

## About Labyrinths

A labyrinth is a pattern, generally two-dimensional, in which a series of lines delineate a pathway which is meant to be walked. Labyrinths are ancient, going back to pre-history. Being mostly circular, labyrinths reflect the basic movement of creation. The labyrinth was modified by the Christian Church in the Middle Ages to incorporate specific Christian meaning and symbolism, and to be used as a means of prayer and possibly penance.

It is very important to distinguish between a labyrinth and a maze. *Labyrinth* is used to identify a pattern that has a single path which, although it may be circuitous, leads unfailingly to the center without any intersections or choices to make. The word *maze*, on the other hand, we use to indicate a complex pattern with many paths, intersections, choices, dead ends, and false passages.



*The Chartres Cathedral Labyrinth*

What also distinguishes mazes and labyrinths is the completely opposite mental states they elicit. A maze involves a contest, a puzzle to be solved. It requires constant mental and intellectual effort. It involves a competition between the walker and the maze designer. A labyrinth, on the other hand, requires no such effort. The mind can completely relax, but because the path is circuitous, one must still pay attention. That state of awareness, combined with a relaxed mind, is typical of meditation. For that reason, the labyrinth is frequently seen as a means for walking meditation.

What happens when walking a labyrinth varies from person to person. Most commonly, people report a sense of peace, relaxation, and well-being. Some have reported emotional healing, such as dealing with grief or contemplating one's next step in life. Labyrinths are thought to restore a sense of equilibrium and balance, which can be especially helpful when our lives seem overburdened or out of kilter.

Many people are surprised by the rapport they feel with labyrinths. Often they are unable to verbalize it, only to feel it. The labyrinth takes us out of our modern rectilinear perspective. It rescues us from the busyness and pressure of schedules and responsibilities and gives us time to be with ourselves in a focused way. We may find comfort or relaxation, or come into contact with our deeper and more authentic selves. Perhaps we tap into a long-forgotten archetypal reservoir that reconnects us with the universe, our ancient predecessors, and ourselves.

With the mind and emotions calmed and the body in a greater state of balance and equilibrium, we have the opportunity to go below the surface of things. The intellect can take a break. We can go deep within, to our authentic selves. In a heightened state of awareness, insights sometimes occur when walking the labyrinth – drawing on a far greater wisdom and vision than is normally accessible.

Getting past the rational mind is the goal of most spiritual paths, using methods such as prayer, surrender, and meditation. The Reverend Dr. Lauren Artress has written, "Most of the experiences that occur in the labyrinth are unexpected. They are guided by a sacred wisdom, a creative intelligence that knows more about what we need than do our conscious selves."

The labyrinth certainly lends itself to expressing our intent and making our supplications. Stating our intent – such as our vision of peace in the world, for example – and then walking the labyrinth makes the purpose clear to ourselves and to higher powers. There is no particular experience that is supposed to happen when walking the labyrinth. The effects of the labyrinth are cumulative. The more you walk, the greater will be the benefits.

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## LABYRINTHS



Labyrinths are found in many cultures dating back as much as 3,500 years. Unlike a maze, the labyrinth is unicursal, having a single path leading to the center with no loops, cul-de-sacs or forks. They all share the basic features of an entrance or mouth, a single circuitous path and a center or goal. Labyrinths are described by how many concentric circuits or paths they contain. They can be a few inches or a few hundred feet in width.

The two most common types of Labyrinths are the Chartres and Classic-7. However, there are many variations, including custom labyrinths created by modern labyrinth-makers such as the 8-circuit Renewal or 7-circuit Triune Labyrinth.

The Chartres, 11-circuit Labyrinth was constructed around 1201 AD in the stone floor of Chartres Cathedral, France. Its distinguishing features are; 11 circuits, the turns arranged in four quadrants, lunations or teeth around the perimeter, and a 6-petal rosette in the center. Medieval Christians visited Chartres (and other cathedrals) and walked the labyrinth instead of taking a hazardous pilgrimage to Jerusalem to walk in the "foot steps of Christ." Modern "pilgrims" walk the labyrinthine path as one of many tools to enhance prayer, contemplation, meditation, and/or personal growth.

The Classic-7 Labyrinth is a simpler design that is often called the 'Cretan' referring to the design found on ancient coins on the Island of Crete. It is also the oldest style found in many cultures as early as 1500 BC. Actual usage theories vary depending on the time and culture. Its distinguishing features are; 7 circuits, an egg-like shape and the turns in the lower part of the labyrinth.

### WALKING A LABYRINTH

Many community organizations, churches and retreat centers are making labyrinth walks available for public use for prayer, meditation, contemplation or personal growth. The labyrinth walk is popular with a growing number of people because of its simplicity and the ability to approach its paths on your own terms.

1) **Environment:** Begin by setting the environment for the experience. At organized walks, your host prepares by adjusting lighting, selecting music, controlling air conditioners, and saying opening prayers. Set your personal environment by dropping your 'physical baggage' such as key-chains and cell-phones. We suggest you remove watches to remove the temptation to measure your progress chronologically. On an indoor labyrinth you may be asked to remove your shoes and walk in your socks. Outdoors, enjoy the sounds of nature; experience a barefoot walk on a grass or stone labyrinth!

**The Walk:** There is not a "required way" to walk the labyrinth. The beauty of the labyrinth is that people can approach the experience on their own terms. However, as a guideline, we break the 'walk' down into these stages.

2) **Entering:** (releasing.) During this stage you walk the path toward the center, and should try to acquire a relaxed, peaceful state, temporarily release concerns and quiet the mind.

3) **Illumination:** (receiving) The time in the center. This is a time of openness and peacefulness; you experience, learn or receive what this unique moment offers. Take your time.

4) **Union:** (reviewing) The journey outward. You choose when to leave the center, following the same path. This is a time to review and consider what occurred in the center and how it may be applied in your life.

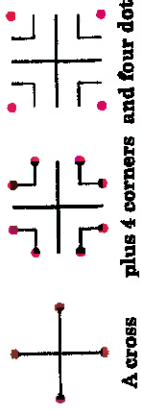
5) **Implementation:** This stage represents your life outside the labyrinth; the world where your experience or illumination is carried into and affects your everyday life.

Other ways to walk include: **Intentional walks:** where you address a specific intention, issue or concern as you walk. **Intercessory walks:** offer prayer for a different person at each turn on the path. **Meditative walks:** meditate on a specific word or passage, or pray repeating the Jesus prayer (Lord have mercy,) or the prayer for world peace. (Let peace Prevail on Earth!)

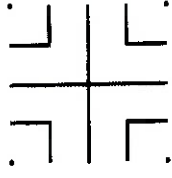
For more information:

visit [www.labyrinths.org](http://www.labyrinths.org) or [www.paxworks.com](http://www.paxworks.com)

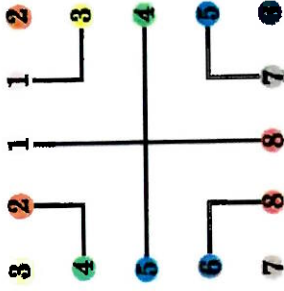
# Draw a 7-Circuit



A cross plus 4 corners and four dots makes a

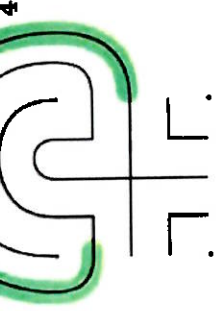
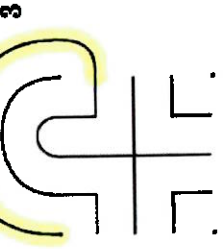
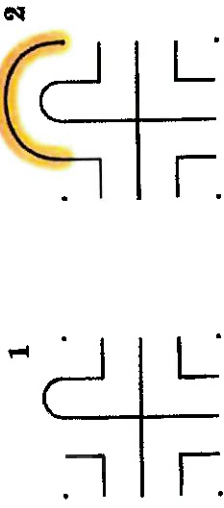


Seed Pattern



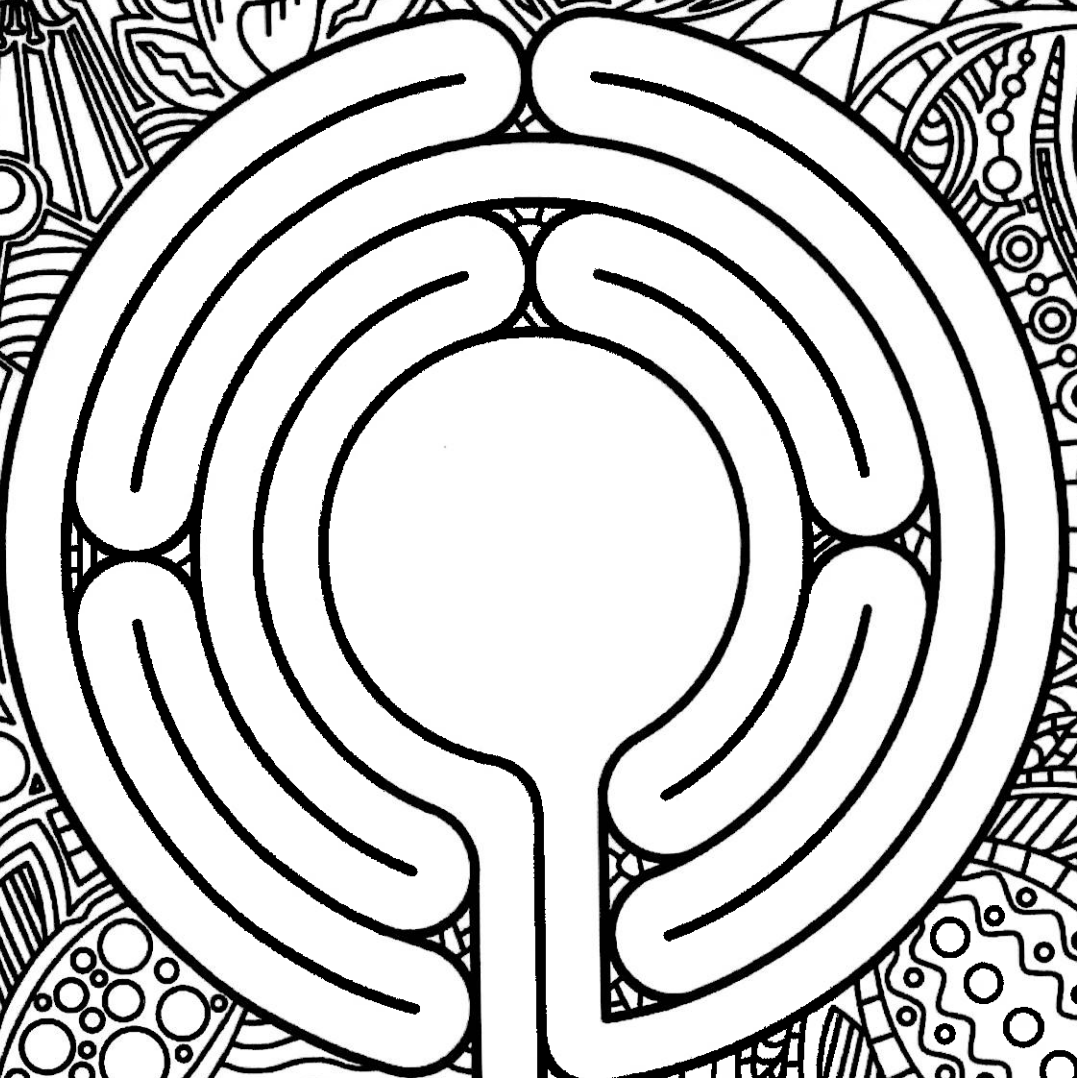
# Classical Labyrinth

Connect the points in the order shown





Journey through the  
**LABYRINTH**



**Before I walk the Labyrinth:**

**I need to Let Go:**

**After I walk the Labyrinth:**

**I need to:**