

PALO ALTO ODYSSEY

Miranda finds life is like a sand painting

MIRANDA steered off University Avenue onto a side street, walking slowly past what looked like a temporary shop-front, rented out ad hoc between major tenants, which sold yoga gear.

To her astonishment, inside were five Buddhist monks bending over a table.

Miranda went inside.

The monks were gathered around a table, dressed in brown robes. They nodded at her openly. She walked to their table.

On the table was a partially constructed mandala made from tiny grains of colored sand.

The sand grains sat in little dishes, divided by colors. There were bright reds, blues, greens and yellows. With

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tweezers, each monk selected one grain of sand at a time, and added it to the sand mandala.

Miranda read their flyer on the wall.

The monks were on a tour of the West Coast, creating sand paintings, which celebrated compassion through acknowledging the impermanence of life.

The monks would spend several weeks in a town creating a sand painting, one grain at a time; and then when it was finished, hold a ceremony to destroy the painting; and move on to their next destination to repeat the process.

Wow, thought Miranda, I am living in a sand painting of my own life, here in my return to Palo Alto, watching before my eyes the changing impermanence of life.

Like this store I am standing in, she thought. What business will occupy this space in a few years?

But instead of compassion, she reflected, I am experiencing stress — as I witness the loss of the old, and its replacement by the new.

The creators of the sand painting wanted to help her understand that life was unstable, and that life was change.

We all live impermanent lives, the sand painting told Miranda. If we grab on to our impermanent lives; we will

suffer, because inevitably our impermanent lives are lost.

And when we suffer over this, we realize that others suffer too. So compassion for others in this suffering creates a world where love and healing have a chance to live.

Miranda looked again at the mandala. It was complex. So much work for something that has so short a life. Just like me, she thought — so complex and so short a life.

The monks invited Miranda to come closer, and bend in. She realized that if she sneezed, she would destroy the whole thing. Understanding that fragility, she realized, was the point.

The world was one sneeze away from destruction.

More tomorrow.