

Labyrinths – Tools for Transformation

Labyrinths are a form of maze. Unlike mazes, however, labyrinths offer one path which always leads to the center. There are no false turns or dead ends.

By following the one path to the center, the seeker can use the labyrinth to quiet the mind and find peace and illumination at the center of his or her being. This is a tool for meditation that serves as a metaphor for one's spiritual journey. The labyrinth reflects back to the seeker whatever he or she needs to discover.

A Three-Fold Mystical Tradition

Three stages, known as the Three-Fold Mystical Path, comprise the labyrinth experience. The first part of this path, until you reach the center of the labyrinth, is shedding or **Purgation**. This comes from the root word "to purge" meaning to release, to cleanse, to let go. It is a letting go of the details of your life. It quiets the mind.

The second stage of the Three-Fold Path, **Illumination**, is found in the center of the labyrinth. Usually it is a surprise to reach the center because the long winding path seems "illogical" and cannot be figured out by the linear mind. After quieting the mind and opening your heart in the first part of the walk, the center presents a new experience: a place of meditation and prayer; a place to receive what is there for you. You are encouraged to spend as much time in the center as feels right for you. Often people at this stage in the path find insight into their life situation or clarity about a certain problem.

The third stage, **Union**, begins when you leave the center of the labyrinth and continues as you retrace the path that brought you in. In this stage, the meditation takes on a grounded, energized feeling. Union is the joining with Divine, your Higher Power, to bring your new insights and discoveries of your individual gifts out into the world. This part of your journey empowers, invites, even pushes you to be more authentic and confident in sharing your gifts with the world.

The Three-Fold Path is based on a universal understanding of meditation: to release and quiet; to open and receive; to take what was gained back out into the world. Each time you walk the labyrinth you become more empowered to find and do the work for which your soul is reaching.

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Labyrinth in Chartres Cathedral, France

Directions to the outdoor Labyrinth at St. Paul's Monastery

The Labyrinth is located west of the Monastery.

When outside, facing the Monastery's front main entry (north), go left (west). Continue on the sidewalk; and then, right on the blacktop path (north). The Labyrinth is on the elevated land (left side) amidst some shrub bushes and trees. Walk up this hill toward the Labyrinth entrance.

History of the Labyrinth

The labyrinth pattern has one concentric, circular path with no dead ends. Various styles of labyrinth patterns can be found in ancient cultures from all over the world dating back as far as 5,000 years. These archetypal patterns can be found in places as diverse as Peru, Arizona, Iceland, Crete, Egypt, India, Sweden, England, and France. Labyrinths find form in caves, rock patterns, etchings, stories, and dance. In the past, labyrinths on the ground have been used for ceremony and walking meditations.

Although the labyrinth crosses many sacred traditions, the labyrinth is rooted in Christian history. Some medieval cathedrals have labyrinths that were used as a form of pilgrimage. For medieval pilgrims who were unable to go to Jerusalem due to plague or war, the inward walk of the labyrinth was sometimes used as though it was the path to Jerusalem. The center might represent the arrival at Jerusalem.

The pattern on this finger labyrinth is a replica of the great 42-foot labyrinth embedded in stone within the floor of Chartres Cathedral in France, southwest of Paris. There is evidence that the Chartres labyrinth was first installed between 1194 and 1220. From the 5th to the 12th centuries there was a school of philosophy called the School of Chartres. The theory is that this pattern came from the school.

There is a labyrinth renaissance in the United States gathering momentum and inspiring many to use this beautiful and powerful spiritual tool. The labyrinth engages the body, mind, and spirit through the walking of its twists and turns, whether we walk it with our feet or our finger.

May you find your essence of source, of center, as you use this form of body, mind, and spirit prayer.

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Preparing to walk the Labyrinth

"If you want to know God better, you should take a walk with God." 4-year-old Asa

The goal of walking the labyrinth is connecting with God. One of the by-products of walking the labyrinth is transformation. The key to getting as much as you can out of your walk is to remain open.

There are as many ways to walk the labyrinth as there are people who walk it. There is no "right" way or "wrong" way. However you choose to interact with God as you walk is the right way.

There is only one path. You follow it to the center, spend time in the center, following back out.

Many understand the walk to have these phases:

Preparation
Entering: Crossing the threshold
Moving in
Being in the center
Moving out
Taking leave: Crossing the threshold

Many people have found meaning from noticing everything that happens while they pray the labyrinth. This is a process of receptivity. The labyrinth can make one's life transparent. Open your heart; open your mind.

Prayerful ways of approaching your Labyrinth Walk

Openness: *God, what do you want me to know? What do you want to show me?*

Intercessory prayer: *God, I walk to communicate with you about this person, situation, need...*

In honor of a significant date or transition: *Thank you, God, that I have a new opportunity.*

Repeat a prayer phrase - or - one of God's names that has particular meaning for you (*Jesus, Jesus, Jesus...*) - or - a spiritual word that has significance for you (*love, love, love...*).

Reflect on your life or something significant that is concerning you now.

Observe whatever thoughts, impressions, or feelings that come: *God, help me to pay attention to what is going on inside and outside of me...*

As a new approach to an old problem or memory: *God, I need to talk with you and gain new insight or commitment about this situation...*

Walk with a question that is important to you now - or - identify a central question in your life. Walk with that question in your mind and heart: *God, I am wondering what I need to do next in my life... what input do you have? Or repeat as you walk: What is my next step? If you are unsure of a question, ask: What do I seek? What spiritual needs do I have?*

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