

6.27: The Labyrinth of Cultural Intelligence

We have not even to risk the adventure alone...the labyrinth is thoroughly known. We have only to follow the thread of the hero path...and where we had thought to slay another, we shall slay ourselves. Where we had thought to travel outward, we will come to the center of our existence. And where we had thought to be alone, we will be with all the world.

Joseph Campbell, The Power of Myth

Labyrinths often serve as metaphors for personal journeys into the self and back into the world. In a labyrinth, there is one path to the center, and that same path leads you out. You make the choice to enter the path and start a journey. You make the choice to continue the journey or to end it by retracing your steps to the place you entered.

You can think about your journey into cultural intelligence as entering a labyrinth. It is not a maze; rather, it is journey that brings you to a deeper awareness of yourself and your place in the world. In a labyrinth, you find yourself walking around short curves, long curves, around edges of the circle, getting closer to the center. As you do so, you may feel a variety of emotions and thought: hesitation, confidence, motivation, ease, caution, or reflection. In the labyrinth, we become the observer of these thoughts and emotions. As Carlson noted, “We can simply step back and watch the show. It’s really just like watching a movie on the screen.” Carlson (2005), p. 50.

The labyrinth has long served as a metaphor of change and growth. Walking the labyrinth is a time of exploration and discovery. Careful listening and the willingness to take risks, and to challenge yourself, lead you to a transformation. This transformation encompasses a new, expansive vision of possibilities in your world. It serves as a container for your experiences in life: fun and play, disappointment and sadness, grief and loss, joy and prosperity, success and failure. When you look at the labyrinth as a metaphor for your cultural intelligence journey, you will see that your path is sometimes shared with others, and, at times, it is yours alone.

As Joseph Campbell noted, everyone goes through a psychological transformation that brings them to a more fulfilling life. Campbell (1988). Cultural intelligence is a process and a tool to help you evolve, to help you take the risks required when in unfamiliar cultural interactions. When applied, you will notice that you have gained a new consciousness of your place in the world.

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