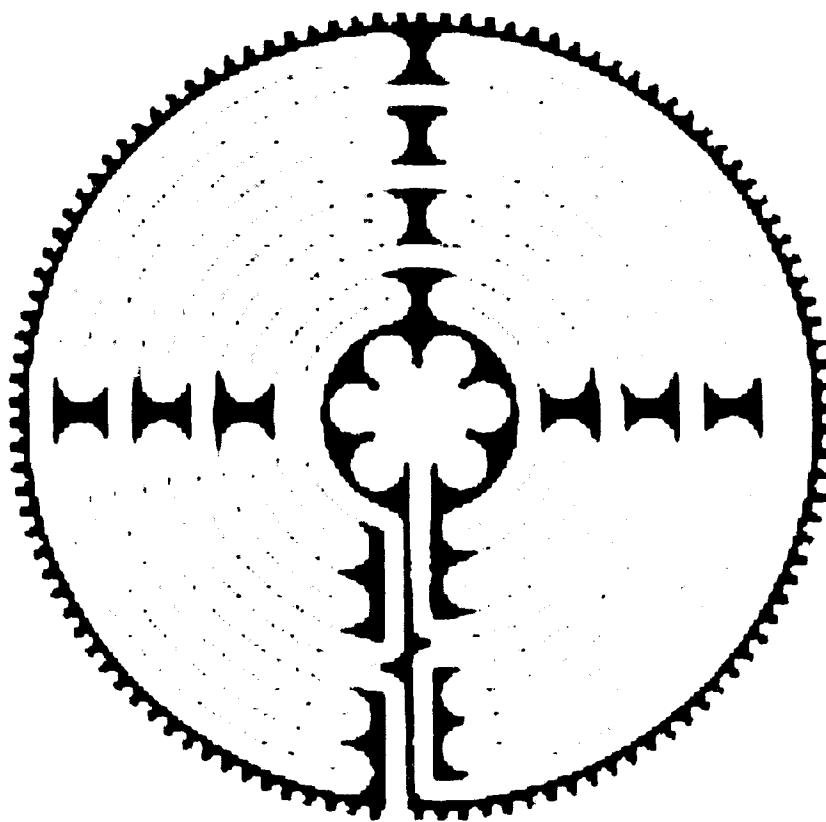


Walking the Pilgrim's Path

A Journal for Labyrinth Walkers



A Personal Pilgrimage

A pilgrimage is a journey taken in faith and hope to a sacred place. The journey provides direct experience, reflection and conversation so that a person can see how compassionate acts of justice, peace and loving-kindness reveal God at work. Knowledge can grow into understanding. Which in turn can lead to action. When one goes on pilgrimage, one seeks to find Christ. Christ is always there, waiting.

Persons who journey to sacred places are pilgrims. They have within them the motivating promise that in seeking God they will find God. In The Book of Common Prayer, we are Pilgrims seek answers to deep questions, traveling in the spirit of open attentiveness to the Sacred. Pilgrimage Manuals throughout history counsel living mindfully. The mindful person approaches life's experiences with "soulfulness." Ray Charles defines "soulfulness" as the ability to respond to our deepest place. Preparation, intention, experiences, and reflection engender mindful and soulful attitudes. As a pilgrim be open, attentive and responsive.

A pilgrimage is an outward journey reflecting an inward journey, a spiritual exercise that helps each out toward God and deepens our relationship with God. The pilgrim seeks to follow the spirit's compass, which guides us to find an inner openness to the outer world of people, places, and events that become the fabric of our lives.

O God, our heavenly Father, whose glory fills the whole creation, and whose presence we find wherever we go: Preserve those who travel, in particular those who travel the Labyrinth this day; surround them with your loving care; protect them from every danger; and bring them safely to their journeys' end; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer, p. 831

"The glory of God is the human person fully alive." *Irenaeus*

Walking the Labyrinth

There is no right way to walk a labyrinth.

You only have to enter and follow the path. However, your walk can encompass a variety of attitudes. It may be joyous or somber. It might be thoughtful or prayerful. You may use it as a walking meditation.

When you walk a labyrinth choose your attitude. From time to time choose a different attitude. Make it serious, prayerful, or playful. Play music or sing. Pray out loud. Walk alone and with a crowd. Notice the sky. Listen to the sounds. Most of all pay attention to your experience

Preparation

How do I choose to walk the labyrinth today?

Why am I choosing this attitude?

What am I bringing with me on this walk? Is there something heavy on my heart? Is there a question I would like to offer up to God?

What are my hopes for this walk? Do I have any expectations?

What is a Labyrinth?

Labyrinths are ancient human symbols known to go back at least 3,500 years and probably much older. They appeared on most inhabited continents in prehistory, with examples known from North & South America, Africa, Asia and across Europe from the Mediterranean to Scandinavia. The labyrinth symbols were incorporated into the floors of the great gothic pilgrimage cathedrals of France in the 12th and 13th centuries.

The most famous of these remaining labyrinths is in the nave floor of the Cathedral of Notre Dame de Chartres outside of Paris, France. An eleven-circuit labyrinth, it was built around 1200 and is laid into the floor in a style sometimes referred to as a pavement maze. The original centerpiece has been removed and other areas of the labyrinth have been restored.

There was a time when Jerusalem was considered the center of the world. Christians would attempt to make the pilgrimage at least once during their lifetime. When the journey became dangerous due to conflict among people, the labyrinth, a sacred path to the divine, was introduced as a means of taking such a spiritual journey. In the past it could be walked as a pilgrimage and/or for repentance. As a pilgrimage it was a questing, searching journey with the hope of becoming closer to God. When used for repentance the pilgrims would walk on their knees. Serving as a substitute for an actual pilgrimage to Jerusalem, as a result labyrinths came to be called the "Chemin de Jerusalem" or Road of Jerusalem.

In walking the Chartres style labyrinth the walker meanders through each of the four quadrants several times before reaching the goal. An expectancy is created as to when the center will be reached. At the center is a six-petaled rosette, a Medieval symbol for Mary as well as a metaphor for enlightenment. The four arms of the cross are readily visible and provide significant Christian symbolism. The four-month lunar calendar around the perimeter is a mechanism for calculating the date of Easter; documents lead to the belief that this labyrinth was used by the clergy for an Easter ceremony.

Why do we walk a Labyrinth?

A labyrinth is not a maze, but a walking meditation device with a single winding path from the edge to the center. There are no tricks, choices or dead ends in a labyrinth walk. The same path is used to return to the outside. Combining a number of even older symbols, including the circle, spiral and meander, the labyrinth represents the journey inward to our own true selves and back out into the everyday world.

Walking a labyrinth is a right brain activity (creative, intuitive, imaginative), and can induce or enhance a contemplative or meditative state of mind. It is a tool, which can clear the mind: calm our anxieties during periods of transition and stress, guide healing, deepen self-knowledge, enhance creativity, allow for reconciliation, restore feelings of belonging to a community, and lead to personal and spiritual growth.

For many walkers, the labyrinth becomes a metaphor for the journey of life: although full of twists and turns, each of us is on a single path through his or her life, and yet each person's journey is a separate and distinct qualitative experience. In walking labyrinths, modern seekers are emulating and recapturing the pilgrimage tradition of many ancient faiths.

The Threefold Path

There are many approaches to the labyrinth. One Christian approach to the labyrinth is based on the "threefold path" of Purgation, Illumination, and Union. These represent three stages in a labyrinth walk.

1. *Releasing* (Purgation). From the entrance to the goal is the path of shedding or "letting go." There is a release and an emptying of worries and concerns.
2. *Receiving* (Illumination). At the center there is illumination, insight, clarity, and focus. It is here that you are in a receptive, prayerful, meditative state.
3. *Integrating* (Union). Empowerment and taking ownership. The path out is that of becoming grounded and integrating the insight. It is being energized and making what was received manifest in the world.

There are three stages but one path, and it is different for everyone.

What do I need to "let go" and "release" as I begin my walk?

If you came this way,
Taking any route, starting from anywhere,
At any time or at any season,
It would always be the same: you would have to put off
Sense and notion. You are not here to verify,
Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity
Or to carry report. You are here to kneel
Where prayer had been valid. And prayer is more
Than an order of words, the conscious occupation
Of the praying mind, or the sound of voice praying.
And what the dead had no speech for, when living,
They can tell you, being dead; the communication
Of the dead is tongues with fire beyond the language of the living.

"Four Quarters" by T. S. Eliot

"Palms Up, Palms Down"

Enter the labyrinth and walk to the center with "palms down" (symbolizing release) and center your thoughts on releasing conflictual issues and concerns in your life. When you reach the center turn your "palms up" to be receptive to insight. As you walk out of the labyrinth keep your palms up to receive strength and guidance to make your insight manifest. As you leave the labyrinth turn to face the center and bring you "palms together" for a prayerful end to your walk.

Some general guidelines for walking a labyrinth are:

1. *Focus:* Pause and wait at the entrance. Become quiet and centered. Give acknowledgment through a bow, nod, or other gesture and then enter.
2. *Experience:* Walk purposefully. Observe the process. When you reach the center, stay there and focus several moments. Leave when it seems appropriate. Be attentive on the way out.
3. *Exit:* Turn and face the entrance. Give an acknowledgement of ending, such as "Amen."
4. *Reflect:* After walking the labyrinth reflect back on your experience. Use journaling or drawing to capture your experience.
5. *Walk often.*

Approaches to the Walk

Gracious Attention – simply quiet the mind, choosing to let all thoughts go when they present themselves in your awareness.

Asking a Question – journal your thoughts before the walk: this gives a focus and context in which to hear from the still, small voice within

The Use of Repetition – meditate by using a word, a mantra or a phrase over and over to yourself

Abba (Father in Aramaic)

~

Come Holy Spirit, Come

~

May I dwell in the heart
May I be free from suffering
May I be healed
May I be at peace

Journal Reflections

The Road Traveled

You shall not bear hatred for your neighbor in your heart. Though you may have cause to reprove your neighbor, do not incur sin because of him or her. Take no revenge and cherish no grudge against those of your own country. You shall love your neighbor as yourself. I am your God. (Leviticus 19:17)

Moses told us not to do what comes naturally, not to follow the “natural” low road of our primal nature. Moses told us to take the high road, to respond to the higher nature within us.

Reflect:

On which of the two roads – or alternating from one to the other – you habitually travel. How do you detour from the low road to reach the high road when you are caught up in strong emotion?

Sacred Sentences

All the way to God is God (Catherine of Siena)

I am the Way (Jesus in John 3:16)

From the Unreal lead me to the Real (The Upanishads)

Reflect:

How are you aware that when you are really on the way you stand face to face with the Divine Mystery?

Your Life's Work

You are the temple of God. (1 Corinthians 3:18)

Reflect:

How do you view your life's work: as part of the building up of a great cathedral – the church, the Body of Christ – or simply as a means to make a living?

How can you learn to see that whatever work you do is part of the great and divine design to re-create the world?

The pilgrim seeks to follow the spirit's compass, which guides us to find an inner openness to the outer world of people, places, and events that become the fabric of our lives.

The Rev. Dr. Lauren Artress, "Walking a Sacred Path"

Reflections of the Walk

How did I feel as I began the walk?

Did I pass someone? Did someone pass me? What was it like to encounter another person along the path?

How did it feel to reach the center? What thoughts entered my mind?

What caused me to decide to begin the journey outward?