



Take a Walk on the 'Mild' Side

Labyrinths celebrate a centuries-old spiritual practice, combining peaceful meandering and meditative therapy

As Feng Shui practitioners and consultants, we can easily find ourselves drained of personal and emotional chi. Helping others to help themselves takes a lot of energy and effort! While there are a number of tried and true Feng Shui "cures" we can use to revitalize our souls, sometimes it is refreshing to try something different. For a different perspective on boosting your chi, find a labyrinth in your community and talk a walk ... on the "mild" side!

What is a labyrinth?

When viewed from above, a labyrinth looks like a puzzle, a maze or some kind of weird crop circle left behind by extra-terrestrials who visited earth under cover of darkness.



Classical Labyrinth
www.labyrinthsociety.org

A labyrinth is, however, none of the above. Simply put, a labyrinth is an ancient symbol representing life's journey. People walk through the uni-circular pattern of the labyrinth, pause to relax and meditate at its centre, then walk out feeling better. It is a non-denominational, centuries-old spiritual healing practice.

A labyrinth can be laid out on the ground in a variety of ways. It can be painted on a concrete or other solid surface, identified with colored bricks or paving stones, or be a simple arrangement of stones on any natural surface, such as grass, gravel or sand. Sometimes, a series of candles are placed on the labyrinth pattern and people walk its path at night. This provides an even more mystical and spiritual experience.



Chartres Labyrinth
www.labyrinthsociety.org

Labyrinths can be very large... or small enough to, quite literally, let your fingers do the walking. You can still feel the benefits of a labyrinth by using your finger to

trace its path when printed on a piece of paper or displayed on a computer screen.

How does a labyrinth work its magic?

Although they may look similar, a labyrinth is not to be confused with a maze – it is not a puzzle to be solved, with dead ends and blind alleys. Walking through a maze is a "left brain" task that requires logical, sequential, and analytical activity to find the correct path into and out of it. A labyrinth, on the other hand, has only one uni-circular path to the centre and then out again. It is a "right brain" task, involving intuition, creativity and imagery. The only decision you need to make is whether to enter the path or not.

*A maze
is designed to make you lose your way.*

*A Labyrinth
is designed to help you find it.*

Once most people understand the *concept* of the labyrinth, they are often still confused about how to pronounce it. The 'y' is silent, so you simply say "lab-rinth."

Although labyrinths are relatively new to modern-day society it is a holistic meditative tool that has been used by many cultures and religions throughout history. Evidence of its use dates back to 500 A.D.

Dr. Herbert Benson, of the Benson-Henry Institute for Mind-Body Medicine at Massachusetts General Hospital, has written that the fundamental element of mind/body medicine - the elicitation of the relaxation

response - can be traced back to the earliest civilizations. It appears that one of our most basic bodily avenues to better health is the simple following of the breath, in and out, and the avoidance of distracting thoughts.

Dr. Benson's research (some of it dating back to the 1960s) has revealed that focused walking meditations – such as the labyrinth – are highly effective at reducing anxiety and eliciting what he refers to as “the relaxation response.”

When eliciting the relaxation response:

- Your metabolism decreases,
- Your heart beats slower,
- Your muscles relax,
- Your breathing becomes slower,
- Your blood pressure decreases, and
- Your levels of nitric oxide increase.

Perhaps, as a result of research like this, the concept of building and using labyrinths to improve personal well-being is currently enjoying a renaissance. You can now find them throughout the world, at hospitals, prisons, churches, universities, public parks, and even individuals' yards.



www.labyrinthociety.org

It is generally believed that the resurgence of labyrinths is due, in part, to the fact that we live in a society with changing views and attitudes. In this fast-paced world, many have lost touch with their inner voice and with nature. The labyrinth is a powerful tool to help relax our frenetic minds, bodies and spirits. It is also a tool that is bridging the ever-widening gap between traditional religious rituals and new spiritual practices.

We, as a society, are being drawn to the labyrinth and exploring it as a healing tool because it provides a safe place to clear the mind and to receive answers to life's troubling questions. It is a place to feel grounded in the present and to help guide you in the future.

Linda Magnuson, owner of Kairos Guest Suite, is proud to have built one of the first labyrinths in Comox, British Columbia.



www.labyrinthatkairos.ca

“I feel absolutely honoured and blessed to have a labyrinth in my backyard,” says Magnuson. “There is a real energy to it and the more people that walk it, the more energy it seems to absorb. As with various forms of meditation and energy, some people don't have a profound experience the first or second time they walk a labyrinth. To help someone make the most of their experience, I advise them to take a deep breath and pause before entering the labyrinth. Walk its path with the intention of being open to the still, small voice inside of them. Walk slowly to the centre, sit for a while, and then slowly retrace your steps. In doing so, you are more apt to feel a sense of clarity and find inner peace.

“Think of the labyrinth as a playground for allowing your intuitions to take wing. Follow what comes into your head and your heart while inside its ‘walls’; what many consider to be ‘Sacred Space’.”

***To find a labyrinth near you check
www.labyrinthociety.org***

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Terri now lives in Courtenay, B.C., and is available for home, garden and business consultations. She also presents a variety of Feng Shui workshops.

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