

WALKING THE LABYRINTH AS A SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

In the context of labyrinths created for symbolic, spiritual, or religious purposes, a labyrinth is a meandering path, with a singular path leading to a center. There are no tricks to it and no dead ends. Unlike a maze where you lose your way, the labyrinth is a single, continuous path – one way in and the same way out



There is no right or wrong way to walk a labyrinth. You can walk it alone or with others, you can walk it slowly or quickly. While you typically walk from the outside into the middle and back out; you could start in the middle, walk out and then walk back in. The labyrinth is symbolic, it is a tool or resource and only you can decide what it will symbolize or be used for and what meaning might be given to your experience.

What To Expect

As with many things in life, if you can give up, let go, or set aside any expectation of any particular outcome, you will be more available and open to receive whatever might be available from the experience of walking the labyrinth. Expectations take us out of the present moment. One of the benefits of walking the labyrinth is to bring us into the present moment.

So, my advice to you is to expect nothing . . . and be open to receiving anything.

Preparation

While preparation is not required, as a practice preparation creates the context for your experience and can create the conditions that will be more likely to create a meaningful experience for you.

You can spend as much time as you feel you need before starting your walk in the labyrinth. You may want to pray or journal or sit quietly and reflect on what's going on in your life, in the world or what's important to you. You may take some time to get clear on a specific question you want answered, a concern for which you desire guidance, or a person or situation you want to bring in prayer.

If you don't have much time, you can simply take a minute or two to set your intention – why are you walking the labyrinth today? Some examples of intentions include: to relax or calm down, to be fully present in each moment, to express gratitude, to connect with your true Self, to pray for someone or some situation, to be open to the guidance of or deepen your relationship with God/Spirit/the Divine/Your Higher Power, etc.



A Brief Note About Spiritual Practices

"Spiritual practices are not like other practices we may have in our lives like exercise or nutrition. Those practices tend to have a set of instructions or rules which if you follow produces particular results. Spiritual practices are not like this. The only promise spiritual practices make is to teach those who engage in them what those practitioners need to know – about being human, about being human with other people, about being human in creation, about being human before God."

~ Barbara Brown Taylor, An Altar in the World: A Geography of Faith

A LABYRINTH WALK SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: A MEDITATION TOOL

We don't have to go on some great pilgrimage to benefit spiritually from walking. We can simply walk with some intention and attention.

Bring your meditation practice to the labyrinth

In the same way that you approach meditation while sitting, you can walk the labyrinth and meditate. As you walk into the center, you can focus on your breathing and/or repeat a mantra, sacred word or scripture passage, or simply walk slowly and mindfully.

In the Center, simply pause as long as you like and be still – standing, kneeling or sitting. Then as you walk back out of the labyrinth, continue with your silent meditation.

This can be especially helpful if you've had a particularly busy day, been rushing about, or are simply unable to sit still. Since the labyrinth consists of a single path into the center and you follow the same path back out, there are no decisions to make as you walk. You do not have to be concerned about where you are going – simply put one foot in front of the other. The walking allows your body to move and gives your mind something to focus on – just enough so that it becomes quieter.



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LABYRINTH WALK SPIRITUAL PRACTICE: LETTING GO – GRATITUDE

This practice can be particularly helpful if you are feeling anxious, upset, overwhelmed or your head just feels “full” or your mind won’t stop and the thoughts just keep coming.

Immediately Before Entering the Labyrinth

Step 1 - PREPARATION: Breathe and set an intention. Pause at the threshold, the entrance to the labyrinth, before you start walking. In this moment, you may want to set an intention for your walk. Possible intentions could be to feel calm, peaceful, or fully present; to receive guidance or insight for a worry, problem or decision; or to relax and rest. You could also say a prayer or blessing, hold your hands in prayer position and/or bow, take one or more deep breaths, or simply acknowledge that you are about to enter a sacred, special space and time.

Step 2 – LETTING GO: As you are walking in, notice any thoughts, concerns, worries, or your to-do list. Breathe and let them go. Imagine that you are “dropping” them along the path or setting them down or putting them in a bucket – knowing that they will all be there when you finish, if you still want or need them. Or you could pick up a handful of small stones before you start or leaves (or something else that doesn’t create trash) and literally drop them one by one as you walk and let go of your thoughts and concerns.

Step 3 – BEING PRESENT: In the center, pause for as long as you want. Take a few deep breaths, be fully present, be attentive, be open to receiving or simply rest. If you find your mind still wandering, bring your attention to your breath and any body sensations. When you are ready, start walking back out.

Step 4 – BEING GRATEFUL: As you are walking out, call to mind and name what you have received or anything you are grateful for, things you want to carry out with you into your life and into the world. Imagine picking them up or putting them into a bucket or basket.

Step 5 – GRATITUDE & BLESSING: As you finish your walk and step out of the labyrinth, turn and pause, breathe. Say a brief prayer or blessing, place your hands in prayer position and/or bow, or simply acknowledge this sacred time in the labyrinth.

