

What is a Labyrinth?

A labyrinth is an ancient symbol that relates to wholeness. It combines the imagery of the circle and the spiral into a meandering but purposeful path. At its most basic level the labyrinth is a metaphor for the journey to the centre of your deepest self and back out into the world with a broadened understanding of who you are.

Labyrinths and mazes have often been confused. When most people hear of a labyrinth they think of a maze. However, a maze is a left-brain task that requires logical, sequential, analytical activity to find the correct path. With a maze many choices must be made, and an active mind is needed to solve the problem of finding the centre and getting back out again.

A labyrinth is a right brain task. It involves intuition, spirituality, creativity, and imagery. A labyrinth has only one path and is unicursal which means the way in is the way out. There are no blind alleys. The path leads you on a circuitous path to the centre and out again. With a labyrinth there is only one choice to be made. The choice is to enter or not. A more passive, receptive mindset is needed. The choice is whether or not to walk a spiritual path.

Labyrinths are an ancient archetype dating back 4,000 years or more, used symbolically, as a walking meditation, choreographed dance, or site of rituals and ceremony, among other things. They are named by type and can be further identified by their number of circuits. Labyrinth walking is an ancient practice used by many different faiths for spiritual centring, contemplation, and prayer.

The actual procedure of labyrinth walking is divided into three phases or stages: the journey inward, a pause for prayer or meditation at the centre, and the return journey. There are no rules or guidelines for the pace or speed of labyrinth walking. Some people choose to dance, run, crawl on their hands and knees, or walk backwards in the labyrinth.

You can have more than one person on the labyrinth at a time so it is important to be aware of others, allowing them the time and space that they need to complete their journey. It is possible to move past each other without making eye contact or disturbing the meditative state that each of you are in.

Walking a labyrinth can be surprisingly calming and clarifying for your thoughts. Even if you don't have a spiritual side, the slow, intentional walking in a quiet place on a set path allows for a level of focus that can be difficult to find in a busy life. Labyrinth walking is said to benefit participants by allowing a temporary suspension of left-brain activity—logical thought, analysis, and fact-based planning—and encourage the emergence of the intuition and imaginative creativity associated with the right brain. It can also help you to find answers or insights to personal problems or

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circumstances, emotional and physical healing, and a sense of connection to all that is.

Also, labyrinth walking can put you in touch with simple body rhythms. Because it involves physical movement, you may find yourself becoming more mindful of your breathing patterns, the repetition of your footsteps, and the reorientation of your entire body that occurs as you move through the circular turns within the labyrinth. More particularly, the overall pattern of movement in labyrinth walking - first inward toward the centre of the labyrinth and then outward on the return path - holds deep symbolic meaning for many people.

Labyrinths are most often found on church grounds and spiritual retreat centres. The World-Wide Labyrinth Locator (<https://labyrinthlocator.com/>) allows you to search by country, city, state, and zip code. The listings include descriptions, directions, open hours, and photos. You can also search for labyrinths in New Zealand at Labyrinths New Zealand (<http://www.labyrinthsnz.com/home/4560000838>).

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