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A Mandala of Self

This is a wonderful exercise of Transformation and Finding Your True Self

It's fun, it works, and it draws on practices that go way back in our human history in our search for self. The circle is the oldest symbol of the self. And a mandala is a wonderful "polaroid" of where you are at any given moment—a mirror of your journey—and one that you can shape and change as you learn about yourself.

What you need:

1. Create a **circle** at least 12 inches across by using string, a plain necklace or string of beads, or draw a circle on a large piece of paper.
2. Have handy a collection of **10 or more objects** that could all fit inside the circle, such as: stones, shells, leaves, beads, small objects from your altar—if you are doing this outside, use anything handy, even an old bottle cap you find lying around.
3. **An issue, edge, question or dilemma in your life.**

What to do:

- Sit quietly before your empty circle with your collection of objects at hand.
- Bring into mind your dilemma.
- Mindfully place into your circle, one by one, as they occur to you, the different aspects of the situation.
- Allow yourself to be playful, irrational, dreamy, and spontaneous—pick a stone for whatever comes up, *even if you think it's silly or not related, and especially include anything that comes up that you'd like to censor or push back down into your unconscious (that's often the most juicy stuff!)*
- Take all the time you need to place the stones or other objects.
- When all the stones are "placed," close your eyes for a while and just rest.

For example: Let's say the issue is standing up to a challenging boss. Your mandala could contain: A stone for **The Boss**, a stone representing the **Person In Your Family of Origin Who Was Like Your Boss**, a stone for the message you learned growing up of **Having To Stuff Your Feelings To Be Safe**, a stone for your **Longing To Be Powerful**, a stone for your secret desire to say "**Fuck Off!**" then another stone for **Guilt** for having the Fuck Off stone at all (nice people don't say that, right?), a stone for your **Power**, a stone for your **Longing For A Different Job**, a stone for the **Critic** part of you that says "You should be able to deal with this better than you are," a stone for your **Compassionate Heart**, a stone for your **Ability To Understand Other People's Suffering**, and a stone for **All The People Who Believe In You** these days.

- Now you are ready to "look" at your mandala in a right-brain way that allows what's most important to "pop." This is how you do it—Mostly you keep your eyes closed. So, start with your eyes closed for about 10-20 seconds, then open your eyes for a *literally two-second* view of your mandala and then close your eyes immediately. Keep your eyes closed for another 10-20 seconds and take another two-second "blink." Do this 3-5 times, or until something "pops" or "grabs you" or "stands out." This could be: a particular stone, a color, the placement of the stones, the relationship of two stones to one another, or a sense that something's missing.
- When we look in this way, we're not so predisposed to "try to figure it out" with the left brain which usually gives us the same unhelpful answers anyway or leads to a dead end full of self-perpetuating anxiety. Instead you're using your right brain to help you out. The wonderful thing about the right brain is that it offers new and creative perspectives and answers. The left brain is about making lists of what is already known and trying to safely keep that going. A musical example is that the left brain is great for learning scales, a very necessary thing, but not for

creating a piece of music or giving a heartfelt performance—for that we need the right brain. We need both left and right brain perspectives, but we also need to know when to let go of our left brain, list-making side and dive into our metaphorical, heart-connected right brain. So in our self-mandala we honor the left brain (and keep it satisfied) by listing all of the different parts of a dilemma, and then switch over to the right brain's ability to look at things from many perspectives while remaining kind, heartfelt, critic-free, connective, cooperative and creative. The right brain can take all those left brain detailed lists and spontaneously offer a felt sense "Eureka! Here's a healing perspective on that difficulty we're having!" The right brain can embrace it all and allow something "new" to arise.

- Okay, so let yourself "blink" three or four times and playfully notice what "pops" out of the mandala.

For example: Here are some things that may "pop" out of the difficult boss mandala: the Fuck Off stone, which you had reluctantly added, is rather large and on the outer edge of the circle, while the Guilt stone has taken center stage, but interestingly what has "popped" for you is that "unbeknownst to you"—right next to Fuck Off you have placed the stone for All The People Who Believe In You.

- Allow yourself to sit with the new "take" on your situation. You may feel some fresh sense. Or it may feel uncomfortable—Great! Just let it all cook. **So, take a break and come back to it later in the day, or even better, come back tomorrow.**
- Okay, you've taken a break. **Now come back with fresh eyes.** What do you see?

For example: This morning you may notice that the Fuck Off stone is a really cool stone. It's bigger than you thought you'd allow yourself to have, and it's got some really cool colors—how about all that red! Suddenly the center of your mandala feels "off." You begin to feel like moving two stones to the center—Fuck Off and People Who Believe In You, and you put the Guilt to the side. Gee, that's interesting that you naturally put Guilt next to the Person In Your Family of Origin Who Was Like Your Boss. So you move the two stones to the center, and suddenly Fuck Off starts to feel different . . . you don't know how, but it does.

- Take another break and come back to it later and sit with the felt sense of what you discover when you return. **Feel free to move the stones around when you come back—that's about getting a new perspective. You may also want to add stones.**

For example: The next day, with fresh eyes, you may see that somehow the configuration of the two stones in the center—Fuck Off and All The People Who Believe In You—feel really supportive—ie, "magically" there's a sense of "rightness" about the whole mandala. Then you notice that something is still missing. You sit quietly meditative with the felt sense of "something else wants to come in" and hold a new stone from the pile near your mandala. Then it comes to you—the felt sense for this new stone, it's energy that the mandala—that *you*—are drawing to you is: It's Okay For You To Express, and you add that stone. OR: maybe you have all that you need already in your mandala—you realize that Fuck Off is really It's Okay For You To Express, but it needs All The People Who Believe In You near it in order be clear and direct before you rename this energy. In any case, you can thank yourself for having a Fuck Off stone—because that's a really human feeling, it's an important clue to your boundaries, and it's lead you to your truth.

- **Take the felt sense of your new perspective on a spin.**

For example: So back at work, you sit quietly at your desk with eyes closed (no one sees you) and call to you the felt sense of It's Okay For You To Express AND All The People Who Believe In You. Isn't that interesting—you feel more grounded, feel your feet, feel calmer. You remember a friend of yours who recently told you how much your way of expressing was unique and clear. You're a bit anxious, but you also feel the truth of what your friend says in your heart. Then you go in to the meeting with the boss and express yourself, and something different happens—not because the boss is different, *but because YOU are more in alignment with yourself!* Congratulations!

Good luck! Thanks for stopping by! And feel free to let me know about your experiences with this

exercise.

Warmly, Kathleen

PS: Kudos to all the traditions that I've drawn this exercise from: Alberto Villoldo, Hakomi, Jon Eisman's Re-Creation of the Self, Emily Conrad's Continuum, Robert A. Johnson, Stan Grof, the medieval alchemist crowd, some Jungian folks, and every human who's ever looked into the sacred circle of the self.