

Circumambulating the Labyrinth

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Circumambulation--the act of circling round a point of reference--defines the boundaries of a sacred space by relating to a center of value, whether by meditating, by performing a sacred ritual, or by following the meander of our life. In the course of life we gradually recognize that we have "circled around" and thereby identified and protected certain central values many times.

The labyrinth often symbolizes the process of individuation. When we enter a labyrinth, such as the labyrinth on the floor of the Chartres Cathedral, we are quickly led toward the center. But soon the path veers, and as we proceed on our way, we turn right and left, switching back and forth, until we are far from the center in some peripheral alley. The early promise of reaching the center seems a hoax. At this point, the temptation may be to give up, or turn back. Surrender or defeat, however, guarantees we will never reach the center that first drew us toward it. Only if we retrace our steps out of the blind alley to the previous fork in the path and follow the other route can we hope to continue our journey.

Flight or capitulation would defeat the purpose of the whole undertaking.

At one level, our circumambulation this is personal; at another, transpersonal. At the personal level we each create a self: an identifiable, stable personality, part of our sense of who we are, our identity. As Jung says, "The idea of the circumambulatio . . . is . . . to find a centre and a container for [one's] whole psyche." At the transpersonal level we each discover our own relationship to the Greater Reality, the Higher Power, the Primal Soul. Hence circumambulating the labyrinth of one's life is both a psychological process as well as a spiritual path, the path to the Soul.

Looked at in the context of circumambulating the center along a labyrinthine path, our life's journey may be construed balancing inner and outer as we discover the center, the meaning of our individual existence in the bigger picture. As we more fully identify, embrace and ground our svadharma or true inner potential and calling, it becomes the medium through which and foundation upon which we fulfill the other dharmas or spiritual responsibilities to family, community and the primal Spirit. Over the course of a lifetime, a person who faithfully heeds the whispers of the Soul and follows the labyrinthine spiral of individuation circumambulates a virtual center point or axis that represents that person's dharma. In circumambulating the center, we repeat cycles of maya, and karma, but at progressively "higher" levels of consciousness and development that gradually approximate a realization of our innate, individual potential (the svadharma); accomplish the developmental tasks that each stage of life demands of us (ashrama dharma); discover our right relationship to our fellow human beings (varna dharma); and ever more fully live in accord with the Primal Soul, the Higher Power (reta dharma).

Our individual soul is the unique gift each of us has from the Primal Soul, the Higher Power. The path to the Soul--what psychology calls individuation--is not a "straight and narrow path," but rather a labyrinthine course. As we traverse it, we gradually

circumambulate and thereby define the core of meaning that centers our life.

Individuation--the path to the Soul--is both a personal journey unique in the details but typical in its overall pattern. To follow the labyrinth of individuation to the center we need the courage to look at ourselves as well as the knowledge to understand what we see.

The Holy Cross: Integrating Maya and Dharma

The structure of the Christian cross symbolizes the relationship between maya and dharma. The vertical axis represents the spiritual dimension, dharma; the horizontal axis, maya. Our task is to find the center where the axes cross. When we have found the center, the spiritual dimension is the point around which our material existences pivot. When we are centered, we are living dharmic life here and now. When we go too high up the vertical axis, we flee into ungrounded spirituality; when we descend too far down the vertical axis, we end up in depression or psychosis. At either extreme, we lose the world. If we go too far out on either horizontal axis, we lose the spiritual pivot point. The task at the center is to see through the visible world, to perceive the spirit informing the manifest.



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Trained in India, Great Britain and the US, he is interested in the emerging frontiers of Spirituality and Healing and the synapses of the Mind, Body, Soul and Spirit. He is author of the book, Path to the Soul, Weiser Books, 2000, Awaken the Slumbering Goddess: The Latent Code of the Hindu Goddess Archetypes, Booksurge Publishers, 2007 and the coauthor of Retire Your Family Karma, Nicholas-Hays, Inc. 2003, These and his other upcoming presentations can be previewed at his website www.pathtothesoul.com

Ashok Bedi has been in practice in Milwaukee for over twenty-five years and specializes in Adult Psychotherapy and Jungian Psychoanalysis. He regularly presents lectures and seminars in India, Great Britain, Ireland and USA on the topic of the Spiritual and analytic dimensions of treatment, healing and personal growth. Over the last several years, he has been the International Association of Analytical Psychologists liaison person for developing Jungian training programs in India and travels annually to India to teach, train the consult with the Jungian Developing groups at several centers in India including Ahmedabad & Bangalore. He leads the annual "In the Footsteps of Carl Jung in India" study group to several centers in India under the auspices of the New York Jung Foundation.

