



Enter the labyrinth, and be prepared to leave the world behind as you trace your way around the sacred pathways. Simple but effective, this ancient meditation aid would be an attractive addition to any oasis of calm...

Walking the magical maze

Although labyrinths have been appearing in retreats and health care centres across the United States for some time, they remain a mystery to the majority of UK residents.

Enthusiasts are, however, convinced that the power of the labyrinth should be used to bring health and stress-relieving benefits to the masses. Could introducing them into spas be the next logical move?

A labyrinth is different from a maze in that it is not possible to actually get lost in a labyrinth. Described by some as a metaphor for a spiritual journey, lending a semblance of calm to inner chaos, the labyrinth has certainly attracted a myriad of uses over the ages. Its centre was seen as a resting-place for the spirits of the dead in

Pagan practices, and in Scandinavia, labyrinths were built to encourage good weather by trapping unfavourable winds within its coils! Early Iron Age labyrinths found in Italy show what could be human dancers imitating the mating display of the crane, connecting them to ancient fertility rites. The recent revival has led to the use of the labyrinth as more of a meditative tool, for clearing and focusing the mind. The labyrinth is said to balance opposites and bring relief to the 'spiritual drought' of recent times, the experience of two forces working in harmony and the personal space to re-energise.

"Some dowsers feel that there are energies contained within the labyrinths – that they can have effects on personal vibrations," says Jeff Seward, editor of

UK-based 'Caerdroia – Journal of mazes and labyrinths.'

"Somehow the labyrinth creates its own energy. It isolates you from everyday experience – it is its own little force field. The outside world stops at the boundary and you are wrapped up in the world of the labyrinth."

Jeff first stepped into the mysterious world of the labyrinth when he was an art student. There was something about the turf labyrinth, which fascinated him. Although sign posted as a maze, Jeff realised straight away that he was dealing with something quite special and different. He went to the town's Tourist Information Centre to find out more but they couldn't give him the answers he was looking for, so he decided to do →

→ some research of his own. This started a fascination with labyrinths that has spanned over 25 years and led to the creation of papers, books and even a dedicated web site on the subject.

"Labyrinths have become quite trendy in the past 10 years, mostly down to the 'new age revival'. The history of these designs can be traced back 3000 to 4000 years, whilst the oldest UK example is a Roman mosaic which is approximately 1800 years old. A labyrinth is created using a special technique, which results in an identical pattern of concentric pathways all leading to the centre. Once you know how it's done, you can create one anywhere - this probably led to the spread of the labyrinth from Asia and the Far East, through Europe and North America, through trade routes.

"Medieval cathedrals and hill tops in England used labyrinths as a substitute for pilgrimages to Jerusalem. At the time it was difficult to make an actual pilgrimage because of the Crusades, so the labyrinth was used as a symbol of the 'long and tortuous pathways of life' with its twists and turns, ultimately leading to salvation and redemption. In Medieval England, they were often used as a rustic village-green game, along with the maypole, where both children and adults would enjoy walking and dancing them"

The popularity of the labyrinth peaked around the 15th century, and then fell to such an extent that in the 18th and 19th



One of the 12 terracotta angels, four of which hold labyrinths, decorating the roof corbels on Watts Chapel, Compton, Surrey

centuries, a number of them were destroyed. Their place in the nation's heart was taken by garden mazes, which at the time were seen as the new entertainment - the labyrinths simplicity and mindfulness gave way to the challenge of the mazes abstract designs. The pull of the labyrinth noticeably seemed to be re-exerting its force towards the end of the last century, following an emergence in holistic health and new age beliefs, but they actually started to regain public interest towards the end of the 19th century, when non-Christian beliefs and practices started to gain more widespread tolerance.

Healing pathways

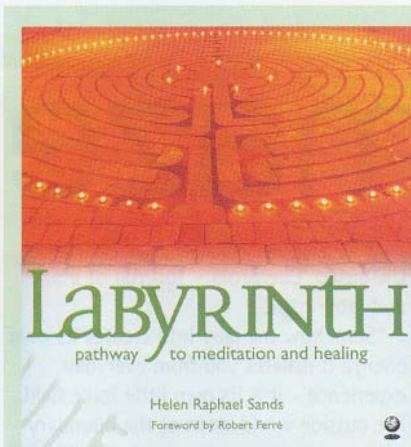
The Sacred Space Foundation is a charity that aims to provide peaceful rest, retreat

and recuperation facilities for health care workers, and for any others feeling exhausted and burned out by their work. The Foundation has a full-size portable canvas labyrinth that can be used both indoors and outdoors. It is used with great success at conferences and workshops and is also used to help with the foundation's other programmes, such as the prison and sanctuary projects. There is a now a permanent labyrinth in the grounds of 'Ravenscroft', in Renwick, Cumbria, one of the Sacred Space retreats.

St James' Church in London's Piccadilly is now running facilitated walks around its own labyrinth for a small suggested nomination of just £1.

The Reverend Lauren Artress, canon of Grace Cathedral, San Francisco claims that many people have told her of hearing what they describe as an 'an inner voice of wisdom' while walking the path. There are even reports of healing having taken place. Ritualist and pilgrimage leader, Linda Sewright believes that the labyrinth helped her heal after cancer surgery and now plans on using her own portable labyrinth in healing rituals for AIDS sufferers and their carers.

The greatest thing about this tool for inner calm is that a cathedral or large garden is not necessary to create the desired effect. The recent resurgence in popularity of labyrinths has brought up new ideas and ways of using its energies at minimum inconvenience - with the portable version! Teacher Helen Raphael Sands from South London has created her own labyrinth on canvas, which is used at Glastonbury Festival, and as recently as last year a hessian labyrinth was temporarily laid in St Paul's Cathedral for use as a pilgrimage tool. For anyone severely space-challenged, there are even finger labyrinths, table tops and floor mats. Search on the internet and it's easy to find custom designed labyrinths, although most are in the States. •



**Labyrinth -
Pathway to meditation and healing**
Helen Raphael Sands
Gaia Books
ISBN 1-85675-186-4

Helen Raphael Sands is a healer, poet, artist and dancer. Following a visit to Chartres Cathedral, Helen developed the idea of labyrinth walking into a form of meditation, and now leads workshops. This delightful new book draws on Helen's personal experiences of labyrinth walking to help readers discover their history, legendary powers and the different rituals that can be

used when walking them. A perfect introduction to the subject, the book also contains ideas for creating your own labyrinth, resources, and a gazetteer to help readers explore labyrinths from around the world.

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