



The Labyrinth as a Sacred Healing Path

What is a labyrinth?

Many people confuse a labyrinth with a maze. A maze is essentially a walking puzzle with many blind alleys and false paths. A maze usually has high walls to make its exploration a challenge. The walker explores its many turnings in order to find the way to the center or through it.

A labyrinth, on the other hand, has only one path even though that path may have many turnings. No matter what the design, a labyrinth's path always takes the walker to its center. There is one path in, and the same path is walked out. The borders of the paths are low, so the whole labyrinth is visible.

The labyrinth is an ancient pattern found world-wide, with representations of it found on pottery fragments dating back at least 4,000 years. Although the labyrinth had been all but forgotten in the Western world during the last few centuries, it has been recently brought back into common usage largely through the work of Dr. Lauren Artress and Veriditas, The Voice of the Labyrinth Movement, which Dr. Artress founded in 1996.

The labyrinth is a meditative and spiritual tool that can be walked in many different ways, although generally the walker releases that which he or she wishes to let go of on the way in, receives insight in the center, then brings what has been received back into the world on the return path. Walking the labyrinth can be a deeply transformative experience and an effective way to gain insight, or it can simply be walked in quiet meditation. There is no "wrong" way to walk a labyrinth.

About the Santa Rose labyrinth

The labyrinth in our back yard is a Santa Rosa labyrinth, a design created by Dr. Lea Goode-Harris of Santa Rosa, California. It has seven rounds and a fairly large center space, and the turnings of its path are at its four quarters. In honor of its design my husband and I oriented our labyrinth to the four cardinal directions. We placed symbols of the four Elements at its four quarters, following the symbology of our spiritual tradition. There is a bell on a post representing Air in the East, where we placed the entrance to our labyrinth. In the South is a chimenea representing Fire, in the West a fountain for Water, and in the North a stone pillar representing Earth. If at night you stand in front of the chimenea facing across the labyrinth to the North, the North Star will be directly above the stone pillar.

We have walked the labyrinth in solitary meditation and have also used it with groups in ritual. It is available for your use if we work together.

Bibliography

Artress, Lauren: *Walking A Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Tool*. New York: Riverhead Books. 1995.

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McCullough, David Willis: *The Unending Mystery: A Journey Through Labyrinths and Mazes*. New York: Pantheon Books. 2004.

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