

# Symbols in Arts, Religion and Culture



# Symbols in Arts, Religion and Culture:

*The Soul of Nature*

By

Farrin Chwalkowski

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To God, the Great Nature Artist



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## PREFACE

Nature is the divine work of God. No man made system can compare with the joy and well-being we feel in the presence of Nature's infinite creativity. Throughout history and from all corners of the world, humans have been inspired and intimidated by storms, plants, animals and the sky. *Symbols in Arts, Religion and Culture* identifies and explains many fascinating examples of how the forces of Nature have become symbols and a fundamental part of the human experience and its art and culture. Each chapter outlines different symbols and their meaning, historical analysis, and briefly explains their history and development. The book makes reference to an impressive collection of illustrations to show how Nature and its human inspired symbols have manifested. My own artwork, poems and quotations, are strongly influenced by my research. They are also used to support points made in the book. Although *Symbols in Arts, Religion and Culture* tends towards the academic in tone, the detail makes for stimulating reading for anyone with interest in symbols, patterns and art. Many readers will find numerous occasions to say, "Oh, so that's where that comes from." The book will help place the reader into the mind of the artist. The chapters have clearly labelled subdivisions, and bold-face type or italics are used to identify key terms, while footnotes help to clarify the terms. This style approach greatly enhances the appearance and readability of the book, so that students, professionals, as well as casual readers can easily enjoy and understand the information within the book.

*Symbols in Arts, Religion and Culture* could not have happened without significant assistance. It would not have happened at all without the support provided by Harvard University to pursue my childhood interest in symbolism. I also take this opportunity of expressing my sincere appreciation to the Rhode Island School of design, Department of History of Art and Visual Culture, and the Professional Development Grant that school provided me for this publication. I would like to acknowledge Jan Spencer, who provided insight and expertise that greatly assisted the research. A special gratitude for the encouragement and supportive domestic ambiance goes to my husband, Rob Chwalkowski. Finally, I would like to extend these appreciations to include Dr. Nasser Mohseni,

my friends and family, love to all. Finally, my thank you to all the writers whose books and articles I made use of that have enhanced this book.

# CHAPTER ONE

## MIMIC NATURE

We are a product of nature. Every single cell in our bodies is made of, and depends, on nature. In addition, our inner soul is heavily impacted upon by nature. We feel depressed if the sun has not shone for a few days and, conversely, feel pleasure looking at flowers and listening to birds. We came from nature and are part of it. In sum, we are nature.

*By the sweat of your face,  
You shall eat bread,  
Because from it you were taken;  
For you are dust,  
And to dust you shall return.* (Gen. 3:19: American King James Version  
(AKJV))

Our love of nature can be found in a variety of things and places. Walls, windows, doors and ceilings become places to capture the soul and essence of the natural world. Stylized vines, birds and flowers, and even geometric forms representing natural phenomena, bring the wonder and beauty of nature to enhance the health and well-being of people at home, where they work, where they worship and in their life overall. According to Wilson (2002) there are large numbers of examples where we have benefited from copying nature. Presently the new mantra in the design world is to mimic nature. As Wilson points out, we have been able to create better fluid dynamic foils by mimicking the way in which dolphins swim, stronger insulation techniques by studying the fur of polar bears, more sophisticated helicopter designs by observing how bumble bees fly, and better light bulbs by understanding firefly luminescence. These are among innumerable examples that are being researched all over the world. Since we have evolved with other life forms, our brains are consequently wired to enjoy the beauty of nature. No manmade systems can compete with the joy and well-being we feel when observing the infinite, seasonal variations of nature around the year. Therefore the best we can do is to copy the natural designs, live in harmony with nature and evolve with it.

All of the world's great spiritual traditions call for the care and protection of the natural world. Being faithful to these ideals can help lead humans towards a more peaceful relationship with themselves and with Nature. Applying these values to the built environment along with Nature can lead to many benefits. Our cities and towns can be more beautiful and sustainable, and the people who live in them significantly healthier, happier and uplifted. The equality and divinity of nature, and the realization that humanity is not above nature as a manager, or a victim of nature at the mercy of it, but is part of nature in our life. We must know and accept our place, fitting into the natural realm to create a paradise on earth for all life. God loves beauty and all the religions encouraging the beauty and having a beautiful environment. It is easy to find numerous quotes within divinely inspired texts from all of the world's religions.

*"Allah, being beautiful himself, loves beauty."*

(attributed to Prophet Muhammad, from Alam and Hussain 2011)

God is an artist and nature is his art. The earth is God's gift to humans and humankind is responsible for the care and well being of God's gifts. Art has been defined as a vehicle for the expression or communication of emotions and ideas. It is a means for exploring and appreciating God's creation. According to the Qur'an, nature is a mirror of God's beautiful names. The whole of creation is the reflection of God's name (Qur'an 13:16, 15:28, 35:3, 38:71, 39:62, 40:62, 59:24). The Bible describes the elements of nature as God's gift to all humanity; for example, as the water that flows from the throne of God, through the center of the city's landscape and trees that become the "Tree of Life" that integrate nature (Ezek. 47:1-12). In the Judeo-Christian tradition, this passage from the Old Testament, Psalm 26, clearly describes God's intention for humans towards Nature: "I love the beauty of your house, Lord; I love the place where your glory resides." (Psalm 26:8 CEB: Common English Bible)

All the world's great religions, such as Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, are largely anthropocentric. These religions assert that nature is viewed as secondary to God, that nature is God's creature, and this is reinforced by a strong sense of the transcendence of God above nature. Religion scholars Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Berthrong have argued that there are rich resources for rethinking views of nature within the covenantal tradition of the Hebrew Bible, in sacramental theology within incarnational Christology, and in the vice-regency concept of the Qur'an. For example, Incarnational Christology proposes that because God became flesh in the person of Christ, the entire natural order can be viewed as sacred. The

concept of humans as vice-regents of Allah on earth suggests that humans have particular privileges, responsibilities, and obligations to creation. Religions help shape how people interact with the natural world. Diverse cultures from all over the world share a primary human need for their people and beliefs to fit within the larger physical and often mysterious natural world that surrounds them. Early religions and faith systems revolved around the basics of life – food, clothing, shelter, and so on – and there existed an innate need in early societies to somehow acknowledge the benefits they received from the natural world. This was a world full of scary elements – storms, sickness, and phenomena impossible for them to understand.

Early religions and faith systems invented ritual calendars to help make sense and find comfort in the world around them, calling attention to seasonal events such as returning birds, the blooming of certain plants, movements of the sun, and changes in the moon. According to Tu Weiming, 1998, each indigenous religious tradition is embedded in a specific place with its own unique way of perceiving, a mode of thinking, a form of living, an attitude, and a worldview. If we look at and learn from nature, we will hear God's true word and be led to knowledge concerning God's wisdom, power, and love. In Christian doctrinal and moral reflection, one believes that the natural world has a close relationship with humanity and God. Based on this doctrine, nature requires protection and care from humans. Further, human beings are in a covenantal relationship with God to protect nature in the same way that they should care for other human beings. The Bible makes reference to the importance of diverse elements of nature in many verses such as these noted by Mark I. Wallace:

The vivifying breath that animates all living things (Gen. 1:2, Ps. 104:29-30 (cited by Bron Taylor 2008), the healing wind that brings power and salvation to the indwells (Judg. 6:34, John 3:6, Acts 2:1-4), the living water that quickens all who drink from its eternal springs (John 4:14, 7:37-38, (cited by Bron Taylor 2008), the purgative fire that alternately judges evildoers and ignites the prophetic mission of the early church (Acts 2:1-4, Matt 3:11-12, (cited by Bron Taylor 2008), and the divine dove, with an olive branch in its mouth, that brings peace and renewal to a broken and divided world (Gen. 8:11, Matt. 3:16, John 1:32) (Dieter and Rosemary 2000).

This passage indicates the frequent and widespread attention that is given to Nature, and its relationship to humans, within the Bible. Furthermore, it shows the great importance God places on Nature and its relationship to

the human condition. It is God's intention that humans embrace a spirituality and practice in daily life in order to cultivate a peaceful relationship with the natural world. By doing so, they create a peaceful relationship with themselves and their fellow humans.

Similar to Christian beliefs, Judaism has a deep and intrinsic reverence for the natural world. Judaism sees the natural world as created by God and entrusted to humans for their health, well-being and safe keeping. They value nature as the "Image of God:"

1 In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. 11 and God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seeds and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its own kind upon the earth." 20 and God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens." 27 so God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 and God blessed them, and God said to them, "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth." 29 and God said, "behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seeds in his fruit, you shall have them for food." 30 and to every beast of the earth, and to every bird in the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food." And it was so. 31 and God saw everything that he had made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, a sixth day. (Gen. 1, King James Version (KJV)).

But all men are vain, in whom there is not the knowledge of God; and who by these good things that are seen, could not understand him that is, neither by attending to the works have acknowledged who was the workman; but have imagined either the fire, or the wind, or the swift air, or the circle of the stars, or the great water, or the sun and moon, to be the gods that rule the world. With whose beauty, if they, being delighted, took them to be gods; let them know how much the Lord of them is more beautiful than they; for the first author of beauty made all those things. Or if they admired their power and their effects, let them understand by them, that he that made them, is mightier than they; for by the greatness of the beauty, and of the creature, the creator of them may be seen, so as to be known thereby. (Book of Wisdom, Chapter 13: 1-5<sup>1</sup>)

Islam is the religion of over one billion people, roughly one-sixth of humanity. Like Christianity and Judaism, Islam is a monotheistic faith

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.drbo.org/chapter/25013.htm>



religion based on sacred scripture. The Qur'an is replete with references to the precious resources of water, air, and land and proscribes wastefulness. From its origins fourteen centuries ago, Islam has instructed in its believers an ecological understanding and care for the natural world; "Our Lord is he who gave to each created thing its form and nature, and further gave it guidance" (Qur'an 20:50).

As it is written in the Qur'an (80:24-32<sup>2</sup>):

Then let man look at his food and how we provide it,  
 For that we pour forth water in abundance,  
 And we split the earth into fragments,  
 And we produce therein corn,  
 And grapes and nutritious plants,  
 And olives and dates,  
 And enclosed gardens, dense with lofty trees,  
 And fruits and fodder,  
 For use and convenience to you and your cattle.

According to Islamic teaching, the origin of beauty is realized in the existence of Allah, which is so magnificent that the naked human eye cannot bear to gaze upon Him. When manifested in a simpler form in divine creation, the magnificence of Allah can be perceived by those who are pious and have deep spiritual vision.

Our environment is the nature symbols and our view of nature is based on our religions, belief, and perspective. In ancient societies, such as the Zoroastrian people, communities organized their daily activities according to how time was dictated by natural processes. For example, the day would begin when the sun rose and would end when the sun set. Ancient cultures were focused on making well-being the center of their varied and active lifestyle. At the end of each day, people from each neighborhood would gather together for a fiesta and exchanged with their neighbors offerings consisting mainly of food and agricultural produce. The size and magnitude of a fiesta would increase if the occasion was a grand one, such as the end of the harvesting season, the beginning of the spring season which is the Persian New Year, or following a period of good weather. During such occasions as these, offerings such as water, air, sunlight, noon, rain, trees, and plants were regarded as offerings from gods, which were treated with utmost respect. Every region has diverse customs based

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.prophetmuhammadforall.org/webfiles/downloads/wordofGod.pdf>

on their religion and there are usually many aspects within these customs that relate to the environment. For example, the Zoroastrians had a special day, *Charshanbeh Soury*, where dry branches and leaves were burned in order to clean the environment at the end of winter, and also to mark the beginning of the new *rooz* or day. Zoroastrian teachings also nurtured a culture based on more practical ideals including knowledge, order, participation, cooperation, federation, alliance, and devotion. More widely, earthly elements aided practical ideals and, together, assisted mankind in making the world an ideal place. This ideal world allowed individuals to exist in peace and harmony, with every living being allowed to achieve the divine eternity ordained by God.

Religion teaches us about the world we live in. It teaches us about our role and status, in short, where we fit into the world. Religion provides stories relating to our origins and explanations of who we are, where we have come from, and where we are going. Religion explains Nature, where it came from, why it was created, and how humans should interact with this divine blessing. Religion suggests the ways in which humans should treat other humans. Religion provides fundamental attitudes and values that have profound consequences upon cultures and societies. It dictates how its human believers see the world around them and how they should construct systems for their own survival. Religion consequently has a profound influence on human creativity. From the construction of cities and towns, to the creation of art that expresses beliefs, values, hopes, and ideals, the impact of religion on the human experience cannot be overstated, as it inspired me in this poem.

Your soul  
Your sense  
Your thoughts  
Your dream  
Your love  
Your life  
I'm life

I'm with you  
Vivifying breath  
Healing wind  
Living water  
Purgative fire  
Divine dove  
Look within yourself  
I'm you

I'm earth  
Water  
Air  
Wind  
Fire

I'm your aura  
Your humanity, You within yourself

Your land  
Your heaven  
Your earth  
Your seeds  
Your fruits  
Trees  
Birds  
Stars  
Sky

I'm you

Look within yourself; you will see the entire world. (FAZ)

### **Symbols: A Shadow of a Higher Reality**

In all of the religions mentioned above, Nature is the divine work of God. It may be that a single image of God cannot be produced or proposed but according to the holy writings of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, Nature is the expression of God's beauty, his love for humanity and his intention for humans to care for and protect Nature. Nature is a symbol of God's divinity to humans. Nature represents God and can be considered to be a symbol of God's love for humanity, or even a comprehensible stand-in for the Creator. As religion becomes a core element of the human experience and world in general, the impact of religion becomes manifested in how humans live their lives and how they take care of their earthly needs such as food, shelter, transit, safety, and security. Nature often becomes abbreviated and represented symbolically in environments created by humans. These stylized symbols and representations have their own unique form, that are based on local geographies and cultures, e.g., using human figures in early Islamic art and literature. While there is nothing specific within the Qur'an that forbids the depiction of human figures, it does explicitly forbid idolatry. The prohibition of the representation of

living forms may arise from the traditional story of the Angel of Mercy who will not visit the home of an idol worshipper:

O you who believe, wine and games of chance and idols and divining arrows are an abomination of Satan's handiwork; so avoid it and prosper.  
(Qur'an, chapter Al-Maeda Verse No: 90)

Over time the absence of figures became a principal characteristic of Islamic art, leading to the development of complex, repetitive, geometric forms representing the pervasive presence of one God throughout his creation. Instead of figures, geometric, vegetal, and animal figures were used. Representations of plants and animals continued to be utilized in eastern parts of the Islamic world and are found especially within Persian art. (Please refer to Chapter 1-4 for geometric, figure and vegetal symbols.)

A symbol<sup>3</sup> is the reflection or shadow of a higher reality (Lings 2005) and it indicates the relationship between myth and reality. Through the use of symbols, men have even sought to communicate with each other. Symbolism is therefore also a way of looking. A symbol has its own story to tell how it finds its way into human-made objects. The beauty of nature becomes a living poem that is inserted into a piece of art, the weaving in a rug, or the carving of a building. Some symbols are talismans against the hazards of everyday existence while others invoke religious or mythological themes, otherwise immemorial archetypes. They can be found in calligraphy, dinnerware, ceramics, and fabrics along with architectural elements such as doorways, columns, facades, balconies, lintels, sills, and low reliefs, both indoors and outside, and from ancient to modern times. Carpets best exemplify the way in which natural elements from life are symbolized. Carpets have been an art form since ancient times. For example, the Pazyryk Carpet, discovered in Iran in 1949, dates back 2600 years. The carpet is a practical and decorative invention of historical importance. From earliest times, the carpet features riders on horseback, deer, vegetal, geometric shapes, and other animal forms. Carpets from this early period were designed with a nearly infinite variety

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<sup>3</sup> A symbol is the use of a concrete object to represent an abstract idea. The term *symbol* is often a figure of speech in which a person, object, or situation represents something in addition to its meaning. A symbol also may appear in a number of different ways in different cultures and religions to suggest a number of different things. Most commonly, a symbol presents itself in the form of: 1) a word, 2) a figure, 3) an event, 4) an action, or 5) a character.

of floral shapes. Whether realistic or stylized, carpets have inspired people with a sense of wonder and respect and have encouraged a love of nature. The carpets are characterized by beautiful natural forms that show the varied and often complicated designs created by the artist.

Nature has been an intimate part of the human experience from the earliest times. Different religions and cultures have explained nature in their own ways and created symbols to represent nature. These symbols have been incorporated into art. This book is intended to explain some of these symbols and I use examples of my own poem and artwork to illustrate how these symbols are used.

This book will categorize symbols into three different groups: geometric and numeric, plant vegetal, and figurative. Each chapter is illustrated with examples of art objects that feature or are based upon the symbols being described. Carpets are my own focus of interest and experience so I concentrate on symbols used in carpet design.

Chapter Two will examine numbers and geometric shapes that are used as symbols. Numbers and geometry are intimately related and both combine to form a rich history of symbols. Nature, religion, spirituality, secular life, the movements of earth and heaven, the seasons, and mythology all possess a deep relationship with symbols. Furthermore, these symbols are used extensively in art and decoration as well as being used as motifs, and are connected to floral and figurative patterns.

The focus of Chapter Three is plants. Section One will touch on smaller plants and trees, while Section Two will be concerned with flowers. Plants have been intimate human companions since the earliest times. Many plants have become symbols of love, affection, fear, and superstition; many have religious and spiritual significance. Like geometry and numbers in Chapter Two, symbols of the plant world are used extensively in decoration and art.

Chapter Four will take a close look at figures, including humans, birds, mammals, reptiles, and insects. Figures have been represented in numerous ways, often in relation to religion and spirituality. Animal characters have fascinated humans since as humans see their own behavior manifested in animals. Folktales and myths all devote a great deal of attention to figures.

*Symbols in Arts, Religion and Culture* calls attention to numbers and geometry, plants and figures, and their meaning in our life and art.

## CHAPTER TWO

# THE SYMMETRY OF NATURE: GEOMETRY AND NUMBERS

### Numbers

Geometric patterns are all around us and occur in a wide range of forms. They may be seen in both natural and built environments, as well as in many aspects of day-to-day living.

Nature is full of geometry that inspired so many artists to use geometric abstract art to express their view of the world. Squares, circles, straight lines, stars, and geometrical patterns are as powerful and liberating elements as the expansive and seemingly more random gestures of the action painters. Artists such as Josef Albers, Paul Klee, Kasimir Malevich, and Piet Mondrian who were spiritual by nature and transformed nature as geometric elements into their art to send their message via a combination of lines and geometric shapes.

We know that line, shape, form, pattern, symmetry, scale, and proportion are the basis of both art and math. Both art and math involve drawing and the use of shapes and forms as well as an understanding of spatial concepts, two and three dimensions, measurement, estimation, and pattern. Geometry is part of mathematics that is concerned with number first, then shape and size. So, numbers are the creator of geometric patterns. Numbers have fascinated many great people throughout history, like Augustine, Newton, and Pythagoras. They and countless others have labored mightily over the centuries to explore and clarify the mysteries of numbers.

Numbers are the basic principles of every geometric shape. Numbers are important in all our life's aspects. Numbers have different meanings and significance to different religions and cultures. The Bible contains many esoteric references to numbers. Zoroastrians base their beliefs on the four

elements – air, water, earth, and fire while Christians revere the four gospels in the Bible. In order to understand how nature's elements transfer into human-created environments, geometric environments in particular, having a good knowledge of numbers and their meanings is essential.

Each number and shape carries different meaning and everything in nature tells us its purpose if we know how to read the language in which it is written. According to Michael S. Schneider, knowing nature's own language is a step towards our harmonious, respectful cooperation with a wonder world of beauty, and is a key to understanding the symbolic significance of numbers and shapes wherever they occur. Numbers one through fourteen, which are explained in the following section, are the most popular and common numbers in our life.

While zero might be considered a number for classification purposes, does it truly exist in the real world? This is a question that is answered differently based on different cultures; zero as an empty circle depicts both the nothingness of death and yet the totality of life contained within the circle. As an ellipse, the two sides represent ascent and descent, evolution and involution. Before the one there is only the void, or the non-being thought, the ultimate mystery, the incomprehensible absolute and the absence of all quality or quantity. For Taoism and Buddhism, zero symbolizes the void, the non-being, while for Islam it is the Divine Essence.

However, zero is a powerful number as well as concept, which brings great transformational changes, sometimes occurring in a profound manner; because the common knowledge of zero is non-being and void, this section starts from number one.

### **One - The Power of Sun**

Number one is generally the symbol of unity; it is the symbol of God or the universe. The Pythagoreans did not consider one to be a number because number in their idea means plurality and one is singular. However, they considered one as spirit and source of all things because by adding many together, one can create any other number. They called one the number of the *Monad*.

The number one means aggression, action, ambition; one primarily deals with strong will, positivity, and pure energy. One represents strength.



Number one is synonymous with being the best. It symbolizes the leader and it is the number of confidence. One is the number of the human being, the only creature on earth to stand up straight on two legs. It is a divine number, the number of the One God. One symbolizes the creative spirit and individuality.

The number one reflects new beginnings and purity. We begin to see ones recurring in our lives and that number can indicate a time to exert our natural forces, take action, and start a new venture.

The number one is divisible only by itself. It is independent of any other numerals yet composes all of them. In the Bible, it symbolizes unity and primacy, and the oneness of the Godhead. The number one also represents the unity between “God the Father” and “His Son Jesus” (John 10:30). Jesus, by his singular sacrifice, has made possible the forgiveness of all our sins. He is the one “Mediator and Shepherd” in the life of a Christian (1 Timothy. 2:5, John 10:16). These traditions hold the number one in high esteem. There is a similarity in all of the Abrahamic religions, Christianity, Judaism, and Islam, about number one; it is the symbol of unity and one God. For Islam, besides being the symbol of one God and unity, number one means the absolute and self-sufficient. For Judaism, number one, which is the symbol of one God, is the Adonai, the Lord, the Most High, the I am, hidden intelligence.

The Chinese number one refer as Yang, masculine and celestial. In Chinese culture, number one is the symbol of the beginning, the origin, and the whole; this was first suggested by Laozi, a well-known philosopher in ancient China and the founder of Taoism, in his classic text *Tao Te Ching*. Laozi suggested that number one, in his understanding of cosmology that “The Way gave birth to unity (which is number 1); unity gave birth to duality; duality gave birth to trinity and trinity gave birth to the myriad creatures.” (Translated by Mair 1990)

## **Two – The Balance of the Moon**

Number two means balance, contrast, opposition. The symbolic meaning of number two is kindness, tact, equalization, calm, justice, equality, and duality. The number two reflects a quiet power of judgment and the need for planning. Two is the number of choosing between two objects. Two leads us to do what is best for our souls.

Plato says two is a digit without meaning as it implies relationship, which introduces the third factor. When we add 1+1 we get number two - which is also a balance number. (Tenzin Gyurme, 2010)

In alchemy, two are the opposites, sun and moon. Number two means king and queen, sulphur and quicksilver, at first antagonistic but finally resolved and united in the androgyny. The Book of Revelation says two is the number of witness. The disciples were sent out by two's (Mark 6:7). Two witnesses are required to establish truth (Deu. 17:6, John 8:17, 2Cor. 13:1, cited by Tenzin Gyurme). Examples in Revelation are the beast out of the earth who has two horns like a lamb but spoke like a dragon (Rev. 13:11). He is the false prophet. However, the two witnesses are the true prophets of God (Rev. 11:3, cited by Tenzin Gyurme).

According to Christian tradition, Christ is with two natures as God and human.

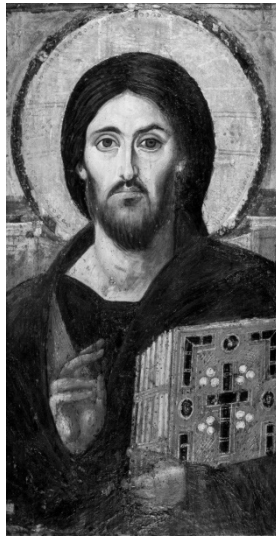


Fig. 2-1. The oldest known icon of Christ Pantocrator (Saint Catherine's Monastery). The two different facial expressions on either side emphasize Christ's dual nature as both divine and human.

In Judaism, two is the life force; in Kabbalism, two is wisdom and self-consciousness. For Islam, two is spirit; in Islam, number two is related to

two angels that follow each human and write down their good and bad deeds (Qur'an 50:6-17). Hindus believe two is duality, the *shakta-shakti*<sup>1</sup>. For Pythagoras, two is The Dual, the divided terrestrial being. Number two in Pythagoras' idea is a symbol of *vesica piscis* which is created by mirroring two circles side by side and that builds a foundation for all numbers. Number two is also related to dyad. The dyad involves the principles of "twoness" or "otherness." Greek philosophers referred to the dyad as "audacity" because of the boldness of separation from the one, and "anguish" because there is still a sense of tension, of a desire to return to oneness. They believed that the dyad divides and unites, repels and attracts, separates and returns.

*Pythagoras held that one of the first principles, the monad, is God and the good, which is the origin of the One, and is itself intelligence; but the undefined dyad is a deity and the evil, surrounding which is the mass of matter. (Aet. 1.7; Dox. 302<sup>2</sup>, Translated by Arthur Fairbanks, 1898)*

The dyad is the door between the one and the many. Recall the symbolic figure of the *vesica piscis* (explained further in geometric section). The *vesica piscis* is a passageway to the journey of spiritual self-discovery. The notion of fertility is associated with its vulva shape and is thus related to the passage of birth.

Buddhism sees two as the duality of samsara; male and female. Two is theory and practice, wisdom and method. It is the blind and the lame united to see the way and to walk it. Taoism says two is representative of the K'ua, the two determinants the yin-yang. Two is a weak yin number as it has no center as opposed to one. For the Chinese, two is yin, feminine, terrestrial, inauspicious. For the Chinese, the number two is an auspicious number, because the Chinese believe that good things come in pairs.

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<sup>1</sup> Shakti Hinduism, also known as Shakta or Shaktism, is a term used to describe a diverse group of goddess traditions that have emerged in South Asia as the Hindu tradition has developed. Many followers of Shaktism believe that the multiple goddesses within the Hindu pantheon are all manifestations of Shakti, the "Great Goddess." She has a variety of names and forms, including Devi, Uma, Parvati, Ambika, Kali, Durga, Shitala, and Lakshmi

<sup>2</sup> Dox. = Diels, Doxographi Graeci Hirtl n IH7 I and Aet. = Aetii deplacihis telnjmae

People with number two enjoy relationships, they don't want to be alone. These people are the best at analyzing problems and have the capability to be a commentator.

The meaning of number two is similar to number eleven. Elevens appear consistently as bases indicating a reflective, thoughtful, and intuitive soul, just like number two. Number eleven means vision, balance, invention, refinement, fulfillment, and higher ideals.

The number eleven suggests balance, like the number two although eleven represents two similar objects while number two usually refers to two different things and opposites. The number eleven represents male and female equality. It contains both sun energy and moon energy at the same time yet holds them both in perspective and in separation. Consequently, constant reoccurrences of numbers two and eleven manifesting in our lives often signal us to be aware of our own balance:

- Balance of work and play, balance among emotion, thought and spirit, and balance of masculine and feminine aspects.

### **Three – The Magic of Mars**

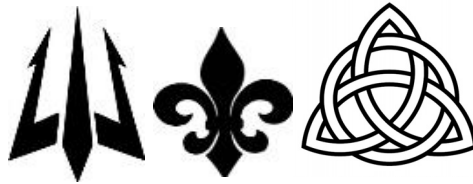
Three means talent, veracity, and joviality. The spiritual meaning of number three deals with magic, intuition, and advantage. The number three invokes expression, versatility, and pure joy of creativity. Three is also a time identifier as it represents the past, the present and the future.



Many world religions contain triple concepts of trinity, including the Holy Trinity in Christianity, Trimurti and Tridevi in Hinduism, the three jewels of Buddhism, the three pure ones of Taoism, and the Triple Goddess with three heads of Wicca.

Consecutive threes in life may symbolize the need to express oneself creatively, or consider one's present directional path in relation to past events and future goals. Three represents promising new adventures and it

symbolizes reward and success in most undertakings. The power of three is universal and expresses the tripartite nature of the world as heaven, earth, and water. It is human as body, soul and spirit. Three is birth, life, death. It is the beginning, middle, and end. Three is a complete cycle unto itself. According to Pythagorean philosophy, three means completion.



The symbol of three is the triangle. Three interwoven circles or triangles can represent the indissoluble unity of the three persons of the trinity. Others symbols using three are the trident, the fleur-de-lis, the trefoil, the trisula, the thunderbolt, and trigrams. The trident is a symbol of the Roman sea god, Neptune, that represents the past, the present, and the future.

Three has different meanings in different cultures. For example;

- Africa Ashanti: the moon goddess is three people, two black, and one white.
- Pre-Islamic Arab: the Manant is a threefold goddess representing the three Holy Virgins, Al-Itab, Al-Uzza, and Al-Manat. They are depicted as aniconic steal, stones or pillars, or as pillars surmounted by doves.
- Buddhist: traditionally the theme of three is represented by, the Triratna, The Three Precious Jewels, and the Buddha, Dharma, Sangha.
- Chinese: Sanctity; the auspicious number; the first odd, yang number. The moon toad, or bird, is three-legged.
- Celtic: Bridgit is threefold; there are the three blessed ladies and innumerable triads, often a threefold aspect of the same divinity.

The Christian trefoil of the trinity represents the soul, the union of body and soul in human. There were three gifts of the Magi to Christ as God-King-Sacrifice, three figures of transformation, temptation, denials by Peter. There were three crosses at Calvary, Jesus died on the hills, there were three days to the death process for Christ, and there were three

appearances after his death. There are three qualities or theological virtues, i.e., Faith, Hope, Love or more commonly known as Charity. Its source is Paul's letter to the Corinthians, I Corinthians 13. Therefore, the Christian trinity is one God in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Three is sometimes equated to the three days Jesus spent in the tomb and to the three epochs of one world:

1. Before the law (Adam to Moses),
2. Under the law (Moses to Jesus),
3. Under Grace (Christ to Last Judgment).

For Judaism, three is symbolized by limitless light, sanctifying intelligence. In the Kabbalah, three represents understanding the trinity of male, female and their connection to intelligence. According to the tradition of the Kabbalah, the soul consists of three parts with the highest part being *nefesh* (repose), the middle being *ruach* (spirit), and the lowest being *neshamah* (breath).

In Hinduism, three is an important symbol of the trinity of Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva that form a powerful trinity of gods. Among them, they create, sustain, and destroy life in an endless cycle of birth and rebirth. The trimurti, the triple power of creation, destruction, preservation, of unfolding, maintaining, and concluding, shows the significance of the number three for Hindus. According to some Hindus, the moon chariot has three wheels.

The three virtues of *Humata*, *Hukhta* and *Huvarshata* (good thoughts, good words and good deeds) are a basic tenet in Zoroastrianism.

Three is considered a good number in Chinese culture because it sounds like the word “alive”; in Taoism, the great triad is heaven, man (human) and earth. Three is the strong number in Taoist symbolism because it is the center point of equilibrium.

In Japan, there are three different numbers of things: the three treasures are mirror, sword and jewel i.e., truth, courage and compassion.