Deeper Relational Connection through Sacred Geometry Garden

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“Listen to what God tells you in the sounds of nature.” – Anthony de Mello, SJ

Abstract

Revolutionized in Ancient Greece, geometry is one of the oldest branches of mathematics which translates directly to ‘measurement of the earth.’ As a way to order and discover knowledge about the world, geometry quickly became sacred in many cultures and religious traditions. In our modern society, the sacredness of geometry in nature has been lost due to the creation of cities whose goals are often to dominate nature. Loyola University Chicago is located in highly urban settings, with locations in downtown Chicago, Rogers Park and Maywood. These campuses provide little opportunity to connect with nature, leaving students without this life-giving asset. As a method for growing in relation with ourselves, nature, and God, this research will evaluate the benefits of meditation gardens filled with sacred geometry. Further, this research will analyze the opportunity for building relationships with external partners – like students at Loyola College, Williamnagar in Northeast India – through shared planning, implementation, and use of meditation gardens in our distinct locations.

Introduction

Sacred Geometry

- The Ancient Greeks observed the natural world and conceived its creator in terms of absolute truth. The unification of these dichotomous studies allows for the formation and strengthening of a relationship with the Earth and its Creator, as well as personal growth.

- Mathematics, specifically arithmetic and geometry, allowed for the explanation and codification of the world.

- Geometry became sacred as a way to know the Creator more closely.

Similar understandings of geometry and nature are present in cultures and religions that span the globe.

Eco-Spirituality

- Thomas Berry, a cultural historian and scholar of world religions, was a seminal figure in the field of eco-spirituality, which observes the crucial linkage between ecology and spirituality.

“The limitations of redemption rhetoric and scientific rhetoric can both be seen, and a new more integral language of being and value can emerge.” – Thomas Berry

- In The New Story, Berry explores the need for education that integrates scientific knowledge of the world and religious understanding of meaning to provide a greater picture of life.

- The unification of these dichotomous studies allows for the formation and strengthening of a relationship with the Earth and its Creator, as well as personal growth.

Geometric Significance

- The nautilus shell is one example of the Fibonacci spiral in nature. Sacred geometry, spirals are representative of energy and connection. Although each snowflake is unique, they share the common geometric building blocks of all things: triangles, squares, circles, spirals and lines. They are contemporary thought by juxtaposing the randomness of the natural world with the order of the garden. The act of restoring and preserving the garden provides a space for meditation and contemplation.

Design Ideas

- For Loyola University Chicago’s Lake Shore Campus, I propose a combination of the three designs.

- The classical labyrinth design holds significant geometric value and could be implemented with little cost.

- The raised dimension of the Old Summer Palace allows for increased privacy and shielding from outside distractions. This technique could be replicated with native hedges, such as juniper or cedar.

- The ability to interact with nature, albeit in an artificial way, is a valuable takeaway from Zen Buddhist gardens. This can be harnessed through an interactive aspect of the garden, such as a rock garden.

- The prayer and meditation garden should serve as a refuge for students, faculty and staff at Loyola University Chicago to escape into nature within the urban environment.

Proposed Design

- The Northeastern region of India is comprised of eight states: Arunachala Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Tripura, Meghalaya, Assam.

- The Kohima Project is a remote cultural exchange with college students at Loyola College, Williamnagar in the state of Meghalaya.

- The project’s mission is to discuss the topics of environmental sustainability and eco-spirituality from our diverse backgrounds.

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students in the project from the United States and from India have not met face-to-face.

- The planning, implementation, and use of sister meditation gardens will allow the two groups to become closer through shared experience.

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The Kohima Project

- The Kohima Project is a remote cultural exchange.

- At Loyola College, Williamnagar in the state of Meghalaya.

- Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, students in the project from the United States and from India have not met face-to-face.

- Meditation gardens are used as gateways to meditation located in Beijing, China was created in 1709. Dissimilar to other popular labyrinths, the Old Summer Palace has raised walls to guide visitors.

References


Design Ideas

Figure 1 & 2. Nautilus Shell (L) & Snowflake Under the Microscope (R). The nautilus shell is one example of the Fibonacci spiral in nature. In sacred geometry, spirals are representative of energy and connection. Although each snowflake is unique, they share the common geometric building blocks of all things: triangles, squares, circles, spirals and lines.

Figure 3. Classical Labyrinth Design in Chartres Cathedral. This is one of the world’s most well-known labyrinths, dating back to 1205. At the center of the labyrinth is a six lobed rosette – an ancient symbol used to portray the nature of God. Some scholars posit that the path of the labyrinth represents the human journey from sin to redemption.

Figure 4. Old Summer Palace Gardens and Labyrinth. This space for meditation located in Beijing, China was created in 1709. Dissimilar to other popular labyrinths, the Old Summer Palace has raised walls to guide visitors.

Figure 5. Buddhist Zen Garden. Zen gardens are used as gateways to contemplative thought by juxtaposing the randomness of the natural world with the order of the garden. The act of restoring and preserving the garden provides a space for meditation and contemplation.

Figure 6. Ms. Nonora Maykindik M. Marak, a Kohima Project participant from Loyola College, Williamnagar.