



Staff photos by Mark Czajkowski

Bhiksuni Trime Lhamo walks the labyrinth she built behind Fellowship in Prayer on Witherspoon Street.

## Pathway to peace

### *Walking labyrinth a form of meditation*

By Ilene Dube  
Lifestyle Editor

Tucked behind the modest building at 291 Witherspoon St. in Princeton lies the secret to serenity and inner peace.

Where there had been a meditation garden, a red cedar path now winds, bordered by white "goose egg" stones, under the canopy of mature shade trees. In the dappled sunlight, it beckons the curious.

Bhiksuni Trime Lhamo, a Buddhist nun, set out to replace the underused meditation garden with a labyrinth.

This sacred path is on the property of Fellowship in Prayer, a 50-year-old organization whose mission is "to encourage and support a spiritual orientation to life, to promote the practice of prayer, meditation and service to others, and to help bring about a deeper spirit of unity among humankind."

A labyrinth is, basically, a sacred geometric pattern, or path, to be walked as a form of prayer or meditation. Labyrinths are known to date back at least 4,000 years. Cretan labyrinths, or seven-circuited labyrinths, were so much a part of the Greek society from 2500-2000 BC that they were embossed on coins and pottery.

Christian labyrinths date back to the fourth century. The cathedral floor at Chartres, France, from the 13th century, is a classical 11-circuit labyrinth, with 11 concentric circles.

Labyrinths are found in almost every religious tradition. The Kabala, or Tree of Life, found in the Jewish mystical tradition, is an elongated labyrinth figure. The Hopi Medicine Wheel and the Man in the Maze

are two Native American labyrinths. Tibetan and Hindu sand paintings, or mandalas, are a kind of labyrinth, created through a meditative state.

There are many labyrinths in Sweden, Finland and Estonia, believed to have been built by fishermen who walked the labyrinths before going fishing to ensure a good wind and a good catch. The labyrinths also were believed to keep the pesky trolls from going out with the fishermen. The fishermen would walk in slowly, with the trolls supposedly following, and then the fishermen would run out and jump in their boats. The trolls couldn't figure out how to get out fast enough and would be left behind.

A maze differs from a labyrinth in that it is a puzzle to get out of. With a labyrinth, getting in and out is straightforward.

Trime (pronounced Tree-may), a trustee of Fellowship in Prayer, had read that labyrinths are undergoing a resurgence of interest.

Another woman in Trime's prayer group was interested in labyrinths, and had signed up for a workshop on labyrinths at the Kirkridge Center in the Catskill Mountains, a Christian retreat and conference center. But at the last minute, she could not attend, and offered her spot to Trime.

Trime was the only Buddhist to attend, along with 12 Christian ministers. When she returned to Princeton, she knew she wanted to build a labyrinth, and so she sought permission from Paul Walsh, president of Fellowship in Prayer, to make it in the former meditation garden.

Once she obtained his approval, she be-

See LABYRINTH, Page 17A

came obsessed with the idea. She conducted further research on her own. Labyrinths, she found, often are made with a cross as the starting point. In the cathedral at Chartres, the center of the labyrinth is a flower, a symbol of the feminine principal. According to Trime, it is creative and transforming.

She had to level out the former raised flower beds. Trime, who takes a Tai Chi class at the Senior Center in South Brunswick, spent three weeks lifting soil and leveling it, using a hoe and a shovel and buckets, "all the while not knowing what I was doing," she said, sitting on a bench in the now complete labyrinth. "It was a very interesting process."

After raking the garden, she

spent one full day trying to draw the design. "I am not an artist and I couldn't make it work," she said. She found a pattern on the Internet and tried it with chalk — "it didn't work" — and finally got down on her hands and knees and laid out string and pegs to mark the design.

She based her design on a seven-circuit, Cretan labyrinth. Next, she went to garden stores, looking for the best prices on goose egg stones and red cedar mulch.

"There is no right or wrong way to walk the labyrinth," said Trime. "Christians think of it as a three-fold process: Walking in is putting away worries; being in the center is receiving insights and creativity; and coming out is being able to integrate those things in life. By making a spiral, it draws sacred energy."

California Pacific Medical

Center in California uses a labyrinth to restore spiritual and physical health to both patients, their families and staff. The World-Wide Labyrinth Project is an organization that seeks to establish labyrinths in cathedrals, retreat centers, hospitals, prisons, parks, airports and community centers.

Trime's labyrinth at Fellowship in Prayer is open to the public, free of charge. Attached to a stone bench alongside the labyrinth is a sheet of paper explaining the labyrinth, and how to walk it — although it is clearly stated that there is no wrong way.

At the center of Trime's labyrinth are four tree trunks, a rest place to sit, or even lie down (one chooses). "You can face north, south, east or west and commune with the energy. When I walk the labyrinth, I feel a different kind of energy. It seems valid. Who knows?"

## Sacred journey

By Ilene Dube  
Lifestyle Editor

Bhiksuni Trime Lhamo — her first name means fully ordained, the second name is her ordination name, and the third name means, in Tibetan, “without stain” — was raised as a Protestant in West Virginia. In 1972, while living in Miami, she responded to an ad for a Tibetan Buddhist meditation group.

“I started meditating, and stayed with it,” said Trime from the study of Fellowship in Prayer at 291 Witherspoon St. in Princeton.

In 1979, she left behind a career as a lab technician and studied Buddhism at the Vajradhath Seminary in Lake Louise, Canada.

“The first teaching of the Buddha is, ‘life is suffering,’” said Trime. “I don’t like to use that — it says that life is a big pain. Most of life is filled with dissatisfaction, and when we find satisfaction, it is only temporary. I had the feeling that if I did meditation, my life would be better. And it’s true.”

Through meditation, she says, she has reached an equanimity, a state of calm, rather than being overwhelmed.

After seminary, she has lived in Miami, Boulder, Halifax, Nova Scotia, Philadelphia and Vermont, where she has practiced and taught Buddhism. She lived in a monastery in Nova Scotia where, in 1988, she was ordained as a novice, taking 36 precepts, or vows,



on ethical ways to live her life. The basic five precepts are:

- do not kill sentient beings, or anything with a consciousness;
- do not steal;
- do not lie;
- do not engage in sexual misconduct;
- do not partake of intoxicating substances.

“These are not commandments, but a choice you make, a mindfulness practice,” said Trime. They are also open to interpretation. For example, many Buddhists do not eat meat, but Tibetan Buddhists eat meat out of practicality — there is simply very little vegetation in Tibet, due to the climate. Yak meat and yak butter is plentiful.

“Buddha didn’t give any dietary laws,” said Trime. It is mostly a choice. When the Buddha was alive, he lived a nomadic life, giving teachings in return for food, and was grateful for any food he received. It was considered beneficial to the giver, as well, to make a spiritual offering.

In order to become fully ordained, Trime took 348 precepts, including one to become monastic, or celibate.

Trime has taught Buddhism at the Lawrenceville School, and at the Omega Institute in Rhinebeck, N.Y. She has been on the board of trustees of Fellowship in Prayer for five years.

Fellowship in Prayer was started by people on different spiritual paths to come together and organize prayer groups. The organization publishes a bimonthly journal, Sacred Journey.



Bhiksuni Trime Lhamo's labyrinth is based on a seven-circuit Cretan design.

## The way in is the way out

By Ilene Dube  
Lifestyle Editor

Trime invites me to walk the labyrinth. "In walking meditation," she says, "you actually feel your foot connect to the earth, and it focuses you. It's just another way of meditation."

I read the guidelines on a sheet of paper attached to the bench:

*"When you walk a labyrinth, choose your attitude. From time to time, choose a different attitude. Make it serious, prayerful or playful. Play music or sing. Pray out loud. Walk alone and with a crowd. Notice the sky. Listen to the sounds. Most of all, pay attention to your experience.*

*Some general guidelines:*

*Focus — Pause and wait at the entrance. Become quiet and centered. Give acknowledgment through a bow, nod or other gesture and then enter.*

*Experience — Walk purposefully. Observe the process. When you reach the center, stay there and focus several moments. Leave when it seems appropriate. Be attentive on the way out.*

*Exit — Turn and face the entrance. Give an acknowledgment of ending, such as "Amen."*

*Reflect — After walking the labyrinth, reflect back on your experience. Use journaling or drawing to capture your experience.*

*Walk often.*

I am so nervous I forget the instructions all at once — I follow Trime as we walk the path of the labyrinth. Nothing is happening. I work very hard to make myself feel some kind of spiritual energy. All I feel is how very far I am from enlightenment. The best I can muster is a self-induced trance.

As we are walking around, at one point I think, Oh, no, I was so self-conscious I missed the center! But, no, we do get to the center. Trime sits on a stump and I sit on a stump opposite her.

She tells me the first time she went through she didn't feel a thing. I breathe a deep sigh of relief. Trime is so practical, so down to earth. A Buddhist nun who takes classes at the Senior Center and surfs the Net and shops for bargains at the nursery. I like her a lot.

After she speaks, she looks down. I look down, too, thinking, OK, this is it. This is where I will experience some deep gaining of wisdom, some enlightenment.

See WAY IN, Page 17A

Continued from Page 15A

"We don't have to sit here," Trime says at once and stands up. I follow her back out.

She tells me it is OK to talk, that she meets here Monday mornings with a group of women to sit, and they talk. She says that when we get out, I may want to write or paint.

On the way out, feeling more relaxed, I become aware of the life forces pushing their way up. I see three little mushrooms that have popped up next to the stones, and at first I mistake them for stones. I

bend down to pet their soft, moist caps.

As we leave the labyrinth — and I don't want to; I am just now getting used to it, and liking it — Trime tells me that when there was a garden, nothing grew. Now that it is a labyrinth, everything wants to grow.

She tells me that ever since she began the labyrinth project, people have been telling her stories about labyrinths and providing her with additional reading on labyrinths. She tells me she has heard that, in places where people have doused and found no water, and then later built labyrinths, the water came.

She says that people have told her that a person's aura, when measured before and after walking a labyrinth, increases substantially.

Trime is, of course, right. Walking the labyrinth has made me want to write. Urgently. I do not go back to my office. I find a quiet spot to sit and write and write.

I don't know about auras, but I know that when I finally do go back to work, I feel this bubble of . . . well, bliss, surrounding me, and I want to share it with all.

It lasts until the skeptics around me prick it with their disbelief.