

Labyrinth Information and History

Labyrinths have been around for over 4000 years and are found in just about every major religious tradition in the world. They have been an integral part of many cultures such as Native American, Greek, Celtic and Mayan. The Hopi called the labyrinth the symbol for "mother earth" and equated it with the Kiva. Like Stonehenge and the pyramids, they are magical geometric forms that define sacred space.

During the crusades, they were used to symbolically represent the pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Today, labyrinths are being used for reflection, meditation, prayer and comfort. They are found in many sizes and shapes, and are created in sand, cornmeal, flour, painted on canvas, fashioned with masking tape or string for a temporary design, or built in a permanent fashion from stones, cut into turf, formed by mounds of earth, made from vegetation, or any other natural material.

There are three basic designs -- seven circuit, eleven circuit, and twelve circuit. The most common design found around the country today is the seven circuit. These seven circuit designs were found on pottery from over 2000 years ago. Chartres Cathedral at Chartres, France is a very famous example of an eleven circuit design, as seen to your right. One of the most famous aspects of the cathedral in Chartres is the spectacular rose window over the great west doors. It has the same dimensions as the labyrinth and is exactly the same distance up the west wall as the labyrinth is laterally from the cathedral's main entrance below the window. An imaginary cosmic hinge located where the doors and floor intersect would, if closed, place the rose window directly on top of the labyrinth, thus the sparkling, colored light of the window and the darkness of the labyrinthine pilgrimage are combined.

Many people make the mistake of thinking a labyrinth and a maze are the same. A maze has dead ends and many trick turns. A labyrinth has only one path leading to the center and back out again. There are no dead ends.

When you walk a labyrinth, you meander back and forth, turning 180 degrees each time you enter a different circuit. As you shift your direction you also shift your awareness from right brain to left brain. This is one of the reasons the labyrinth can induce receptive states of consciousness. It can also help to balance the chakras.

Starting from the left as you enter the center, the petals may represent the realms of;

Mineral - Plant - Animal – Human – Angelic and Divine Mystery

Each person's walk is a personal experience. How one walks and what one receives differs with each walk. Some people use the walk for clearing the mind and centering. Others enter with a question or concern. The time in the center can be used for receiving, reflecting, meditating, or praying, as well as discovering our own sacred inner space. What each person receives can be integrated on the walk out. Your walk can be a healing and sometimes very profound experience or it can be just a pleasant walk. Each time is different.