

INTRODUCING THE LABYRINTH

Welcome to the labyrinth. These brief notes are intended to introduce a little of the history of labyrinths, as well as to offer some guidance on how you might want to approach your own walk today.

Enjoy your walk. I hope that it brings you peace, inner joy, and a space for reflection.

– Clive Johnson, host for Labyrinth Around America.

WHAT IS THE LABYRINTH?

The labyrinth is a single path, toward a center – there are no dead ends or blind passageways for getting lost. Usually following one of several common patterns, a labyrinth may be painted onto a canvas, mowed into a lawn, or permanently set into a floor – among many other possibilities.

Labyrinths can be found all over the world, and have a long history. Common patterns etched into the ground, paved in stone, or marked out on cave walls have been discovered in many different places, as well as in cave paintings and drawings in ancient texts. They feature in many Roman mosaics, and were laid into the floors of many of Europe's great cathedrals. At Chartres in France, for example, labyrinths used to be walked by pilgrims who were unable to travel to Jerusalem.

However, labyrinth walking isn't just a practice enjoyed by Christians – labyrinths feature in Native American, Hindu, Buddhist, Jain, and other faith traditions, and are walked by many people of no faith too. Labyrinths have become especially popular in recent years since a labyrinth printed on canvas (rather than having to be permanently set into a floor) was made for Grace Cathedral in San Francisco in the 1990s.

Today, many people walk labyrinths to meditate, reflect, or detach from the everyday for a short while. Many people report feeling inspired, uplifted, having flashes of inspiration, but most commonly having a sense of peace when walking a labyrinth. Were it to offer nothing else, the labyrinth offers a safe space where you can be at one with yourself, not demanding anything from you other than that you put one foot in front of the other and breathe!

WALKING THE LABYRINTH

All that's necessary to walk a labyrinth is to start at the beginning and move at your own pace toward the center. You might want to focus on a particular thought or question as you walk, just notice how your feet arch and move as you walk, or pay attention to your breathing. Otherwise, try to empty your mind of busy thoughts as much as you can, but don't worry too much about whatever thoughts or feelings may come to you.

During your walk, you may feel inclined to walk at a quicker pace and sometimes slower than others, possibly occasionally wanting to stop. You may need to occasionally sidestep to pass by someone who is walking ahead of you, or others may need to pass by you. The walk is not a race! Take whatever time you need to arrive at the center, and rest there a while if you wish to (sit, stand, kneel or whatever feels right). When you are ready, leave the labyrinth by the path opposite the one that you entered the center from. Then, simply return to your place to rest a while longer, and feel free to leave when you wish, or stay for a short while to talk after we finish walking.

If several people are waiting to enter the labyrinth at once, I will indicate when you might want to start your walk, to allow a little space between each person. I'll also indicate when the labyrinth is open for walking, usually by ringing a small bell (there's no need to rush to start your walk until you feel ready – take your time). Similarly, when we are approaching the end of the time that we have available, I will start to walk very slowly around the edge of the labyrinth, and then will close the walk with another ring of the chime. Most people like to sit and reflect on their walk before rushing off, and some may jot a reflection in a notebook that they may keep with them.

“GROUND RULES” FOR WALKING

While there are no hard and fast rules for walking a labyrinth, I suggest that the following guidelines are observed:

- If you're able, please remove boots or shoes before walking the labyrinth, especially if they are muddy. This will help preserve the life of the labyrinth.
- Please switch off mobile phones, and avoid talking if you can while walking and while waiting for others to start or finish their walk. Don't run in the labyrinth!
- Please enter the labyrinth via the path on the left. The path to the right is the exit path from the center. This will minimize the need to step past people coming from different directions.
- Hold your hands out, walk at any pace, and do whatever feels right on the labyrinth – but please be mindful of the interests of others. Please note too that I can't be held responsible for any accident that might occur during a walk, however unlikely that may be.
- When the time that we have available is beginning to draw to a close, I will begin to very slowly walk around the edge of the labyrinth. If you are still walking at this time, please start to bring your own walk to a close.

The only real things that I ask is that you **respect other walkers**, and **respect the labyrinth itself** (so that it won't become worn or damaged too quickly). Children under 9 must be supervised.

AFTER YOUR WALK

At some walks, I will try to provide refreshments for anyone who wants to join me and others for a brief chat after the walk is finished. I ask for a small contribution toward the cost of refreshments, if you're able, and also invite any voluntary contributions toward the costs of hosting the labyrinth, but these are totally voluntary (I also have a webpage for any donations that you might feel able to give, <https://www.gofundme.com/labyrinth-around-america>).

If you enjoyed your walk, and might be interested to find out more about labyrinths, you might like to visit the Labyrinth Around America website, www.labyrintharoundamerica.net, where there are a range of websites, books, YouTube videos and podcasts listed. These include 'The Labyrinth Locator', an online search facility for finding labyrinths that may be nearby where you are.

You might also like to buy a copy of a little book that I've written to introduce the history of labyrinths and offer suggestions on how you might find out more about labyrinths. 'Labyrinth A–Ω (Alpha to Omega)' is available as a paperback, ebook, or Audible audiobook, in English or Spanish, via Amazon, Barnes&Noble, and other bookstores.

ABOUT LABYRINTH AROUND AMERICA

Labyrinth Around America is a project to take a single portable labyrinth around the states that mark the boundaries of the United States (those that have a coastline, or which have a border with either Canada or Mexico). The idea is to 'create a positive energy' by the movement of the labyrinth in a circle around this great country, and to introduce many people to the pleasure of walking a labyrinth who may not have had the opportunity before. This great road trip was conceived by Clive Johnson, an interfaith minister and writer from near London, UK.

If you'd like to keep in touch with the journey of the labyrinth that you walk today, please keep a watch on our blog, <https://labyrintharoundamerica.wordpress.com/>, or our Facebook page, <https://www.facebook.com/labyrintharoundamerica/>.