

Tyler Curtis
College of the Consistory
School of Religion
17th Degree – Knight of the East and West
Topic 1

“The Old No. 7: The Symbolism and Meaning of the 'Perfect' Number”

As William Dunkerly's Christian hymn “In Christ There Is No East or West” reads, “In Christ there is no East or West/In Him no South or North/But one great fellowship of love/Throughout the whole wide earth/In Him shall true hearts everywhere/Their high communion find/His service is the golden cord/Close binding humankind/Join hands, then, members of the faith/Whatever your race may be!/Who serves my Father as His child/Is surely kin to me.” In the 17th degree, Knight of the East and West, we find the philosophical ideas of the East united with those of the West. The number “7” is but one way example of a symbol that transcends the dogma of geographical regions and links all religious and philosophical thought together. In the course of all human experience, the number “7” seems to show up repeatedly. We all plan our calendars that consist of seven-day weeks and musicians quickly learn that there are seven notes in an octave. From pop culture to religion and of course to Freemasonry, this number appears over and over again. For me, the number “7” is quite significant on a very personal level as well.

Popular culture is indeed filled with numerous references to the famed number “7.” From designer “Seven Jeans” to Jack Daniels' famous “Old No. 7” Tennessee Whiskey, we see this number time and time again. The children's book and Walt Disney film *Snow White* would not be complete without her “7 Dwarfs.” Heavy metal band Iron Maiden entitled their 1988 release *The Seventh Son of a Seventh Son*, the title track of which tells the birth story of a prophet son who is destined to be a great healer and even has the gift of second sight. John Elway, fellow Freemason and esteemed NFL quarterback, wore the number “7” throughout his days at Stanford University and as a Denver Bronco. Comedian George Carlin once said that there are seven dirty words that you can never say on television, words that I will refrain from mentioning here as well. The 1995 film *Seven* recalls to our minds the famous “seven deadly sins.” In music today, the band Sevendust is very popular amongst rock enthusiasts. Seattle is the home to famed music venue Studio Seven, and the list could go on and on.

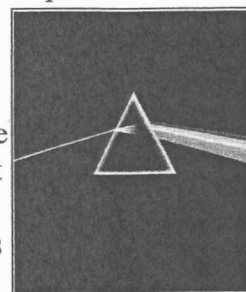
Of course, the number “7” appears in religious and philosophical writings as well. Pythagoreans called it the perfect number because it consisted of the numbers “3” and “4.” The number “3” relates to the triangle, a symbol of the deity, while the number “4” relates to the square, which symbolized the earth (thought to be flat at the time). Like the Pythagoreans, the Hebrews regarded the number “7” with equal reverence. Hereto the number “7” represents the unity of God and man. The Norse or Gothic people had seven gods. Interestingly, in the Gothic mysteries candidates were required to pass through a series of seven obstructions or the road of seven stages. Even in the Persian mysteries, the candidate has to pass through seven caverns. In Hermetic philosophy, there are seven principles: mentalism, correspondence, vibration, polarity, rhythm, cause/effect, and gender. Seven alters burned for Mirtha, and there are seven holy temples for Arabians. The Hindus believe that the world is enclosed within seven peninsulas. Philosophically, there are seven essential virtues: faith, hope, charity, force, prudence, temperance, and justice. Each virtue is aligned with an antithesis as well: arrogance, avarice,

luxury, rage, indolence, gluttony, and envy. The ancients paired these virtues with the seven known “planets” of their time: faith with the sun, hope with the moon, charity with Venus, force with Mars, prudence with Mercury, temperance with Saturn, and justice with Jupiter. Thus, the number “7” appears in religious and philosophical writings the world over.

Seven is also an important number in the Jewish and Christian tradition. First, the seventh day of the week has long been considered a Sabbath Day for Jews. From the Old Testament, Noah spent seven months constructing the ark and was given a seven day notice to complete the task and fill the ark prior to the great flood. King Solomon began the work of building the temple on the 7th day of the 7th month, a task that took seven years to complete. There are seven archangels, and the prophet Zacharias was told that the Lord has seven eyes. In the New Testament, Christ feeds 4000 people with seven loaves of bread and some fish. This feast produced seven baskets of leftovers as well. In the book of *Revelation*, we find the famed Book of the Seven Seals. After the seventh seal is opened, seven angels appear and seven trumpets are sounded. Hence, once more we see the number “7” appearing in a religious context.

Masonically, the number “7” is well represented. A lodge of Entered Apprentices requires seven members. In the Blue Lodge, seven essential working tools are explained: the 24-inch gauge, common gavel, square, level, plumb, compasses, and trowel. The winding staircase in the Fellow Craft degree consists of three, five, and *seven* steps. According to Masonic history, Zerubbabel was ordered to rebuild the temple in the 7th month and on the 21st day, a number which is arrived upon when multiplying the number “3” times the number “7.” Obviously, Freemasonry uses ideas and concepts from the world over to unite us all into one fraternal body.

The question remains, why seven? Why did the ancients find this number so intriguing? We of course know that people have long been fascinated with the sky. When unassisted by telescopes, seven “planets” can be viewed: sun, moon, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Saturn, and Jupiter. One of these, the moon, changes phases every seven days. Could it be that this mystical number is rooted in astronomy? Also, there are seven colors in a rainbow: red, yellow, blue, orange, green, indigo, and violet. As rainbows appear following rains which nourish needed crops for human subsistence, could it be that the ancients saw this “mysterious” phenomenon of the rainbow as a clue that the number “7” is likewise important and mysterious? We may never know exactly why “seven” is such a mystical and important number, but we know that the number surely is such. Going back to the rainbow, when white light passed through a prism the result is the formation of the seven colors of the rainbow (see image). Hence, white light is often regarded as “perfect light,” and Masons use light as a symbol for wisdom and knowledge. It is important to note that in the image the prism is a triangle – a symbol of deity. Again, the idea of perfection being obtained only with the assistance of the Supreme Architect is displayed. Truly, the number seven contains mysteries that enhance our understanding of the universe that surrounds us as well as the Creator of this complex system.



As I stated in the introduction to this paper, the number seven is important to me on a personal level as well. My daughter, Allison Brenleigh Curtis, was born on July 7, 2007 (07/07/07). Although 12 days early, her mother and I were tickled that she decided to grace us with her presence prior to her supposed date of arrival. She has allowed me to experience fatherhood, a joy that I have never known – one that fills my soul with love and peace. I find her birth date to be truly symbolic: as the number seven represents God (3) combined with man (4),

Allison is the embodiment of God's gift of love in the form of flesh and blood. Also, my wife and I have always discussed the idea of having three children. Allie's birthday consists of three "7's," and I have taken that as a sign that God too desires for us to have three of our own examples of His will manifesting itself in human form. Although I believe that God normally speaks to us in subtle ways, to me this is an example of God making it abundantly clear to my family that he is indeed present in our lives.

Indeed, the number "7" is an important cultural, religious, and philosophical symbol. It displays in numeric form the very union of God and man, a union which results in the perfecting of an individual. In the words of Pike, "Seven is a sacred number in all theologies and all symbols, because it is composed of 3 and 4. It represents the magical power in its full force. It is the Spirit assisted by all the Elementary Powers, the Soul served by Nature, the Holy Empire spoken of in the clavicules of Solomon..." (727). As we learn in the 14th degree, it is our aim to become Perfect Elus, a goal which is impossible unless we unite with our Creator. As we progress through the Rite, we learn more about how we can obtain perfection. If we can see as He does, if we can act as He acts, if we can love as He loves, then we will have reached the apex of our potential; we will have become perfect. Whether we are from the East or the West is irrelevant. Knowledge is knowledge; wisdom is wisdom; love is love. As Knights of the East and West, we transcend the geography of wisdom and find universal truth.

Works Reviewed

- Clausen, Henry. *Clausen's Commentary on Morals and Dogma*. San Diego: Neyenesch, 1985.
- De Hoyos, Arturo. *Scottish Rite Ritual Monitor and Guide*. Washington, DC: Supreme Council, 33°, Southern Jurisdiction, 2007.
- Hutchens, Rex R. *A Bridge to Light*. Williamston, S.C.: Electric City, 1995.
- Mackey, Albert. *Encyclopedia of Freemasonry and its Kindred Sciences*. Chicago, Masonic History Company, 1924.
- Pike, Albert. *Morals and Dogma*. Richmond: J.H. Jenkins, 1945.
- Pike, Albert. *Symbolism of the Blue Degrees*. Washington, D.C.: Arturo De Hoyos and the Scottish Rite Research Society, 2005.
- Smith, William. *Smith's Bible Dictionary*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1986.
- Three Initiates. *The Kybalion*. Bridgewater, NJ: Baker & Taylor, 2003.