Section 4

Labyrinths have existed for well over 4,000 years. Labyrinths and labyrinthine symbols have been found in regions as diverse as modern-day Turkey, Ireland, Greece, and India. There are (1) …….. but what they all have in common is a (2) …… which leads to a central area. There is one starting point at the entrance and the goal is to (3) ……. Finding your way through a labyrinth involves many twists and turns, but it's not possible to get lost as there is (4) …….

In modern times, the word labyrinth has (5) …….. and is often used as a synonym for a maze. A maze is quite different as it is a kind of puzzle with (6) ……... Mazes became fashionable in the 15th and 16th centuries in Europe, and can still be found in the gardens of (7) ……. The paths are usually surrounded by thick, high hedges so that it's not possible to see over them. Entering a maze usually involves (8) …….. before using logic to work out the pattern and find your way to the centre and then out again. There are lots of dead ends and paths which lead you back to where you started. The word 'maze' is believed to come from a Scandinavian word for (9) ……. This is where the word 'amazing' comes from.

Labyrinths, on the other hand, have (10) ……... Although people now often refer to things they find complicated as labyrinths, this is not how they were seen in the past. The winding spiral of the labyrinth has been used for centuries as (11) …….. It served as a spiritual reminder that there is purpose and meaning to our lives and helped to give people (12) …….. Labyrinths are thought to encourage (13) ……. and have been used as a meditation and prayer tool in many cultures over many centuries.

The earliest examples of the labyrinth spiral pattern have been found carved into stone, from Sardinia to Scandinavia, from Arizona to India to Africa. In Europe, these spiral carvings date from the late Bronze Age. The Native American Pima tribe wove baskets

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with (14) …… that depicted their own cosmology. In Ancient Greece, the labyrinth spiral was used on coins around four thousand years ago. Labyrinths (15) ……. were commonly found in bathhouses, villas and tombs throughout the Roman Empire.

In Northern Europe, there were actual physical labyrinths designed for walking on. These were cut into the turf or grass, usually in (16) ……. The origin of these walking labyrinths remains unclear, but they were probably used for fertility rites which may date back thousands of years. Eleven examples of turf labyrinths survive today, including the largest one at Saffron Walden, England, which used to have (17) …… in the middle of it.

More recently labyrinths have (18) ……..... Some believe that walking a labyrinth (19) ……., and there are those who believe in its (20) ……., which include slower breathing and a restored sense of (21) ……... This idea has become so popular that labyrinths have been laid into the floors of spas, wellness centres and even prisons in recent years.

A pamphlet at Colorado Children's Hospital informs patients that 'walking a labyrinth can often calm people in the midst of a crisis'. And apparently, it's not only patients who benefit. Many visitors find walking a labyrinth less stressful than sitting in (22) …….. Some doctors even walk the labyrinth during their breaks. In some hospitals, patients who can't walk can have a paper 'finger labyrinth' brought to their bed. The science behind the theory is (23) ……., but there are dozens of (24) ……. which support claims about the benefits of labyrinths. For example, one study found that walking a labyrinth provided 'short-term calming, relaxation, and relief from anxiety' for Alzheimer's patients.

So, what is it about labyrinths that makes their appeal so universal? Well …

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