

Walking the Labyrinth

Ancient cultures and religions would prepare those initiates, who aspired to reach higher consciousness, with a series of tests to take them to the galactic source and back. These tests included walking the path of the maze, or labyrinth. The initiates would be required to confront and overcome their fear of losing themselves within the dark passages, both literally and figuratively. Ultimately, however, there was only one path to the center and if the initiate would get in touch with one's inner voice, he or she could find the way to the center and back. While labyrinths have almost always been associated with myth and legend, and have had somewhat dark connotations, they have, only in the last decade, been reintroduced for study and exploration, amidst a multifaceted revival. The symbolism of the labyrinth and the renewed interest in them pose somewhat of a mystery in itself. So what is the great secret of the labyrinth and why the sudden interest in its uses?

Labyrinths have existed in many different cultures and religions, but partially as a result of modern uses of communications and video/audio technology for religious purposes, they have lost much, if not all, of their spiritual value as a tool for transformation. Religion itself does not practice spirituality and has become a purveyor of modern hypnotherapy via hi-tech bells, whistles, and broadcast equipment that produce mass hysteria. The more fundamentalist the religion, the more extreme is the use of these control mechanisms. Religion, itself, is no less an institution than is government, politics, or education, and similarly imposes external rules, regulations and restrictions to manipulate personal behavior and beliefs.

But spirituality, an internal experience, has all but disappeared in most modern religions. At one time, spiritual experiences were shared by cultures, religions and individuals, and provided the participants an opportunity to communicate directly with the divine. The labyrinth, or sacred path, served as a tool toward achieving this spirituality. But now modern technology produces a fear-induced OZ effect on most followers who have lost that personal connection between God, themselves, and their inner path. Instead, they pray for salvation, rather than enlightenment, from a techno-wizard hiding beyond a wall of wires, TV equipment and holographic images. And within this new maze of wires and technobabble, they've lost sight of the light at the end of their own spiritual tunnel. The labyrinth is neither a modern innovation nor a complicated technology. It does not require knowledge of how to make it work. It is a design of nature, found in many elements in the universe and on this planet. Ultimately, it is a tool that is and always has been with us and within us for use and personal growth. But its exceptional nature and function have been purposely veiled by our modern institutions, in an attempt to keep us from making our own personal connections to the creative source. This, however, is changing as more and more people are looking for answers outside these failing institutions.

Some cultures, particularly those that are indigenous, have never lost their spiritual roots and sacred tools, although our western institutions have tried like hell to change that. And many of the indigenous groups, who inherited Western-style religion and cultural practices, are turning back to their roots as they see Western civilization destroying our environment and the female element of nature.

What they know and what we are relearning, especially in more open-style Western-religious traditions, is that the female element is responsible for leading us to the source just by nature of our design, which we'll explore later. And that source is in the geometric form of a spiral or labyrinth. There is a slight difference between the labyrinth and the maze. The maze has dead ends and the initiate must find the way back onto the path, whereas the labyrinth has no dead ends. But in real life, our experiences are much like a maze in that we have momentary lapses of movements, we sometimes must back up, or we stray off the path. The labyrinth itself is a circular path to the center but many initiates still find themselves walking off the path regardless of its clearly defined direction. The yellow brick road in the Wizard of Oz was also a clearly defined path but as in the movie, in real life we always find distractions that take us off the path.

Indigenous groups understand these distractions and for many of their initiation rituals they built mazes into their labyrinths to force the initiate to become alert quickly when they strayed from the beaten path. Unfortunately, because of the electro-magnetic maze of wires and techno-babble that our religious institutions and leaders today have created to manipulate us down our spiritual paths, our own internal radar and sonar can no longer detect these dead-ends and snags. The road to hell is always paved with "good intentions" or more accurately with "superficial distractions and enticements". The labyrinth, on the other hand, manifesting both the dark and light sides of the vision spectrum, functions as a path that takes us from the outside to the inside and from the inside to the outside, covering all that there is or ever was. In its true sacred form, it takes us from the lower realms to the higher realms, and from our divergent paths to the source and back, all in one spiral path known as life. The labyrinth, in its natural spiral form, is a form of harmonic geometry that exists between dimensions, and only the spiral is able to bridge the physical with the spiritual. This spiral formation, known as the Fibonnaci spiral, is the basis of all creation and is seen in nature in very basic life forms such as flower petals, pinecones and nautilus shells, for example .Our own Milky Way galaxy is a spiral starting in the dark galactic center and spiraling outward, and we are a living, breathing part of that spiral.

Per Miriam-Webster, Fibonnaci math is defined as "an integer in the infinite sequence 1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13, ...etc., of which the first two terms are 1 and 1 and each succeeding term is the sum of the two immediately preceding." Harmonics are defined as "one whose vibrational frequency is an integral multiple of that of the fundamental". When viewed geometrically, one sees a spiral formation that never ends as it spirals inward and outward starting with one, then repeating itself, and then adding to itself incrementally. This is the spiral that makes up female DNA. While male DNA is also circular, it forms in 90-degree angles and thus, in a nutshell, does not have the ability to reproduce itself.

Thus, the circular or spiral formation is a metaphor for the mystical journey of eternal life where we gain awareness of self, and then continue to grow and expand our consciousness through life, death and rebirth.

Subsequently, the spiral has been used as a sacred tool and an experiential test for those who seek a connection to the galactic center, or life-giving/life-taking cosmic source. Indigenous cultures used this sacred tool as part of their regular spiritual practices and initiations.

And, in fact, early Christianity also used the labyrinth as part of its sacred practices and worship of the female aspect of life; that is, until the church decided that control and manipulation of the female was far more important than making contact with the source of our creation, illumination, inspiration and awareness.

One of the more recently renovated (within the last five years) and interesting cultural sites is Oxkintok, in the Yucatan peninsula, not far from Merida. This Mayan site is interesting because it has a series of labyrinth-type structures although not all are obvious. The name Oxkintok means "of the devil". It is so named because one of the excavations at this site uncovered an approximate eight-foot statue of a being that looks like an extraterrestrial humanoid, with deeply scooped areas on both sides of the head and one at the root chakra. These scooped areas may have been used for candles, crystals, or possibly other items of transmission and reception. The archeological teams that named the site, having had no other basis of recognition or insight, thus named it Oxkintok.

These extraterrestrial contacts would be received as the result of a spiral transmission through the devil's crystals, which surround his invisible "third eye", connecting to and transmitting through the point of the root chakra, that final scooped area, otherwise known as the internal galactic source. The transmission pattern through the crystals could be seen as an inverted triangle if an invisible line were drawn between all the scooped areas. The root chakra, or source of life, with its subsequent spiral transmissions, serves as a catalyst to not only the internal source of life but to all life in the cosmos. The humorous and old adage of "contemplating one's navel" takes on new significance in light of its function. It is through this spiral transmission that a new soul enters the body and new DNA is structured. Does this mean that "the devil" is responsible for life and death? Not so.

Remember that this archaeological structure was only named as such because of the ignorance of archaeologists to its true meaning and purpose. However, this does not mean that the structure itself is not representative of the life/death cycle that has been our cosmic heritage. As such, its message, coming from the depths of the dark galactic night, may be alien in nature and frightening, at best, as we remain veiled to our true cosmic identities. The Mayans used these spiral structures to get in touch with the galactic source, much as other cultures and religions built or drew labyrinth-type spirals in caves, gardens, and churches to get in touch with their spiritual identities.

Oxkintok is very unusual because it includes other structures not found at most other Mayan sacred sites. Besides the extraterrestrial structure, there is also a labyrinth-type structure that opens in a low meadow with twists and turns until the initiate has climbed up a series of intermittent stairs to reach the top of the structure, which exits into a higher meadow. In my opinion, this site was used by shamans and initiates to gain access to, and control of, their hidden nature and the hidden side of nature, in general.

At Oxkintok, Shamans were more than likely required to confront the dark or shadow side of their soul and integrate it into their consciousness. Whether they confronted that dark nature first in their meeting with "the devil", or as a result of their journey through the labyrinth, has not been determined.

It would appear, however, that they would need to pass the test of the labyrinth, to meet head on with their own internal "devil", or dead-end paths, to be able to understand, discern and integrate subconscious, interdimensional and extraterrestrial transmissions, alternately referred to as God-induced transmissions.

For those who took the journey to the center and back, these cosmic transmissions opened up a window to the soul and to collective memories. The Shamans and initiates who studied at Oxkintok were most likely aware that they were dealing with a force that could only be contacted and understood through a deep regression of self into one's center, and then back. Thus, the spiral served as yet another tool on the path of cosmic transcendence and transformation. In more open Christian traditions, there is also the belief that self-awareness and spiritualism are gained through knowing and transforming one's shadow side. When we deny our shadow it manifests as hatred and projects itself onto others. Unless we learn to integrate the shadow side and face our internal darkness we cannot overcome hatred, prejudice or war. And by far, the worst application of our unacknowledged shadow side is our constant propagation of religious wars in the name of self-righteous indignation.

Contrary to public opinion, the hidden or dark side of nature can be our best friend because it teaches us how to identify and overcome adversity, the unknown and fear. It also teaches us how to identify our dark self and the dark self of others so as not to be overwhelmed by those forces, allowing us to move above and beyond the dark night. The labyrinth can certainly be a tool toward uncovering the dark side of our nature. If we are in denial or stray off the path, the dark side is always there to greet us. But if we can identify the dark and awaken from the hypnotic effects of our digression, we can avoid the lengthy pitfalls and challenges that accompany this falling out. However, as digressions are a part of life, it is rare that a soul evolves without having to experience some of these short falls.

Last, the shadow side of the labyrinth allows us to get in touch with the remote avenues or spirals of our own soul, which have been hidden in our akashic memory banks for lifetimes.

The labyrinth functions as a tool that forces us to go to our center and confront our deepest collective aggressions and fears, allowing us to identify, transform and release them, lest we become the Cretan minotaur who requires a constant feeding of fear to live out its eternal life in a hellish, half-dead zombie state.

However, there is the lighter or more philosophical and psychological side to the spiral, or labyrinth, that can be used by the novice. It comes without the heavy initiatory challenges that indigenous groups practiced on their spiritual paths, or that Dorothy, of Wizard of Oz fame, confronted in her spiritual pilgrimage to return home.

According to Rev. Lauren Artress, author of *Walking a Sacred Path*, who serves as the Canon for Special Ministries at Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, the labyrinth is a metaphor for: "The journey to our center of being and the creation of order through chaos.

“Completion, competition, emptying, turning our back on the center, distrusting our judgment, whatever our psyches need to deal with, becomes the spiritual lesson of the labyrinth. It captures the mystical union between heaven and earth, an understanding of death and rebirth. It is a path of faith and doubt, the complexity of the brain, the turns of the intestines and the birth canal, and the celestial city. In medieval times the labyrinth was said to reflect our entanglements in a deceitful world, unless we allowed God to guide us along the way”.

At Chartres, in France, there is a labyrinth on the floor of the great cathedral. It has since been duplicated by numerous other churches, and in particular, Grace Cathedral in San Francisco. An esoteric school existed at Chartres between the sixth and twelfth centuries and it taught four of the original sciences: the science of numbers, the science of geometry or space, the science of astronomy and the science of music or harmony. It is believed that all of these sciences were integrated into the design of the labyrinth of Our Lady of Chartres Cathedral. At that time, birth and female mysteries were central images in religious, social and cultural life, and also the main theme for the building of Our Lady of Chartres. Also at that time, the medieval mystical themes of love, life, rebirth and flow were far more venerated than the themes that the church later replaced them with: religious war, ethnic cleansing, willful death and force.

Chartres was supposedly the center of the cult of the Magdalene. For those not currently in the know, Mary Magdalene not only was a disciple of Christ, but was supposedly his wife and lover, and there is currently research supporting this theory. The church, however, in its strive for power and patriarchal control, suppressed all information related to any female disciples and permanent relationships. The labyrinth at Chartres became no more than a decorative feature as did anything that was remotely female following this period of time. But the power of the spiral never diminished or disappeared; it was only temporarily lost in the conscious scheme of things.

There are also some theories that Mary Magdalene’s bones are buried beneath the Chartres labyrinth. With that in mind, it is easy to make a leap to another aspect of the spiral web that creates life from the womb of the female: that of the spider. It has been noted that the Chartres labyrinth is minted on coins from Cnossus. This labyrinth is the same design as the one of the Cretan minotaur earlier mentioned. Daedalus of Greek-myth fame supposedly designed this Cnossus labyrinth as a dancing floor for Ariadne. The thread that was used to find the way out of the labyrinth is a metaphor for the thread produced by the spider Ariadne, or Arachne, the spider woman.

Eastern spirituality takes this further teaching that the spider is the symbol of the mother who is within and without the world. She gives birth to the world while being in it and is the spider of life while the world is her web; thus, she creates the spiral web and then lives as an integral part of it.

The Fibonacci spiral is a formation that exists in every form of nature, from DNA to spider webs. Sometimes its pattern and resources are hidden and sometimes they’re not. Today, the spiral is gaining new ground and some of the more obscure meanings and uses are being unveiled.

It is no surprise that as we find ourselves at the end of a cosmic age as defined by indigenous cultures, entering a new undefined age, that we look for ways to identify the shady areas of our collective unconscious and dust out the cobwebs that have hindered our spiritual path and clouded our vision. The mystery of life, death, rebirth and creation is becoming available to anyone with an interest to search beyond the physical. Sometimes that means leaving the institutions that we were taught to believe in. When one lets go of beliefs in outside authoritarian sources and begins to look within, then a labyrinth of possibilities opens up. This labyrinth takes you both deeper within and without. When within, you can find the source of your fears, your pain and your illusions. When without, you can create new and exciting possibilities for your future.

Either way, the collective voices of the cosmos become accessible but as result one must become alert and discerning. It is important not to fall prey to indiscriminate acceptance of these new realms of communication. In the labyrinth, while you can open up to other dimensions, they do have the same pitfalls as the mazes of today's religious institutions, with their superficial communication methodologies and voodoo magic. There are many dead-ends that you must learn to detect and discern on your way to the center. The challenge is to be aware of your own weaknesses and fears so that you are not deceived into digressing off the sacred path. When you follow your joy by letting go of your fears and your digressions, the road to the center and out is more likely to produce a smooth ride home.

And as Glinda, the good witch of the North, said to Dorothy in Frank Baum's WRITTEN version of the Wizard of Oz, "Your SILVER shoes will carry you over the desert. If you had known their power you could have gone back to your Aunt Em the very first day you came to this country." And so, if we carefully follow our own sacred path and the footsteps that created that path, we too can return home quickly from our self-imposed spiritual exile.

Editor's Note: "Silver" represents the moon, which is synonymous with reflected light or the "shadow side" of the light.

In Lakech, Dawn