

THE PATH THROUGH SILENCE

The path through silence is called the apophatic path. It is the path of meditation or contemplation which leads us to the center of our being. We plant the seed of silence within ourselves by quieting the mind. We allow our minds to empty of thought so we can enter our own resounding silence, a state from which we gain deep refreshment. Gregory the Great called this state “resting in God.” Experiencing the silence within is like opening a hidden door to the soul. It takes enormous patience. Thomas Keating, a Trappist monk who teaches this method of contemplation, calls it centering prayer.

The path of silence demands a disciplined concentration that many of us do not have the ability to sustain amid the chaos of our stressful lives. However, the amount of stress that we are under is what makes it so crucial that we find a method of meditation. If we do not develop this outlet in our lives, we have no way to reach the spaciousness within that allows us to move with the flow of our complex world. The labyrinth can be a tremendous help in quieting the mind, because the body is moving. Movement takes away the excess charge of psychic energy that disturbs our efforts to quiet our thought processes.



APPROACHES TO THE WALK

Gracious Attention

Asking a Question

The Use of Repetition

Reading Scripture

Asking for Help through Prayer
dear God;
dear Divine Mystery

Honoring a Benchmark in Time

THE INNER WAY: THE THREEFOLD MYSTICAL PLAN

In Western Christianity the mystical path is traditionally called the Threefold Path. The three stages that define the sequence, the process we experience as an ever-deepening sense of union with the Divine, are **Purgation**, **Illumination**, and **Union**. The hope is for self-knowledge and knowledge of one's relationship to the Divine. This is the path that is energetically embedded in the labyrinth design.

“Mysticism---in a very broad definition---is the experience of communion with Ultimate Reality.” In Christian mystical tradition, knowledge of self and knowledge of God are one. If you have gone deeply within yourself and experienced mystery of your being, the mystery of God reveals itself. Knowing the depths of our being, both the shadow and the light introduces us to the vastness of the Spirit, the Sacred held within each of us.

Purgation, the walk from the entrance of the labyrinth to its center, represents the first part of the mystical path. *Purgation* is an archaic word, from the root “to purge”---to release, to empty, to quiet. It is often experienced as shedding. We let go of the things that block communication with our Higher Power. We relinquish the things that we attempt to control. It is believed that the monks and pilgrims walked the first part of the labyrinth on their knees as a penitential act, to humble themselves before God. In order to come before the Holy One, whether we envision this force inside or outside ourselves, we need to surrender our daily concerns.

Illumination, the second stage of the Threefold Path, may be found in the center of the labyrinth. Usually it is a surprise to reach the center because the long winding path seems so “illogical.” We don't know we're there until we're there, which is often true in life. Being fully present in the moment is the key to realizing the potential of time. After we have quieted the mind on the labyrinth's path, the center is a place for meditation and prayer. Here people find insight into their problems; their lives are illuminated. We may come to clarity in the center. If we enter with an open heart and mind, we will be able to receive what is there for us.

Union begins as we leave the center of the labyrinth, following the same path back out that brought us in. In this stage, our meditation often produces a grounded, empowered feeling. Many people who have had an important experience in the center feel that this third stage of the walk gives them a way of integrating the insight they have gained. Others feel that it stokes the creative fires within. It energizes the insight. It invites us, empowers us, even pushes us to be more authentic. It gives us the confidence to take risks as we manifest our gifts in the world. Union means communing, or communion with the Holy.