



Stuck in a Labyrinth

Being stuck can feel like being cornered with nowhere else to run, or struggling under a heavy weight, or sitting at the bottom of an empty well looking up at an impossibly distant light. What is your experience of being stuck?

You are not alone. Being stuck could be emotionally neutral. “I don’t know what to do about that, and I’ll wait until I do.” More often, being stuck comes with intense, difficult emotions. We feel terrified, frustrated, exhausted, defeated, trapped. We judge ourselves for not knowing how to extricate ourselves immediately.

Give yourself permission to be exactly where you are. You are not alone in feeling stuck.

Elements of feeling stuck. Feeling stuck can arise from a mixture of internal and external sources from both the past and the present. Your responses are valid no matter what their source, and it can help to sort out the different elements.

- **Flashbacks.** Traumatic events almost always involve some aspect of being unable to get away. Feeling stuck in the present can trigger memories of past trauma, with all the associated emotional intensity. Is there any part of being stuck in the present that has familiar echoes from the past, or feels like it will last forever?
- **Sensitivities.** When you are sensitive to certain foods or chemicals, accidental exposure can

lead to brain fog, depression, and feeling overwhelmed. Do you feel more stuck at some times than others while your circumstances are unchanged?

- **Double binds.** Double binds lead to feeling stuck when you are pinned between contradictory demands. When you name the elements of a double bind, it clarifies that you are not to blame and helps you evaluate your options.
- **Recurring patterns.** A recurring pattern can leave you feeling stuck when you observe yourself moving through the pattern, unable to change it. Ironically, you feel most stuck as the pattern begins to shift, since your observation is already a change.
- **Spiritual losses.** There may be a spiritual losses involved. Perhaps you have faithfully made sacrifices and tried your best, and now feel betrayed by the results. You might notice grief, anger, disappointment, or bitterness as you sit with feeling stuck.

Say hello to your truth and judgments. When you feel stuck, acknowledge your reality. “Something in me feels stuck. I say hello to that.” Say hello to any emotions, images, and physical sensations that emerge.

Also say hello to any judgments that arise. Perhaps something in you thinks you should try harder, figure it out faster, think more positive thoughts, feel sweeter emotions, or otherwise have a different experience than feeling stuck right now. “Something in me wants this to be different. I say hello to that.”

A labyrinth, not a maze. Being stuck can feel like being

lost in a maze, choosing turns at random, unintentionally going in circles, stopping in despair. Unlike a maze, a labyrinth has only one path through it, twisting and doubling back on itself, but always making forward progress.

You can use your finger or a pointer on a small labyrinth like the one on the next page, or find a nearby labyrinth* to walk. As you move mindfully along the single path into the center and then out again, make room for your actual experience, rather than what you think you should be experiencing.

What is it like for you to approach the center, only to swing around it into yet another set of zig-zags? What do you notice when the center finally opens before you? Do you follow the labyrinthine path outward, or simply leave?

As you move through the labyrinth, you might notice blissful peace, or bored impatience, or some mixture of both. You might feel most engaged while moving inward, or pausing at the center, or moving outward. Does any part of your labyrinth traversal feel like an achievement or relief?

Turn away. Sometimes there is no direct path to a goal, and turning away can help you move forward in unexpected ways. Indulge in distractions, get some sleep, and let the back of your mind work on the problem. Turn your attention toward what works well in your life. What challenges have you overcome in the past? If nothing comes to mind, carry those questions around with you and invite answers to arise.

Perhaps you can make progress in an area unrelated to the stuck problem. You could sweep the floor or pull weeds

* labyrinthlocator.com/locate-a-labyrinth

in the garden or make some other small satisfying change in your environment.

Wait and rest with kindness. Even when we feel the most stuck and helpless, time is still moving forward. The world is changing in tiny and large ways, and we change with it. When we run out of ideas, or energy, or hope, we can allow ourselves to wait and rest with as much kindness as possible.



Chartres Labyrinth. “Walk” with your finger or a pencil.