

THE SPHERE AS A VISUAL METAPHOR

Take a look round

Spheres are Everywhere

Employing spheres as visual metaphors is nothing new:

- We describe people with admirable life balance as *well-rounded*.
- When a person or group is doing well, we say they are *on a roll*.
- We refer to *spheres of action* and *spheres of influence*.
- We speak of *inner circles* (2D spheres).
- We characterize the seasons, life and death, as *the circle of life*.
- We have *circles of friends*.
- We try to *stay in the loop*.
- When we experience failure, we *bounce back*.
- We *round out the day*, or an activity, or a collection.



Round is Round

The geometric and symbolic nature of spheres is particularly apt for the communication of thoughts, ideas, feelings and concepts.

Spheres are:

- Universally familiar
- Mathematically elegant
- Geometrically fundamental
- Relevant over time
- Found in all cultures
- By definition holistic
- Metaphorically neutral
- Naturally qualitative and quantitative



Spheres R Us

The sphere as a visual metaphor for systems is not arbitrary.

As a symbolic image the sphere appears throughout human history and human thought with stunning consistency and frequency – in physics, biology, psychology, mythology, cosmology and just about every other ology.

Spheres and circles emerged as potent mythological symbols in our pre-historic past and have been there ever since.

We see the circle in the mandalas and sand paintings used by many cultures to guide and heal body and soul. Native American societies envision the world as a great hoop – dreamcatchers, medicine wheels and the pollen path invoke both the circle and the sphere.

The psychologist Carl Jung identified the sphere as an archetype – an elemental expression of the human psyche. He used the circle as the symbol for the self.

Plato concluded the human soul is circular.



Naturally Spherical

The stars and planets are spherical. The Big Bang Theory says the universe began 13.7 billion years ago as an infinitesimally tiny sphere.

Astronomers have detected evidence that suggests the entire universe might be spherical in shape.

Nature adopts the sphere wherever it needs a highly efficient structure that encompasses the greatest volume of mass using the least surface area – oranges, eggs, immune cells and bubbles, to name a few.

Our joints are made of balls and sockets. Our eyes are spheres by which we know the world.

The sphere has no corners or sharp edges and, therefore, no single point of weakness. That is why soldiers under attack form a circle, why hedgehogs roll into balls to defend against predators and why our skulls are not shaped like shoeboxes.

Their spherical shape is the reason macadamias are tough nuts to crack.

As a symbolic representation, the sphere encompasses all – the atom, the cell, the earth, the sky, the universe.



The Shape of Our Lives

The sphere is the shape of least resistance. Its anti-friction properties are why we roller skate on ball bearings and why tumbleweeds tumble. The sphere is also the shape of most resistance. Its unique ability to withstand internal and external pressure is why we use it to explore the expanse of space and the depths of the sea.

Since earliest times and still today, we use spheres to signify authority in business and politics. We place spheres atop scepters, crowns, palaces and temples. We design political and religious buildings with domes.

We see the sphere in the cycles of the seasons and our lives. We cultivate and treasure our circle of friends. We speak of the circle of life to express the grand pattern of our own existence.

Temporally, the circle represents the beginning, the end and a return to the beginning – the journey and the destination.

What is it that makes the sphere so pervasive and so potent? Why does it appear with such regularity and prominence in every culture, faith, area and era?

In the sphere, we see everything in relationship to everything.



The Sphere in the Mirror

Geometrically speaking, life is not spherical. The Sphere applied to collaboration, or any other area, is not a literal depiction of reality. It does not represent a school of thought or ideology. It is not a belief system.

The Sphere is a visual system of pattern recognition founded on the understanding that systems form patterns and patterns form systems.

The Sphere is a guiding visual metaphor for a new perspective – a transition from a worldview of separation, alienation and isolation to one of holistic interdependence.

When thinking about The Sphere, or when using it to describe our experience, we are contemplating the totality of interconnectedness.

The Sphere represents the dynamic interconnections and interactions that continuously shape the contours of our lives and the world around us. In it we see the changing patterns of our families, businesses, communities and countries. We see the patterns of our behaviors, attitudes and actions.

The Sphere metaphorically depicts the completed patterns of the past and the emerging patterns of the present. It reveals how we can and do influence the patterns of the future.

If we can see the patterns, we can influence the patterns.



The only myth that is going to be worth thinking about in the immediate future is one that is talking about the planet, not the city, not these people, but the planet, and everything on it.

When you see the earth from the moon, you don't see any divisions there of nations or states. This might be the symbol for the new mythology to come. –Joseph Campbell

Black Elk Speaks

...the Power of the World always works in circles, and everything tries to be round.

In the old days, all our power came to us from the sacred hoop of the nation and so long as the hoop was unbroken the people flourished.

The flowering tree was the living center of the hoop, and the circle of the four quarters nourished it.

The east gave peace and light, the south gave warmth, the west gave rain and the north with its cold and mighty wind gave strength and endurance.

This knowledge came to us from the outer world with our religion.

Everything the power of the world does is done in a circle.

The sky is round, and I have heard that the earth is round like a ball and so are all the stars.

The wind, in its greatest power, whirls.

Birds make their nests in circles, for theirs is the same religion as ours.

The sun comes forth and goes down again in a circle.

The moon does the same and both are round.

Even the seasons form a great circle in their changing and always come back again to where they were.

The life of a man is a circle from childhood to childhood, and so it is in everything where power moves.

Our teepees were round like the nests of birds, and these were always set in a circle, the nation's hoop, a nest of many nests, where the Great Spirit meant for us to hatch our children.



Black Elk
Holy Man of the Oglala Sioux
1863-1950

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