

Wisdom Journey

We Are All One



Laura Lander



Wisdom Journey traces a personal evolution fostered by life, meditation, study, nature, dreams, bodywork and counseling. Prequel and sequel to the author's first book, *Chapters From the Farmhouse Journal*, this memoir begins with a vivid childhood dream, then fast-forwards to construction of a backyard labyrinth with unexpected angelic assistance. Thus begins seven years of synchronicities and unfolding events that illustrate how a hijacked prayer for wisdom on the island of Maui receives its remarkable answer.

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Wisdom Journey: We Are All One
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For the third time, I turn, grab the panther by the scruff of its neck and throw it to the bottom of the cement steps, thinking, "I am so close to the house, maybe I can reach the front door before the panther makes it up the steps." But I no more than turn toward the front porch when I am aware that the panther has leapt up the steps in a single bound and is right at my back once more. I understand that there is no escape.

At that moment, I awoke. And this is how what I only came to recognize years later as my first totem³ came to me. I was about 4 years old.

Forty-six years later, I was at a winter solstice celebration at the home of my good friends Alan and Kathleen.⁴ On this evening, we were led in a type of soul-journey meditation, also known as a shamanic journey. (This is described and explained in greater detail in Chapter 7.) During the meditation, I encountered a wise and aged sea turtle who taught me that this nightmare and all of the bad dreams I had as a small child, all those animals that were after me, were my own animal helpers and guides coming to me. Now, instead of being afraid and running from them as I did in the childhood nightmares, it was time to turn and make them welcome, to learn about their significance and accept their help.

Oh.

The panther that I could not outrun, fast, sleek and black as the night. The vulture that swooped down over me as I was walking up the wide front walk into my kindergarten building, who I was terrified would snatch me up in his talons and carry me away forever. The dolphin with the menacing eye who, with one thrust from the water, "beached" himself on a plank that ran

from the ship I was on into the ocean, then stood and walked upright on his tail and with sharp claws at the edge of his fin slashed bloody stripes into the skin of a woman's lovely, flawless chest. The buffalo (a whole herd of them stampeding around me) that knocked me down and knelt on my back, pinning me to the ground under his great weight. In the dream, I could actually feel his hot moist breath on the back of my neck.

Panther, Vulture, Dolphin, Buffalo. After me, after me, always relentlessly after me, and I was so afraid of being caught by them. Attacked. Devoured. Stolen away from my home and family forever. Sliced open. Crushed.

Following the instructions from the sea turtle in my solstice soul journey, I decided to revisit these animals, research their symbolism and attributes and, instead of fleeing, stop to listen to what they might have to tell me.

In the book *Animal Speak*⁵ by Ted Andrews, I read that Black Panther is a totem both powerful and ancient, one that has great mysticism associated with it. Its keen abilities of sense, sight and hearing denote depth of vision and insight, clairaudience, and palpation skills. Symbolizing the feminine, the dark of the moon and the quality of night, Black Panther teaches that dark and death need not be feared, but acknowledged and used. This echoed the message from the turtle in the soul journey about the animals in my nightmares actually being my totems, guides come to assist me in life. Not to be feared but acknowledged.

The coming of Black Panther signifies an *imminent awakening and rebirth*, a time of *entering into our true power*, but more than that, it marks *a turn in direction* for those to

whom it comes. It heralds a reclaiming of a power that was lost due to suffering in childhood or beyond, and connection with the great archetypal force behind that power. It brings with it the promise of guardianship and protection that is needed throughout that process. It is thus a symbol of immeasurable power reclaimed from whatever darkness within our life has hidden it.

Strong medicine there! Imagine a panther coming to a 4-year-old girl-child. I believe that the message that first came to me then was meant for me more fully as an adult who, having reached the landmark age of 50, was gearing up for the second half of my life.

The other dream animals have important symbolic meanings as well. Vulture is associated with purification, death, rebirth and new vision. Dolphin teaches us the use of breath and sound to enter altered states. Buffalo is the abundance that is available if we know how to tap into it and follow an effortless pathway to facilitate it. (These meanings and their relationship to my life are more fully discussed in Chapter 7.)

All of these dream animals were summoned to me at an early age. Now I was to learn from them and benefit by their presence in my life.

Chapter 3

Spirit Guides and the Mowing of the Labyrinth

(Spring 2003)

Help from spirit...Creating the labyrinth...Praying the labyrinth

In March 2003, I was present at a talk given by teacher and healer Vivien Schapera⁶. Her presentation was natural, down-to-earth and humorous. She did not exude an outer impression of being “other-worldly” or unusual in any way. Her voice, with its wonderful South African accent, was musical and very pleasant to listen to. The guided meditation she led was an exercise for inviting our angel or spirit guides to come and visit us.

Having been raised in the Catholic tradition, the notion of angels guarding and guiding us was not at all unfamiliar to me. Neither was communication between people on earth and people who have passed on, especially for the purpose of obtaining assistance with our earthly lives, which is what praying to patron saints is all about.

So when she invited us to sit comfortably, close our eyes and follow her in the meditation, I felt ready, open, intrigued and a little excited about what might happen.

In our minds, she led us down ten steps, slowly, through a sliding glass door and to a garden, to sit on a bench. We could imagine it any way we wanted.

I imagined myself in my own woodland garden at what was my current home in rural northern Kentucky,

the log home that I had helped to build and where I lived during my second marriage. I envisioned my woodland garden as being more developed, as I hoped it might be in the future.

Deep into the meditation, I asked my angel to come and be with me. At once, I saw a man approaching. He was not young, not old; he appeared to be in his late thirties or early forties. He was strong and muscular, with tanned skin and a rich brown color of curly hair, and eyes of the same brown. He was somewhat hairy and virile but relaxed and easy-going.

When he came, I was a little surprised. I had asked my guardian angel to come, someone I had always thought of as feminine. He told me that his name was Ray or Ramon (with the accent on the second syllable). He seemed to prefer that I just call him Ray.

His message to me was that I have a lot to learn yet in my spirituality and in my perception of energy, chakras⁷, all of the unseen world, so to speak. Up to this point in my life, I had been somewhat open to all of these things but had not delved very deeply into them. He seemed to be telling me that now was the time, and that he was here to help me along the path of advancement in balance, presence and spiritual growth.

At one point, he instructed me to buy a green pendant, and I could clearly see a mental image of just what kind of green pendant he meant. It was a dark green stone, wrapped with gold trim, on a chain.

When Vivien suggested to us that we ask our guide for a sign, anything we wanted, so that later on we would know that this was not just in our imaginations, I

thought for a while, and then I asked for this sign: I would receive a tree to plant in the woodland garden before the coming month of June.

I was happy to meet this Ramon, or Ray, and happy for his help. I remember feeling a little nervous and shy about being so close to such an attractive man/angel. I felt novice-like, as if embarrassed at needing to learn so much. I believed that learning is what we are here for and that it was nothing to be embarrassed about, but still there was the self-conscious feeling of being a beginner in the presence of a master. It felt similar to those occasions when I have had the opportunity to play music with a musician who is much more proficient and talented than I am.

In bringing the meditation to its conclusion, Vivien suggested that we let our guides depart, and then she led us back from our gardens, back up the steps. She asked us to make a commitment to meet with our guide again sometime during the coming week, and to keep that commitment.

After the session, I went out to Vivien's table where she had stones and crystals displayed for sale. I searched for one of the shade of green that Ray had shown me. What I found was called malachite. I placed an order for it to be made into a pendant. Later, I learned that malachite is associated with spiritual transformation.

While my intellect acknowledged the possibility that I could just have imagined the entire thing, I felt myself to be on the brink of something new and very helpful. It was interesting to me that at home the next day, I stepped out onto the front porch, heading out to the

garden shed, when my eyes immediately fell on a package of seedling trees wrapped in clear plastic, from the Arbor Foundation. They had been sent in response to a recent donation from my husband, unbeknownst to me. I had requested as a sign that I would receive a tree for the woodland garden and here, as a seeming overstatement, were ten!

I walked over to the shed to get out the tiller and prepare to work in the garden. It was foremost in my mind that I had an appointment with Ray, my angel or spirit guide. As I tried to start the tiller over and over, with not the least sign of it cooperating, I remembered Ray's strong muscular build. I called upon him to ask if he would lend me a hand. The tiller started easily on the third try after that!

I thanked him and smiled and then went about tilling the garden. I also tilled up a smaller side plot and heeled in the ten trees from the Arbor Foundation. All of this time, I was well aware of my agreement to meet with Ray. Once I had finished all of the tilling that I had planned to do, I put my tools away and walked out to the woodland garden for the promised appointment.

I felt a little nervous and still somewhat doubtful. The skeptic in me wondered if anything would happen or if my conversation with Ray the day before was just imagined, under the influence of Vivien's hypnotic and melodious voice, the seedling trees delivered to the front porch a mere coincidence. I sat down in a lawn chair and closed my eyes. I began the meditation.

In my mind's eye, I went down the ten steps and through the glass door, and came to the woodland

garden to sit right where I was then actually seated. I envisioned Ray coming toward me, but somehow this time I really felt more like it was me imagining it all.

I felt rather than heard him say, *"Listen."* So I kept quiet and listened. To the wind...to the birds...to a distant airplane...to the wind again. I listened for some time. It was peaceful but unremarkable.

At one point, I thought I heard him say, *"When you get your malachite pendant, you will be stronger,"* as if he wasn't too concerned about all of my doubts or inability to see and understand. (It may be important to note, for purposes of clarification, that I was not hearing an audible voice outside of myself, but I was distinctly hearing these lines spoken silently in my mind.)

Ray's voice continued, *"Remember the labyrinth⁸ that you have been thinking about creating here in the meadow someday? Well, this is the year to do that."*

When I opened my eyes and looked around, I saw the woodland garden and the newly mown meadow, picturing how it could be. Suddenly, I thought to ask Ray if he would help me with the gardens and with creating the labyrinth. He said he would.

I stood up and went over to the edge of the meadow. I heard his inner voice giving me directions, laying it all out before me: *"See, the entrance to the labyrinth will be here to the left of these forsythia bushes. Now look to your right. You see that tree? That will be what you measure by. See, on the left, that tree? And look straight ahead across the meadow. See how these three trees together with the forsythia form a diamond? They will be the basic guideposts for the labyrinth."*

I walked out to what would be the center of the labyrinth, between the two trees right and left, and straight toward the far tree. It was similar to walking out to the pitcher's mound in a baseball diamond, with the trees that had been pointed out to me as the bases and the forsythia as home plate. I had counted twenty-five steps to where I was standing, at the center of the future labyrinth.

I walked twenty-five steps more to get an idea where the far edge might be. I turned around and surveyed. The entire area fit perfectly into the space that was the back half of the meadow. I walked back to the center, then back to the forsythia. I felt very reassured at having my guideposts all mapped out for me. It was a start.

I knew I needed more information on the actual pattern for the labyrinth, and how to go about mowing it into the meadow. And now I knew I could trust that it would all be provided to me. I had a spirit guide to help me.

As I walked back toward the house, I thanked Ray and told him I would plan to meet him next Monday here in the woodland garden.

Creating the Labyrinth

The next weekend, I did some Internet research to learn more about labyrinths and to hopefully find information about making one. There was good information available. I discovered and joined The Labyrinth Society.⁹ I also found the pattern I needed, the Cretan pattern, also called the seven-circuit pattern, with

instructions for how to draw it. Still, I wasn't sure exactly how to go about transcribing the pattern into the meadow.

I asked Ray for assistance again. Early on that next Monday morning, seated at the dining-room table, I practiced drawing the pattern with pencil and paper. I became proficient at that, but I realized that mowing the pattern into a meadow would not be quite as simple as drawing it on a piece of paper. I could see that the lines I was actually drawing were not the paths that would need to be mown; the space *between the lines* was the pathway. I had learned how to draw the lines to create the pattern, but I needed to be able to *mow the spaces between the lines*.

I kept trying to envision the opposite, with the spaces as the lines I would mow, like a photographic negative. I wondered how I would measure it out on the land and mow it.

It was then that I had an inspiration, and I attribute this to Ray's help: I "happened" to remember one page on the Internet I had seen while reading about labyrinths. Someone had correlated the seven chakras with the seven circuits of the labyrinth, and had used the colors associated with the chakras to delineate this.



Suddenly, my mind divined a way to physically mark out the labyrinth over the meadow using colored paper flags on stakes, a different color for each circuit of the pathway. I could draw it on paper and then plot it on the land. I could then use the paper drawing as a kind of map, directions to follow through and around the flags while I mowed. I could mark out the pathway with spray paint first to make it even clearer.

In a matter of seconds, I had gone from staring at my pencil-line drawing, clueless about how to transcribe it onto a field of grass, to having a very practical, workable plan.

I remembered my remark to Alan just the week before: I was telling him of my intention to put a labyrinth in the back meadow and said confidently that I didn't have any idea of exactly how to go about doing that, but that my guiding spirit was going to help me. Four days later, I had found my pattern, I had practiced drawing it, and I had a concrete idea as to how to go about putting it down in real grass!

The Mowing of the Labyrinth

The following Saturday, the mowing of the labyrinth was accomplished with surprising ease. I had requested support from the Energy Keepers, the Labyrinth Society Members who offered to send good energy to anyone who was constructing a labyrinth. Of course, Ray was around to guide me, and I became aware of another helping spirit named Paulo who now seemed to be showing up frequently in my mind.

No longer questioning my sanity over the receiving of guidance and inner messages, I accepted that Paulo cared and was there to help with the project.

Twice that week, I stopped at stores where I had hoped to buy spray paint to help with marking out the pattern on the grass. The stores I tried were either closed or didn't have spray paint. At each unsuccessful attempt, the thought would come to me, "*You won't need any spray paint.*"

Friday evening then, I measured, walked off the distances and laid down the seed pattern that would be the center of the labyrinth with some wooden two-by-fours from the garage (see illustration). By that time it had grown dark, and I went inside to prepare dinner.

On Saturday, I arrived home from work, grateful to have the long drive from town behind me and in happy anticipation of making some progress on the labyrinth. Even though it was rather late, I figured I still had some time before dusk to at least begin staking out the pattern.

Using a staple gun, I stapled the colored flags to sharpened stakes. Then, gathering up a small sledgehammer, the stakes, tape measures and my color-coordinated "labyrinth map" that I had drawn on paper, I headed back to the labyrinth area. Pacing off the distances, I set out the flags, tapping them into the ground with the sledgehammer. Sooner than I thought, the labyrinth was ready for mowing.

First, I practiced walking the pattern three times. I needed no spray paint. The mowing went easily, beginning at the center and using the map as a guide. Upon reaching the outer entrance, I turned the mower

and made my way back to the center again, widening the pathway. In no time at all, it was done!

I stood and gazed at the pattern of the pathway mowed into the grass. Looking over my handiwork, I realized for the first time that this labyrinth that I had been inspired to create was not intended to be just a lawn ornament or a unique garden feature. It was meant to be used and shared.

I thought of making a beginning, sooner rather than later, of my long-term plan to work from home, conducting my massage practice there and inviting clients to enjoy the deck and gardens and to walk the labyrinth. A hazy notion began to take form in my mind, the seed of an idea. I could begin hosting days of self-directed retreat with massage, meditation and lunch. It fit perfectly with my massage mission statement of inviting people to step out of our crazily paced current of life and make time to be in-touch with their center, with what is deep inside.

Morning Labyrinth Walk

The very next morning, Palm Sunday (the Sunday before Easter), I rose early and went out to walk the labyrinth. From my reading about labyrinths, I had learned that it is customary to make the walk with an intention in mind. As one friend described it, “You *pray* the labyrinth.” My intention was simply to be open to the experience of it.

The following morning, I did the same. I stood at the entrance, said a prayer and set an intention: to be open to

my spirit guides' direction, to "what next" I should do. I walked along the path, not worrying about which way to go because, of course, there is only one way.

The answer that came to me was that I didn't *need to know "what next,"* I didn't need to make any big decisions. I just needed to go along, following my path, and all would unfold along the way, as it has throughout my whole life.

I came easily and almost unexpectedly to the center circle. It would be as simple as that. My message from the labyrinth on that day was that I only need to follow along with awareness and intention, and I will arrive at the place where I am supposed to be. It's just that easy.

It became my practice to begin most days with a meditative walk in the labyrinth. It felt natural to be outdoors first thing in the morning, to witness the colors of the dawn, to breathe in fresh air, to connect with Spirit. Many insights and ideas, and much encouragement and consolation came to me there.



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