needs of the patient. The one-sung over’s identification with the sandpaintings produces the transformation effect of the Nightway Rite. To facilitate bringing about a connection with health and holiness to the one-sung-over, during the nights there are initiations that use both songs and prayers with drums.

There are twelve (sometimes sixteen) recognized sandpaintings that can be used in the Nightway. As such, the family of the one-sung-over can influence the medicine person to create particular sandpaintings. Some of the gods often represented in the sandpaintings are: Black God, Talking God, Hunchback (Humpedback) God and Fringed Mouth God with Monster Slayer as an intermediary god.\(^4\) The power and importance of the many gods that make up the Holy People changes based on how and why they are used in the rituals and ceremonies. It is important to understand that there is no ultimate

\(^4\) Reichard, 56.
god (i.e., one that is above all the others). For example, Black God is a powerful god in the Nightway who works against things that disrupt hoxhq. His presence is also an important component that works to restore Beauty.\(^{145}\) There are, however, other gods who are represented in the sandpaintings and who have equal importance in the Nightway. Sandpaintings of Talking God are important because of the deity’s relationship to corn, which is a central image in many of the Nightway sandpaintings. Hunchback (or Humpedback) God is responsible for giving the visionary process to the Navajo and his image represents the importance of visualization in the ceremony. Monster Slayer is a figure that represents the destruction of great dangers that are held against the world. Monster Slayer is a very active god, which is why he is included in the Nightway sandpaintings.

Because of the interest, largely from the outside world, in the sandpaintings used in the Navajo rituals, reproductions of the sandpaintings are increasingly being created and sold. These reproductions are somewhat accepted by the greater Navajo community because they are not intended for healing. There are two arguments used that allow for creating, showing and selling sandpainting reproductions. The first argument holds that because the reproductions have small graphic changes, the images are unattractive to the Holy People and not dangerous in non-ceremonial use. The second argument is that the reproductions do not have the necessary pollen and feather plumes that make them whole.\(^{146}\)

\(^{145}\) Reichard, 108.
\(^{146}\) Faris, 110.
8.9 Discussion of Selected Reproductions of Nightway Rite Sandpaintings

In this paper, four completed reproductions of sandpaintings used in the Nightway Rite will be described. These include the sandpainting called Whirling Logs that is created on day five, the painting of First Dancer made on day six, the Fringemouth Gods sandpainting made on the seventh day and finally the sandpainting of Black God constructed on day eight. The medicine person who is assisted by an apprentice constructs all of these sandpaintings in the ceremonial hogan. At the end of each session in the ceremonial hogan, the sandpainting is destroyed after the one-sung-over has absorbed the power of the specific deity represented in the sandpainting. In this way, the one-sung-over achieves the state of the Dreamer by the end of the Nightway Rite, thereby enabling him or her to have absorbed the power of the Holy People.

In the reproduction of the Whirling Logs (Figure 13), the paired figures (black male and white female gods) stand on logs spiraling out from the center. The Holy People (the larger figures) are placed directionally with Humpedback God in the South and the North while the White Talking God is in the East and Black Calling God stands in the West. There are also four sacred plants in the image, placed on the diagonal line of the logs; they are white cornstalks in the East, blue cornstalks in the South, yellow cornstalks in the West and black cornstalks in the North. The images of the gods bring Talking God, Calling God and Humpedback God to the sandpainting where they are presented with the offering of a cornstalk. By making the offerings, the one-sung-over can take on the power of the Holy People. By not having a border, also known as a guardian, the reproduction of this sandpainting is considered not to be fully completed.

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147 Gold, 204-5.
148 Faris, 123.
During day six, the sandpainting of the First Dancer's (Figure 14) is created. On the left side of the reproduction, Talking God (white) is shown holding folding sticks. These sticks are like those used during the first few nightly rituals in which the one-sung-over has the evil (or imbalance) pulled from him or herself. These sticks also represent the power of the concentrated winds. The Black God figure represents the one-sung-over and also marks where the one-sung-over should be placed in the sandpainting. The white female god is holding plumed wands that are used in the first half of the Nightway Rite.149

The sandpainting of the Fringed Mouth Gods (Figure 15) is constructed on the seventh day. In the center of the sandpainting is the blue cornstalk, an important symbol in the Navajo world because of its use as a primary food source. To the South of the central cornstalk (on the right) are four pairs of Fringed Mouth Gods who are blue and yellow and are standing with the female gods that are white. The Fringed Mouth gods on this side of the image represent the water element. On the far side of these pairs are two Humpedback Gods. These two figures, which are up against the border, have blue faces and black humped backs with red and white feathers. To the North of the corn stalk (on the left), there is a similar composition of gods. In the two tiers are four pairs of red and black Fringed Mouth Gods with their companion white female gods. The Fringed Mouth Gods and companions represent the element of land. There are also two Humpedback Gods placed against the border. The border, which signifies protection, is shown by the presence of the rectangular rainbow guardian whose head is placed in the North (left) and whose legs extend out to the South (right).150

149 Faris, 122.
150 Ibid., 125.
The last sandpainting to be discussed is that of the Black God (Figure 16) constructed on the eighth day of the Nightway Rite. In this reproduction, Black God is seen moving out from the center while the image of Monster Slayer is seen standing on a blue sun. The four other figures of Black God are placed on Big Stars that are moving clockwise which are white, blue, yellow and pink. Again, there is a protection boundary provided by the rectangular rainbow guardian. The sandpainting brings power to the one-sung-over, now the Dreamer, who sits in the center of the sandpainting. At the end of each ritual, the sandpainting is deconstructed and its materials are returned to the earth.

151 Faris, 127.
Part 9: University of Redlands Mandala Construction April 5-8, 2011

During the week of April 5th-8th 2011, eleven Tibetan monks came to the University of Redlands to construct the Mandala of Compassion of the Buddha of Great Compassion, Avalokiteshvara. The presence of the Tibetan monks of Drepung Loseling Monastery provided a rare opportunity to witness the construction of a mandala and apply my knowledge of the subject matter to a sandpainting I had not studied in depth. Through my knowledge of the mandala construction process used in the Kalachakra Initiation Rite mandala, I was able to apply this knowledge to the present mandala construction. Because of this, I was able to know, without words or direct communication, what was happening in the ritual process during the mandala construction.

9.1 Opening Ceremony

During the twenty-minute Opening Ceremony, students of the University of Redlands and members of the city of Redlands witnessed a complex series of prayers, chanting, music and hand rituals. As explained by the spokes person for the monks, four activities were to be performed during the ritual opening: examining the space to ensure it is the perfect place to construct the mandala, permission for the local deities to perform the ritual, displacing obstacles that would hinder the construction of the mandala, and finally performing a series of chants. Once these were concluded, the monks would then begin constructing the mandala by laying the chalk lines. With this brief explanation, the Opening Ceremony began.

Before the arrival of the guests and students, the monks had prepared the stage at the front of the chapel. This involved setting up the offering table, on which was placed vases containing materials such as purified water, chalk strings, eighteen bowls of
powdered dyed marble used as sand, and an altar to the Dalai Lama. These materials were brought by the monks with them and were blessed during set up of the site and again during the Opening Ceremony.

Witnessing the Opening Ceremony provided the audience with a multitude of sights and sounds. As I watched, the ceremony closely replicated many of the Rituals of the Site used in the Kalachakra ceremony. One monk, recognizable as a the chanting master, led his companions through throat chanting rituals, prayer and playing of traditional instruments such as horns, drums, cymbals and a bell. The chanting master played two large cymbals while two monks played short horns, two played long horns, one played the drum and another monk, serving as the vajra master, held the vajra and bell (dorje). Nine monks participated in the chanting and prayer during the Opening Ceremony with all of them working together to perform the completed ritual ceremony. (It should be mentioned that the Opening ceremony is not a play. It is a complex ritual serving a necessary function in the construction of the mandala.) As the chanting and prayer concluded, the vajra master performed a series of hand gestures, mudras, using both the vajra and dorje. This monk then walked around the mandala site, starting in the east moving west while completing a full circle. Doing this provided both the orientation and the spiritual preparation needed to begin construction of the mandala. The Opening Ceremony was concluded with all the monks removing their ceremonial headdresses and beginning the laying of the lines.

9.2 Mandala Construction

The monks began straight away with the laying of the mandala lines with chalk powder and oil pens. Working with remarkable speed and accuracy, each monk laid out a
specific component of the *mandala* on the platform where it to be constructed. Construction of the lines first began by working with the chalked string, and then the finer measurements were made using a compass and oil pen. After each section was marked with the oil pen, the chalk lines were wiped away. Watching the development was mesmerizing. The skill of the monks was made even more astonishing because they were able to work interchangeably in laying the chalk and oil lines. They were able to do this because each of the monks had memorized the entire texts of the *mandala* and thus knew where each mark was required to be placed. Because of this foundation of knowledge, the monks rarely needed to communicate with each other while making the necessary measurements.

In what seemed no time at all, the monks had completed the working lines (similar to those of Figure 4). They then began filling in the sand starting at the center of the *mandala*. Again, it was astonishing to watch the monks work with the ease, confidence and comfort gained by long practice. Working in groups of three, the monks alternated working on the mandala for a set amount of time. They moved in and out of each other’s working space with fluid movements, appearing to work as parts of one body instead of three separate beings.

At the center of the *mandala* structure resided an eight-petaled lotus with five key elements of Buddhism represented. The lotus flower symbolizes rising above the muck and mire (so to speak) of life while reaching towards enlightenment. Surrounding the lotus flower, on alternating petals, were the *vajra*, jewel, sword, and wheel as well as elaborate gates and gardens constructed around it. Finally, circular boundaries protected the *mandala* thereby holding it in a ring of elements.
Over the next two days (Wednesday and Thursday), the *mandala* continued to grow as the monks worked on it. Watching the construction, many visitors and volunteers experienced feeling a type of energy that positively influenced them. As a result, many repeatedly came back to watch progress of the *mandala* construction and to re-experience the energy.

### 9.3 Closing Ceremony

The *mandala* construction was completed Friday morning. This allowed visitors to come and see the completed image before start of the Closing Ceremony at noon. The Closing Ceremony was similar to the opening. It was another incredible demonstration of prayer, chanting and ritual practice by the monks and *vajra* master. The Closing Ceremony, however, was much longer than the opening, lasting almost a full hour. At the end of the ceremony, the *vajra* monk circled the fully completed *mandala* while conducting prayers and performing *mudras* with the *vajra* and *dorji*. At the end of each full rotation, the *vajra* monk used a brush to sweep the sand from each corner into the center, ceremonially disassembling the *mandala*. He continued to circle the *mandala* platform and sweep sand into the center of the *mandala* platform. Then the other eight monks joined the *vajra* monk at the *mandala* platform as the sandpainting lost its shape, finally becoming one pile of blended colored powder.

The final act of the monks was to spoon sand into small individual plastic bags and hand them out to the visitors. The powder was handed out to provide the visitors with the blessings of the completed sandpainting. While the sandpainting only remained completed for a few short hours, in the minds of the viewers its teachings of compassion and impermanence will remain long after the image is gone. Construction of the *Mandala*
of Compassion offered the many visitors and me the opportunity to witness its construction and destruction, to appreciate its visual beauty and to experience its ritual importance.
Part 10. Conclusion

Tibetan Buddhists and the Navajo Indians both perform rituals that produce transformative actions in the world. These transformations are primarily performed in the spiritual mind, but they do produce results that are reflected in the physical wellbeing of the individual. Sandpaintings provide guidance and visual assistance for the transformations over or in an individual. The Tibetan Buddhist Kalachakra Initiation and mandala is transformative because the specified deity’s pure awareness becomes the awareness of the disciple (student). Through deity meditation the student absorbs the teaching, which transforms the mind of the student into the mind of the deity. In the Navajo Nightway Rite, the Holy People are called to the sandpaintings in order to instill a transformation on the one-sung-over (sufferer or patient). This transformation alters the individual who has been thrown out of the desired balance (hozchq) and re-establishes the desired state of Beauty (hozhq).

Although many similarities exist, differences remain in how these practices affect the life of the practitioner. The Navajo people want to live in a perpetual state of Beauty, and the Nightway Rite provides the spiritual self with a return to its previous desired state of Beauty. In Tibetan Buddhism, the individual moves beyond the spiritual self through the initiation of the Kalachakra Tantra. In both cultures, however, it is understood that the use of sandpaintings remains an essential part of a much greater whole.

The inclusion of songs, prayers and chanting holds a shared importance in the mandala construction ceremonies and in the Nightway. These components of the ritual process purify the location and attract the attention of the respected deities. During the Opening and Closing Ceremonies for the Mandala of Compassion, these spoken
components began the process of the *mandala* construction. In the Nightway, the spoken words attract the Holy People to the ceremonial *hogan* where the sandpainting is being created for the one-sung-over. These sacred words share a striking similarity because of their use at the beginning of the ritual practices.

In the Nighway Rite, the medicine person has to individualize each performance in order fit the needs of the one-sung-over. In so doing, each performance is different depending on the situation and understanding of the medicine person. On the other hand, Tibetan monks have performed the Kalachakra Initiation Rite and construction of the *mandala* in exactly the same way for hundreds of years. This ensures that each performance is the same as the one before it. By removing all individuality, the Kalachakra represents a universal *mandala*, constructed for the betterment of all beings. This lack of individuality, however, removes the possibility for situational specificity as is present in the Nightway ceremony.

No matter what the similarities or differences are, the final step of the sandpainting process, actualization, remains the most important part to both traditions. The image, (*mandala* or sandpaintings) was created to assist in the visualization and realization of the teaching, or to produce a healing that can be obtained by any individual. The process of renewing life brings order from chaos by internalizing a visual image of a wholly connected universe of life forms. The balance can be restored in every human being through the truth found in the sandpainting.

By witnessing the construction of the *Mandala* of Compassion, I have gained firsthand experience in the study of Tibetan *mandala* practices. From this, I not only
visually experienced a sandpainting construction but also received a physical and emotional feeling of great clarity and momentary separation from myself.

Through my studies of the Kalachakra mandala, I was able to apply this knowledge during the physical construction of the Mandala of Compassion. Doing this enabled me to understand the process as it unfolded before my eyes. I also believe that because of this knowledge, I was better able to experience a subconscious emotional response based on the visual image. Experiencing the physical construction of the Mandala of Compassion crystallized all that I have learned studying the Kalachakra Initiation Rite and the Nightway Rite over the past year.
FIGURES

Figure 1. Navajo Progression from the Lower World by Migration
(Trudy Griffin-Pierce, *Earth is My Mother, Sky is My Father*, 69)

Figure 2. Completed Kalachakra sand mandala
Figure 3. Laying down the mandala lines
(Martin Brauen, Mandala: Sacred Circle in Tibetan Buddhism, 2009, 196)

Figure 4. Working lines of the mandala
(Martin Brauen, Mandala: Sacred Circle in Tibetan Buddhism, 2009, pg 200)
Figure 5. Filling the eastern wall of the Mandala of Enlightened Mind

Figure 6. Mandala of Enlightened Great Bliss
(Barry Bryant, *Wheel of Time Sand Mandala*, 200)
Figure 7. Mandala of Enlightened Wisdom
(Barry Bryant, Wheel of Time Sand Mandala, 201)

Figure 8. Mandala of Enlightened Mind
(Barry Bryant, Wheel of Time Sand Mandala, 203)
Figure 9. Mandala of Enlightened Speech
(Barry Bryant, *Wheel of Time Sand Mandala*, 207)

Figure 10. Mandala of Enlightened Body
(Barry Bryant, *Wheel of Time Sand Mandala*, 212)
Figure 11. Six Outer Circles
(Barry Bryant, *Wheel of Time Sand Mandala*, 225)

Figure 12. Dismantling the mandala
Figure 13. Sand painting of the Whirling Logs
(Faris Plate 3)

Figure 14. First Dancer’s sand painting made on day six
(Faris Plate 1)
Figure 15. Fringed Mouth Gods sand painting made on day seven
(Faris Plate 8)

Figure 16. Black God sand painting made on day eight
(Faris Plate 11)
BIBLIOGRAPHY


