

A COMPARATIVE STUDY ON THE SIGNIFICATION OF NUMBER SEVEN IN DIFFERENT SOCIAL AND RELIGIOUS CONTEXTS

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ABSTRACT

In the present paper the authors endeavors to shed light on the high signification of number seven in the religious, cultural, social and mystical background of human history. Having analyzed Quranic and biblical contexts, the author presents the reader with numerous examples to demonstrate the holiness often attributed to number seven. Delving into mythology and sociology he has also provided the reader with enough evidence in order to indicate how number seven is reckoned in different civilizations. There is an emphasis to trace the historical status of the number in Persian context.

Keywords: *Number seven in the religious, cultural, social, mystical background*

INTRODUCTION

Islam

Number seven plays a crucial role in Muslims' beliefs and it is very well provable by pointing out the significance of this number in Holy Qur'an and Hadith. The number of ayat in surat Al-Fatiha. The number of layers of the Earth in Islamic religion is seven. The number of skies in Islamic religion is seven and also the number of circumambulations (Tawaf) that are made around the Kaaba. The number of walks between Al-Safa and Al-Marwah mountains - that is travelling back and forth - seven times during the ritual pilgrimages of Hajj and Umrah. The number of heavens in Islamic religion, i.e. levels in heaven. The number of hells in hell is also seven i.e. levels in hell. The number of doors to hell is seven (for heaven the number of doors is eight). In Verse 12:46 (see Islamic view of Joseph) of the Quran, Joseph (Yusef) is asked to interpret the King's dream where seven fat cows were dreamt to have been devoured by seven skinny cows and seven green spikes, and others shrivelled. The number of the big sins or vices is seven which are from a Hadith of the prophet Mohamed: "Avoid the seven sins polytheism, witchcraft, the killing of the soul which Allah has forbidden except by right, consuming riba, consuming the wealth of the orphan, to escape from the battles and slandering chaste women". In the Verse 18:10, there are 7 youths who slept inside the cave for 300 years. There are seven rivers in paradise and in some cases, in order for getting rid of Nijasat, based on Shiite doctrines, you out to wash things seven times.

Christianity

1. The number 7, according to Ambrose, corresponds to the Old Testament but he sees it also as the number representing the virginity. Thibaut of Langres gives also this attribute to this number because it is the only one of the first nine numbers which does not father and the only one which is not fathered. It is considered as virgin and representative of the Holy Spirit to which are attributed the same properties. Macrobe goes in the same way telling that it symbolizes Minerve, born of his father without passing by a mother.

2. The seven indicates the senses of a change after an accomplished cycle and of a positive renewal.
3. Perfect number and symbol of the divine abundance, it is also according to the Bible the number of the punishment, the purification and the penitence. It is also attributed to Satan who tries to copy God being the monkey of God. Also the infernal beast of the Revelation (Rv 13,1) has seven heads.
4. It is the number of the perfect man, complete and perfectly realized as the sum of the four females and the three males.
5. Symbol of the totality of the created Universe (3 the sky + 4 the earth), it expresses the creation within which the man evolves.
6. Saint Augustin sees the seven like the perfection of the Plenitude. He made it also the number of the creature, considering not the life of this one but its become, the evolution.

Old Testament

In Old Testament we will easily observe the importance of number 7. To illustrate we can put forward the following proofs. Seven days of Creation (Genesis 1) e.g., God rested on and sanctified the seventh day (Sabbath). Anyone who dares to kill Cain 'will suffer vengeance seven times over' (Genesis 4:15). Lamech in his "Song of the Sword" claims that 'if Cain shall be avenged sevenfold', he himself shall be 'seventy-sevenfold' (Genesis 4:24). Seven years of plenty and seven years of famine in Pharaoh's dream (Genesis 41). In regards to the sin sacrifice, the anointed priest was to sprinkle the bullock's blood seven times before the lord (Leviticus 4:6). Seven days of the feast of Passover (Exodus 13:3–10). Seven day week and the pattern concerning distribution and use of manna (Exodus 16) is also noteworthy. The Menorah (Hebrew: מנורה), is a seven-branched candelabrum lit by olive oil in the Tabernacle and the Temple in Jerusalem (Exodus 25). We may consider seven year cycle around the years of Jubilee (Leviticus 25) as well. Jericho's walls fall on the seventh day after seven priests with seven trumpets march around the city seven times (Joshua 6:8). Seven things that are detestable to the LORD (Proverbs 6:16–19) and seven Pillars of the House of Wisdom (Proverbs 9:1) are striking too. Seven is also the number of notes in the traditional Western diatonic scale (major or minor).

New Testament

Seven loaves multiplied into seven basketfuls of surplus (Matthew 15:32–37). Peter asked Jesus if he should forgive those who sinned against him up to 7 times; Jesus responded by saying to forgive them 'seventy times seven times', remembering so the curse of Cain and the song of Lamech in Genesis 4.[6]. The seven last words (or seven last sayings) of Jesus on the cross is a well-known for all. We should also consider seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom (Acts 6:3). In the Book of Revelation, seven is a central figure of quantities: Seven Spirits of God, Seven Churches (to which the book is addressed); Seven of the following appear in Revelation: golden lampstands(1:12), stars(1:16), torches of fire(4:5) seals(5:1), angels and their trumpets(8:2), last plagues(15:1), golden bowls(15:7), thunders(10:3), horns and eyes(5:6), diadems(12:3) and kings(17:10).

Others

Other sevens in Christian knowledge and practice include: □□The Seven Corporal Acts of Mercy and Seven Spiritual Acts of Mercy of Roman Catholic, Anglican, and other traditions □□The Seven deadly sins: lust, gluttony, greed, sloth, wrath, envy, and pride □□Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit □□The Seven Joys of the Virgin Mary, of Roman Catholic, Anglican, and other traditions □□The Seven Sacraments in the Catholic faith (though some traditions

assign a different number) □□The Seven Sorrows of the Virgin Mary, of Roman Catholic, Anglican, and other traditions

□□There are seven suicides mentioned in the Bible (OT and NT).[7] □□The seven terraces of Mount Purgatory (one per deadly sin) □□The Seven Virtues: chastity, temperance, charity, diligence, kindness, patience, and humility □□In the genealogy in the Gospel of Luke, Jesus is 77th in a direct line □□The number of heads of the three beasts ($7 \times 10 \times 7 + 7 \times 10 \times 10 + 7 \times 10 = 1260$) of the Book of Revelation, and of some other monsters, like the hydra and the number of seals

The seven demons that came out of Mary Magdalene. (Lk 8,2)

The seven indictments to the scribes and to Pharisees announced by Jesus. (Mt 23,13 31)

The seven requests in the prayer of the Our-Father.

The hunted demon brings back with him seven others more stronger than him.

The seven deacons of the primitive Church: Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas and Nicolaus. (Act 6,5)

In Mt 25,35-36, Jesus enumerates six charitable actions that will be considered in the last Judgement for man salvation: to visit invalids, to quench the thirsty, to feed the hungry, to repurchase the captives or to visit prisoners, to dress those who are naked and to welcome foreigners. But to the 13th century, someone discovers in documents of Lactance a seventh act of mercy: to bury the deads. This one was ratified in 1220 by the canonical collection of Raymond of Penafort.

The gift of the stupid will bring you no advantage, his eyes look for seven times as much in return. (Si 20,14)

Solomon's wedding lasted seven days.

In psalms it is written: "Seven times a day I praise you for your upright judgements" (Ps 119,164) and again "which comes from the earth seven times refined" (Ps 12,7). The psalmist also talks about the seven clamours of God that appear in the celestial phenomena.

The seven psalms of penitence: 6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129, 142.

The Leviticus prescribes a penitence of seven years for each sin.

Number of time that a leprous is sprinkled with the blood of a sparrow.

Seven nations that had the promised earth were exterminated in front of Israel. (Dt 7,1)

There are seven weeks between Easter and the Pentecost. (Lv 23,15)

The jews's easter holidays lasted seven days.

There are seven feast days of Tabernacles. (Lv 23,34)

It takes seven days for the consecration of Aaron and his sons, and the altar. (Ex 29,35-37)

If you buy a Hebrew slave, he will serve six years; but on the seventh he will be free without anything to pay. The slaves were released the seventh year which corresponded to the Year of the Sabbath named also Year of Exemption. (Ex 21,2)

Jacob served seven years for Rachel. (Gn 29,20)

Cain would be revenged seven times if someone killed him. (Gn 4,15)

Joseph remained in prison seven years when he was falsely accused to have slept with the woman of his master.

The seven ewes given in present to Abimelech by Abraham. (Gn 21,28)

The seven couples of each kinds of cattle which entered in the ark of Noah and were saved from the flood. (Gn 7,2)

On the seventh day, the Sabbath, God rested. (Gn 2,2)

Hinduism

Number seven bears a visible significance in Hindu religion as well. For instance, The Sanskrit word *sapta* refers to number seven. Indian Music has "Saptak Swaras," seven octaves (sa re ga ma pa dha ni) which are basics of music, using which hundreds of Ragas are composed. Celestial group of seven stars are named as "Sapta Rishi" based on the seven great saints. Seven Promises, Seven Rounds in Hindu Wedding and Seven Reincarnation are also noteworthy. According to Hinduism, there are seven worlds in the universe, seven seas in the world and seven Rishies (seven gurus) called *sapta rishis*. Seven hills at tirumala also known as *ezhu malaiyan* means Sevenhills god. There are 7 Chakras in the basic model used in various eastern traditions and philosophies.

Judaism

In line with other religions number seven has an important status in Jewish beliefs and scriptures. *Shiv'a* (another pronunciation of the Hebrew word for 7—(Hebrew: שבעה ; "seven")), is the number of days of mourning. Hence, one *sits Shiva*. As in Shiva (Judaism). The weekly Torah portion is divided into seven *aliyahs*, and seven Jewish men (or boys over the age of 13 who are considered men; Bar Mitzvah) are called up for the reading of these *aliyahs* during *Shabbat* morning services. Seven blessings are recited under the *chuppah* during a Jewish wedding ceremony. A Jewish bride and groom are feted with seven days of festive meals after their wedding, known as *Sheva Berachot* ("Seven Blessings"). The number of *Ushpizzin* (also known as the "Seven Shepherds") who visit the *sukkah* during the holiday of Sukkot: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses, Aaron, and David. The number of nations God told the Israelites they would displace when they entered the land of Israel (Deut. 7:1): the Hittite, the Gergashite, the Amorite, the Canaanite, the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite. In Breslov tradition, the seven orifices of the face (2 eyes, 2 nostrils, 2 ears, and the mouth) are called "The Seven Candles." The 7 Sephirot of primary conscious emotion that are attributes of the creator.

General

Jesus would have fallen on the path of the cross seven times, according to visions of Ann-Catherine Emmerick.

The seven virtues. Three theologicals: faith, hope, love - or charity. Four cardinals: force, justice, prudence and temperance.

Presentation of the Virgin and the Immaculate Conception; the Christians of the first centuries were making born the Virgin Mary gave birth after seven months of gestation.

The seven Archangels who are stood continuously in front of God: Gabriel, Michael, Uriel, Raphael, Chamuel or Samael or Sealtiel, Japhiel or Orifiel or Jehudiel, Zadkiel or Zachariel or Barachiel. In messages given by the Virgin Mary to "Bush of thorns", May 28, 1995, the Virgin specified that each one was subjected to the guards of one of the seven sacraments of the Church: The Eucharist is assigned to Michael, the Baptism to Gabriel, the Confirmation

to Uriel, the Penitence to Jehudiel, the Extreme-Uncion to Raphael, the Order to Sealtiel and the Marriage to Barachiel.

In the Islamic religion: the Koran has seven esoteric senses, according to Muslim mysticisms (sometimes they talk about seventy senses); there are seven consonants, called sawakit, that are not in the first verse of the Koran; there are seven towers at the Mecca; during of the pilgrimage to Mecca, they have to undertake seven turns of the Kaba and seven courses between the mounts Cafa and Marmia; the soul of the deads remains seven days beside the tomb and the new-born baby receives his name the 7th day; the cats and the dogs have seven lives; the Fatiha counts seven verses (opening the Koran); the seven gates that possess the Hell which are in relation with the various torments it contains, and there would be also seven hells: Gehennan, Ladha, Hatorna, Sair, Sakar, Jahim and Hawiyat; the Koran says that Allah has created seven skies and as much lands. (Koran 65,12 and 41,8-11)

The man would be composed of seven souls according to Plato and also according to Hindus.

The seven emblems of the Buddha.

Some agree to say that the size of the lobes of the ear determines the degree of spiritual affinity of an individual. Lao-tseu, the founder of the Taoism, had, they said, ears of seven inches, having the nickname of "long-ears". Also, in the Oriental iconography, Buddha is always represented with excessively long lobes.

The Sufism names seven cosmic plans: Zat, the not-expressed; Ahadiat, the conscience; Vahdat, the self interior; Vahdamiat, the internal light; Arwah, the spiritual plan; Ajsam, the astral plan; Insaam, the physical plan. It recognizes also seven aspects of the manifestation: the stars, the moon, the sun, the reign mineral, vegetable, animal and human.

The seven symbolic colors of the Tarot.

The seven pillars of the Wisdom.

One of the twelve works of Hercules consisted to cut in only one stab the seven heads of the hydra of Lerne.

The seven cords of the lyre of Hermes and the seven cords which has the "vina", an instrument of India.

The seven tubes of the panpipes.

The seven sages of ancient Greece: Thales of Milet, Solon of Athena, Chilo of Lacedemone, Pittacos of Mitylene, Bias of Priene, Cleobule of Lindos and Periandre of Corinth. If you should turn your tongue seven times before talking, it is possibly because 7 was the number of these sages.

Sinbad tells to Hinbad his seven travel.

The seven towers "resonating" in Byzance.

The seven Greek vowels used by the gnostic: alpha, epsilon, eta, iota, omicron, upsilon, omega.

A Tibetan manuscript has a title "The seven books of the Wisdom of the Great Path".

The seven fundamental notes, or modulations, of the musical scale.

The seven colors of the rainbow - visible spectrum only.

A man cannot have more than seven transverse lines on his front.

The seven types of characters of the traditional astrology.

The seven branches of the sacrificial and cosmic tree of the Shamanism.

The ceremonies in the cult of Apollo were celebrated the seventh day of the month.

In China, popular feasts took place on the seventh day.

The red lamp of the Chinese secret societies has seven branches.

The Buddha would have taken the measure of the universe by making seven steps in each of the four directions.

A Hindu tradition attributes to the sun seven rays.

In Iran, at the time of the childbirth, one puts on a tablecloth a lighted lamp and one furnished the tablecloth with seven kinds of fruits and seven aromatic seed species. The child received generally his name on the seventh day.

The 7 is often found in the superstitions. In Portugal, the woman who wears seven superposed undershirts is sure of happiness. The seventh son of a family will be always protected by the gods. For Scottish, the seventh son of a seventh son will have the donation of second sight. In the homeland of the doctor Faust, we know that the pact signed with the devil lasts seven years. If someone breaks a mirror he will be submitted to the bad influences during seven years. In Morocco, the sterile women roll up their belt seven times around the trunk of some trees, then attach it to one of the seven cords that are fixed there. In Syria, a young girl without pretender exorcises the bad influences that prevent her to find a husband by bathing in the sea and by letting seven waves to pass above her head. When seven young girls assist a family meeting, one of them will get married during the year.

For the "Maya-Quiehe", the great God of the Sky is also God-Seven, or seventh, surround by six suns: he constitutes thus the group of the agrarian gods.

At the Mayas, the seventh day, placed in the middle of the week of thirteen days, is a lucky day.

In Persia, 7 was a sacred number with its seven initiatory grades of the cult of Mithra: raven, griffon, soldier, lion, persian, heliodrome (mail of the sun), father. The ceremonial scale had seven levels; each level was made from a different metal. By climbing this ceremonial scale, the initiate traversed the seven skies, then raising the "Empyrea".

Seven is the number of the female initiation, in the legend of the Grail, which presents 7 virgins defended by 7 knights confronting the hero Galaad.

The seven skies of Zarathustra.

The seven oxen pulling the chariot of the sun in the Scandinavian legends.

The seven rituals of the Sioux: guards of the soul, the rite of the purification, the entreaty of a vision, the dance face to the sun, rites of puberty, the political alliance and the games of the ball.

Rome did not cease increasing until it had contained in its centre the seven hills.

The summer solstice takes place when the sun passes in the 7th zodiacal sign, the winter solstice when it traversed seven signs starting from this last. There are seven signs from an equinox to the other.

The seven bones composing the tarsus of the human skeleton and the seven orifices in the head of the man.

There are seven rare gases.

Anniversary of marriage: copper or wool's wedding.

Number 7 in Iran

It would be easy to extend this enumeration of Indian sevens. But the specimens already given will suffice; especially as we are not in condition to determine how far they belong to the earlier forms of the Hindu religion, or what proportion they bear to other mythological numbers in the same system. Let us now turn westward to Central Asia, to the countries which formed the heart and strength of the ancient Persian empire. Here in ancient times the prevailing religion was that of Zoroaster, which owns the Zend-Avesta for its Bible, and is professed at the present day only by the scanty remnants of the Parsees. The two great divinities of this religion are Ormuzd (Ahura-mazda), the divinity of light and good, on the one hand; and, on the other, Ahriman (Angra-mainyus), the divinity of darkness and evil. Ormuzd is surrounded by his attendant spirits, the seven Amshaspands, who may be compared with the seven throne-angels, that, according to the book of Tobit, go in and out before the glory of the Holy One. Ahriman in like manner has his court, composed of seven arch-devs or demons, whom, as regards the number, we might compare with the seven that haunted Mary of Magdala, or with the seven more wicked than himself, whom the evil spirit, after his restless wandering through the desert, took back with him to his former habitation, which he found ready, swept, and garnished--"and the last end of that man was worse than the first."

There are seven steps to attain divinity in Zoroastrianism and Earth is also comprised of seven parts based on this religion. There were seven fire temples in ancient Iran. In Iran, German, Spanish, and other cultures that speak Romance Languages, cats are said to have 7 lives as opposed to English, where cats are said to have 9 lives. The modern literature of Persia abounds in sevens. Native dictionaries enumerate above a hundred centenaries, groups of objects designated as the seven so-and-sos. We will not undertake to name them. We could not say what it would be most interesting to know about them, how far they have sprung out of the spontaneous feeling and invention of the Persian, or how far they are due to the Arabian influence, itself saturated with sevens, which entered Persia with the religion of Mohammed in the seventh century of our era. It is a custom in Iran to mourn the death of people seven days after their death. In Norouz Holidays, Iranians as a custom perform Haft Sin, which is a table cloth including seven items which start with Persian letter s. The myth of Haft Peykar is versified by Nizami. In Iran, due to holiness of number seven, metal decorations of ancient doors are most often seven in number. Even the number of boards used in some old doors is mostly seven in number. Below you can see the fact:





In Thailand holy pictures reflect number seven. Similarly, In Iran number seven always symbolizes divinity and sanctity. However, in most of the Chinese holy pictures manifestation of number nine is clearly visible.



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