

WHY LABYRINTHS? WHY NOW?

Labyrinths as Archetype

The labyrinth has been used periodically for thousands of years, in many different cultures. Now, once more, it is making a comeback. Because it is generic, it lends itself to many applications, both religious and secular. Some believe that labyrinths appear during the waning stages of empires, at a time of moral crisis. The labyrinth puts us back in touch with our roots, reflecting the solar system, nature, the earth, and all of creation. The back-and-forth movement of the labyrinth resembles our own DNA structure. It is no wonder that in these modern times, in which we have lost ourselves, the labyrinth has come to remind us of our true identity. In a maze, it is said, you lose yourself. But in a labyrinth, you find yourself.

Benefits of Walking the Labyrinth

People react in different ways to walking the labyrinth. Here are some of the reported results.

- h Experiencing tranquility and peace
- h Reducing stress and irritation
- h Re-establishing equilibrium and balance
- h Increasing intuition and insight
- h Enhancing physical and emotional healing
- h Offering a form of walking meditation
- h Taking time off to be with oneself
- h Developing creativity
- h Running, dancing, having fun



A number of years ago, Annette Reynolds decided to make a labyrinth on the beach one morning. She used a broomstick to make the pattern and walked it, still dressed in her nightclothes. Her daughter caught the sequence of events on film. The last photo in the sequence has been published widely, including on the cover of a labyrinth book. Good going, Annette!

USES OF THE LABYRINTH



Meditation

Many people don't sit still comfortably. A good alternative is to practice walking meditation, in a labyrinth. Since there are no choices, the mind can relax. To follow the path, however, one must stay alert. This combination of awareness and relaxed mind is the ideal state for meditation. The physical activity embodies the act of prayer.



Rituals

In ancient times, young men rode horses in procession through large labyrinths as a passage to manhood. Labyrinths have been used for marriages and for celebrations of all kinds. In ancient times the labyrinth was apparently a symbolic map for the recently deceased to find their way through the underworld.



Health and Well-Being

The labyrinth helps one to feel expansive, grounded, balanced. It has been shown to help reduce grief and to enhance physical and emotional healing.

Expressing Intent

On Earth Day, people walk labyrinths in solidarity with the earth. On New Year's Eve, people walk labyrinths to express the hope for peace in the new year. Others walk as an expression of gratitude. It is in the act of walking that the intent is affirmed.



INSTRUCTIONS FOR WALKING THE LABYRINTH



- 1) Relax your mind. Give yourself time in the labyrinth without thinking about work or schedules or what's for dinner. Be attentive to whatever experience the labyrinth brings.
- 2) Be aware of your intention. Say a prayer, ask for guidance, or just decide to walk the labyrinth for fun.
- 3) Walk at your own pace. It is OK to pass someone in front of you if they are going slower than you wish to go.
- 4) Be aware of how you feel. Notice your thoughts, your breath, your footsteps.
- 5) When you reach the center, stay as long as you would like. You can meditate there.
- 6) There are two possible ways to exit. One is to retrace the path you took to the center. The other is to walk straight out the top of the labyrinth, crossing over the paths.
- 7) As you walk out, cooperate with others who are walking in.



ADDITIONAL POSSIBILITIES

- h Wear a Sony Walkman or other device to have music while you walk
- h Wear a scarf over your head like a tent, creating your own private space
- h Write in your journal both before and after walking the labyrinth
- h Walk barefoot or in your stocking feet
- h Dance or skip or run, as long as you don't disrupt others on the labyrinth
- h Close your eyes and have someone lead you through the labyrinth
- h Walk the labyrinth in procession with others
- h Sit for a while and watch others walk the labyrinth
- h Meditate after exiting the labyrinth
- h After walking, draw mandalas or write with your non-dominant hand to express how you feel.



INFORMATION ABOUT LABYRINTHS



Websites

www.labyrinth-enterprises.com The resource for labyrinth materials. Besides information on purchasing portable and permanent labyrinths, the website includes "how to" instructions, books and other products, articles, a photo gallery of labyrinths, *Labyrinth Circles* newsletter, and 289 links to other labyrinth sites.

www.labyrinthsociety.org An international labyrinth organization. Membership is \$50 per year. They have an extensive bibliography on their website and a forum for asking questions. The annual gathering is a wonderful event for all people who love labyrinths (usually in November).

www.gracecathedral.org Articles and information about many upcoming events, a Labyrinth Locator for finding labyrinths around the world, and a selection of labyrinth products.

www.labyrinthos.net The website of Jeff Seward, the world's greatest expert on labyrinths, editor of *Caerdroia*, a journal of mazes and labyrinths, and author of two major new books on labyrinths.

www.geomancy.org A site with many topics, including labyrinths. Mostly oriented toward the seven-circuit labyrinth. Includes dowsing and a wide range of materials relating to dowsing and earth energies.

www.labyrinthproducts.com A cooperative of labyrinth professionals who offer a variety of products and services.



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