

LABYRINTHS

WALKING A SACRED PATH

LABYRINTH AT THE LIGHT HOUSE

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[1] I THE LABYRINTH

This presentation started out as a review of the book *Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Practice* by Lauren Artress. But much like my own journey with the Labyrinth, it has expanded, and now includes an introduction to Labyrinths at the start, a summary of some of the main points in the book, and then some information about my Labyrinth at The Light House.

I was on a Zoom call with the author this week, and mentioned I had too much material, and she said “cut the book and talk about the labyrinth”, so I will talk about the book a bit, but I have put a summary of the book in one of the handouts.

I LABYRINTHS

LABYRINTHS 1 – WHAT IS A LABYRINTH

[2] As an introduction, here is a definition of what a labyrinth is, and I’ll talk about some of the types of labyrinths.

[3] A LABYRINTH IS NOT A MAZE

First of all, a labyrinth is not a maze. A maze is a puzzle with many paths and dead ends. It is designed for you to lose your way.

[4] A LABYRINTH HAS ONE PATH

By contrast, a labyrinth has one path that leads from the outer edge in a circuitous way to the centre, and out again. A labyrinth is designed to help you to find your way.

This diagram is of the Medieval labyrinth at Chartres Cathedral in France, which was rebuilt in the early 13th century after a fire.

It has 11 circuits, which is the number of paths on each side of the centre, and is divided into 4 quadrants, symbolic of the cross. The cross is made of lunations, or moon shaped areas at

the bends of the path. This pattern is one of the most frequent designs of labyrinths being built today.

[5] MEDIEVAL LABYRINTH

This photo is of the Chartres style labyrinth inside Grace Cathedral in San Francisco. You can see the paths and the lunations.

Not well shown here is the central 6 petalled rose, symbolising love and union with God.

[6] CLASSICAL LABYRINTH

The classical design is the most ancient of labyrinth patterns. It appears as petroglyphs in Spain (dating from around 2000BCE), on silver coins in Crete, on rocks in northern Europe, on bark in Indonesia, and carved on rocks in the desert of the American Southwest.

This example is a 7 circuit labyrinth.

[7] RAMBLING ROSE

This is the pattern for the Labyrinth that I put in at my home and clinic this year.

It is called The Light House, after the practice I used to have on the corner of Bealey Avenue and Sherborne Street, just down the road.

The arrows at the corners point to the four Cardinal points.

[8] ROMAN MOSAIC LABYRINTH

And this is an example of a Roman mosaic labyrinth, which flourished between 165 BCE and 150 CE.

It depicts a bull's head in the centre, symbolising the Greek myth of Theseus and the Minotaur, a creature which was half bull and half man, and was housed in an underground labyrinth.

LABYRINTHS 2 - EXPERIENCES

[9] EXPERIENCES

So I'd like to mention here some of the labyrinths that I have experienced, and that maybe you can as well.

[10] CHARTRES

I visited Chartres Cathedral many decades ago now. It is a magnificent Cathedral south of Paris, which sits on a hill, and is visible from miles away over the corn fields.

It is in high Gothic style, and has wonderful stained glass windows, including two rose windows, which contain a blue colour not seen elsewhere.

It also houses a much venerated Black Madonna, which has unfortunately been painted white in recent renovations.

However, until recently the labyrinth has not been in use, and has been covered with chairs.

[11] SOUTHERN LIGHTS CENTRE AKAROA

There are also a number of labyrinths in New Zealand, closer to home.

The labyrinth at the Southern Lights Centre above Akaroa has a seven-circuit classical design. Together with an octagonal temple, it has stunning view over the harbour, and is part of a centre for the Trans Himalayan School of Wisdom.

[12] MANA RETREAT COROMANDEL

Mana Retreat is based on the west coast of the Coromandel peninsula.

High on a hill above is the Tara Sanctuary, with an amazing view over hills and the Firth of Thames. This sanctuary is devoted to the major world religions and spiritual paths, and was built using medieval materials and techniques.

The acoustics are amazing, and the singing of Taize chants there is mesmerising.

Alongside the sanctuary is an 11 circuit labyrinth, under which are buried stones from sacred sites around the world.

There is also a bell tower, with bells that ring the changes every 15 minutes during the day, much like the medieval monasteries.

I was fortunate to meet the German architect, and to climb into the belfry, but not at the time that the bells were ringing, of course!

[13] TE MOATA RETREAT COROMANDEL

Te Moata is a retreat centre situated in native bush on the east coast of the Coromandel Peninsula.

Their statement of intent includes: “we provide opportunities for the deepening of well-being through connection with self, community and nature, and a safe haven for native flora and fauna.”

The labyrinth is the heart centre of Te Moata and is situated by the stream on a ley line which runs through the land.

The design of the labyrinth is based on the sacred geometry of Chartres Cathedral. It is made of Te Moata red clay and hand moulded stones.

This is a sacred space in which to symbolically walk your life's journey; a place of contemplation, celebration, ceremony, commitment and inspiration.

I haven't been to Te Moata yet, but it was one of their keepers who encouraged me to do the Labyrinth Facilitators course recently.

[14] MADONNA RISING CHARTRES

One of the great advantages of lockdown is that courses and pilgrimages are now being offered online, and last year I was able to attend Madonna Rising, an annual pilgrimage to Chartres Cathedral, run by Ubiquity University, which developed from Matthew Fox's University of Creation Spirituality.

There were daily talks by philosophers, theologians, and art historians, and daily classes in singing, poetry and dance.

And this time in Chartres, even if only virtually, I was able to fully experience the Cathedral and the labyrinth.

[15] BANAFSHEH SAYYAD

The coordinator of the Chartres pilgrimage was Banafsheh Sayyad, a dance artist and teacher based in UCLA California. She communicates the universal message of Sufi mysticism.

When Andrew Harvey started the Chartres Academy the labyrinth was hardly ever used, as it was thought somehow sinful to be doing physical activity in a Cathedral.

Nevertheless, there were stories of priests dancing in the labyrinth centuries earlier, and a ritual that involved carrying a ball, and throwing it out of the circle.

I am showing this slide, because there was a breakthrough in 2019, when the priests invited Banafsheh to dance in the labyrinth, marking a real change in attitude.

I don't have the actual dance, but this is a still from her dancing at one of Marianne Williamson's Monday lectures.

LABYRINTHS 3 - VIDEOS

[16] VIDEOS

So until recently this had been my experience with labyrinths, but I'd like to give you a few examples of different labyrinths around the world.

[17] GRACE CATHEDRAL SAN FRANCISCO

The author Lauren Artress of Grace Cathedral, was one of the people who pushed the chairs back at Chartres so that she could walk the labyrinth there.

She has been one of the foremost people in bringing labyrinths to the western world, and popularising their use. At Grace Cathedral there is now a permanent outdoor labyrinth, and a permanent indoor tapestry labyrinth.

Both have been in widespread use, and on the zoom call this week she said that the walkers are coming back in after the lockdown.

She states that you don't have to be serious when you are walking the labyrinth, and describes a group of elderly Chinese ladies who do Tai Chi in the square each day, and then run the labyrinth together, shoulder to shoulder, laughing loudly.

[18] LEUCADIA BEACH CALIFORNIA -

VIDEO NEW YEARS DAY

This next video is of an artist who draws an elaborate labyrinth on the beach each New Years Day.

People come and walk it, and can think about their lives, letting go of the year that has passed, and looking ahead to their life in the New Year.

And at the end the tide comes and washes it away.

LABYRINTHS 4 - PHOTOS

[19] LABYRINTHS 4 - PHOTOS

And now, to end this section, I have a few pictures of different of labyrinths around the world.

[20] GRACE CATHEDRAL SAN FRANCISCO

This is a full moon walk on the indoor labyrinth at Grace Cathedral.

[21] LANDSCAPE LABYRINTH NEW MEXICO

And this is an outside labyrinth in the desert in New Mexico.

[22] CROCODILE RIVER RESERVE SOUTH AFRICA

This one is a huge labyrinth in South Africa. It has a diameter of 50 metres, and the path is 2km long.

[23] LAVENDER LABYRINTH CZECH REPUBLIC

And this is a sweet little lavender labyrinth in the Czech Republic.

[24] BACKYARD LABYRINTH SEDONA

But labyrinths don't have to be large, or particularly complex. This backyard labyrinth in Sedona has 5 circuits, and is a similar size to the labyrinth I am the keeper for.

[25] BURY ST EDMONDS, UNITED KINGDOM

Created with wild flowers in the ruins of a Benedictine Abbey, this 3 pathway labyrinth, is 45 metres in diameter.

An information sign says: "Down the centuries, visitors came here to the Abbey of St Edmund to be more aware of God. This wildflower labyrinth continues that tradition on this sacred site."

And at the end of the summer the labyrinth is mown, to come up again the following year.

[26] TEMPORARY LABYRINTH NORWAY

Labyrinths don't have to be particularly permanent either. This one in Norway was made out of fabric to celebrate World Labyrinth Day.

[27] FULL MOON LABYRINTH ONTARIO

And, of course, the ultimate in impermanence is a labyrinth that is offered back to the sea with the next full tide, as in this full moon labyrinth in Canada.

II WALKING A SACRED PATH

[28] WALKING A SACRED PATH BY LAUREN ARTRESS

That is the main part of my presentation about labyrinths, but the underlying theme here is the book *Walking a Sacred Path: (Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Practice)* by Reverend Doctor Lauren Artress, who I've mentioned several times.

Here she is standing on the indoor tapestry labyrinth at Grace Cathedral.

I've summarised the most interesting parts of her book into one of the handouts, but I'd like to give a few quotes from the book as well.

[19] WALKING A SACRED PATH 1 – HANDOUT

TO WALK A SACRED PATH

The labyrinth, in its strange and uncanny way, offers a sacred and stable space to focus the attention and listen to the longing of the soul...

To walk a sacred path is to discover our inner sacred space: that core of feeling that is waiting to have life breathed back into it through symbols, archetypal forms, rituals, stories and myths.

Understanding the invisible world, the world of pattern and process, opens us to the movement of the Spirit.

NEW PILGRIMS. NEW PATHS

The tradition of pilgrimage is being revitalised during our own times to seek answers to our longings... The pilgrim seeks to follow the spirit's compass, which guides us to find an inner openness to the outer world ... that become[s] the fabric of our lives.

The labyrinth introduces us to the idea of a wide and gracious path. It redefines the journey to God: from a vertical perspective that goes from earth up to heaven, to a horizontal perspective in which we are all walking the path together

WALKING – THE PROCESS

Walking the labyrinth does not demand a great amount of concentration in order to benefit from the experience. The sheer act of walking a complicated path...begins to focus the mind.

The labyrinth experience sensitises us, educates us, and helps us distinguish superficial extraneous thoughts from the [true] "thought" that comes from our soul level... that each of us longs to hear.

REDISCOVERING THE DIVINE WITHIN

Our souls hunger for the lost connection to our intuitive... We long for a creative, symbolic process that nurtures our spiritual nature, that feeds the soul...

Many of us sense this mysterious unfolding. And many are seeking experiences that help us respond to the changes this evolution brings to our lives.

[30] WALKING A SACRED PATH 2 – STAGES OF THE LABYRINTH

And now I have some information about the actual process of walking the labyrinth.

To quote from Lauren Artress again:

The path becomes a mirror for where we are in our lives. The rhythm of walking, placing one foot in front of the other, quiets the mind, relaxes the body and refreshes the spirit. Walk it with an open heart and an open mind.

RELEASING (LETTING GO)

The first stage is releasing or letting go. It involves walking into the labyrinth.

This is the time to quiet the mind, and let go of details, distractions and extraneous thoughts. To open your heart to feel whatever it might feel.

To become aware of your breathing, and relax and find your natural pace.

RECEIVING (LISTENING)

The second stage is receiving or listening..

When you reach the centre, you can sit or stand there as long as you like.

This is a place of reflection, meditation and prayer. Receive what is there for you to receive.

RETURNING (REFLECTING, RESOLVING, RECLAIMING)

The third stage is walking out of the labyrinth.

Walking out, integration of your experience can occur, and you take back into the world what you have received.

Each labyrinth experience is different however, and the reaction can be quite subtle, right up to a powerful experience.

And sometimes it can take time for the meaning of the walk to release.

Whatever happens, you are asked to listen to your heart and take the time you need to integrate the experience.

[31] WALKING A SACRED PATH 3 – GUIDELINES

The book also talks about guidelines and expectations for walking a labyrinth.

For example, follow your natural pace. Walk at the speed you wish, and you may change speed or stop as you go.

Feel free to move around others, or let others walk around you. This is easiest to do on the turns.

The path is a two-way street, and you will meet others coming out as you are going in.

Let your gaze be soft as you walk.

And let everything be a metaphor – whatever you feel is an indication of how things are for you, and the area of your life it would be helpful to be present with.

[32] WALKING A SACRED PATH 4 – EXPECTATIONS

People can be concerned about the expectations for their walk, such as thinking “I bet everyone is going to get this apart from me”, or “I’m not doing it right.”

But we can point out that “This is your walk. We are walking the labyrinth together with others, but this is your walk.”

We just experience what we experience on the walk. It may feel as if nothing has happened, but inevitably something has, although that may not be obvious straight away.

Each person’s experience is unique.

“Can we give each other permission to be un-self conscious in the labyrinth?”

III LABYRINTH AT THE LIGHT HOUSE

[33] LABYRINTH AT THE LIGHT HOUSE

So inspired by the labyrinths I'd discovered, I followed my intuition and made a labyrinth at The Light House.

At first I thought of it as "my" labyrinth, but it has become its own entity, and I now I see myself as the "Keeper" of the Labyrinth.

[34] BASIC LABYRINTH

I showed you earlier the starting design, and this was adjusted to match the site.

I contacted Student Job Search about the painting, and found Eddie, who is an architectural design student. He'd been working as a ships captain in the Mediterranean, and came back to Christchurch where his partner is a medical student. He is part French, and has worked part of the Camina trail, so understood what I was looking for. He was able to make the procedural decisions, and then carry them out.

[35] LOGO, FLOWER OF LIFE ON ROSE

I also have a logo, which is the Flower of Life symbol superimposed into a rose...

[36] LABYRINTH WITH LOGO IN CENTRE

...so this became a mandala in the middle of the labyrinth.

[37] BLUE CRYSTAL GRID

There is a blue crystal grid, and this slide shows one of the corners.

So I wasn't quite sure what to do with the labyrinth, when Maniisha, of Te Moata, with the Rainforest labyrinth, contacted me and encouraged me to do the facilitators course with Lauren Artress, and to become a Regional Representative with the Labyrinth Society.

[38] TEMPLE GARDEN

As a bit of an indulgence, I'll show you pictures of some other areas at The Light House, alongside the labyrinth.

This is my Temple Garden, based on a Medieval monastery garden, with roses, medicinal herbs, fruits and berries.

It was started after the first lockdown, and is doing well for being just over a year old now.

[39] TEMPLE

I call this room my Temple – it is an Egyptian themed room that I sit and meditate in, and use as a waiting room.

[40] UNITY ROOM

And this is the Unity Room, the converted garage, named after a lady who bequeathed me some money that I used for the furniture.

[41] LABYRINTH

The Unity Room opens back onto the labyrinth and can be used as part of the walking experience.

[42] FOOT PATH SIGN

So thank you, I have enjoyed putting together this presentation based on the book *Walking a Sacred Path* by Lauren Artress.

But I now have a request. To become certified as a facilitator I need three groups of 10 people to come and walk the labyrinth, and one person from each group to evaluate me. It doesn't have to be a good evaluation, as I'm just finding my way, so to speak!

In the future I would like to open up the labyrinth to groups of people, maybe from churches, rest homes, community groups, kindergartens, or wherever, and see what develops.

Meanwhile I have an open day every Friday afternoon between 2pm and 5pm, but this is weather dependant, so check my Facebook page Labyrinth at The Light House Christchurch.

This isn't a promotion, and I am not looking for work, but I have brought some business cards for the Facebook page about the Labyrinth, so you can look up what's on, and see what's happening around the world. And cards for The Light House webpage, where there is more information about the labyrinth, and this talk, PowerPoint and handouts will be posted.

There are also two handouts, one about labyrinths, and one with more information from the book.

www.thelighthouse.co.nz

Facebook: Labyrinth at The Light House Christchurch