United Lodge of Theosophists Santa Barbara
Study Class May 2024
Readings on "Theosophical Symbols"

Text: *Theosophical Articles by H.P. Blavatsky, Vol. 1* - Reprinted from Original Sources. The Theosophy Co., Los Angeles 1981.

May 15th: "The Number Seven" and "The Number Seven and Our Society" by H.P. Blavatsky

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The Number Seven

A DEEP significance was attached to numbers in hoary antiquity. There was not a people with anything like philosophy, but gave great prominence to numbers in their application to religious observances, the establishment of festival days, symbols, dogmas, and even the geographical distribution of empires. The mysterious numerical system of Pythagoras was nothing novel when it appeared far earlier than 600 years B.C. The occult meaning of figures and their combinations entered into the meditations of the sages of every people; and the day is not far off when, compelled by the eternal cyclic rotation of events, our now sceptical unbelieving West will have to admit that in that regular periodicity of ever recurring events there is something more than a mere blind chance. Already our Western *savants* begin to notice it. Of late, they have pricked up their ears and begun speculating upon cycles, numbers and all that which, but a few years ago, they had relegated to oblivion in the old closets of memory, never to be unlocked but for the purpose of grinning at the uncouth and idiotic superstitions of our *unscientific* forefathers.

As one of such novelties, the old, and matter-of-fact German journal *Die Gegenwart* has a serious and learned article upon "the significance of the number seven" introduced to the readers as a "Culture-historical Essay." After quoting from it a few extracts, we will have something to add to it perhaps. The author says:

> The number *seven* was considered sacred not only by all the cultured nations of antiquity and the East, but was held in the greatest reverence even by the later nations of the West. The astronomical origin of this number is established beyond any doubt. Man, feeling himself time out of mind dependent upon the heavenly powers, ever and everywhere made earth subject to heaven. The largest and brightest of the luminaries thus became in his sight the most important and highest of powers; such were the planets which the whole antiquity numbered as *seven*. In course of time these were transformed into *seven* deities. The Egyptians had *seven*

original and higher gods; the Phœnicians *seven* kabiris; the Persians, *seven* sacred horses of Mithra; the Parsees, *seven* angels opposed by *seven* demons,

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and *seven* celestial abodes paralleled by *seven* lower regions. To represent the more clearly this idea in its concrete form, the *seven* gods were often represented as one *seven-headed* deity. The whole heaven was subjected to the *seven* planets; hence, in nearly all the religious systems we find *seven* heavens.

The belief in the *sapta loka* of the Brahminical religion has remained faithful to the archaic philosophy; and—who knows—but the idea itself was originated in Aryavarta, this cradle of all philosophies and mother of all subsequent religions! If the Egyptian dogma of the *metempsychosis* or the transmigration of soul taught that there were *seven* states of purification and progressive perfection, it is also true that the Buddhists took from the Aryans of India, not from Egypt, their idea of *seven* stages of progressive development of the disembodied soul, allegorized by the *seven* stories and umbrellas, gradually diminishing towards the top on their pagodas.

In the mysterious worship of Mithra there were "*seven* gates," *seven* altars, *seven* mysteries. The priests of many Oriental nations were subdivided into *seven* degrees; *seven* steps led to the altars and in the temples burnt candles in *seven*-branched candlesticks. Several of the Masonic Lodges have, to this day, *seven* and *fourteen* steps.

The *seven* planetary spheres served as a model for state divisions and organizations. China was divided into *seven* provinces; ancient Persia into *seven* satrapies. According to the Arabian legend *seven* angels cool the sun with ice and snow, lest it should burn the earth to cinders; and *seven thousand* angels wind up and set the sun in motion every morning. The two oldest rivers of the East—the Ganges and the Nile—had each *seven* mouths. The East had in the antiquity *seven* principal rivers (the Nile, the Tigris, the Euphrates, the Oxus, the Yaksart, the Arax and the Indus); *seven* famous treasures; *seven* cities full of gold; *seven* marvels of the world, &c. Equally did the number *seven* play a prominent part in the architecture of temples and palaces. The famous pagoda of Churingham is surrounded by *seven* square walls, painted in *seven* different colours, and in the middle of each wall is a *seven* storied pyramid; just as in the antediluvian days the temple of Borsippa, now the Birs-Nimrud, had *seven* stages, symbolical of the *seven* concentric cycles of the *seven* spheres, each built of tiles and metals to correspond with the colour of the ruling planet of the sphere typified.

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These are all "remnants of paganism" we are told—traces "of the superstitions of old, which, like the owls and bats in a dark subterranean, flew away to return no more before the glorious light of Christianity"—a statement but too easy of refutation. If the author of the article in question has collected hundreds of instances to show that not only the Christians of old but even the modern Christians have preserved the number

seven, and as sacredly as it ever was before, there might be found in reality *thousands*. To begin with the astronomical and religious calculation of old of the pagan Romans, who divided the week into *seven* days, and held the *seventh* day as the most sacred, the *Sol* or *Sun*day of Jupiter, and to which all the Christian nations—especially the Protestants—make *puja* to this day. If, perchance, we are answered that it is not from the pagan Romans but from the monotheistic Jews that we have it, then why is not the Saturday or the real "Sabbath" kept instead of the Sunday, or *Sol's* day?

If in the "Rámáyana" *seven* yards are mentioned in the residences of the Indian kings; and *seven* gates generally led to the famous temples and cities of old, then why should the Frieslanders have in the tenth century of the Christian era strictly adhered to the number *seven* in dividing their provinces, and insisted upon paying *seven "pfennigs"* of contribution? The Holy Roman and Christian Empire has *seven Kurfursts* or Electors. The Hungarians emigrated under the leadership of *seven* dukes and founded *seven* towns, now called *Semigradyá* (now Transylvania). If pagan Rome was built on *seven hills*, Constantinople had *seven* names—Bysance, Antonia, New Rome, the town of Constantine, The Separator of the World's Parts, The Treasure of Islam, Stamboul—and was also called the city on the *seven* Hills, and the city of the *seven* Towers as an adjunct to others. With the Mussulmans "it was besieged *seven* times and taken after *seven* weeks by the *seventh* of the Osman Sultans." In the ideas of the Eastern peoples, the *seven* planetary spheres are represented by the *seven* rings worn by the women on *seven* parts of the body—the head, the neck, the hands, the feet, in the ears, in the nose, around the waist—and these *seven* rings or circles are presented to this time by the Eastern suitors to their brides; the beauty of the woman consisting in the Persian songs of *seven* charms.

The *seven* planets ever remaining at an equal distance from each other, and rotating in the same path, hence, the idea sug-

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gested by this motion, of the eternal harmony of the universe. In this connection the number *seven* became especially sacred with them, and ever preserved its importance with the astrologers. The Pythagoreans considered the figure *seven* as the image and model of the divine order and harmony in nature. It was the number containing twice the sacred number *three* or the "triad," to which the "one" or the divine *monad* was added: 3 + 1 + 3. As the harmony of nature sounds on the key-board of space, between the *seven* planets, so the harmony of audible sound takes place on a smaller plan within the musical scale of the ever-recurring *seven* tones. Hence, *seven* pipes in the syrinx of the god Pan (or Nature), their gradually diminishing proportion of shape representing the distance between the planets and between the latter and the earth—and, the *seven*-stringed lyre of Apollo. Consisting of a union between the number *three* (the symbol of the divine triad with all and every people, Christians as well as pagans) and of *four* (the symbol of the cosmic forces or elements), the number *seven* points out symbolically to the union of the Deity with the universe; this Pythagorean idea was applied by the Christians—(especially during the Middle Ages)—who largely used the number *seven* in the symbolism of their sacred architecture. So, for instance, the famous

Cathedral of Cologne and the Dominican Church at Regensburg display this number in the smallest architectural details.

No less an importance has this mystical number in the world of intellect and philosophy. Greece had *seven* sages, the Christian Middle Ages *seven* free arts (grammar, rhetoric, dialectics, arithmetic, geometry, music, astronomy). The Mahometan Sheikh-ul-Islam calls in for every important meeting *seven* "ulems." In the Middle Ages an oath had to be taken before *seven* witnesses, and the one, to whom it was administered, was sprinkled *seven* times with blood. The processions around the temples went *seven* times, and the devotees had to kneel *seven* times before uttering a vow. The Mahometan pilgrims turn round Kaaba *seven* times, at their arrival. The sacred vessels were made of gold and silver purified *seven* times. The localities of the old German tribunals were designated by *seven* trees, under which were placed *seven* "Schoffers" (judges) who required *seven* witnesses. The criminal was threatened with a *seven*-fold punishment and a *seven*-fold purification was required as a *seven*-fold reward was promised to the virtuous. Every one knows the great importance placed in the

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West on the *seventh* son of a *seventh* son. All the mythic personages are generally endowed with *seven* sons. In Germany, the king and now the emperor cannot refuse to stand as god-father to a *seventh* son, if he be even a beggar. In the East in making up for a quarrel or signing a treaty of peace, the rulers exchange either *seven* or forty-nine (7 X 7) presents.

To attempt to cite all the things included in this mystical number would require a library. We will close by quoting but a few more from the region of the demoniacal. According to authorities in those matters—the Christian clergy of old—a contract with the devil had to contain seven paragraphs, was concluded for *seven* years and signed by the contractor *seven* times; all the magical drinks prepared with the help of the enemy of man consisted of *seven* herbs; that lottery ticket wins, which is drawn out by a *seven*-year old child. Legendary wars lasted *seven* years, *seven* months and *seven* days; and the combatant heroes number *seven*, *seventy*, *seven hundred*, *seven thousand* and *seventy thousand*. The princesses in the fairy tales remained *seven* years under a spell, and the boots of the famous cat—the Marquis de Carabas—were *seven* leagued. The ancients divided the human frame into *seven* parts; the head, the chest, the stomach, two hands and two feet; and man's life was divided into *seven* periods. A baby begins teething in the *seventh* month; a child begins to sit after *fourteen* months (2 X 7); begins to walk after *twenty-one* months (3 X 7); to speak after *twenty-eight* months (4 X 7); leaves off sucking after *thirty-five* months (5 X 7); at *fourteen* years (2 X 7) he begins to finally form himself; at *twenty-one* (3 X 7) he ceases growing. The average height of a man, before mankind degenerated, was *seven* feet; hence the old Western laws ordering the garden walls to be *seven* feet high. The education of the boys began with the Spartans and the old Persians at the age of *seven*. And in the Christian religions—with the Roman Catholics and the Greeks—the child is not held responsible for any crime till he is *seven*, and it is the proper age for him to go to confession.

If the Hindus will think of their Manu and recall what the old Shastras contain, beyond doubt they will find the origin of all this symbolism. Nowhere did the number *seven* play so prominent a part as with the old Aryas in India. We have but to think of the *seven* sages—the *Sapta Rishis*; the *Sapta Loka*—the *seven* worlds; the *Sapta Pura*—the *seven* holy cities; the *Sapta Dvipa*—the *seven* holy islands; the *Sapta Samudra*—the *seven* holy seas;

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the *Sapta Parvatta*—the *seven* holy mountains; the *Sapta Arania*—the *seven* deserts; the *Sapta Vriksha*—the *seven* sacred trees; and so on, to see the probability of the hypothesis. The Aryas *never* borrowed anything, nor did the Brahmans, who were too proud and exclusive for that. Whence, then, the mystery and sacredness of the number *seven*?

H.P. Blavatsky
Theosophist
June, 1880

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The Number Seven and Our Society

The thoughtful reader must have pondered well over the mysterious import that the number *Seven* seems to have always had among the ancients, as succinctly epitomized in our June number, as well as the theory of cycles, discussed in the July issue. It was there stated that the German scientists are now giving attention to this manifestation of the numerical harmony and periodicity of the operations of Nature. A series of statistical observations, embracing some centuries of historical events, tend to show that the ancients must have been perfectly aware of this law when constructing their systems of philosophy. In fact, when statistical science shall have been fully perfected, as it seems likely to be, there will be constantly increasing proofs that the evolution of heroes, poets, military chieftains, philosophers, theologians, great merchants, and all other remarkable personages, is as capable of mathematical estimate upon the basis of the potentiality of numbers, as the return of a comet by the rules of astronomical calculations. The comparatively modern system of life insurance rests upon the calculated expectancy of life on the average at certain ages; and, while nothing is so uncertain as the probable longevity of any single individual in a community, nothing is more certain than that the probable life-chance of any one person, in the mass of population, can be known on the basis of the general average of human life. In fact, as M. de Cazeneuve, in the *Journal du Magnetisme,* justly observes, the law of numerical proportions is verified in every department of the physical sciences. We see it in chemistry as the law of definite proportions and multiple proportions; in physics, as the law of optics, acoustics, electricity, &c.; in mineralogy, in the wonderful phenomena of

crystallization; in astronomy, in the celestial mechanics. Well may the writer, above-quoted, remark: "Physical and moral laws have so infinitely numerous points of contact, that, if we have not as yet reached the point where we can demonstrate their identity, it is nonetheless certain that there exists between them a very great analogy."

We have attempted to show how, by a sort of common instinct, a peculiar solemnity and mystical significance has been given the

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Number *Seven* among all people, at all times. It now remains for us to cite, from the experience of the Theosophical Society, some facts which indicate how its power has manifested itself with us. Continually our experiences have been associated with *Seven* or some combination or multiple of it. And it must be remembered that, in not a single instance, was there any intention that the number should play a part in our affairs; but, on the contrary, what happened was in many cases exactly the reverse of what we desired. It was only the other day that we began to take any note of the striking chain of circumstances, and some have only been recalled now at the moment of writing.

The two chief founders of our Society were the President, Colonel Olcott, and the Conductor of this Magazine. When they made each other's acquaintance (in 1874), the office number of the former was *seven,* the house number of the latter *seven*teen. The President's Inaugural Address before the Society was delivered, November *17,* 18*75*; the Head-quarters were established in the 4*7th* street, (the up-town streets in New York are all designated by numbers), and Colonel Olcott's office was removed to *71* Broadway. On the *17th* December 18*79,* our delegates to India sailed for London; the voyage, owing to storms and fogs, lasted *seven*teen days; on the *17th* January 1880 we left London for Liverpool to take the steamer for Bombay, got on board the next day, but lay all night in the Mersey, and on the 19th—the *seven*teenth day from our landing in England, we got to sea. On March 2—*seven*teen days after reaching Bombay—we removed to the bungalows where we have ever since been living. On the 23rd March, *thirty-five (7 X 5)* days after landing, Colonel Olcott delivered his first public oration on Theosophy, at Framji Cowasji Institute, Bombay. July *7,* the first Prospectus, announcing the intended foundation of the THEOSOPHIST was written; on the 2*7th* September, the first "form" was made up at the printing-office, and on October 1—our *227th* in India—the magazine appeared.

But we anticipate events. In the beginning of April, last year, Colonel Olcott and the Conductor of this Magazine went to the N.W. Provinces to meet Swami Dayánand, and were absent from the Head-quarters thirty-*seven* days, and visited *seven* different cities during the trip. In December of that year we again went northward, and on the 21*st (7 X 3)* of that month, a special meeting of the Society of Benares Pandits was held to greet Colonel

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Olcott and elect him an Honorary Member in token of the friendliness of the orthodox Hindu pandits for our Society – a most important event.

Coming down to the Ceylon trip, we find, on consulting the diary, that our party sailed from Bombay, May *7*, the steamer starting her engines at *7.7* A.M. We reached Point de Galle on the 17*th.* At the first meeting in Ceylon of candidates for initiation, a group of *seven* persons presented themselves. At Panadure, *seven* were also initiated first, the evening proving so boisterous and stormy that the rest could not leave their houses. At Colombo, *fourteen (7* x 2) were initiated the first night, while, at the preliminary meeting to organize the local branch temporarily, there were twenty-*seven.* At Kandy, *seven*teen comprised the first body of candidates. Returning to Colombo, we organized the "Lanka Theosophical Society," a scientific branch, on the 17*th* of the month, and on the evening, when the Panadure branch was formed, *thirty-five* names (7 x 5) were registered as follows. *Seven* priests were initiated here during this second visit, and at Bentota, where we tarried to organize a branch, there were again *seven* priests admitted. *Thirty-five (7* x 5) members organized the Matara branch; and here again the priests taken into fellowship numbered *seven.* So, too, at Galle, twenty-*seven* persons were present on the night of the organization – the rest being unavoidably absent; and at Welitara the number was *twenty-one,* or three times *seven.* Upon counting up the entire number of lay Buddhists included in our *seven* Ceylon branches, that are devoted to the interests of that faith, we find our mystical number *seven* occupying the place of units, and what adds to the singularity of the fact is that the same is the case with the sum-total of priests who joined our Parent Society.

Our septenary fatality followed us all throughout the return voyage to Bombay. Of the Delegation, two members, having urgent business, took an earlier steamer from Colombo, thus reducing our number to *seven.* Two more fully intended to come home from Galle by the vessel of the *7th* July, but, as it turned out, she did not touch there and so, perforce, our band of *seven* came together on the 12th—the fifty-*seventh* day after our landing. The sea voyage from Ceylon to Bombay may be said to begin upon leaving Colombo, since the run from Galle to that port is in Ceylonese waters. From friends—five laymen and two priests—

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again *seven*—who came aboard at Colombo to bid us farewell, we learned that the July THEOSOPHIST had reached there, and being naturally anxious to see a copy, urgently requested that one should be sent us to look at, if possible, before 5 o'clock P.M., the hour at which it was thought we would leave port. This was promised us, and, after our friends left, we watched every craft that came from shore. Five o'clock came, then six and half-past six, but no messenger or magazine for us. At last, precisely, at *seven,* one little canoe was seen tossing in the heavy sea that was running; she approached, was alongside; on her bows, painted on a white ground was the Number *Seven;* a man climbed over the ship's rail, and in his hand was the paper we were waiting for! When

the anchor was up and the pilot's bell rang for starting the engines, two of our party ran to look at the ship's clock: it stood at *seven* minutes past *7* P.M.

At Tuticorin, Mr. Padshah, one of our party, went ashore as his desire was to return by rail to Bombay, so as to see Southern India; the little boat in which he went ashore we noticed, after she had got clear from the crowd of craft alongside, bore the number forty-*seven.* Going down the coast on our outward voyage, our steamer touched at *fourteen (7* X 2 ports; coming home, our vessel, owing to the monsoon weather and the heavy surf along the Malabar Coast, visited only *seven.* And finally, as though to show us that our septenate destiny was not to be evaded, it was at exactly *seven* o'clock—as the log of the S.S. *Chanda* shows—when we sighted the pilot off Bombay harbour, at *7.27* the bell rang to slow down the engines, at *7.47* the pilot stepped on the "bridge" and took command of the ship, and, at *9.37,* our anchor was dropped off the Apollo Bunder, and our voyage was thus ended on the 24th of July, the seventy-*seventh* day after the one on which we had sailed for Ceylon. To ascribe to mere coincidence this strange, if not altogether unprecedented, concatenation of events, in which the Number *Seven* was, as the astrologers might call it "in the ascendant," would be an absurdity. The most superficial examination of the doctrine of chance will suffice to show that. And, if, indeed, we must admit that some mysterious law of numerical potentialities is asserting itself in shaping the fortunes of the Theosophical Society, whither shall we turn for an explanation but to those ancient Asiatic philosophies which were built upon the bed-rock of Occult Science?

H. P. Blavatsky
Theosophist
September, 1880