

# THE PENDULUM

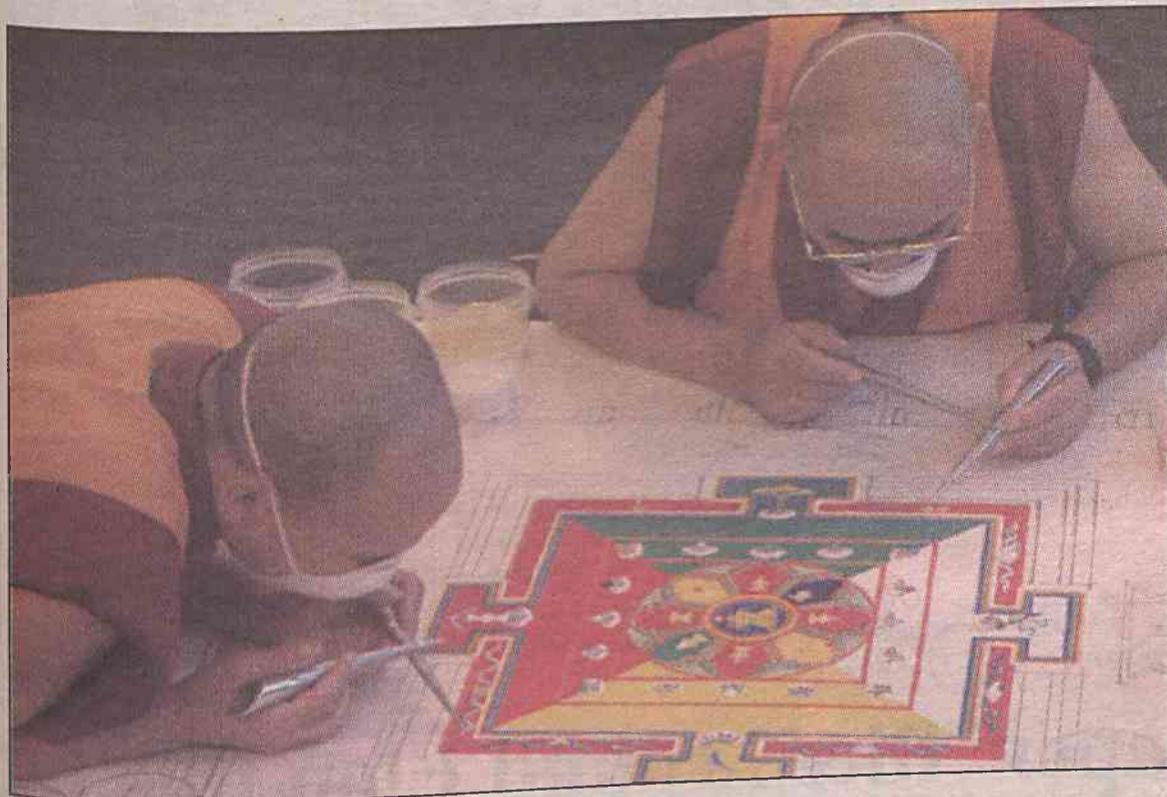
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"If it matters to you, it matters to The Pendulum."

## Tibetan monks meditate with mandala



Three of the Tibetan monks visiting Elon work on a mandala in Belk Library as part of their spiritual journey while they visit.

Krista Naposki  
Photographer



**Mary Austin Slate**  
Reporter

A strange, ethereal sound echoed in Belk Library early Monday morning. Four Tibetan Buddhist monks had begun a chanting ritual, part of their opening ceremony for the creation of a symbolic sand mandala. The ceremony marked the beginning of the Shiwa Tour, a week-long visit by the monks.

Today at 9:50 a.m. they will begin the deconstruction process, which results in a closing ceremony that ends at Lake Mary Nell. The deconstruction of the mandala represents the Buddhist belief in the transience of life and the spirit of impermanence.

No sand will be given to visitors because the meaning of the mandala can be found in the process rather than the physical remnants. Instead, the monks will fling the sand into the lake, symbolizing its return to nature.

A mandala is a traditional Tibetan sand painting of geometric shapes made from crushed marble. Each grain is blessed individually, creating a "vast store of spiritual energy," according to the Truitt Center for Religious and Spiritual Life.

The art of mandala painting can be traced back to the sixth century B.C., when it originated in India. In the centuries since then, the tradition has been passed on from generation to generation.

The creation process is a form of meditation and requires extreme concentration as the monks pour the colored grains through a funnel to create a fine stream of sand.

The second floor lounge was filled with students and professors, who watched silently on Monday as the three monks, dressed in traditional red and yellow garb, vocalized prayers in their native language.

The chanting switched from unison to harmony to solo voice as the monks followed an intricate prayer pattern designed to bless their visit at Elon.

"The chanting seemed really simple, but when they explained it, there were a lot more layers," freshman Jenna Hill said.

Many students present at the opening ceremony expressed an interest in returning to see the progress of the mandala.

"I'm going to come back during the week and during deconstruction," said sophomore Nikki Allem. "I want to look at it from the ceiling," she said, pointing at the view from the third floor. "I hear that's the best way to see it."

The monks will be working on the mandala from 9 a.m. to noon and 1:30 p.m. to 5 p.m. on the second floor lounge of Belk. Students can talk to the monks, who speak limited English or simply watch their progress.

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