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Labyrinth walking: Origin, patterns, significance, walking procedures and spiritual benefits

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Abstract

A Labyrinth is a particular pattern (generally circular, sometimes square etc.), walking through which in a particular way enhances energy, brings peace of mind, freshness, emotional quotient, spiritual quotient, love, compassion etc of the walker. Labyrinth patterns have been on the scene for the last thousands of years in many countries in and outside India. A 'typical' labyrinth sequentially involves the 'preparing' to walk designated path one way towards the centre in the given labyrinth pattern (called 'releasing') followed by spending adequate time in the centre (called, 'receiving') returning from the centre towards the exit following through the same pathway (called 'returning'), and finally recollecting and recording the experience (called 'journaling') after the walk. Besides, it has been argued that the breathing-based (Sohum-mantra-based, for example) walking through the labyrinth enhances the beneficial effects as compared to walkthrough without a mantra. Different patterns of Labyrinth result in different benefits to the walker, which are explained in this paper.

Keywords: Labyrinth, maze, patterns, walking meditation, spirituality, Mahabharata

1. Introduction

A labyrinth is a patterned path, often circular in form, used as a walking meditation or spiritual practice. A labyrinth's walkway is arranged in such a way that the participant moves back and forth across the circular (or square or rectangular) form through a series of curves, ending at the Labyrinth's heart or centre. It is unicursal, which means that it has only one entrance and leads in only one direction ^[1, 2]. Although the word maze is often used as a synonym for labyrinth, mazes are sometimes multicursal in design; the user has to make choices at many points along the path. Mazes often have more than one entrance, and at times, contain many wrong turns and dead ends.

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2. Origin of Labyrinth Walkthrough in countries outside India

The English word labyrinth is derived from the Greek word labyrinths, which in turn may come from labrys, the word for the double-headed axe associated with the Minoan culture on the island of Crete that was at its height around 1650 B.C.E According to the Greek historian Herodotus (c. 450 B.C.E.), King Minos of Crete asked an Athenian architect and inventor named Daedalus to build a house with winding passages for the Minotaur, a monster that his queen had borne after having intercourse with a bull. This mythical Cretan labyrinth was actually a maze rather than a true labyrinth, as it was intended to prevent those who entered it as human sacrifices to the Minotaur from escaping.

Walking the labyrinth combines actions of the body, mind, and spirit in an ancient, yet currently used, activity—a walking meditation. The labyrinth has reemerged as a result of attention from Reverend Dr. Lauren Artress, President and Founder of Veriditas, The Voice of the Labyrinth Movement in San Francisco ^[2].

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The human mind is a cooperative or joint effort between two distinct brains: our left and right hemispheres. Each hemisphere understands the world in vastly different ways. While the left brain is concerned with logic, details and facts, the right brain is based on feelings, emotions and imagination. Our personality is determined and moulded by which brain, left or right, we allow to be dominant in resolving problems and making decisions in our daily life. This view of a "two brained" mind has produced a new model of mental illness seen as a struggle for dominance by each brain. Therapies seek to lessen the conflicts between opposite parts of our brain and coax them to work together in peace and harmony. In the classic labyrinth there is left-right and right-left movement combined with boredom, future planning, goal attainment and repetition. Each element forces the two brains to cooperate on a mental as well as physical level. If some problem is contemplated while performing the labyrinth, it is possible that logic and emotional compromises will likewise be mediated. The labyrinth is just such an exercise in "team building" between the left and right brains, forcing them to cooperate on a task in which they must both learn to trust and compromise. In this way, it may indeed be therapeutic.

Hospitals have used labyrinths as a support tool for treating diseases such as cancer. The act of walking a labyrinth awakens the potential for contemplation, reflection, and transformation, according to data from the Oncology Nursing Society. These data indicate that walking a labyrinth is a form of psychoneuroimmunology that may use for integrative patient care. Labyrinths are available to nurses as a tool for aiding patients undergoing oncology treatment to reach a contemplative and altered state of consciousness.

Labyrinths have been found in many cultures around the world, including ancient India, Spain, Peru, and China. Members of the Tohono O'odham and Pima tribes in southern Arizona have made baskets for centuries decorated with the so-called "man in the maze" design. The labyrinth pattern woven into the basket represents the path to the top of a local sacred mountain known as Baboquivari (following figure).



Fig 1: This labyrinth is believed by the Pima to be a floor plan to the house of I'toi, and by the Tohono O'odham to be a map giving directions to his house.

According to the legend, at the beginning of the Spanish conquest of what is present day Arizona, a certain Spanish officer and his men tried to dig their way into Baboquivari. Suddenly, the ground under them opened and Baboquivari swallowed them. This legend has similarities to Francisco Vásquez de Coronado search for the Seven Cities of Cibola and a place called Quivira, where, he was told, he could get his hands on unlimited quantities of gold.

More than five hundred ancient stone labyrinths have been identified in Scandinavia. Most are located near the coast, and are thought to have been used for rituals intended to guarantee good fishing or protection from storms. The best-known labyrinths in the West, however, are those dating from the middle Ages. They were built as substitutes for going on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, a journey that was physically or economically impossible for most Christians in Western Europe during this period. Cathedrals were designated as pilgrimage shrines, and labyrinths were embedded in the stone floors of the cathedrals as part of the shrine's design. The labyrinth on the floor of Chartres Cathedral in France was installed around 1200 A.D. (following figure), and a similar labyrinth in Amiens Cathedral was made around the same time.

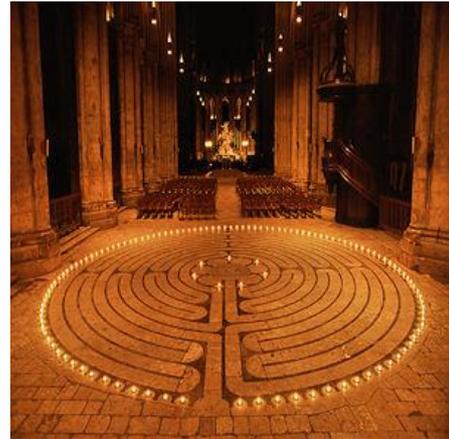


Fig 2: labyrinth on the floor of Chartres Cathedral in France

Tracing the path through the labyrinth, often on the knees, was for many pilgrims the final act of devotion on the pilgrimage. The circuitous journey to the center of the labyrinth represented the many turnings in the journey of life, a journey that required the Church's guidance and support. Medieval labyrinths were circular in shape, the circle being a universal symbol of wholeness, completion, and unity.

By the seventeenth century, however, many cathedral labyrinths were removed or destroyed. There is some disagreement among scholars regarding the reasons for their removal. Some experts think that the labyrinths were removed because the cathedral clergy had forgotten their history and original purpose, while others speculate that they were destroyed to prevent children from playing on them during Mass and disturbing worship. Another factor was the growth of rationalism in the seventeenth century and the hostility toward religion that emerged during the French Revolution at the end of the eighteenth century. The labyrinths were regarded as remnants of "superstition" and therefore offensive to "enlightened" people.

During the middle ages, people made pilgrimages to these great churches instead of going to Jerusalem. It became the custom to walk the labyrinth to the centre and then retrace the path out of the labyrinth. This "walking the labyrinth" was seen as a spiritual event. By walking the labyrinth, the faithful traced the path of a long and difficult life on earth, beginning with birth, at the entrance, and ending with death, at the center. The way out symbolized the fact or hope that a well lived life continued in either heaven or purgatory.

The contemporary revival of interest in labyrinth walking began in the early 1990s, when Dr. Lauren Artress, a psychotherapist who was on the Special Ministries staff of

Grace Cathedral (Episcopal) in San Francisco, attended a Mystery Seminar led by Jean Houston, who describes herself as "a scholar and researcher in human capacities," and directs the Foundation for Mind Research in Pomona, New York. Dr. Houston presented the labyrinth as a tool for spiritual growth that would lead the seminar participants to their spiritual center. She had taped the forty-foot-wide pattern of the Chartres Cathedral labyrinth on the floor of the meeting room. Dr. Artress felt drawn to return to the labyrinth later that night and found walking through it a powerful experience. She then made a pilgrimage to Chartres itself in 1991, followed by further research into the history and significance of labyrinths. After returning to the United States, Dr. Artress made a canvas version of the Chartres labyrinth for use in the San Francisco cathedral. It was introduced to the public on December 30, 1991, and was used twice a month until 1995, when a permanent outdoor labyrinth made of terrazzo stone was laid down in the cathedral's outdoor garden.

3. Origin of Labyrinth Walkthrough in India

3.1 2000 Year Old Labyrinth uncovered in India

According to a report published in the Times of India [4], the archaeologists have uncovered a labyrinth in India that dates back 2,000 years and has a pattern similar to those found on clay tablets found at Pylos, Greece, from 1200 B.C. The square Indian labyrinth Shown in the following figure), which measures 56 feet (17 meters) by 56 feet (17 meters), is in Gedimedu near Pollachi and is being excavated by researchers from the Verarajendran Archaeological and Historical Research Centre, of Tirupur, says the Times of India. The site is on an ancient trade route on the east coast that went from Palakkad Gap to Alagankulam.

"The labyrinth has one pathway which leads inexorably to the goal from the point of entry. One has to walk through the right path to reach the goal. It is believed that the person who walks through the seven routes correctly will fulfill his wishes," S. Ravikumar, chief of the research team, told the Times of India.



Fig 3: 2000 Year Old Labyrinth uncovered in India

3.2 Abhimanyu's Chakravyuha as Labyrinth

The symbol of Chakravyuha or the labyrinth is drawn in the rangoli of Maharashtra (following figure). One of the formations of the army is described in the Mahabharata as Chakravyuha. Abhimanyu's Chakra was also called Manas Chakra. It symbolized the eight activities of the mind to attain Moksha before it was used as a military formation in Mahabharata [5].

This pattern of Labyrinth can be linked to a story in Mahabharata, in which Subhadra, the sister of Lord Krishna

and the wife of Arjuna, conceived a demon, an enemy of Krishna. The demon would not leave the womb of Subhadra even twelve months after the date of her conception, and began to harass the mother. Lord Krishna, knowing of the demon's presence and the cause of his delay, took pity on the afflicted condition of his sister and read Chakrava (Chakravyuha), a book consisting of seven chapters and explaining the method of conquering a labyrinthine fort with seven cross-lines. Lord Krishna completed six chapters, and promised to teach the demon the seventh, provided he came out. The demon ceased troubling Subhadra and emerged from the womb. He was called Abhimanyu. Lord Krishna had not read the seventh chapter; otherwise Abhimanyu would have been invincible and able to take his life. This ignorance of the seventh chapter cost Abhimanyu his life on the field of Kurukshetra in conquering the seven cross-lined labyrinthine formations.



Fig 4: Chakravyuha / Labyrinth Mahabharata tines

3.3 Labyrinth Pattern in a historic temple in Mysore

While examining some carvings on the temple of Halebid in Mysore, one can see a circular labyrinth pattern similar to those which are found in various parts of Europe (following figure). This temple was built by the members of Hoysala dynasty during the 12th and 13th centuries. The appearance of this pattern on a site of historical importance in Mysore is yet to be researched as a link to labyrinths in Europe.



Fig 5: Labyrinth Pattern in a historic temple in Mysore

4. Labyrinth Patterns

Contemporary labyrinths are constructed from a wide variety of materials in outdoor as well as indoor settings. In addition to being made from canvas, mosaic flooring, or paving stones, labyrinths have been woven into patterned carpets, outlined

with stones, bricks, or hedgerows, or carved into firmly packed earth. Most modern labyrinths range between 40 and 80 feet in diameter, although larger ones have also been made. Following figure (circular) depicts one of the most popular Labyrinth constructions.



Fig 6: A typical circular labyrinth

One classification scheme categorizes labyrinths as either left- or right-handed, according to the direction of the first turn to be made after entering the labyrinth. The entrance to the labyrinth is known as the mouth, and the walkway itself is called the path. Classical labyrinths are defined as having a simple path with an equal number of turns and counter-turns. Labyrinths are also classified by the number of circuits in their design, a circuit being one of the circles or rings surrounding the center of the labyrinth. The labyrinth in Chartres Cathedral, for example, is a classical eleven-circuit labyrinth. Three- and seven-circuit classical labyrinths have been constructed in many parts of the United States, while one labyrinth in Denmark has 15 circuits.

4 (a). Jupiter Labyrinth Walk Pattern: The Labyrinth of Wisdom

Its natural form is expressive, outward spiral, four alternating paths, and a centre [3, 5]. It influences the knowledge, happiness, education, wisdom, wealth, virtues, relationship with the divine, children, teachers and students, as well as justice. Its expressive form encourages peace, dispersal, (spiritual) leadership, understanding, tolerance, impartiality, satisfaction, humbleness, order, wholeness, and morality. Its receptive form eliminates heaviness, possessiveness, exclusiveness, prejudice, wrong judgments, dishonesty, and stinginess.



Fig 7: Jupiter Labyrinth Walk Pattern: The Labyrinth of Wisdom

4 (b). Mars Labyrinth Walk Pattern: The Labyrinth of Energy

Its natural form is expressive, four turns, five alternating

paths, and a centre. It influences energy, the strength, activity, courage, real-estate, enemies, defence (military and aggressive activities), logic, fights, injuries, acute illnesses, wounds and operations. Its expressive form encourages accuracy, mobility, acuteness, spontaneity, organisation, dynamism, and heroism. Its receptive form eliminates harshness, aggression, destructiveness, arrogance, quarrelsomeness, impulsiveness, vengefulness, rage, unreliability, negligence, cowardice, violence, and obtrusiveness.



Fig 8: Mars Labyrinth Walk Pattern: The Labyrinth of Energy

4 (c). The labyrinth of life and death – Saturn labyrinth

Its natural form is receptive, three outer paths, central spiral, three inner paths, and a centre [6]. It influences spirituality, sorrow, reliability, permanence, longevity, death, old age, loss, limitations, hard work, separation, slowness, chronic illnesses, earth matters (ore) and real estate (land, not structures). Its receptive form encourages persistence, obligingness, simplicity, modesty, endurance, fidelity and depth. Its expressive form eliminates lowness, selfishness, insensitivity, pettiness, simple-mindedness, obtuseness, laziness, irresponsibility, inconsideration, dishonesty, malice, equanimity, and deprivation.



Fig 9: The labyrinth of life and death – Saturn labyrinth

4 (d). The labyrinth of love and creation – Venus labyrinth

Its natural form is receptive, three outer paths, an inner spiral, and a centre. It influences fertility, wishes coming true, love, beauty, charm, pleasure, purity, correct behaviour, occult knowledge, comfort, partners and relationships, art, music, poetry, all types of creative work, vehicles, and life abundance. Its receptive form encourages creativity, expressiveness, softness, sophistication, cooperation, originality, passion, refinement. Its expressive form eliminates greed, being overshadowed, obsession, jealousy, immortality, exaggeration, and infatuation.



Fig 10: The labyrinth of love and creation – Venus labyrinth

4 (e). Mercury labyrinth – the labyrinth of connection

Its natural form is expressive, outer spiral, three central paths, inner spiral, and a centre. It influences the speech, intellect, logic, friendship, trade, diplomacy, negotiation, writing, and adaptability. Its expressive form encourages neutrality, expressiveness, delicacy, speed, easiness, optimism, playfulness, and youthfulness. Its receptive form eliminates: materialism, cynicism, forgetfulness, talkativeness, two-facedness, indecisiveness, and dishonesty.



Fig 11: Mercury labyrinth – the labyrinth of connection

4 (f). Rahu Labyrinth – the labyrinth of transformation

Its natural form is receptive and expressive simultaneously, seven paths without a centre. It influences the transformations and all forms of changes, passion, connection, inconstancy, harshness, violence, unexpected events, confusion, tragedies, and psychological disorders. Receptive movement encourages: expansion of mind and vision, mobility, quick comprehension, quick ascent, relentlessness, intelligence. Its expressive and receptive movement eliminates destructiveness, separation, uncalled-for rebelliousness, fanaticism, strangeness (being “offbeat”), inconstancy, concealment, mind blurriness, impatience, accusation, and relinquishing.

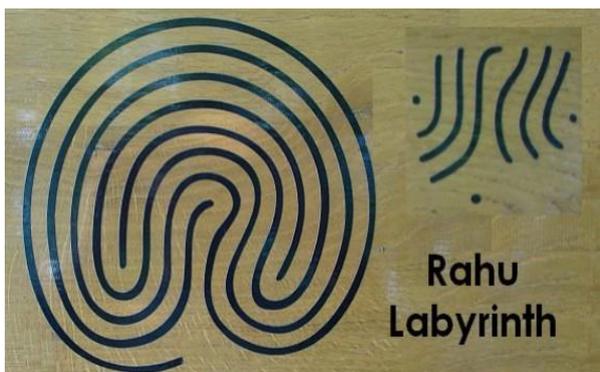


Fig 12: Rahu Labyrinth – the labyrinth of transformation

4 (g). The labyrinth of freedom – Ketu labyrinth

Its natural form is receptive and expressive simultaneously, seven paths without a centre. It influences the liberation from karma, spiritual insights, secrecy, fall, mathematical abilities, unexpected events, enemies, spies, injuries, venoms and cures. Its expressive movement encourages: leadership, accuracy, speed, acuteness, logicity, intelligence, freedom, and discretion. Its receptive movement eliminates: destructiveness, unease, restlessness, unnecessary mysteriousness, panic, terror and fear, morbidity, abnormality, decadent and tainted spirit and body.



Fig 13: The labyrinth of freedom – Ketu labyrinth

4 (h). Sun labyrinth – the labyrinth of power

Its natural form is expressive, six turns, seven intertwined paths and a centre. It influences the human self, ego, soul, individuality, enlightenment, body, health, honour, status, personal power. Its expressive form encourages easiness, sophistication, clarity of spirit, sharpness, leadership, acuteness, dignity, influence. Its receptive form eliminates: insensibility, destructiveness, stubbornness, pride, egocentricity, cruelty, rage, despotism, pompousness, provocativeness.



Fig 14: Sun labyrinth – the labyrinth of power

4 (i). Moon labyrinth – the labyrinth of feelings

Its natural form is receptive, two turns, three spirals one within the other, and a centre. It influences the spirit, feelings, intuition, publicity, home, fame, abundance, social behaviour and journeys. Its receptive form encourages agility, speed, softness, creativity, sophistication, protection, dedication, adaptability, sensuality, tenderness, heartiness, and compassion. Its expressive form eliminates coldness, passiveness, insecurity, shyness, superficiality, carelessness, concern, instability, languidness, malice.



Fig 15: Moon labyrinth – the labyrinth of feelings

4 (j). Labyrinth Walk Pattern at Amity University Haryana, Gurgaon, India

A circular Labyrinth pattern has been set up at Amity University Haryana, Gurgaon, India under the leadership Prof. Padmakali Banerjee [3]. A workshop on the same subject was also conducted in the campus sometime back. Majority of the participants, who walked through this Labyrinth pattern, reported great joy, clarity of mind and peace.



Fig 16: Labyrinth Walk Pattern at Amity University Haryana, Gurgaon, India [3]

4 (k). Labyrinth Quilt Pattern

Following construction is known as the Labyrinth Quilt Pattern walkthrough. You will note that this pattern is somewhat similar to that of Maze found in Sudama (Kirti) temple in Porbandar, Gujarat, and is depicted as below.

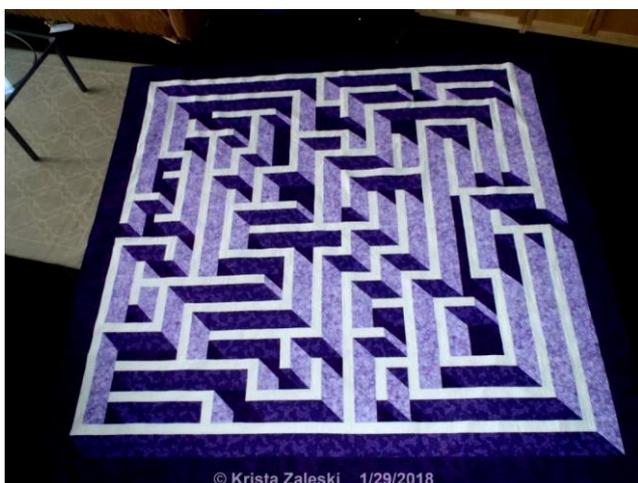


Fig 17: Labyrinth Quilt Pattern

4 (l). Walkthrough the Labyrinth at Sudama Temple Porbandar

During a recent visit to the Sudama (Kirti) temple, Porbandar,

Gujarat, India, this author saw a Labyrinth pattern, which is somewhat identical to the Labyrinth Quilt Pattern, depicted above. A large number of tourists were seen walking through this. Some of them, whom this author talked to, reported a transformation to the peaceful state of mind.



Fig 18: Labyrinth at Sudama Temple Porbandar

5. Procedures for Labyrinth Walk

5.1 Preparations before Labyrinth Walk

Although one need not be a member of any specific faith or religious tradition to participate in labyrinth walking, spiritual preparation is considered an important part of the activity. Although the walk itself is informal and relatively unstructured, most participants find that a period of quietness to focus their attention on their journey is essential. Some also recommend clarifying one's intention for the walk beforehand; that is, participants should ask themselves whether they are seeking spiritual guidance, healing, closer fellowship with God, discernment, blessing, or the fulfillment of some other purpose. The use of prayers or mantras is suggested as a way to calm and "center" one's spirit at the beginning of and during the walk.

Participants are advised to wear comfortable shoes and clothing for labyrinth walking so that they will not be distracted by physical discomfort or concerns about their appearance. They will be asked to remove their shoes, however, if the labyrinth is made of canvas or woven into a rug; thus it is a good idea to bring along a pair of clean cotton socks or soft-soled slippers.

5.2 Labyrinth Walkthrough Procedures

The actual procedure of labyrinth walking is divided into three phases or stages: the journey inward, a pause for prayer or meditation at the center, and the return journey. There are no rules or guidelines for the pace or speed of labyrinth walking, although participants are asked to be respectful of others who may prefer a slower pace, and to move around them as gently as possible. Some people choose to dance, run, and crawl on their hands and knees, or walk backwards in the labyrinth. With regard to pausing in the center of the labyrinth, people's behavior varies depending on the size of the labyrinth. Labyrinths based on the Chartres model have six "petals" or semicircular spaces surrounding the center, which allows several people to remain for a few minutes to pray, contemplate, or meditate. Smaller labyrinths may have room for only one person at a time in the center, and it is considered courteous to remain there only briefly [3].

Labyrinth walking can be incorporated into such ritual events

as weddings, funerals, and anniversary celebrations, or such personal events as completing one's schooling, taking a new job, or moving to a new area. Some published guides to labyrinth walking include meditations to be used for labyrinth walking during pregnancy, or for blessing ceremonies at different seasons of the year.

6. Benefits of Labyrinth Walk

In general, labyrinth walking is said to benefit participants by allowing a temporary suspension of the so-called left-brain activity—logical thought, analysis, and fact-based planning—and encourage the emergence of the intuition and imaginative creativity associated with the right brain. Lauren Artress has said, "The labyrinth does not engage our thinking minds. It invites our intuitive, pattern-seeking, symbolic mind to come forth. It presents us with only one, but profound, choice. To enter a labyrinth is to choose to walk a spiritual path."

In addition to helping people open themselves to the non-rational parts of the psyche, labyrinth walking puts them in touch with simple body rhythms. Because labyrinth walking involves physical movement, participants may find themselves becoming more mindful of their breathing patterns, the repetition of their footfalls, and the reorientation of the entire body that occurs as they move through the circular turns within the labyrinth. More particularly, the overall pattern of movement in labyrinth walking—first inward toward the center of the labyrinth and then outward on the return path—holds deep symbolic meaning for many people.

Specific benefits that some people have experienced as a result of labyrinth walking include ^[1, 2]:

- Answers to, or insights, personal problems or circumstances;
- A general sense of inner peace or calm;
- Emotional healing from past abuse or other traumas;
- A sense of connection to, or unity with, past generations of pilgrims or family ancestors;
- Reawakened interest in their specific religious tradition;
- Greater awareness of their own feminine nature or the feminine principle in nature often associated with circular shapes and patterns;
- Stimulation of their imagination and creative powers;
- Improved ability to manage chronic pain; and
- Faster healing following an injury or surgical procedure.

7. Sohum-Mantra-Based Walking Meditation through Labyrinth

Walking meditation is mindful walking without a goal, being aware of each step and breath. Each footstep is taken slowly and in silence, creating peace and joy with each step.

Walking meditation brings a number of benefits in addition to the cultivation of mindfulness. It can be a helpful way of building concentration, as a supplement to sitting practice. When we are tired or sluggish, walking can be invigorating. The sensations of walking can be more compelling than the more subtle sensations of breathing while sitting. Walking can be quite helpful after a meal, upon waking from sleep, or after a long period of sitting meditation. At times of strong emotions or stress, walking meditation may be more relaxing than sitting. An added benefit is that, when done for extended times, walking meditation can build strength and stamina. Walking meditation is a wonderful complement to the sitting meditation practice ^[7, 8].

7.1 Procedure for doing Sohum-Mantra-Based Walking Meditation through Labyrinth

(i) Preparing before meditation: Before you start your walking session through labyrinth, spend a minute or two just standing there, breathing deeply and anchoring your attention in your body. Take a few deep breaths. Close your eyes and do a scan of your whole body, starting at your feet. Make note of any sensations, thoughts or feelings and take the time to explore the sensations fully.

(ii) Hands and arms: You can clasp your hands behind your back or in front of you, or you can just let them hang at your side—whatever feels most comfortable and natural.

(iii) Pace: Slow is better. Pace should be steady and even. If your mind is agitated, or your ability to focus is weak, walk very slowly, until you can stay in the present moment with each step. If labyrinth walkers want to pay closer attention to the movements of lifting the feet, moving forward, putting down, and pressing the ground, they will automatically slow down. Only when they slow down can they be fully aware of these movements.

(iv) Technique: Take a deep breath. Chant 'So.' (silently) while exhaling, with the simultaneous synchronization of moving one-step forward. For the next step (right step now, if it was left step first or vice versa), chant 'hum.' while exhaling. Repeat this process for the entire walk through the labyrinth. Keep your pace slow. Neither look down on the ground, nor straight; just gently gaze at about one or meters away from you on the ground and keep walking slowly, rhythmically, chanting (silently) Sohum, with synchronization with the breath. Feel the sensation of the lower part of your feet as you walk. Enjoy this exercise. After a few minutes, you will get absorbed into it; and your mind will be focused and become calm. Actually, the initial effort by you in ensuring the simultaneity of synchronization of your breath, Sohum chanting, movement of steps will leave little scope for you to get distracted to other unnecessary thoughts ^[8]. In this way, Sohum-based walking meditation transcends you more easily to thoughtless state as compared to simply walking through labyrinth.

(v) Re-focusing: Whenever your mind starts to engage with thoughts (or any type of mental content), bring your attention back to your walking steps and your breathing. With your attention in the legs and feet, feel the sensations of each step. Feel the movement of the leg as it swings through the air. Feel the contact of the foot with the ground. There is no "right" experience. Just see how the experience is felt by you. Whenever you notice that the mind has wandered, bring it back to the sensations of the feet walking. Getting a sense of the rhythm of the steps may help maintain a continuity of awareness.

(vi) Walk with calmness, dignity and joy, as though you were an emperor or a tiger doing a slow but a majestic walk. Place your foot on the earth with peace and the peace will return to you.

(vii) Attitude: We are not going anywhere. There is nothing to achieve, except mastering our attention and presence. Simply be with the *process*. Be in present state.

7.2 Benefits of Sohum-Mantra-Based Walking Meditation through Labyrinth

1. It can serve as a powerful bridge between meditation practice and daily life, helping us to be present, mindful and concentrated in ordinary activities. It can reconnect us to simplicity of being and the wakefulness that comes from it.
2. Walking mindfully through the labyrinth can restore our peace and harmony. When we practice walking meditation correctly, we massage the Earth with our feet and plant seeds of joy and happiness with each step. This way we heal our Mother Earth and, in turn, she will heal us.
3. The ability of focusing, developed in walking meditation, is easily carried into our daily life.
4. Whenever we are upset or angry on something, walking meditation can be very helpful. Until you are calm enough to look directly at the anger, just continue with your synchronized Sohum-mantra-based walking meditation through Labyrinth. After a while, the anger will subside and you will feel strong enough to understand the cause of anger calmly and objectively.
5. Walking meditation improves immunity of the body and reduces blood pressure. It helps reduce glucose levels in diabetic patients.
6. It helps to regulate the production of serotonin, a key neurotransmitter in controlling mood and suppressing anxiety.
7. It boosts the brain's ability to communicate with the rest of the body while also maintaining the structure of brain's cell membranes, which improves the clarity of mind and memory power.

8. Philosophical Interpretation of Labyrinth

As this ubiquitous unlimited undefinable 'Thatness' we have created a labyrinth in Time and Space for us to play in. The labyrinth is a temporal illusion, a woven fabric of birth and death, wars and peace, endless layers of temporal polarities for us to experience, to test ourselves, to learn from. And yet beneath the play, beneath the curtain of each atom - we are That, we are the One Soul setting all of it in motion, a multitude of realms that are only appearances and have no ultimate reality. The labyrinth appears and disappears, is created, sustained, and dissolved, via three metaphysical principles. In the Indian Sanskrit these three are personified as Brahma the Creator, Vishnu who sustains the universe, and Shiva the Destroyer. The gods and the bodhisattvas are temporal, time based, and no more real or unreal than we are [9].

8.1 Labyrinth of Time

Earth is an amazing Labyrinth of Time - and the cycles of time are excellent incubators for the forms to evolve through layers of holographic experience as consciousness. However this crazed, boring, and increasingly limited entrapment of ours is not a punishment, but rather a test of our strength and resilience. A better comparison is the legendary Labyrinth. We are metaphorically 'clay in the potter's hands' and the potter is 'Time'. We are not enslaved, not in a prison, and have come here as volunteers to evolve within our planet's cosmic 'Labyrinth of Time'. We bravely came here voluntarily to wander in this Labyrinth of Time, a maze of weblike entanglements through unending cycles of time and dissolutions - until we are weary of it all, until we remember, and head 'Home'. Like the spider that spins its own web, we

live in a sort of self-created gauntlet.

Kashmir Shaivism states that we are always the Oneness, but we have chosen to veil our consciousness in differentiated perception through the limitation of the five senses. We literally are 'tricking' ourselves into the illusion that we are separate from the Oneness for the purpose of our 'play' in the Labyrinth of Time and Space. This 'trick' is often called the Veil, for it is an intentional Veil of our forgetting who we are. Worlds are created and destroyed - and nothing has happened. We are, were, and never will be anything but the One. This is basically the core philosophy of the Labyrinth.

9. Conclusion

The importance of walking through different Labyrinth patterns is discussed in this paper. Labyrinth walking is thousands of years old both in India and abroad. Each Labyrinth pattern is meant to give specific spiritual benefits. There are well-defined procedures in walking through these labyrinth patterns and these techniques bring a lot of spiritual benefits to the walkers through labyrinth. Besides, it has been argued that the breathing-based (Sohum-mantra-based, for example) walking through the labyrinth enhances the beneficial effects as compared to walkthrough without a mantra. Philosophical interpretation of the Labyrinth has also been briefly discussed. It is the sincere aim of the author of this paper to spread the spiritual significance of labyrinths to a larger number of people across the globe.

10. Acknowledgement

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