

ZOROASTRIAN LIGHT SHRINE

Design Summary

Introduction

The Zoroastrian Light Shrine is a contemplative structure located within the forested grounds of the Vedanta Retreat in Scappoose, Oregon. Inspired by Zoroastrian philosophy, sacred geometry, and principles of architecture and engineering, the shrine was designed as a place for reflection, learning, and direct experience.

Rather than replicating a traditional fire temple, the shrine reinterprets sacred fire through focused natural light. Sunlight enters through a pyramidal skylight and illuminates a central altar, symbolizing the movement of higher order into the material world. The result is a structure that combines symbolism, geometry, nature, and human participation into a unified experience.

Purpose

The shrine was created to serve several purposes:

- Provide a quiet environment for meditation and contemplation.
- Express Zoroastrian principles through physical form.
- Integrate architecture, symbolism, and experience into a single system.
- Create a bridge between ancient wisdom and modern understanding.
- Offer an educational framework through inscriptions, geometry, and spatial design.
- Demonstrate an environmentally conscious and reproducible design.

The shrine is intentionally open to the surrounding forest, allowing light, air, sound, and nature to remain active participants in the experience.

Architecture and Symbolism

The structure is built from reclaimed Western Red Cedar and is aligned to the cardinal directions. Visitors enter from the west and face east, symbolizing a movement from darkness toward illumination.

Four cedar posts support the structure and define the sacred space. Three benches provide seating for reflection and discussion. Inscribed beams display teachings central to the Zoroastrian tradition, including:

Good Thoughts

Good Words

Good Deeds

and

“Happiness comes to those who bring happiness to others”

A carved Faravahar above the entrance serves as a symbolic reminder of moral choice, personal responsibility, and continual self-correction.

At the center of the shrine stands a seven-sided altar. Each face is dedicated to one of the Amesha Spentas, the seven divine attributes through which the ordering principle of Asha is expressed. The altar functions simultaneously as the symbolic, geometric, and experiential center of the shrine.

The Light System

The most distinctive feature of the shrine is its pyramidal skylight. Positioned at the apex of the roof, the skylight allows natural sunlight to enter and converge upon the altar below.

This creates a vertical axis linking sky, light, altar, and earth. In symbolic terms, the movement of light represents the descent of higher order into material existence.

The shrine therefore transforms light into an active teaching element rather than merely an architectural feature.

Geometry and Design

The design incorporates recurring numerical and geometric relationships including:

- Sevenfold geometry representing the Amesha Spentas.
- Golden-ratio relationships expressed through roof and skylight angles.
- The numbers **3, 7, 9, 18, and 72**, which appear repeatedly throughout the structure.
- A seven-sided altar derived from equal division of the circle.
- A roof geometry that integrates complementary angular relationships associated with **phi (ϕ)**.

These mathematical relationships are not intended to prove spiritual ideas. Instead, they create a clear design language linking structure, proportion, symbolism, and experience.

Experiential Framework

The shrine was designed around three complementary modes of attention:

Inner Attention — awareness directed toward oneself through contemplation and reflection.

Outer Attention — awareness directed toward nature and the surrounding environment.

Universal Attention — awareness directed upward toward larger questions of meaning, order, and relationship.

Together these three perspectives create a simple experiential pathway through which visitors may engage the shrine in their own way.

Conclusion

The Zoroastrian Light Shrine is an exploration of how architecture, geometry, symbolism, and nature can be integrated into a single contemplative environment.

It does not seek to prove a particular doctrine or establish definitive conclusions. Instead, it serves as an invitation to inquiry. Through light, proportion, symbolism, and direct experience, visitors are encouraged to explore the relationship between truth, harmony, and the ordering principle known in the Zoroastrian tradition as Asha.

In this sense, the shrine is both a finished structure and an open question—an exploration of how physical space can foster reflection, learning, and alignment with a greater order.