

Labyrinths

How to Take the Inward Journey

Archeologists believe labyrinths date back 4,500 years, though no physical evidence survives. It is believed their designs evolved from universal patterns found in nature. The paths weave back and forth between quadrants, creating mystery within the walk. All are designed with a single meandering path that leads to the center. The path is traveled in reverse for the outbound journey.

The labyrinth brings you to meditation. It makes you slow down. It keeps bringing you to your inner self. The way it works is that it uses both sides of the brain: The right brain is intuitive. The labyrinth allows the right brain to arise with answers from what is inside you. The left brain solves. Walking and navigating keep your left brain occupied. The right brain is then free to be aware of problems. A lot of solutions may surface. Labyrinths also assist walkers to find answers because of symmetry. A pleasing system of geometry allows the mind to find rest and harmony.

The pattern can be thought of as a pattern of our lives or as a journey to God. Traveling to the center for some may represent rebirth, initiation or healing. The walk is really a metaphor for centering oneself on an inward journey. A meditative state of mind helps in accessing the powers of the labyrinth. The labyrinth should not be rushed. The journey is more successful when you settle yourself ahead of time and begin in a prayerful frame of mind.

Aside from being open, a period of prayer, meditation or reflection should precede the walk. Begin the journey when you feel ready. Take the journey at a comfortable pace. The path toward the center may be walked in prayer, in expectation of answers or just simply walked. For some, praying the Rosary on the inbound journey has a calming effect.

Arrival at the center of the labyrinth brings the journey into a new phase. The center can be viewed as God or can represent our deepest self or our efforts to arrive at true self-knowledge. There is no wrong or right way to view the labyrinth.

For the journey out, remember it's the same length as the way in. Many people walk the outbound path with praise and gratitude. But walkers can continue to pray or experience the peace and healing of the labyrinth. A period of reflection is a good idea after walking the labyrinth.

Centering oneself by walking a labyrinth and coming to God has brought walkers to healing or has led them to answers they were seeking. One family who had been grieving over the loss of their father was told to go around the labyrinth with their memories and walk their grief. They came back and shared their stories with tears and laughs. It was a healing experience for all.

A Labyrinth brings you back to who you are. It brings you to your bare spirit, to who you really are inside. The labyrinth speaks to you without words. It answers questions. It reminds you of the power of God, not humans. A tool that can do all that is amazing. It's definitely worth a try.

Questions for Reflection when Walking a Labyrinth

- What am I experiencing?
- Are there any surprises?
- How do I parallel this with my own life story?
- Where am I on my journey at this moment in time?
- Am I at the beginning or far from the center?
- Have I found the center? The treasure? How does it feel?

(From the August 2005 issue of St. Anthony Messenger)