

Helpful Considerations for Walking the Labyrinth

The labyrinth is a sacred place set aside for you to reflect, look within, pray, negotiate new behavior, and explore your relationship with God as you move through the complexities of life. It is helpful to understand **there are NO required “shoulds” or “oughts”** to be enforced while walking any labyrinth. Thus, the following thoughts are only offered as helpful considerations, and are **NOT** necessarily prerequisites to healing and transformation.

- 1. Preparing For A Walk** can be helpful as you begin to quiet the mind, focus your thoughts, and prepare to mindfully experience the possibilities of this experience. How you prepare is up to you. Some people find that focusing on their breathing helps. For some, a simple prayer repeatedly recited to yourself, setting a specific intention for this walk, just being quiet for a while, or even journaling can be a helpful prelude to walking the labyrinth.
- 2. Offering Sacred Acknowledgement** just before entering, or when exiting, the labyrinth is often valuable for bringing meaning to an experience with a labyrinth. It has been said that what you hold close to the heart is, in essence, sacred. Even small actions, offered intentionally from the heart, can facilitate powerful experiences in the journey of life. Such an action at the beginning or end of a labyrinth walk might include some meaningful habit you learned years ago, or something that emerged from a specific moment in time. For some this might be making the sign of the cross, or holding your hands in a prayer position, or some other gesture that expresses your humility, gratitude or openness.
- 3. Removing Your Shoes** is sometimes requested by those who own canvas labyrinths as a way to help keep the canvas clean. But the removal of shoes is also, perhaps more so, about an attitude of reverence. It brings the possibility of the experience holding sacred intent. It can be an action of symbolically shedding the over-active self-protection that keeps one separated from an intimacy with holiness. Often it can bring a deeper level of blessing, comfort, and joy to our experience.
- 4. Find Your Own Natural Pace:** Move with the rhythm that your body wants to go. This may change as you move throughout the stages of the walk. Walking at a speed you think someone else “expects” you to walk can impoverish you, keep you from being renewed, or even just make the walk frustrating. When you follow your own natural pace, feel free to move around others or let them move around you.
- 5. The Path is a Two-Way Street:** You might enter the labyrinth when someone is on his or her return journey. If so, you will meet that person on the path. To stay with your own meditation, you may want to keep your eyes focused on the path. If you feel you want to greet that person in whatever spontaneous way -- and it feels right between the two of you -- do so. Doing what feels natural is an important guideline for labyrinth walking. It connects us to who we are blessed to be.
- 6. The Labyrinth is a Metaphor** for everything that is your life. In the labyrinth our experience offers a way of teaching us about the bigger picture. Everything that happens begs the question, “How is this like my life?” from the smallest reaction to something that happens, something you notice or the actions of another person -- to your emerging

feelings, choices you make (or choose to not make) and everything else that happens while walking. Use everything that happens to you on the labyrinth as a metaphor.

7. **Handling Expectations:** If you focus on what you think should be happening, rather than on what is actually unfolding, you will miss the experience. Practice mindfulness. “Experience your experience” is the guideline and teaching. Take care to not **impose** an agenda. Be present and available to even the most subtle experience on the labyrinth, even and especially if it is not what you expected or hoped for.
8. **Reflecting on the Walk:** Journaling, drawing, and/or sketching can be a helpful way to reflect on a walk and bring even the most subtle experience to light. These are ways to bring what is unfocused, dim, and hazy into focus. Such non-verbal reflection offers a way to hold on to an experience in a way so that meaning can emerge. Journaling and drawing are not meant to interpret, but rather to freely capture the experience. Only later will you know intuitively what each image means.
9. **Walking the Labyrinth’s Perimeter:** Sometimes a person is not ready to go into the labyrinth, or upon walking – they are not ready for their walk to be finished. Walking around the outside of the labyrinth can be a helpful prelude or conclusion to a walk; a place outside the labyrinth to get ready or to complete your meditation. Listen to your body and let it guide you; walk in the direction your body wants to go.
10. **Distractions and Unexpected Feelings:** If, while walking, you find yourself distracted by other people, thoughts, or feelings that get in the way, then “Pray the distraction.” Follow the distraction to where it leads. What is your irritation about? Judgment? Fear? There may be a lesson here you did not expect, but if you reflect on it, it may enlighten you. Hold your distractions softly and consider them with gentleness. This is also true for unexpected feelings which arise during your walk, even feelings you did not know you had. Unexpected feelings are common within and around labyrinths. Let them be present. Don’t try to figure them out during the walk; experience your experience. Stay with the feelings until they run their course. Journaling after such an experience can be helpful.
11. **Being Comfortable with the Walk:** Walking labyrinths is like other spiritual practices. Even though walking a labyrinth is a very easy thing, sometimes it takes staying with the practice (walking labyrinths enough times) until you become familiar with the basics. Once you are comfortable, you will feel more free to try different things, to truly make the experience your own. The lesson is to be patient and hold your experience softly; like most practices, the labyrinth offers itself most fully to those who make it a regular part of their life.

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