

LABYRINTHS

LABYRINTHS 1 – WHAT IS A LABYRINTH?

A labyrinth is not a maze. A **maze** is a puzzle with many paths and dead ends. It is designed for you to lose your way.

By contrast, a **labyrinth** has one path that leads from the outer edge in a circuitous way to the centre. A labyrinth is designed for you to find your way.

The **Medieval** labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral in France is the most famous pattern. It was rebuilt after a fire in the early 13th century, and reflects the shape and complexity of the gothic architecture and rose windows.

The 11 circuit design is divided into 4 quadrants, symbolic of the cross. The cross is made of lunations, or moon shaped areas at the bends of the labyrinth.

The **Classical** design is the most ancient of labyrinth designs. It appears as petroglyphs in Spain (dating from around 2000BCE), on silver coins in Crete, on rocks in northern Europe, bark in Indonesia, and carved on rocks in the desert of the American Southwest.

The Rambling Rose design is the basis for the labyrinth I have at The Light House.

LABYRINTHS 2 - EXPERIENCES

Chartres Cathedral is a magnificent Cathedral in France, south of Paris, that sits on a hill, and is visible from miles away over the corn fields.

It is in high Gothic style, and has wonderful stained glass windows, including two rose windows, which contain a blue colour not seen elsewhere.

It houses a much venerated Black Madonna, which unfortunately has been painted white in recent renovations.

However, until recently the labyrinth has not been used, and has been covered with chairs.

There are also labyrinths in New Zealand, closer to home.

The labyrinth at the **Southern Lights Centre, Akaroa** has a pebbled path with a seven-circuit classical design. With its small temple, it overlooks Akaroa Harbour and the surrounding hills, and is used by the students of the Trans Himalayan School of Wisdom.

Mana Retreat is located on the west coast of the Coromandel peninsula.

High on a hill above is the Tara Sanctuary, with an amazing view over the hills and the Firth of Thames. This sanctuary is devoted to the major world religions and spiritual paths, and was built using medieval materials and techniques.

The acoustics are amazing, and the singing of Taize chants there is mesmerising.

Alongside the sanctuary is an 11 circuit labyrinth, under which are buried stones from sacred sites around the world.

There is also a bell tower, with bells that ring the changes every 15 minutes during the day, much like medieval monasteries.

I was fortunate to meet the German architect, and to climb into the belfry, but not at the time that the bells were ringing, of course!

Te Moata is a retreat centre in native bush on the east coast of the Coromandel Peninsula.

Their statement of intent includes: we provide opportunities for the deepening of well-being through connection with self, community and nature, and a safe haven for native flora and fauna.

The labyrinth was conceived at the turn of the millennium, and is an exact replica of the 13th century labyrinth at Chartres cathedral.

But the materials are different – it is built on clay, and the marker stones with spirals and hand prints were made at a pottery at Paeroa, also with stones from the beach.

It is built in dense bush, and is said to be situated on a ley line.

One of the great advantages of lockdown is that courses and pilgrimages are now being offered online, and last year I was able to attend **Madonna Rising**, an annual **pilgrimage to Chartres Cathedral**, now run by Ubiquity University, which developed from Matthew Fox's University of Creation Spirituality.

There were daily talks by philosophers, theologians, and art historians, and daily classes in singing, poetry and dance.

This time in Chartres, even if only virtually, I was able to fully experience the Cathedral and the labyrinth, without the chairs being in the way.

The coordinator of the Chartres pilgrimage was **Banafsheh Sayyad**, a dance artist and transformational teacher based in UCLA California. She communicates the universal message of Sufi mysticism and Divine Feminine wisdom.

When Andrew Harvey started the Chartres pilgrimages the labyrinth was never used, as it was thought sinful to be doing physical activity in a Cathedral.

Then there was a breakthrough in 2019, when the priests invited Banafsheh to dance in the labyrinth, marking marked a change in attitude.

LABYRINTHS 3

Lauren Artress of Grace Cathedral in San Francisco, was one of the early people who pushed the chairs back at Chartres Cathedral so that she could walk the labyrinth.

She has been one of the foremost people in bringing labyrinths to the western world, and popularising their use. At Grace Cathedral there is a permanent outdoor labyrinth, and a permanent indoor tapestry labyrinth.

She points out that you don't have to be serious when you are walking the labyrinth, and describes a group of elderly Chinese ladies in San Francisco who do Tai Chi in the square each day, and then run the labyrinth together, shoulder to shoulder, laughing loudly.

There is an artist at **Leucadia Bay** in California who draws an elaborate labyrinth on the beach each New Years Day.

People can walk it, and think about their lives, letting go of the year that was, and looking forwards to their life in the New Year. And at the end the tide comes in and washes it away.

LABYRINTHS 4

There are many examples of labyrinths around the world.

At full moon there is a walk on the indoor labyrinth at **Grace Cathedral**.

Another example is an outside labyrinth in the desert in **New Mexico**.

At Crocodile River Reserve in South Africa there is a huge labyrinth, with a diameter of 50 metres and a path of 2 kilometres.

There is a Lavender labyrinth in the **Czech Republic**.

Labyrinths don't have to be large, however, or particularly complex. One backyard one in Sedona has 5 circuits, and is much the same size as the labyrinth I have installed.

Created with wild flowers in the ruins of a Benedictine Abbey, the labyrinth at **Bury St Edmonds** in Sussex has 3 pathways, and is 45 metres in diameter.

An information sign says: "Down the centuries, visitors came here to the Abbey of St Edmund to be more aware of God. "This wildflower labyrinth continues that tradition on this sacred site."

And at the end of the summer the labyrinth is mown, to come up again the following year.

Labyrinths don't have to be particularly permanent either, and one in **Norway** was made out of fabric to celebrate World Labyrinth Day.

And, of course, the ultimate in impermanence is a labyrinth that is offered back to the sea with the next full tide, as in a full moon labyrinth in **Canada**.

WALKING A SACRED PATH

BY LAUREN ARTRESS

The underlying theme for this handout is the book *Walking a Sacred Path – Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Practice* by Reverend Doctor Lauren Artress.

WALKING A SACRED PATH 1 – SEE HANDOUT

To walk a sacred path

The labyrinth, in its strange and uncanny way, offers a sacred and stable space to focus the attention and listen to the longing of the soul...

To walk a sacred path is to discover our inner sacred space: that core of feeling that is waiting to have life breathed back into it through symbols, archetypal forms like to labyrinth, rituals, stories and myths.

Understanding the invisible world, the world of pattern and process, opens us to the movement of the Spirit.

New pilgrims, new paths

The tradition of pilgrimage is being revitalised during our own times to seek answers to our longings... The pilgrim seeks to follow the spirit's compass, which guides us to find an inner openness to the outer world of people, places, and events that become the fabric of our lives.

The labyrinth introduces us to the idea of a wide and gracious path. It redefines the journey to God: from a vertical perspective that goes from earth up to heaven, to a horizontal perspective in which we are all walking the path together. The horizontal path communicated that we are all in this together.

Walking – the process

Walking the labyrinth does not demand a great amount of concentration in order to benefit from the experience. The sheer act of walking a complicated path...begins to focus the mind. A quiet mind does not happen automatically.

But the labyrinth experience sensitises us, educates us, and helps us distinguish superficial extraneous thoughts from the “thought” that comes from our soul level and that each of us longs to hear.

Rediscovering the divine within

Our souls hunger for the lost connection to our intuitive nature expressed through myths, drama, stories and images. We long for a creative, symbolic process that nurtures our spiritual nature, that feeds the soul.

We begin to nourish ourselves spiritually when we discover the dimensions of divine/human consciousness, when we begin to discover the Divine within. We need to understand that the spirit of creation lives and evolved within each human being, as well as through the whole of the created order. Many of us sense this mysterious unfolding. And many are seeking experiences that help us respond to the changes this evolution brings to our lives.

WALKING A SACRED PATH 2 – STAGES OF THE LABYRINTH

The labyrinth is a divine imprint found in many cultures around the world. The labyrinth has only one path so there are tricks to it and no dead ends. The path becomes a mirror for where we are in our lives. The rhythm of walking, placing one foot in front of the other, quiets the mind, relaxes the body and refreshes the spirit. Walk it with an open heart and an open mind.

Releasing (letting go)

Walking into the labyrinth.

This is the time to quiet the mind, let go of the details, distractions and extraneous thoughts. Open your heart to feel whatever it might feel.

Become aware of your breathing.

Relax and find your natural pace.

Receiving (listening)

When you reach the centre, sit or stand there as long as you like.

This is a place of reflection, meditation and prayer. Receive what is there for you to receive.

Returning (reflecting, resolving, reclaiming)

Walking out of the labyrinth.

When you are ready, follow the same path back out.

Walking out, integration of your experience can occur.

You take back out into the world that which you have received.

Each labyrinth experience is different.

It can be subtle or you may have a powerful reaction.

Sometimes a labyrinth experience takes time to release its meaning and can evolve over months following a walk. Whatever occurs, listen to your heart and take all the time you need.

WALKING A SACRED PATH 3 – GUIDELINES

Follow your natural pace. Walk at the speed you wish, and you may change speed or stop as you go.

Feel free to move around others, or let others walk around you. This is easiest to do on the turns.

The path is a two-way street - you will meet others coming out as you go in. turns are good place to pass.

Let your gaze be soft as you walk.

Let everything be a metaphor – whatever you feel is an indication of how things are for you.

No photographs please

WALKING A SACRED PATH 4 – EXPECTATIONS

“This is your walk. We are walking together with others, but it is your walk.”

Each person’s experience is unique - “I have no idea what’s going to happen for you.”

“Can we give each other permission to be un-self conscious in the labyrinth?”

LABYRINTH AT THE LIGHT HOUSE

Inspired by the labyrinths I've discovered, I have constructed a labyrinth at my home, The Light House. It has a classical design, with has 5 channels.

I have a logo, which is the Flower of Life symbol superimposed into a rose, so this became a mandala in the centre of the labyrinth. There is a blue crystal grid placed on top.

Beside the labyrinth there is a Temple Garden, based on a Medieval monastery garden, with roses, medicinal herbs, and fruits and berries.

There is a small Temple, an Egyptian themed room that I sit and meditate in, and which can be used as the waiting room for my clinic.

The garage has been converted into a Unity Room, named after a benefactor, and this opens onto the labyrinth, and can be used for talks and seminars.

In the future I would like to open the labyrinth to groups of people, and meanwhile I have Open Days every Friday afternoon, but this is weather dependant, so check on the Facebook page.

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Facebook: Labyrinth at The Light House Christchurch