

Sacred Geometry of the Labyrinth

The labyrinth is a model of spiritual cosmology...

—Keith Critchlow, author and sacred geometer

The labyrinth is a large, complex spiral circle which is an ancient symbol for the ultimate mystery of life: the God within, the Goddess, the Holy in all of creation. Matriarchal spirituality celebrates the hidden and the unseen. It is often symbolized by the cycles of the moon that guide the growing seasons as well as the inner map of knowing in women.



Labyrinths can be found in almost every religious tradition around the world. The Kabala, or Tree of Life, found in the Jewish mystical tradition is an elongated labyrinth figure based on the number 11. The Hopi medicine wheel, based on the number 4, and the Man in the Maze are just two of the many Native American labyrinths. Tibetan sand paintings, though not walked, are mandalas, a kind of labyrinth created through a meditative state. They hold the experience of transformation within them as well.

The Gothic cathedrals of Europe were all created according to methods of applied sacred geometry. Labyrinths were strategically located in geometric patterns that related to the whole of the cathedral. Sacred geometry was once considered a divine art and is the key to creating “an abode of eternal

truth,” symbolizing unity. The central concept of unity, symbolized by the circle, stands behind the choice of numbers, proportions and pattern.

The medieval Christian labyrinth, whose path meanders through four quadrants of the spiral, is considered a breakthrough in design because it creates the feeling of not knowing where the path goes next - although there is a definitive end at the center. There are two styles of this classical eleven-circuit labyrinth.

The circular design of the Chartres labyrinth is from the tradition of the Knights Templar. Legend says that the design was part of King Solomon’s temple and was carried to France by the Templars. This style of labyrinth is also associated with the freemasons, the guilds that provided the expertise and labor for the building of the Gothic cathedrals through Europe. The Chartres labyrinth was laid into the cathedral floor sometime between 1194 and 1220. It is one of the last remaining of its time.

The second style is from the Maltese tradition and can be seen in Amiens Cathedral. The same unicursal path is shaped octagonally in this version. When viewed from above, a Maltese cross can be seen within the pattern.

The singular path of the classical eleven-circuit labyrinth lies in eleven concentric circles with a twelfth being the center of the labyrinth. The path meanders throughout the whole circle. There are thirty-four turns on the path going into the center. Six of these are semi-right-angle turns, and twenty-eight other are 180 degree U-turns. The number 12 is important in the sacred arts. It is the multiple of 3, representing heaven, and 4,

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representing earth. The path over all represents creation.

The center of the labyrinth is often called the rosette. It is made up of a six-petaled rose-shaped area. The rose is a sign of beauty and love that dates as far back as the Egyptian myth of Isis, and Aphrodite and Venus of classical times. The rose is also regarded as a symbol of enlightenment even today. The rose, and the lotus, its Eastern equivalent, both occur within the context of cosmic wheels. The center of the geometrical pattern can also be said to symbolize both the earth and sun.

The four quadrants of the labyrinth mark each quarter of the year. On the outer ring of the path, are a ring of partial circles called lunations. They consist of 28 1/2 two-third circles per quadrant and 28 cusps or points per quadrant. Some believe that these offered a method of keeping track of the lunar cycles of twenty-eight days each. They bring cosmic power and energy to the geometry.

The most important part of the labyrinth is the invisible thirteen-pointed star that radiates from its center. As you look at the diagram, notice that the points of the star connect the outer lunations with the center. Two of the lines of the star intersect directly in the middle of the labyrinth. The crossing of these lines determines where the petals will be placed. The number 13 comes most likely from the Pythagorean ratios that were used to lay out Chartres. It is a prime number, only

divisible by itself and the number 1. It is therefore an irreducible expression of the Prime Mover found in Greek thought. The number 13 is also symbolic of the thirteen full moons in a year. A labyrinth walker turns toward the center thirteen times during the walk.

It is believed that the invisible star empowers the labyrinth in some inexplicable way. It establishes the pattern for the flow of energy that allows the walker to have solid and integrative experiences. The path into the center winds in a clockwise pattern, and the path back unwinds counterclockwise. The spiral is a basic form of nature, although the labyrinth spiral is more



complex. The circular path inward cleanses and quiets the mind. The unwinding path integrates and empowers on the walk back out.

Reference: *Walking a Sacred Path* by Dr. Lauren Artress

About the Workshop Facilitator:



Beverly Russell was born and educated in London. She trained as a journalist, and is the recipient of over 20 awards for creative excellence. She has been recognized with honorary Doctorate degrees in Fine Arts from Kendall College of Art & Design and Parsons School of Design, who described her as a "master educator." Beverly Russell Enterprises is a well-known industry consulting firm with a reputation for creative thinking and extraordinary event coordination.

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