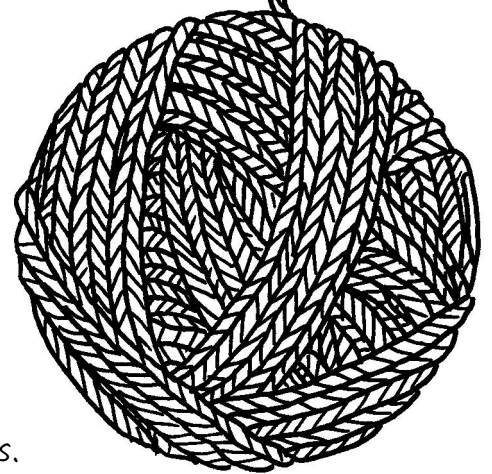


# LESSONS FROM THE LABYRINTH

*An interactive colouring journey  
to the centre of the labyrinth  
and back using pen,  
pencil or brush.*

**By Sarah Toraven**

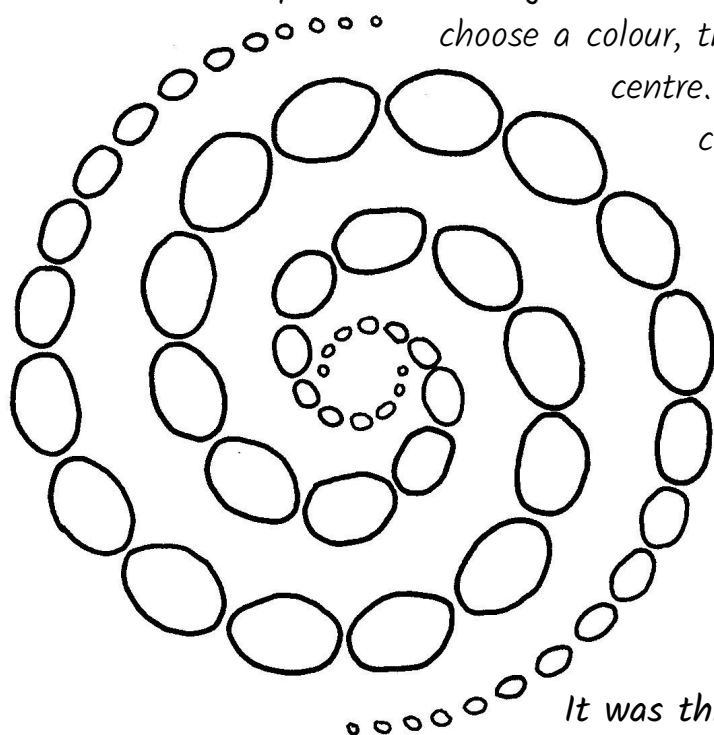
*The Labyrinth word illustration above looks  
effective when coloured in two contrasting colours.  
Start with the top thread into the first letter, then  
alternate the colours changing at each marked black link  
on the design. Different sections of the ball of thread can then  
be filled in a similar fashion.*



# LESSONS FROM THE LABYRINTH - INTRODUCTION

During a period of transition in my life in 2015 I became fascinated with labyrinths and was drawn to find out more about them. Inspired by my learning and reflecting on my experiences with a nearby labyrinth, I found creative thoughts and ideas began to pour out of me, to repeat a quote I came across, "...the work flowed and unwound like the pathway of a labyrinth." - This book is the culmination of all this energy and expression.

My work is mainly based on Seaton Labyrinth (in East Devon) which was created in 2005 as part of the town's Millennium celebrations - the 1000 year anniversary of the granting of Seaton's first town charter in 1005. This was also a time of resurgent interest in labyrinths, just like it seems to be today. The idea for the construction of a labyrinth in Seaton was initiated and implemented by the Spiral Centre, a local non-profit organisation which aims to promote healing, wellbeing, creative arts and connection to the natural world. The Spiral Centre's logo can be seen below. Starting at the uppermost tiny circle,



choose a colour, then fill in and follow each of the pebbles to the centre. Select another colour and starting in the centre colour your way outwards along the second spiral.

On the interpretation board next to the labyrinth it explains that "The purpose of the project is to combine an ancient idea with a modern method of self teaching" and goes on to say "We expect many interpretation, educational, artistic and research studies to flow from our Labyrinth". Both of these concepts played a part in my following creative journey.

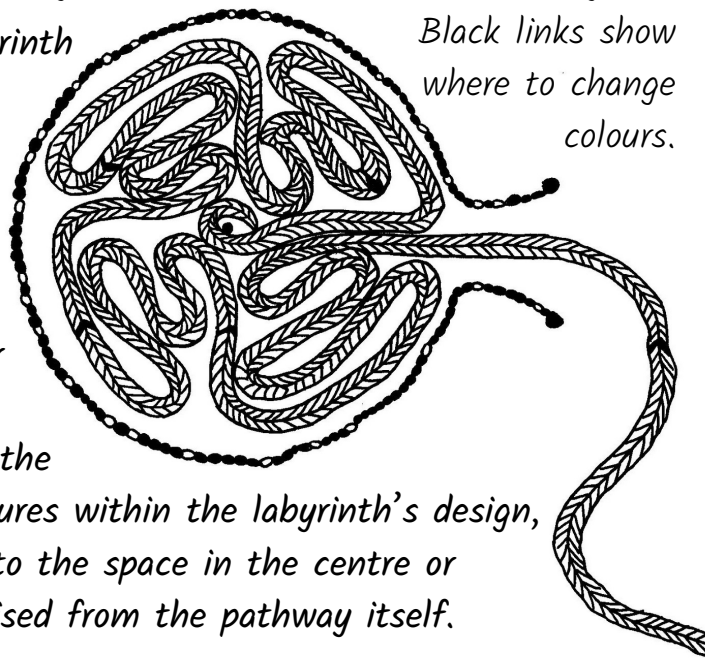
It was through the Spiral Centre that I first encountered Seaton Labyrinth and attended a workshop to make a finger labyrinth (a smaller scale version to be followed by fingers instead of feet). At this workshop, instead of forming the outline of the design itself, we were sewing a length of cord on to a background piece showing the actual pathway walked between the divides.

This way of representing the labyrinth's structure is sometimes referred to as Ariadne's Thread after the part in the most well known labyrinth myth of Theseus and the Minotaur, where Ariadne helps Theseus by giving him a ball of golden thread to unravel behind him so he can find his way back after slaying the minotaur.

We started our finger labyrinths at the entrance position and began attaching the thread along the pathway that we had marked out. As we did I became fascinated by some of the shapes produced as we formed the pattern, so much so, that we decided to take photos at different stages of construction. However as we progressed I found that these interesting shapes quickly became lost within the labyrinth's developing form.

I was re-inspired when I was shown a Rainbow Finger Labyrinth (drawn below) at Seaton Labyrinth's 10th birthday celebrations. I realised that I could emphasise the shapes I saw within the pathway by highlighting them in different colours allowing them stand out and be found within the overall design. A similar process has been used on the labyrinth's interpretation board to illustrate where the different types of rocks have been used in its construction. Starting at the outside end chose a different colour to fill in each of the six sections of cord. Shade one side the cord on the way in and the other half on the way out.

I also divided the whole pathway of Seaton Labyrinth into six stages, in a way that for me formed the most interesting shapes and allocated a different colour to each one. Drawn separately from the main design, these individual patterns began to suggest particular forms to me. Some I recognised immediately, others took a bit longer to emerge and morphed through various designs before settling on one. I thought I could employ the notion, first used by the Romans, to include pictures within the labyrinth's design, only this time the images wouldn't be confined to the space in the centre or around the exterior, but would actually be comprised from the pathway itself.



I added some shapes next to these pathway lines to help communicate and illustrate my visions, in the same manner in which the stones laid into the ground at Seaton Labyrinth guide us in its direction and design. I wanted however, to minimise the use of these additions so they didn't detract from the line itself, instead I wanted the relationship between the line and its surrounding shapes to express the form's identity. I also wanted to present the illustrations in such a way that enabled people to interact with them. This led me to the thought that my journey could be followed by colouring (I have offered some guidance as to how to do this on each page; colour any additional shapes as you wish).

Drawing on the Native American tradition of animal guides, I then arrived at the idea that each of these forms could symbolise something that I had learnt from my experiences walking the labyrinth and from the books I had borrowed from the Spiral Centre library. Gradually these lessons began to attach themselves to the creatures that had emerged from the lines of the pathway and I put together some text, which surrounds each design, to explain their individual background and evolution. The 'lesson' associated with each one is highlighted in slightly larger text with single quotation marks.

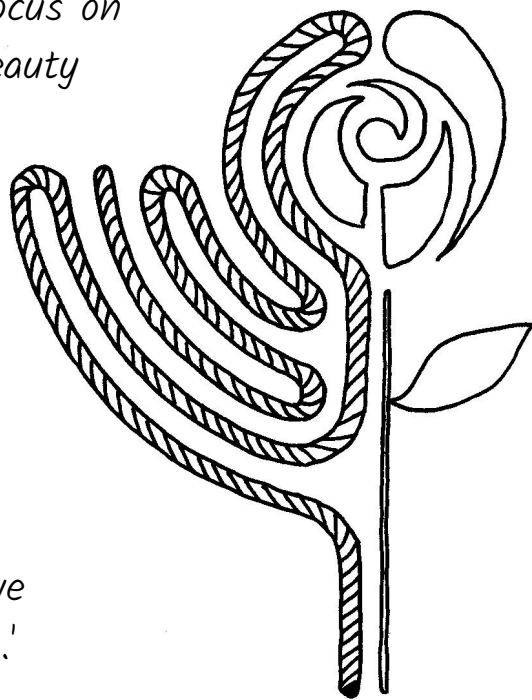
Seven lessons became the companions to seven pieces of artwork (plus seven years to complete!). Interestingly, the ancient significance and sacredness of the number seven was mentioned many times when I was reading about labyrinths and there are seven different types of stone used in the construction of the Seaton one. One of the main notions behind walking a labyrinth is to bring any understandings from our journey back with us into the world and apply them to our lives. This book is my way of sharing some of the insights I have had on my journey into labyrinths and I hope that you enjoy them.

# LESSON 1: THE LABYRINTH ROSE - EXPERIENCING BEAUTY

The Labyrinth is a beautiful ancient design that can be found all over the world, in different cultures and throughout the ages, from simple Bronze Age rock carvings to elaborate Roman mosaics. The more complex form of Seaton Labyrinth (designed by local artist Ann Pengelly) is based on a combination of designs taken from the medieval labyrinth set into the stone floor at Chartres Cathedral in France and the 300 year old turf labyrinth at Saffron Walden in Essex.

The design of a three-path labyrinth and the classical seven circuit version has a very clever and engaging method of construction that grows organically from a starting motif appropriately called a seed pattern (see the back page of this book). Once practised and understood a labyrinth can then be easily replicated wherever it is required using whatever materials come to hand, be that simply drawn on paper or marked out in sand or with stones. This accessibility of creation most probably helped the designs become so popular and widespread.

'Choosing to focus on noticing the beauty we come across, and taking the time to engage with it in some way, can help us to cultivate positive states of being.'



Although the labyrinth's elegant geometry is human-made, it reflects many of the beautiful patterns found in the natural world, from the concentric circles of tree growth rings to the spiral formation of shells (like the ammonites set into the lobes at Seaton Labyrinth). The design also resonates within our own bodies, in the coils of our brains and intestines and the swirl of our inner ear and fingerprints.

A flower shape was the first form I saw when creating the finger labyrinth which got me started with the whole concept. I enjoy the way this first section of the pathway (to be coloured red starting from the end with black tip) appears to grow out of the ground at the labyrinth's entrance, continuing upwards producing leaves before forming a flower head which then blooms outwards.

Choosing to present the flower as a rose, taps into its well known symbolism of beauty and love, along with reminding us to stop and smell the roses. It also reflects Seaton Labyrinth's design association with the version at Chartres which has a six petal flower centre and sits below the Cathedral's famous rose window.



## LESSON 2: THE THOUGHT BUTTERFLY - FORMING AN INTENTION

Throughout history people have used labyrinths for a myriad of different reasons:

- To mark the processes of life, death, transformation and re-birth
- As a form of meditation or pilgrimage following a spiritual path to peace or salvation
- To ease the passage of child birth, tell stories, perform a dance, win a young maiden or in remembrance of loved ones.
- As a way to trap evil spirits, bad weather or even imprison a Minotaur!
- To bring healing, protection, energy, fertility or insight to a particular situation
- As a device for creativity, problem solving, mindfulness and inner calm
- To celebrate the change in seasons or connect to the lunar cycle

There are no rules to walking Seaton Labyrinth, but it can be beneficial to form an intention before embarking on your journey. This

may be as simple as deciding to walk without any expectations and just being open to experiences

that occur. However we may wish to set ourselves a

particular question at

the start. This

could refer to a

current issue in

our lives which we

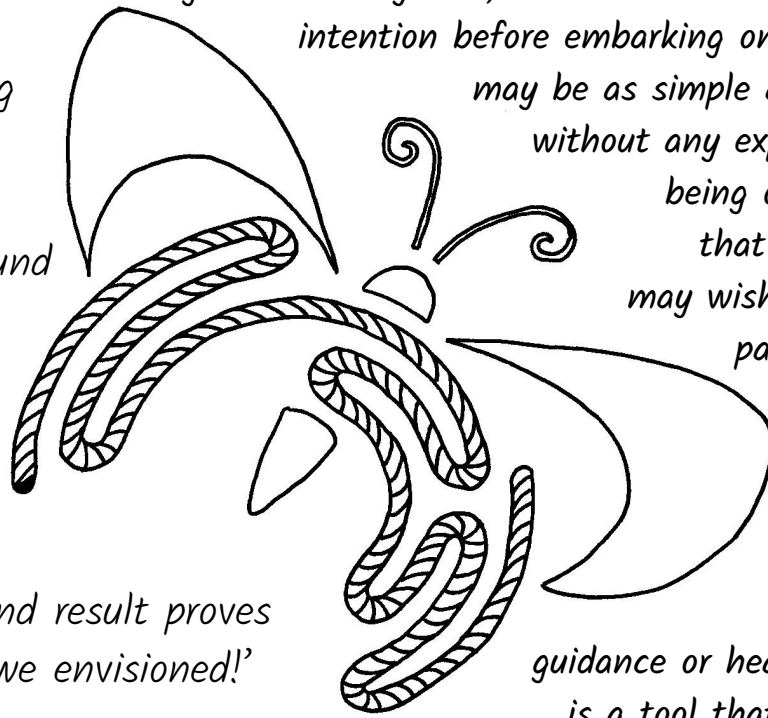
feel needs some

guidance or healing. The labyrinth

is a tool that can be positively

employed for personal reflection and wellbeing.

'The process of forming the right intentions in our approach to our lives and to those around us is an essential one, that hopefully allows our actions to come from a place of kindness and thought, even if the end result proves to be not quite what we envisioned!'



When looking at the intention behind the word labyrinth itself,

I discovered that it appears to be derived from the word *Labyrys* (pre-Greek in origin) meaning double-headed axe. This was the symbol of the Minoan civilization and was used mainly as a ceremonial item that accompanied their goddess *Potnia* and featured in her worship. It was connected as well to the action of clearing ground to create new pathways and the opening of the mind, so relates very well to the notion of intention.

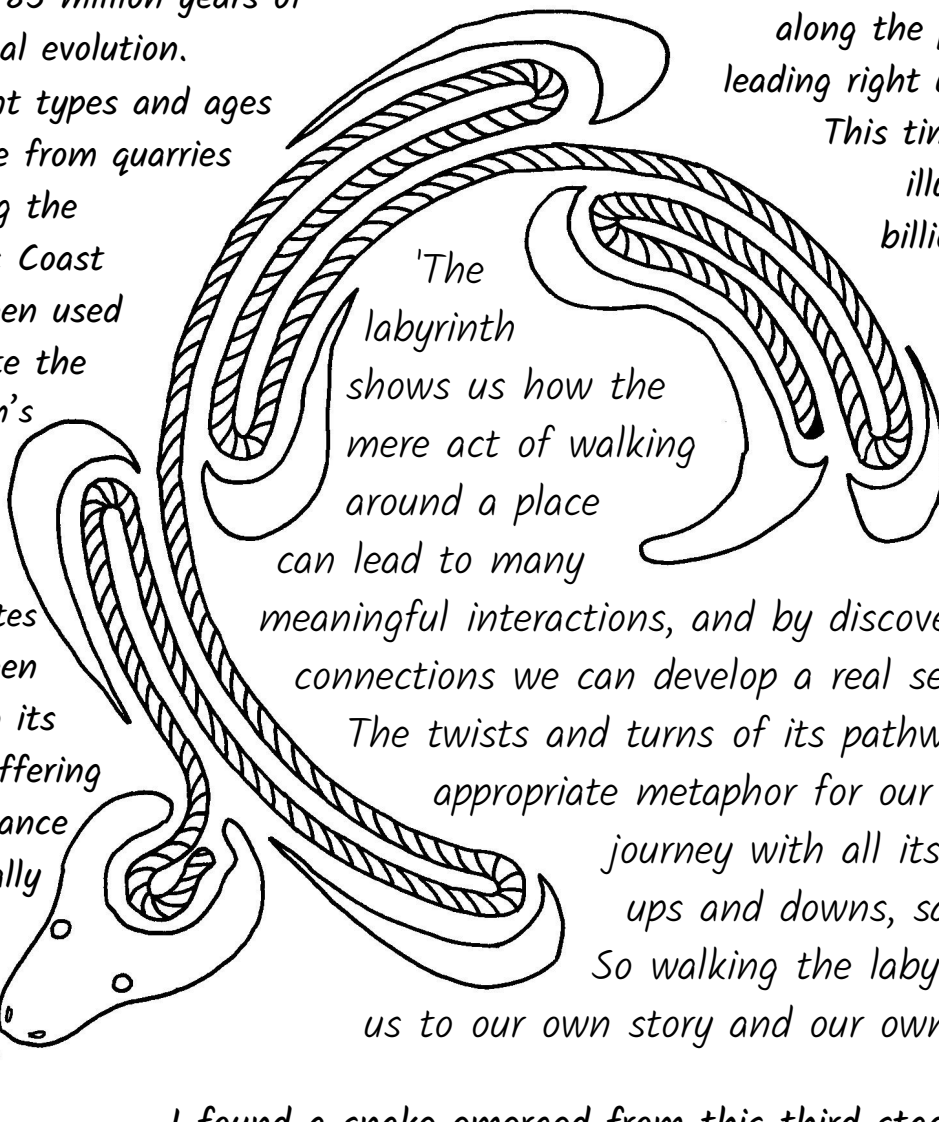
Interestingly this double-headed axe shape appears multiple times within the design of Seaton Labyrinth in the formation of the stones where two parts of the pathway meet and double-back on themselves. The shape was thought to represent the beginning of creation, the waxing and waning of the moon or the butterfly with its properties of transformation and rebirth. The second section of the labyrinth path (to be coloured orange starting from the end with black tip), not only suggested this double arced shape of a butterfly's wings to me, but also its flight pattern, flitting back and forth around a central flower. I also find it connects to the pleasing concept of forming an intention (or butterfly) and sending it out (or releasing it into the air) and seeing what happens (or watching where it goes).

# LESSON 3: THE STORY SNAKE - MAKING CONNECTIONS

The physical location and construction of Seaton Labyrinth itself provides many wonderful opportunities for connection – to the world around us, to other people and even to ourselves!

Just being created outside and from local natural materials, this beautiful sculpture gives us a direct link to our immediate environment. The labyrinth sits on a cliff top on the East Devon coastline which is part of the 95 mile long World Heritage site, unique for its 185 million years of geological evolution.

Different types and ages of stone from quarries all along the Jurassic Coast have been used to create the labyrinth's divides and four ammonites have been set into its lobes, offering us a chance to literally walk through time.



'The labyrinth shows us how the mere act of walking around a place can lead to many meaningful interactions, and by discovering and making connections we can develop a real sense of belonging.

The twists and turns of its pathway are also an appropriate metaphor for our own life's meandering journey with all its changes of direction, ups and downs, sadness and joy. So walking the labyrinth can re-connect us to our own story and our own sense of being too.'

Walking the labyrinth in moonlight beneath a clear night's sky stretches our awareness up to the vast universe beyond and our circular movements on the path echo the planetary orbits above. Our place in our own planet's story can be found on the installation along the pathway in the gardens leading right up to Seaton Labyrinth.

This timeline trail fantastically illustrates the earth's 4.6 billion year journey through key events from the formation of the planet to the emergence of humans.

I found a snake emerged from this third stage of the pathway (to be coloured yellow starting from the black tip). The coils of its body reflect the motion of the path, which in this section folds backwards and forwards on to itself, ending in a circular head formed by our movement around the first ammonite lobe.

The snake's ground dwelling nature infers connection to the earth, whilst its ability to regularly shed its skin throughout its life suggests new beginnings and the passages of time. Its ancient symbolism for fertility, life force and union helps to emphasise the forming of relationships with people, places and ourselves.

## LESSON 4: THE JOYFUL DOLPHIN - TUNING IN

Walking the labyrinth can be a form of meditation or an exercise in mindfulness, which can take us away from the often constant thoughts revolving around our heads and into the direct experience of the present moment. This process can be helped by walking in silence and by being aware and respectful of any others using the space. The labyrinth's pattern is designed to slow us down and focus more on our steps. An essential aspect of connecting to the present moment is to 'tune in' to the physical sensations we notice through our senses as we walk along the path. What can we feel, see, hear, smell and even taste on our journey? It is important to try to not get caught up in thinking about the source of the sensations, but to just become aware of them and acknowledge them, preferably without judgement, before each is replaced by the next.

Our attention is then so taken up with these immediate sensory experiences that there is simply no room left in our minds for thinking about anything else. However if we do find our mind wandering off, we can gently bring our awareness back to the rhythmic sensations of our feet striking the ground or the movement of our breath in and out of our bodies. Our goal could be seen as presence rather than progress.

'Taking moments to tune in throughout our day to the sensations of our inner and outer physical environments can help us to find an aware, but relaxed mental space. This can connect us to the joyful state of just being in the moment and in doing so give us a rest from any stressful thoughts or feelings we may be experiencing.'

Seaton Labyrinth is laid out in a way that can help us find our bearings within our environment and attune to this wonderful space. The places where the doubled-backed shapes of the pathway meet, line up to form the arms of a cross, radiating outwards from the centre in each of the four directions with the entrance in the east. The ammonite lobes on the outer edges have been positioned at the cross-quarter compass points (NE, SE, SW & NW) and it can be beneficial to pause at each of these on our journey to enjoy the different views and orientate ourselves within the landscape.

This fourth section of the pathway (to be coloured green starting from the end with black tip) was the one that took the longest to find its form, as I played with various ideas. In the end all it took was to place the dot of an eye in the left ammonite lobe and I said "hello" to the dolphin!

The playful way dolphins appears to revel in the sensations of their environment along with their highly attuned senses and echolocation abilities, I feel make it a fitting symbol for this lesson. As a mammal living in the water there is also a focus on the breath which links to the practice of meditation and the dolphin's beautiful sounds are used extensively to aid relaxation.

## LESSON 5: THE FAITHFUL HOUND - TRUSTING THE PATHWAY

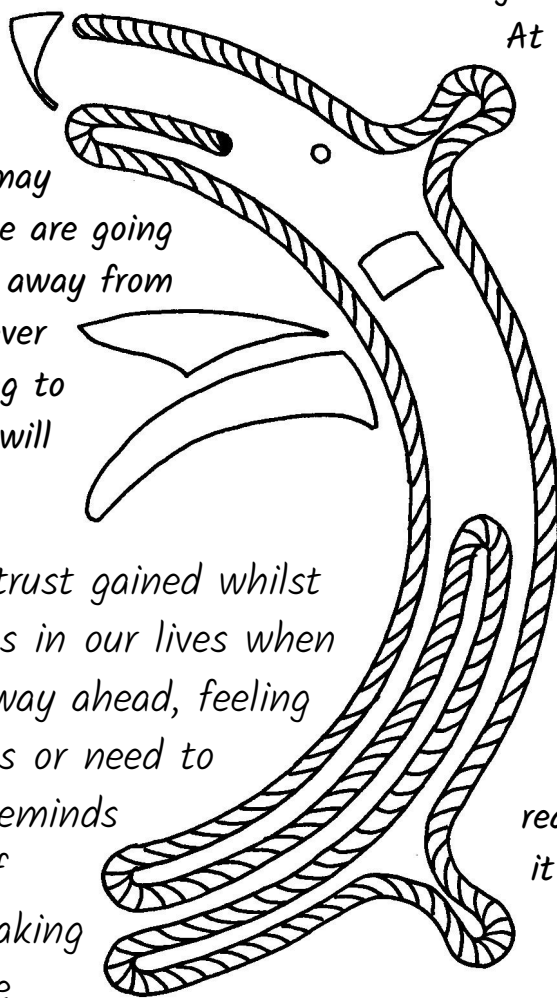
When looking at a labyrinth it is often too hard to take in the intricacy of its design, to see it properly we need to embark on a journey with our fingers or our feet. The labyrinth draws us in and we may find it hard to resist such an inviting path.

Unlike a maze, a labyrinth has no false turns or dead ends, so we can't get lost! There are no decisions to be made about which pathway to choose, as labyrinths are unicursal – that is they only have one winding path that leads us safely all the way to the centre and back again.

And what a wonderful, convoluted path it is, to take us the relatively short distance from its outer edge to its very centre.

This tightly coiled pathway with its numerous circuits and turns makes it very difficult for us to see our route to the centre. So, on our journey, we may at times feel disorientated and that we are going in the wrong direction, moving further away from our goal rather than closer to it. However by trusting the pathway and continuing to put one foot in front of the other we will eventually arrive at the centre.

'We can use our experiences of trust gained whilst walking the labyrinth to guide us in our lives when we feel lost, worried about the way ahead, feeling like we are going round in circles or need to make a change in direction. It reminds us to focus on the journey itself and reassures us that we are making progress even when we can't see a destination. The labyrinth offers us the determination to keep going and the hope that we will get there, wherever there might be!'



At Seaton Labyrinth this direct route there, ignoring the path, is a distance of 30 feet or nine metres, but by following the path, the journey becomes just over a quarter of a mile (400m). So whatever the reason for entering, it is clear that the journey itself is important!

The motif of a dog (to be coloured in blue starting from the end with black tip) literally jumped out at me straight away from within the overall pattern of the design. I've had to add very little to convey its form, even its ear and tail were provided by the shape of the lobes in this fifth section of the path.

The trusting, faithful nature of these wonderful creatures and their abilities as guide dogs and loving companions made them an obvious choice to illustrate the subject of this lesson. Additionally, their encouragement to enjoy the journey of daily walks rather than the need to try and get somewhere in particular also links to the theme.

## LESSON 6: THE PRAYING PILGRIM - BEING OPEN

The state of being open refers both to the labyrinth as well as being a desirable trait for the person walking it. The labyrinth has a timeless quality that evokes a sense of sacredness and spirituality, but has no attachment to any one faith or tradition - making it a very adaptable symbol that lends itself well to many different situations and meanings. This open interpretation offers each of us the chance to use this wonderful space in a way that best meets our individual needs without the constraints of any rules or doctrine.

Its location, in public gardens, means that Seaton Labyrinth is also literally open all the time, whether you want to visit at midday or midnight. It is a piece of ancient artwork which actively welcomes us to interact with it through a gateway which remains permanently open by design!

As we know where the path leads, we can relax into the rhythm of the movement and allow our thoughts and feelings to flow freely. It is desirable to cultivate an attitude of openness to any understandings that may arise during our journey, especially if we formed a particular intention at the start.

Walking the labyrinth can connect us to an intuitive wisdom deep within ourselves, although sometimes what comes to us might not always make sense straight away! It can open us to receive increased energy, healing and creativity; however each journey is unique and will affect us in different ways.

'Bringing this sense of openness and flexibility back from our labyrinth walk and into our everyday lives,

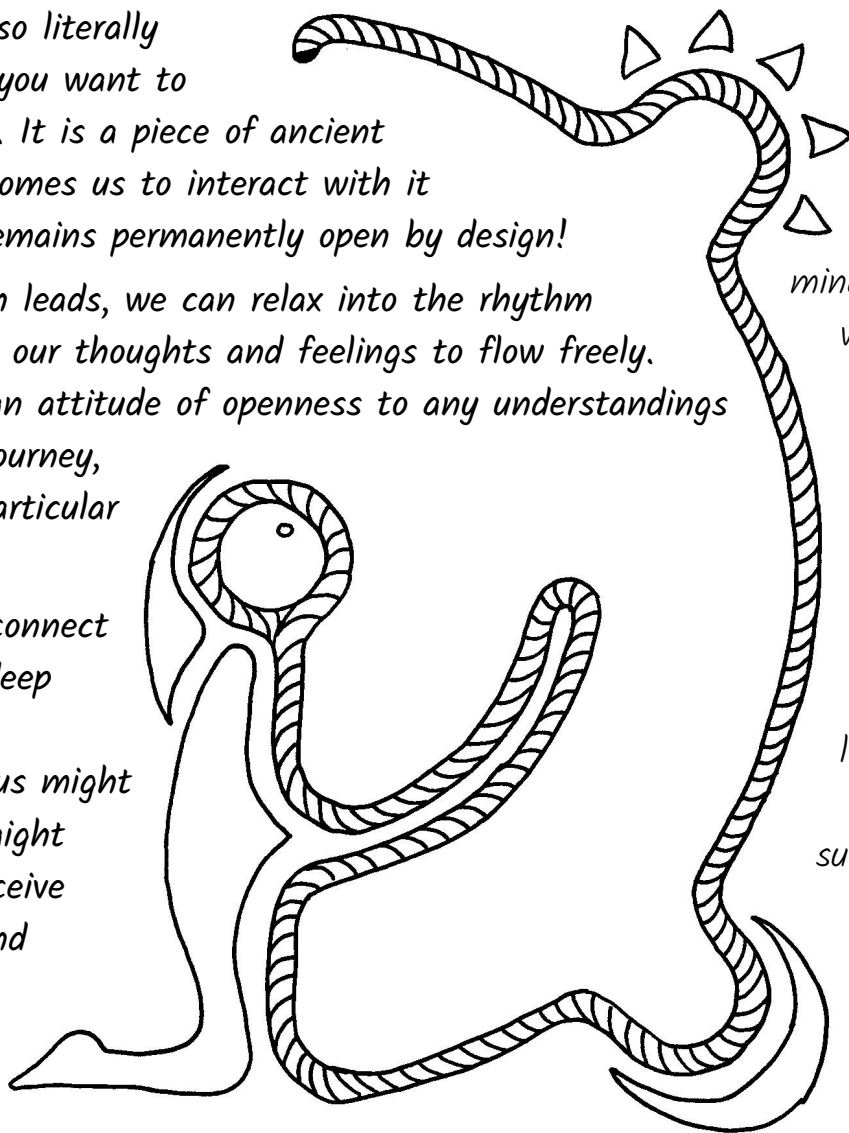
can reduce stress by releasing us from closed

mindsets where we feel that something has to happen in a certain way. A more open approach to life can lead to many surprising and rewarding experiences, sometimes in ways in which we

never could have imagined!'

This final section of the labyrinth's pathway

(to be coloured in purple starting from the end with black tip) immediately conveyed to me the shape of a person with their arms outstretched in front of them in a gesture of openness to receive or in prayer, which lends itself well to this sixth lesson of being open. The path leading up to this figure is also an open shape and has two circular lobes which I have used to communicate the idea of the passage of day and night - connecting to the complete availability of the labyrinth to visitors and to the concept of a journey undertaken. The term pilgrim is often used within labyrinth literature to describe those who walk its pathways, and here I feel it works well to unite the figure with the path ahead as well as suggesting a spiritual dimension to their quest.



## LESSON 7: FINDING OURSELVES - FEELING WHOLE

And so we arrive at the centre of the labyrinth where we can stop and rest. The physical stillness can feel all the more powerful after our extensive movements back and forth across the space.

In this stillness we can connect to our own deep centre where we feel whole and intact, despite any unsettling ripples (or even large waves) we may be experiencing on the surface. It brings us back to ourselves, or as one visitor to a labyrinth expressed it;

"At the centre, I met myself waiting there for me..."

Here at the centre, the Labyrinth holds us in a safe circular container, surrounding us with the solidity and wholeness of its shape.

Walking the labyrinth can be an emptying or a filling experience – things can be both released and discovered. While resting at the centre we can offer our gratitude to the labyrinth for these gifts and answers, before starting our return journey outward bringing what we have learnt back into the world. So the centre can be an end and a beginning simultaneously.

‘The labyrinth reminds us that there is always a still and whole centre within ourselves even at the most difficult and turbulent of times. When we reach it, we can return to face the world with a new strength and a new understanding.’

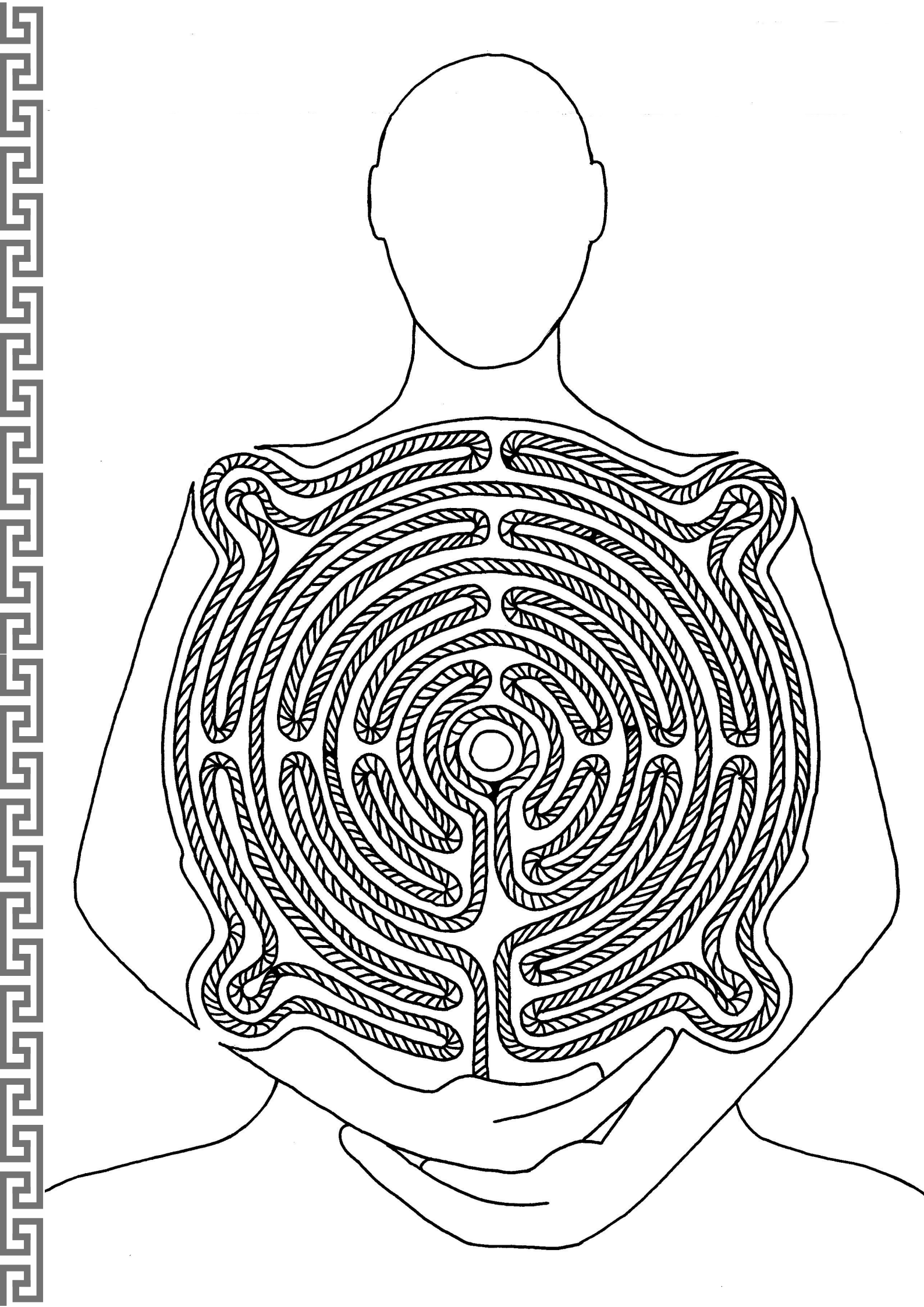
This seventh piece of artwork (shown on the next page) reunites all the different sections of the pathway into one complete whole labyrinth shape. The idea is that all six sections can now be coloured in reverse, the return journey, as you wind your way out of the labyrinth from the centre back to the start (purple, blue, green yellow, orange and red). A small black link on the thread of the path denotes where each colour changes. Together they then form the palette of a rainbow (please customise the rest of the page/image as you wish).

This use of rainbow colours to communicate the whole links back to the rainbow labyrinth mentioned at the start, as well as to several ideas which I came across during my labyrinth research. Firstly, how a single beam of white light can be refracted into the spectrum of rainbow colours. Secondly, how in the dreaming tracks of Aborigines, the rainbow serpent gives birth to the other creatures. And thirdly how the ancient Indian system of Chakras assigns the colours of the rainbow to different energy centres within the body.

Inspired by this, I've used the structure of the labyrinth to form the body of a figure with its centre near the location of the heart. The figure is positioned in a still, meditative pose with the arms circling the outer edge in a gesture of wholeness and being held.

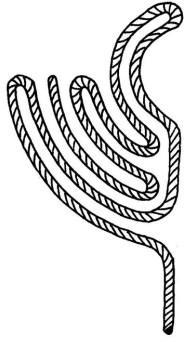
In this way I've made ourselves the final creature which emerges from the labyrinth and who returns to the world with the essence of all other six beings and their lessons contained within.





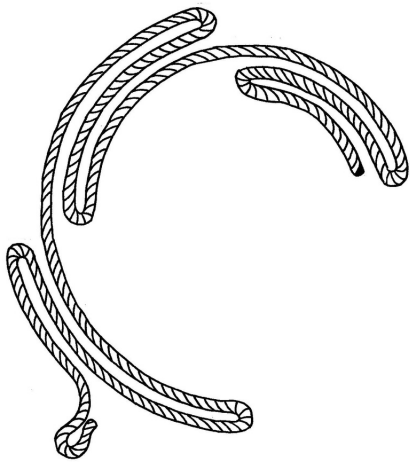
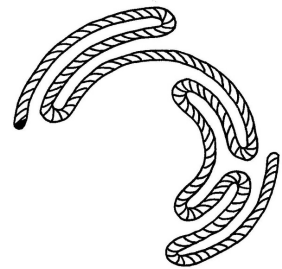


# CREATURES OF THE LABYRINTH: A WALKING POEM



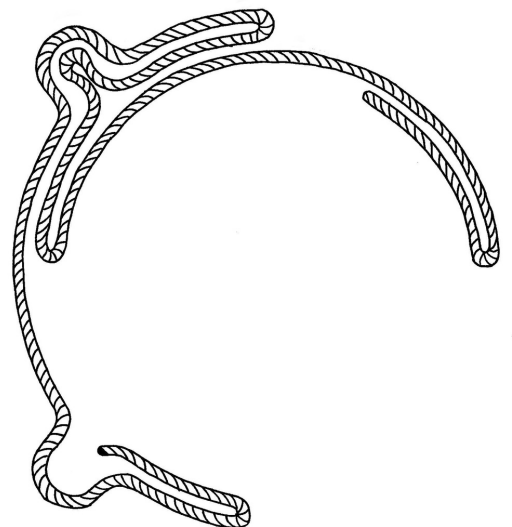
We pause, by the germinating seeds,  
Of the Labyrinth's entrance stones,  
Before emerging like a new green shoot,  
Embarking on its journey towards a central sun.  
The leaves of the path unfurl enticingly ahead of us,  
Drawing us in to a burgeoning flower head,  
Whose soft petals then bloom outwards,  
Scattering their fragrance of beauty,  
For all to experience and enjoy.

A thought butterfly is drawn by the scent,  
And flits back and forth,  
Teasingly close to its goal,  
Before alighting on a question.  
Its delicate wings form a double arc of intention,  
As we release it - hopefully,  
Like a kinetic prayer,  
Into the orb of the labyrinth.

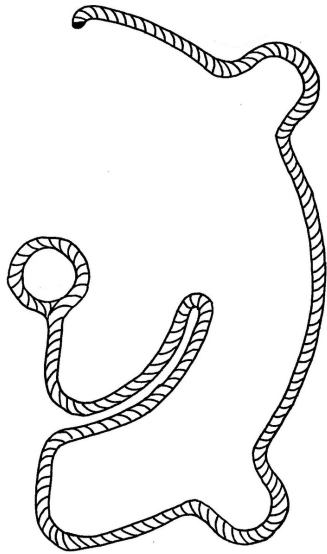
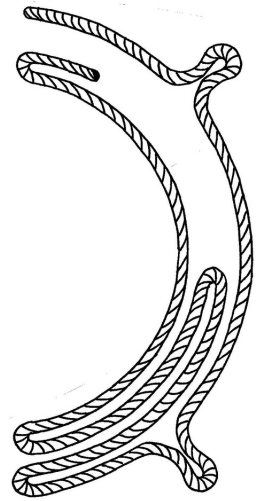


We discover a snaky tail below our feet,  
And follow the twists and turns of this creature's coiled body,  
Reconnecting ourselves to the evolving story of our own lives,  
And to the geological journey of the land around us -  
Our pathway is lined with its ancient stony skins,  
Cast off through the passages of time.  
We share this magical space with other celestial beings,  
Whose passing orbits wax and wane with our own,  
As if choreographed in some elaborate universal dance.

We step off the serpents head  
Into the smile of a dolphin,  
Who reminds us of the joy to be found,  
By tuning into the present moment,  
Through the sonar our of senses  
And the anchor of our breath.  
Finding our bearings through a compass of ammonites,  
We slide playfully down the dolphin's silky tail,  
And into the mouth of an awaiting dog!



Licked clean, we rub our feet,  
Down the length of its inviting belly,  
As it rolls in the ecstasy of our journey.  
We firmly grip the golden lead of Ariadne's thread,  
Trusting that our faithful companion,  
Will guide us in the right direction,  
Even if we can't see the way.  
The determined hound detects a promising scent,  
On our winding, unicursal trail,  
And pulls us into the realm of the pilgrim.



We travel through the lobes of day and night,  
Towards the peace and salvation of our personal quest,  
And into the outstretched arms,  
Of the Labyrinth's welcoming embrace.  
It wills us to open our hearts and minds,  
To receive the gifts and answers it has to offer us,  
On this inward pilgrimage to its centre,  
And to the intuitive wisdom deep within ourselves.

And here at the centre, we can stop and rest,  
Taking refuge in the stillness,  
After our pendulous journey across the space.  
And here at the core of our being,  
We find ourselves - whole and intact,  
Despite any turbulence we may be facing.  
Held gently by this safe container,  
Whose solidity gives us strength.

We can offer our gratitude to the labyrinth,  
For things both received, and released,  
Before beginning our outward journey,  
Along the now familiar path,  
And back into the world anew.

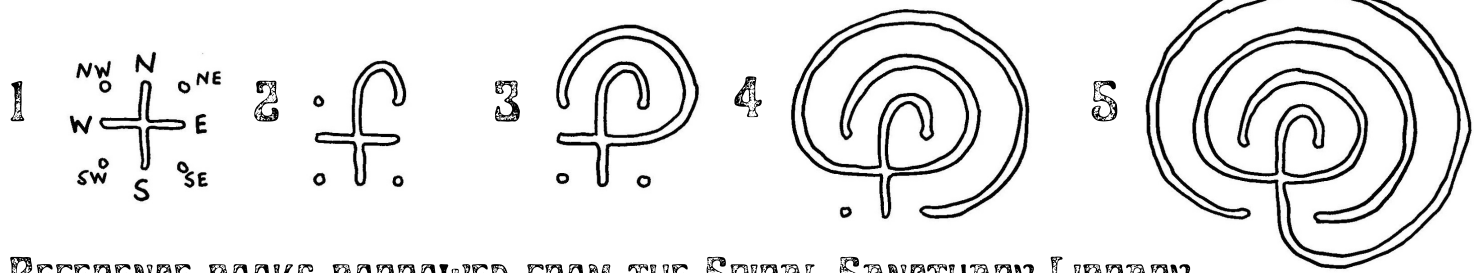
On our way we pass by the creatures who have guided us;  
The Pilgrim, the Hound and the Dolphin,  
The Snake, the Butterfly and the Rose,  
Their lessons reside within us as we return to our lives,  
Ready to be called upon whenever we may need them...



Sarah Toraven  
2015

## DRAWING A CLASSICAL THREE-PATH LABYRINTH:

1. Begin by drawing the labyrinth 'seed pattern' – a cross with four dots. I think of it like a compass. The north/south vertical line crossed by the east/west horizontal line, then the dots mark the mid-way directions of north-east, south-east, south west and north-west.
2. Draw a loop from north of the cross to the north-east point.
3. Next draw a loop round the first one going from the east of the cross to north-west point.
4. Then draw a larger loop clockwise around this one going from the west of the cross to the south-east point.
5. Lastly draw the biggest loop anticlockwise over the top of the others from the south of the cross to connect with the final dot in the south-west.



## REFERENCE BOOKS BORROWED FROM THE SPIRAL SANCTUARY LIBRARY:

- Labyrinth: Pathway to Meditation and Healing* by Helen Raphael Sands  
*Labyrinth: Landscape of the Soul* by Di Williams  
*Walking the Labyrinth* by Tchenka Jane Sunderland  
*Labyrinths and Mazes* by Geoffrey Ashe  
*Mazes and Labyrinths in Great Britain* by John Martineau  
*Mazes and Labyrinths* by Adrian Fisher  
*Labyrinths: Ancient Paths of Wisdom and Peace* by Virginia Westbury  
*Walking a Sacred Path: Rediscovering the Labyrinth as a Spiritual Tool* by Dr Lauren Artress  
Seaton Labyrinth Education Pack and CD ROM

**DEDICATION:** This book is dedicated to the Spiral Centre for introducing me to labyrinths and all the other wonderful gifts it has given me over the years. More information about the Spiral Centre and Seaton Labyrinth can be found at [thespiralcentre.co.uk](http://thespiralcentre.co.uk) including details about the monthly full moon walking meditation sessions at the Labyrinth.

**IN MEMORY OF:** Elizabeth Richie who most wonderfully led the Labyrinth walks from its completion until her passing in April 2022.

**DONATIONS:** If you have found this book a useful offering please consider making a donation to The Spiral Centre Ltd: NatWest Bank Sort code: 54-41-66 Acc.No: 54535239 putting Labyrinth as a reference.

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