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# Tibetan Buddhists teach lessons of impermanence

BY JEANNE FERRIS

The Tibetan Monks of Gaden Shartse Phukhang Monastery are touring the U.S. to give blessings and to create sand mandalas for teaching lessons of impermanence and compassion to Western Buddhists and like-minded people interested in multi-cultural exchanges. The sand mandala was on display at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of San Dieguito in Solana Beach, which hosted the event for five days.

They have traveled with their tour director, Lobsang Wangchuk since 1989, also a former monk, student and a westerner. The tour has been designed to assist with raising funds for their school of 5,000 monks.

"They sorely need more bathrooms – 500 monks share three bathrooms," UUFSDF worship associate, Livia Walsh said.

The five monks created a colorful two-dimensional sand mandala that was intricately detailed with Tibetan metaphysical symbols and elements. The literal translation of mandala means "that which extracts the essence." The mandala is normally used during the initiation of a monk into a high form of meditation. This sacred initiation is referred to as an empowerment ceremony.

As explained in Sacred Arts of Tibet website, "Each sand mandala represents the architectural layout of the entire palace of a specific deity. There are multi-layered symbolic images throughout the 'palace,' where iconography, placement and color all have significance. Additionally, to the learned Tibetan Buddhist monk, the mandala represents his vision of the entire universe."

On Sunday (the fifth day), as witness to the dissolution of this stunning work of art, the murmur of the crowd resounded above the chanting prayers of the monks when the mandala was artistically disassembled in six strokes of a dry paintbrush. Sweeping it up into a little mountain, additional sand (crushed marble stone) was added.

Geshe Lama Phunsho (received full



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The monks at the conclusion of their lesson where they take action to help purify the environment.

ordination from His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama) said, "This sand was brought from India and has been blessed by a 1,000 monks. It can be used anywhere you need protection, or if you would like to give a blessing of healing to a special place on earth."

The monks then placed the sand into tiny packets, which were distributed to everyone present. With heads nodding all around in understanding and acknowledgment, open palms – young and old – reached out in anticipation. All that remained was a blue table with a faint permanent geometric template drawn upon it.

Adhering to the Buddhist principle that life is transient ("all things are impermanent") the monks concluded their lesson by inviting all to join and place the sand in the ocean as an offering to purify the surrounding environment.

Among the surfers, boogie boarders and sunbathers at Seaside Beach, Geshe Lama Phunsho, Lobsang Khamchuk Rinpoche and Geshe Karma Yeshe released the mandala to the wind and sea.

Interested local residents can still see the monks in downtown San Diego through July 24 before their return to India. Visit [www.sacredartsoftibettour.org](http://www.sacredartsoftibettour.org).