

## Labyrinths



### What is a labyrinth?

The labyrinth is an ancient symbol found right around the world.

Although they come in various sizes and designs, they all consist of a single circuitous path. The path winds back and forth through a series of concentric circles till you come to the central point.

With a labyrinth, you follow the same path back out from the centre as you took in.

## Where did they originate?

It seems labyrinths are an integral part of many of the major religions as well as indigenous belief systems. From what we can tell, labyrinths have been part of cultural traditions on every inhabited continent across a vast span of time. From ancient Egyptians and Celts to Native Americans, over 300 labyrinths have been discovered as far afield as Australia, India, Europe, Scandinavia and Russia

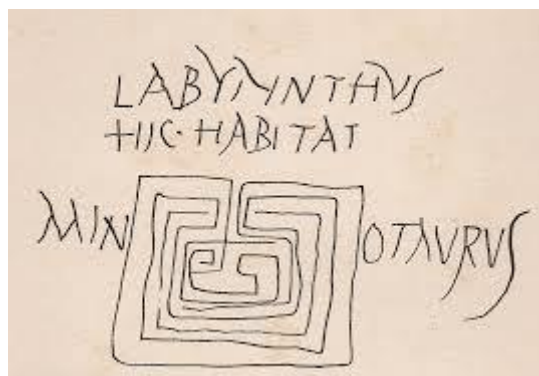
Some of these labyrinths are known to date back at least 5,000 years. However, it has been speculated labyrinths may have existed as far back as 12,000 years ago.

The oldest known myth relating to a labyrinth is the one designed by Daedalus on the orders of King Minos of Crete. Inside this structure lived the Minotaur, half man and half bull, who annually feasted on humans for sustenance. Theseus eventually slayed the Minotaur by taking the advice of the King's daughter to unwind a ball of string as he entered the labyrinth and thus be able to follow it back from the centre.

Whilst the legend of the Minotaur is considered a myth, a bronze age archaeological site referred to as the Labyrinth of Knossos was uncovered on Crete early in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

One of the oldest known labyrinths dates back nearly 4000 years. It can be found in Egypt and is called the Labyrinth of Antiquity. Said by the ancient Greek historian Herodotus in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC when describing a temple containing over 3,000 rooms full of hieroglyphs and paintings that had a labyrinth at its centre to excel even the pyramids.

Graffiti containing a labyrinth was found carved into the wall of house in Pompeii. It says – a Minotaur lives here.



## **What was their purpose?**

Whilst no one knows the true origins of labyrinths, they are most likely a spiritual tool. Over time they have been described as an 'archetypal blueprint where psyche meets spirit', a 'crucible for change' and a 'watering hole for the soul'.

Most likely each culture created the labyrinth around their own set of beliefs about life and the mystical workings of the universe. For example, the Celts are believed to have seen them as representing the never ending circle of life.

There is some debate over their links to Sacred Geometry and the Golden ratio. This is in consideration of the numbers of twists and turns one takes when walking the path, as well as in the numbers of circles.

## **How are they used today?**



Labyrinths today are used on different levels. This can be as a tool to inspire change at a planetary level by raising human awareness of the interconnection between all living beings. They are also used as a tool for community development.

By far the primary contemporary use of them is at a more personal level where they are used for growth and transformation. The practice of

labyrinth walking integrates the body with the mind and the mind with the spirit. It is truly a holistic practice.

Walking a labyrinth is a way to quiet the mind, recover a balance in life, and enter a state of meditation. Participants from all walks of life report gaining insights through self-reflection, ah ha moments of creativity, as well as a reduction in stress.

One of the joys of the labyrinth is that whilst they are considered a spiritual tool to help people walk in their truth, they are non-denominational. In this way they are a cross-cultural blueprint for integration.

The most famous Labyrinth today has to be the one found in Chartres Cathedral in France. It is most likely this particular labyrinth was created for those who could not undertake a full pilgrimage. However, as they grow in popularity once again, so they can now be found in medical centres, parks, churches, schools, prisons, memorial parks, spas, cathedrals and retreat centres, as well as in people's backyards.

### **How is the Labyrinth used on the Wolf Medicine programme?**



On Wolf Medicine we provide you with the space and support you need to experience Walking the Labyrinth. In this context we use the labyrinth as a Releasing Ceremony. That is, as a tool to release what no longer serves you.

We will help you to create your own labyrinth in the sand so you can use this tool time and time again if you want to. You can also share the experience with family and friends.

Previous participants on Wolf Medicine have gone on to create labyrinths from stones, sand, in the forest with twigs, branches and leaves, from bird seed in the park or their garden, or by using chalk paint. One person created a mosaic labyrinth.

Whilst walking the labyrinth bare foot is best, if you find this challenging you can also 'walk' the labyrinth using a drawing and tracing over it with your finger.

We will help you process your labyrinth experience on Wolf Medicine by feeding back observations of your life journey through the path to the centre and back out. This is based on the Zen philosophy of 'how you do something is how you do everything'.