

Skipping Lines

by K Karpen

O the blest eyes! the happy hearts!
That see—that know the guiding thread so fine, along the mighty labyrinth!
Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*

My son Harry and I went down to Battery Park today to walk the labyrinth installed there a few years ago. It's a peaceful place, in the middle of the Jerusalem Grove on the western edge of the park. I'm not sure whether Harry was having a deep spiritual moment or not, but he liked walking around within the rock-rimmed path.

Walking around and around, I began to loose the parts of myself I didn't want, and I drifted off into a calm place. Then I heard Harry, loudly: "Papa, that man's skipping the lines."

It was true. I looked up and saw a well-dressed young man walking straight across the labyrinth in an effort to get back to his office, or find the subway, or something.

Nothing wrong with skipping lines. We do it all the time. New York is a city of line-skippers. How else do you go to the places you need to get?

Still, there's a part of me that knows that the shortest distance between two points can be a circle. Or a labyrinth. And, in fact, there are places you just can't get to by following a straight line.

One of those places is a sense of spiritual centeredness. There is no quick and sure way to the heart of God. Subways don't go there. The numbered streets of the Manhattan grid plan won't keep you from getting lost on the way.

The labyrinth at Battery Park is a classic seven-circuit layout. That means that you walk nearly the whole way around before you change direction. It also means that as you journey towards the center, you sometimes get further away from it. But if you stick to it, you arrive there! Just in time to begin the journey back out again.

This Summer, I propose we meander around together, heading for the heart of God. Emily is starting a new spirituality group, beginning Monday, July 10. Take more prayer time. I'd like to get together with some of you and visit a few labyrinths around the city. Then, I'd love to create one of our own in the courtyard and invite ourselves and our neighbors to come by and walk it.

There is something compelling about the meandering path of a labyrinth, no matter who you are or where you're at, spiritually. The labyrinth laid into the floor of Chartres Cathedral has been walked by countless pairs of feet over the past 800 years. Even Harry, in his 5-year old way, was taken by the random discipline of the labyrinth. Until I got through first. Then I ran Harry with a confession: "Papa, I skipped the lines."