



Walking the Labyrinth

On the messy road of life, it is often challenging to determine what your next step will be, what direction you will take and which way you will turn. Perhaps that is one reason why walking a labyrinth as a meditation is so appealing: the journey is clearly marked, unobstructed and in full view. Although it twists and winds its way to the center, there are no tricks, wrong choices or dead ends. To reach your destination, all you have to do is follow the path.

Labyrinths can be found in spas and retreat centers, churches, medical centers, schools, parks, hospitals, prisons, memorial gardens and people's backyards. Could this centuries-old meditation help you explore the mind-body connection? Below, Mary Monroe, a freelance writer in Los Angeles, provides insights on the labyrinth.

What Is a Labyrinth?

The labyrinth commonly consists of a circular path that moves clockwise from the entrance to the center, traveling through all four quadrants. The same path is used to walk in and out of the labyrinth. The geometric structure for most labyrinths

is designed to recreate archetypal patterns associated with numerous cultural and spiritual symbols: the four quadrants representing the four gospels or the four elements, seven circuits representing the seven chakras, eleven circuits plus the center representing the 12 months of the calendar, and so on. The most famous labyrinth pattern is the eleven-circuit medieval labyrinth found in Chartres Cathedral in France. Labyrinths can be constructed elaborately and permanently or made quite simply, as with a portable canvas or with a dirt path marked by rocks or masking tape.

Why Walk the Labyrinth?

Labyrinths are currently being used worldwide in a variety of ways: to seek spiritual guidance, to quiet the mind, to cope with problems or loss, to reduce stress or develop more balance, to ease transition, to increase creativity or simply to be self-reflective.

Phyllis Pilgrim, director of mind-body-spirit and specialty week programs at Rancho La Puerta in Tecate, Mexico, notes that the labyrinth experience is ideal for many types of people, regardless of their spiritual background or experience with mind-body practices. "[If you are] more comfortable being active than still, the labyrinth is a nice opportunity to meditate, or [to] make the transition to seated meditation."

Experiencing the Labyrinth

The process of walking the labyrinth involves three phases: walking toward the

Labyrinth Resources

Want to find out what the experience of a labyrinth is like? Try the online "finger meditation" labyrinth exercise at www.gracecathedral.org. Of course, it's not the same as actually walking a labyrinth. To find out if there is a labyrinth located in your area, see the labyrinth locator service at www.labyrinthsociety.org.

For another worldwide labyrinth locator and for books by the renowned labyrinth expert Rev. Dr. Lauren Artress, see www.veriditas.net.

center, the stage of releasing or letting go of thoughts or cares; reaching the center, the stage of receiving new insight or spiritual grace; and walking back out, the stage of union or of returning to the world with new awareness. The labyrinth can be walked individually or as a group (single-file), and is often done slowly, in silence or to soft music.

Pilgrim advises labyrinth walkers to clear their minds for the experience, have no expectations and just be open to their thoughts and feelings as they walk. "You make of it what you want," she says. "People often describe the experience as very pleasant, calming and centering. There are many different approaches you can take. For example, you can think of something specific, like peace, at every step. Or you can write down or think of a question or problem and see what answers come as you walk. There does seem to be something powerful about walking back and forth in the concentric circles of the labyrinth." ■

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