

LABYRINTH 101 PRIMER

BASICS: for Labyrinth Walkers as a tool of Meditation and Wisdom Seeking



“We are not human beings on a spiritual path. We are spiritual beings on a human path.” ~Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

What is a labyrinth?

A labyrinth is an ancient symbol of wholeness.

The circle and spiral imagery combine as an invitation to meander the path to our own sacred center.

It is an archetype, a divine imprint, found in religious traditions in various forms around the world.

A labyrinth is a winding pattern whose single path leads to a central core. But it is unicursal: the same path leads in and out. Unlike a maze, a labyrinth holds no false paths or dead ends. It is not a puzzle.

By walking the labyrinth, we are discovering a long forgotten mystical tradition and are invited to walk in the footprints of our personal and indigenous ancestors

Labyrinth History

- Labyrinths have existed **for over 4000 years** and found in many **world religious traditions and are Integral as a part of many cultures** such as **Native American, Greek, Celtic and Mayan**.
- Though earliest examples of labyrinths go back nearly 5,000 years, but the use of labyrinths in Christian prayer emerged during the Middle Ages. ...
- The Hopi Nation saw the labyrinth as a symbol for "mother earth" and equated to the sacred Pueblo Indian ceremonial prayer structure called a KIVA..
- Like a KIVA the labyrinth is round and like Stonehenge and the pyramids...
- Labyrinths are considered geometric forms that define sacred space, a sacred path
- **During the crusades**, it was not safe to travel. Labyrinths symbolized the **pilgrimage to the Holy Land**
- The labyrinth is an ancient tool for **“speaking” to a forgotten part of our spiritual selves**.
- Path for assisting us with **quieting mental focus** and tuning our spiritual focus.
- In the 20th century, labyrinths have been in a revival of interest after being dormant for centuries
- Today, **labyrinths are used for reflection, meditation, prayer, and comfort**.
- Labyrinths exist in many sizes and shapes, created with sand, cornmeal, flour, painted on canvas, airplane fabric permanent or temporary (stones, grass, mounds of earth, vegetation, natural material.
- Books on history (ancient & contemporary) labyrinths is a sure sign of its coming back to life!
- Prayer Labyrinths are found in most areas of the country, abbeys and monasteries, campuses of Catholic parishes and colleges as well as in churches of other denominations.

Types of labyrinth patterns: There are three basic circuit designs...7, 11, 12 circuit



Oldest surviving circuit is a 7 circuit **Celtic (Cretan)** has been found on the isle of Crete and was walked as a symbol of the spiritual journey as far back as 2600 BC. The Celtic labyrinth is a knotwork design which is endlessly loops and weaves...a symbol of eternity.



Most well-known labyrinths, the **Chartres Labyrinth** in France is 11-circuit -four quadrants design.

- Origin-Roman times and imbedded into the marble floor at the Chartres Cathedral ~1200 AD.
- The “Rose” window of Chartres Cathedral reflects colored light patterns on the inlaid labyrinth below like a cosmic sun-catcher hinged to the floor lined up with the design. An amazing sight!
- In the Middle Ages, the Catholic Church adapted the labyrinth for its cathedrals, adopting the 11 circuit and 4 quadrant pattern referred to as the “medieval” pattern design.
- The “medieval” Chartres design is often used for Christian labyrinths (ie Grace Cathedral San Francisco)

Symbolism of the Labyrinth Path

- Viewed from above, the quadrants form a large cross, one of the most sacred Christian symbols, while the entire circle expresses wholeness and completion.
- The labyrinth can symbolize several things: the hard and winding road to God, the mystical ascension to salvation and enlightenment or even pilgrimage to the holy places walked by Jesus.
- The labyrinth is a single winding, unobstructed path moving from the outside to the center, unlike a maze there are no dead ends designed to trick the mind.
- The labyrinth is a metaphor of our spiritual life journey, with its many twists and turns.
- Reflecting the journey of life...parallels change and transition and cycles of nature.
- As in life no effort is wasted; keep to the course, follow the path...Every step brings us close to our goal.
- Essentially is a way of walking in the sacred footsteps of the ancestors.

The Center “petals” symbolism of the Labyrinth

- The contemporary eleven-circuit pattern has a rosette—a six-petaled, rose-shaped area—at the center, and the rose is a symbol of enlightenment, as is its Eastern equivalent the lotus.
- The petals can symbolize 6 days of creation, or the six levels of evolution in Christian theology: mineral, plant, animal, human, angelic, divine. The 4 quadrants may reflect the quarters of the year.
- Time in center is used for rest, receiving, reflecting, meditating, gratitude, prayer.

Why is the labyrinth coming into the current trend today? Simply we need it...

- Simply, our lives can be too unfocused and cluttered. The Labyrinth is an OASIS for the spirit!
- Makes a space to set burdens activities and concerns and regain our internal sense of peace.
- It provided a space of quiet for heart and soul.
- Encourages holistic balanced spiritual, emotional, and psychological well-being.
- Labyrinths are found in churches, parks, private and public gardens, prisons, on the sands of beaches.
- They are permanent, temporary, or transportable and made of natural matter or painted on the floor.

What purpose does a labyrinth serve?

- The labyrinth offers a relaxation technique and a path for meditative prayer.
- It is an excellent meditation tool for people who are unable to sit still or to stop thinking.
- The walking pace is clockwise (energizing) and counterclockwise (releasing) providing peacefulness.
- The labyrinth experience is about the journey. It is about “being” rather than doing.
- The “walk” is grounding. It integrates body and mind, psyche and spirit into a harmonious whole.
- Represents an opportunity to listen deeply, to walk deliberately, yet without conscious thought.
- It is a place for voiceless prayer, petitionary prayer, and repetitive prayer—offering the opportunity to listen more deeply for Divine wisdom and guidance.
- Provides a means of offering healing for the self, others, and the world.

Using the Labyrinth

- No wrong way of walking the labyrinth...Walk with intention, concern, or a question held in your heart.
- A different experience for each person...might not even feel it affected you (at first!)
- Thinking not required when walking the labyrinth...simply remain alert to the path
- When using a labyrinth, you meander back and forth turning 180 degrees upon entering each circuit... this allows for awareness to shift from right to left-brain...a state of ease and receptive consciousness.

Book Resources:

Walking the Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth As a Tool by Dr. Lauren Artress

Introduction of ancient labyrinths and the walking meditation that transcends the limits of still meditation It brings renewal and change. 'Walking the Labyrinth' has reemerged today as a metaphor for the spiritual journey and a powerful tool for transformation. This walking meditation is an archetype, a mystical ritual found in all religious traditions. It quiets the mind and opens the soul.

Labyrinths from the Outside In: Walking to Spiritual Insight-A Beginner's Guide by Donna Schaper

This interfaith guide to making and using labyrinths—for meditation, prayer and celebration explains how the labyrinth is a symbol that transcends traditions, and how walking its path brings us together.

Exploring the Labyrinth: A Guide for Healing and Spiritual Growth by Melissa Gayle West

"Whoever you are, walking the labyrinth has something to offer. If a project is challenging you, walking can get your creative juices flowing. When struggling with grief or anger, or a physical challenge or illness, walking the labyrinth can point the way to healing and wholeness. If you're looking for a way to meditate or pray that engages your body as well as your soul, the labyrinth provides such a path. When you just want reflective time away from a busy life, the labyrinth can offer you time out. The labyrinth holds up a mirror, reflecting to us not only the light of our finest selves, but also whatever restrains us from shining forth."

Looking for a Labyrinth? (Worldwide Labyrinth Locator! <https://labyrinthlocator.com>)

Local Labyrinths:

1. Hartung Park :Menomonee River Parkway And West Keefe Avenue, Wauwatosa Tucked in the center of a hilly park, this brick-lined labyrinth overlooks a two-acre pond. The 87-foot design resembles a giant ancient coin, its neutral tones and two-dimensionality contrasting with the surrounding greenery.

2. Mount Mary University: 2929 N. 92ND ST. Just a stone's throw from Hartung Park, another rock-lined labyrinth lives on the east side of Mount Mary's Bloechl Center. Trees cast some shade over the gravel path made up of 11 circuits, or loops. Three benches at the center are engraved with leaf motifs and sculpted bird figures.

3. Alice's Garden Urban Farm 2136 N. 21ST ST. Native Wisconsin plants densely line the circuits of this 45-foot labyrinth, often spilling over into the walking path. Expect to share your journey with the likes of bees and dragonflies – it's no surprise that the urban farm calls this a "living labyrinth." A weekly guided reflection is provided.

4. Lynden Sculpture Garden: 2145 W. Brown Deer Rd., River Hills A hand-painted sign at this labyrinth's entrance reads, "Walk slowly, breathe deeply and turn inward." Shrouded in trees in Lynden's southwest corner, this 69-foot path is sculpted on a slope, with each of its five circuits taking you up and down the grassy hill. Lynden's artist-in-residence Jenna Knapp chose to leave the land as undisturbed as possible by carving the path directly out of the native prairie.

5. West Bend Labyrinth Garden 800 N. Main St., West Bend This gem is a labyrinth, garden and memorial all in one. A towering dragonfly sculpture welcomes visitors to stroll the seven-circuit grassy path lined with hundreds of herbs, perennials and annuals. Celebration stones, engraved with names of passed loved ones or joyful comments, encircle the labyrinth.

6. Siena Retreat Center, 5637 Erie St. Racine, WI 53402, A Cretan-style, 7-circuit labyrinth, overlooking Lake Michigan, graces our outdoor environment. Chartres labyrinth. For accessibility contact: (262) 898-2590.

In closing: We each come as a beginner even if we have walked the labyrinth path before!

Christine Valters Paintner, PhD, reminds us to remember that in the...

"Buddhist monastic tradition, which invites us into the practice of 'beginner's mind' . . .

the practice of coming to an experience with an openness and a willingness to be transformed...

'The 'monk' in the world knows that holy pauses are essential for discovering the meaning of our experiences.

There is no map. We can only drop deep into our hearts to guide us through our next steps."

SanctuStar Oasis

- Indoor Labyrinth Days of Reflection are available during the year.
- Most anticipated is the NEW YEAR Labyrinth and Fall Outdoor Labyrinth in addition to other opportunities.
- Check for current dates on the webpage: stelladevenutaosf.com

