

The Labyrinth

The labyrinth is a symbol which has been used by mankind since ancient times. There are many styles of labyrinth, from the classical seven circuit labyrinth to contemporary labyrinths being designed and constructed around the world today.

So what is a labyrinth? One definition is

A unicursal maze with a clearly defined centre

The key word here is 'unicursal'. It is one clear path and the path leads to the centre. In fact this is what makes it different from a maze; in a maze there are dead-ends and one can lose one's way. When walking the labyrinth there is one path, no matter how often it turns and twists, it will lead you to the centre.

So where did labyrinths originate? The Labyrinth as a history that can be traced back over 4000 years. The earliest examples, found carved on rocks, all have the same design - the classical labyrinth symbol.

The oldest existing example to date is a labyrinth carved into the rock of a Neolithic chambered tomb in Luzzanas, Sardinia



Examples can also be found in Spain, Italy, India and North and South America.



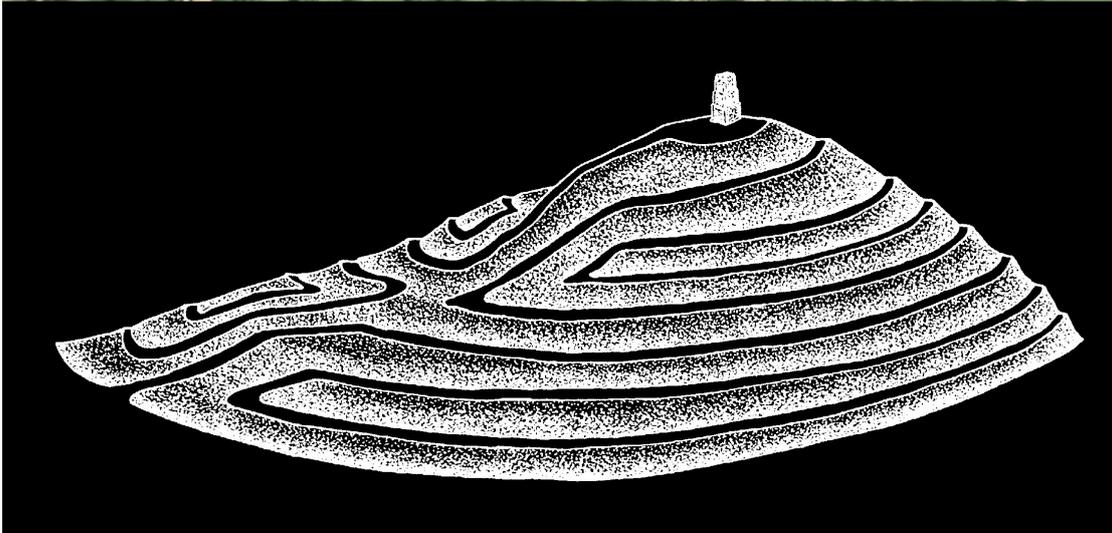
Labyrinth of Mogor Galicia Spain



Labyrinth at Meis, Galicia, possibly from the Atlantic Bronze Age

Labyrinths developed throughout history. They are found in places of power. Here are some examples below.

Glastonbury Tor



It is fascinating to realise that Glastonbury Tor, a sacred place from very early times, is considered to be the largest three-dimensional labyrinth in Europe. It has paths around its sides which can be traced in the pattern of the seven circuit classical labyrinth. Its purpose remains unknown, but conjecture suggests that it may have been used for a sacred meditational ritual or as a sacred route walked by the priests and priestesses who worshipped by the tor.

From the Middle Ages labyrinths were incorporated into a number of cathedrals and churches. It is hard to know how many today as we believe that many may have been destroyed during subsequent renovations and repairs.



The medieval labyrinth still intact today on the floor of Chartres Cathedral, France.



Terracotta Angel – Watts Chapel, England c.1896

It is interesting to record that in medieval times labyrinths were used as a meditative journey to symbolically replace the important pilgrimage to Jerusalem. Often when young, Christians in mediaeval times made a vow: to make a pilgrimage to the holy city of Jerusalem once during their life. However, by the twelfth century, at the time when the Crusades were sweeping across Europe, this became too dangerous and expensive for civilians. In response, seven pilgrimage cathedrals were appointed to become the 'Jerusalem' for pilgrims. The labyrinth in these cathedrals marked the ritual ending of the physical journey across the countryside and

the beginning of the most sacred part of their journey. The path of the labyrinth came to be called the 'Chemin de Jerusalem' – the path to Jerusalem and was walked by very many pilgrims throughout the ages.

Today labyrinths are still being lovingly built by hand: often in natural settings.



Is it relevant for today and if so, how can we use the labyrinth to move us forward on our own spiritual journey?

The Labyrinth is a powerful meditative tool. In fact the labyrinth is a wonderful tool to be used as a walking meditation, whether this is simply to walk quietly and let things be or to seek creative inspiration; to know yourself better and listen to the Master within; to solve a problem; to de-stress, relax and unwind.

My own interest in the labyrinth was awakened one day when, during a time of meditation, I became aware of crawling slowly along a winding path which I came to recognise as a labyrinth. Unfortunately as I became aware of this, my conscious, analytical mind came into play and I lost the meditative state; lost also the feeling of following inquisitively the path of the labyrinth. Then some time later, perhaps even a year or longer, I was meditating again in preparation for initiation into one of the temple degrees of the Rosicrucian Order AMORC. I found myself once again walking the path of the labyrinth. This time I was able to allow myself to be gently aware of the experience, to allow myself to stay with it and to feel the experience. As I walked towards the light I felt good. When the path turned and I faced the darkness and shadow, I longed to face the light again and I did – as the path again led me in a different direction. While walking the path of the labyrinth in this meditation, I was given the words“Follow the light and participate”.....

I took these words home in my heart and wrote them on a piece of paper. I haven't needed to refer back to the piece of paper since, however, as these words have stayed with me. I am doing all I can now to follow the Light and am participating wherever I can, wherever I feel guided to do so.

Part of this participation has included tracking down a thirty-foot, circular canopy on which we have painted a seven-circuit classical labyrinth.





The most basic metaphor for walking a labyrinth is considered to be that of Life's Journey. As we have seen, it twists and turns; it seems to go back on itself; it appears to be leading you away from your goal – but it is, in reality, one continuous path that can only lead you to the centre.

The Labyrinth is a powerful meditative tool. Here are some suggestions as to how you might use the labyrinth and the process of engaging in a walking meditation:

To solve a problem

To travel to a sacred place

To be mindful of and learn from the journey

To find guidance

To find healing

To learn how to "Know Thyself" better

To move forward to accomplish your divine purpose on earth.

So how can we use it?

To Solve a Problem

1. **Stand in front of the entrance to the labyrinth.**



State your intention as clearly as possible. For example: *I want a solution to my problem with ...*

2. **Centre yourself by taking a couple of deep breaths.** This is important because doing this you instruct your subconscious and all other parts of yourself to pay attention to your sincere wish of solving your problem.
3. **Acknowledge your coming meditative or spiritual journey within the labyrinth.** Close your eyes and reflect, then, when you are ready, make a simple bow or draw the sign of the Rosicrucian cross to begin the process.
4. **Begin your walk.** The first step sets the pace for your walk. It can be fast or slow. If you're problem solving, your walk becomes a meditation when you surrender all your problems and just walk.

Surrender to the activity of attentive walking.



Other parts of you have now a chance to process your request of a solution.

If you are very upset: fast walking lets the emotions dissipate more easily.

Most people try slowing down their mind by slower walking, relying on inner mind and body reflection.

When problem solving, walk as you didn't have any problems at all, let it all go

5. **Continue to walk.** Keep your mind quiet. Concentrate on the placement of one foot before the other and rhythmic, gentle and regular breathing
Let the burden (your problem) fall off your shoulders. Various parts of your being are now processing your wish for solution.
6. **Pause on reaching the centre** - meditate or reflect. The main thing is to let yourself surrender totally to your inner process. It feels so good to have all the time you need.
If you don't have a problem, question or quest for inspiration, just stand

or sit quietly and let things be.



7. **Retracing your steps.....**

8. **Walk out.** When you are ready, just follow the path and walk back out.

9. **Remember what you have learned**



as you retrace your path

ned

10. **Accept the insights and gifts you may have received.** Adopting a sense of gratitude will always facilitate resolutions.



11. **Offer your thanks** for what you have learned.

KNOW THYSELF

Above the portal of the Temple of Apollo in Delphi in ancient Greece was inscribed the injunction 'Know thyself'. How can the labyrinth help us in our quest to know ourselves?

Be mindful as you walk. When unwanted thoughts intrude on your mind, gently brush them aside and say 'not now' then focus your thoughts again on the actions and experience, physical, mental emotional and spiritual of walking the labyrinth and learning of this life's journey.

Take time afterwards to reflect on your experiences.

Here are some suggestions for self reflection for walking meditations when following the path of the labyrinth:

- When you are outdoors notice the terrain – subtle ups and downs.
- Notice synchronicities such as an overheard word or a bird's song.
- Consider all of your experiences in the labyrinth in relation to your life's journey.
- Journal or share your experience. What does the labyrinth teach you about your life?
- Do you feel lost at any time?
- If so, where in the labyrinth did it occur?
- What does that mean to you?
- Do you like one part of the labyrinth more than another? Why?
- What do the turns represent in your life?
- Do you resist some turns and like others?

How about giving it a try now? You may not have access to a thirty foot labyrinth, but you can still gain benefit from the process now today.

Below is a finger labyrinth. A labyrinth, literally at your fingertips. You can use it anywhere, and anytime. If life feels very hectic, use it mindfully and your mind will still. You will likely come to feel much calmer and when you are in a receptive state, ask for what you need and be open to receive.



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