

## A Comparative Study of the Literal and Symbolic Meaning of the Numbers in Qur'anic Verses about Creation

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ABSTRACT:

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The number words in the Qur'an are generally considered to have numerical meanings, while other meanings of these words have been reported under some verses (especially the verses on creation). There are diverse cultural-ritual symbols of the number words employed by the people living in different geographical regions of the world from past centuries to the present. The present research aims to conduct a comparative study of the non-numerical meanings of number words and their numbered objects in the Qur'an and different rituals and cultures, using the method of ritual-cultural symbology, in order to discover and analyse the relationship between the literal meanings of Qur'anic numbers and their symbolic meanings. According to the results of this research, it seems that the non-numerical meanings of number words in the verses of Creation are not metaphors, ironies, and parables, and they are possibly symbolic. Moreover, there is a close relationship between the ritual-cultural symbology and the literal meanings of numbers and their associations in the Creation Verses, so it can be suggested that there is a

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kind of language that all people can understand regardless of culture and geography.

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KEYWORDS: The Qur'an, number words, Verses of Creation, symbology, symbolic meaning.

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## 1. Introduction

The issue of creation is one of the most important matters raised in the minds of human beings. The Qur'an has discussed the creation of various creatures in detail in numerous verses. In these verses, the nature and characteristics of the creation of human beings and the world have been described in a wide variety of ways.

The Qur'anic approach to the issue of creation also has certain distinctions, among which we can mention the existence of numerical and counting aspects of some creation-related statements, such as *nafs wāḥidah* (one soul), *sab' samāwāt* (seven heavens), *sittah ayyām* (six days), *thamāniyah azwāj* (eight pairs), and *ulī ajniḥah mathnā wa thulāth wa rubā'* (possessing wings, two, three or four pairs). Commentators have interpreted these terms in diverse ways, such as symbolic (non-numerical) analysis of the numbers (Mughniyyah, 2004, 1:78; Makarem Shirazi 1992, 1:167; al-Rāzī, 1999, 2:383).

Sometimes the historical and symbolic approach to the number is unproblematic and helpful in achieving the correct meaning of the verse, such as understanding the concept of abundance from the number seven, obviously with regard to its numbered object and the context of the verse, as many commentators have pointed out in certain verses. This is despite the fact that some symbolic meanings can also be regarded as examples of imposing meanings on the verses of the Qur'an. This shows the necessity of distinction between the correct and incorrect meanings of numbers, which sometimes imply counting and sometimes do not.

In Qur'anic studies, statistical approaches to numbers have often been of interest, whereas an independent source that methodically analyses the non-numerical meanings of numbers in the verses of Creation or other verses has not been found. The symbolic meanings of numbers and their coexisting terms in Qur'anic interpretations have been addressed only occasionally, thus requiring a more systematic study.

There have also been some studies of the Creation Verses by contemporary scholars, but none of them has investigated the

non-numerical meanings of the numbers with linguistic approaches, the examples of which are as follows:

- “Creation and termination: A semantic study of the Qur’anic worldview” by Shinya Makino (1998);
- “The secret of gradualness in creation” by Gholamreza Vatandoost (1998);
- “Number: The Language of Science” by Dantzig and Mazur (1982);
- “Al-‘Adad fi’l-Lughat al-‘Arabiyyah” by Na‘im Ḥumṣī (1946);
- “Numbers and Enumeration” by Andrew Rippin (2024).

In the present research, the Qur’anic uses of each number and its numbered object in the verses of creation were investigated in order to extract and examine their symbolic meanings. Then, these ritual-cultural symbols were analysed in terms of their consistency with their Qur’anic usages. The above approach is an attempt to answer the main question: “How is the relationship between the ritual-cultural symbols of numbers and their co-occurring words explained with the use of these words in the creation verses?”

## 2. *Symbology*

A symbol is a term, name, or image that may represent a familiar object in everyday life that nevertheless has special implicit meanings in addition to its obvious and usual meaning (Jung 2012). The symbol cannot be artificially created or invented for personal interpretation at will, since it extends beyond the human and reaches the global level (Cooper 1987).

The difference between a metaphor and a symbol is that there is no indication or proof to express the meaning in symbols. Being used in ordinary everyday language, symbols are different from parables, which are used in the form of anecdotes. The main distinction between a symbol and a metaphor is that symbols have broader meanings, allowing several symbolic meanings to be used for the same word.

From another point of view, symbols can be seen as parables or metaphors that have been around for a long time and have undergone some transformations and changes, and now, they do not necessarily have that initial metaphoric or allegorical clarity. In fact, in a way, some symbols can be considered a kind of fossilized metaphors and allegories.

Every civilization has special symbols for numbers. In most traditions and cultures, numbers have possessed sacredness, ominousness, and

special functions to the extent that their importance has not diminished to this day (Nooraghaei 2008, 13). This leads to the conclusion that numbers have long had symbolic and interpretable meanings (Robertson 2018, 332). For example, one and zero represent all numbers in Leibniz's system. In his view, if it is possible to present all mathematical and non-mathematical problems in a symbolic form (in the form of numbers and numerical codes), it is ultimately possible to build machines that can recognize truth or falsity (at least for mathematical propositions) (Dantzig and Mazur 1982, 120; Mitchell 2016, 86-91).

Although the use of symbolic language in Islamic texts, especially in the Qur'an, has always been a subject of controversy, at the level of vocabulary we see symbolic meanings that were part of the culture and common language of the people and were not unknown or mysterious. An example is the symbolic meaning of number seven, for which the symbolic concept of abundance has become famous among many commentators (Abū Ḥayyān 1999, 1: 219; Ibn Abī Ḥātim 1998, 1:75; al-Rāzī 1999, 25:128; Hosseini Shirazi 2003, 4:278; al-Modarresi 1998, 10:173; Sadeqi Tehrani 1986, 305; Taleghani 1983, 1:111; Makarem Shirazi 1992, 1:167).

Therefore, it is possible to study the use of symbolic meanings of numbers in the Qur'an comparatively, so that focusing on the Qur'anic applications, it can be determined whether numerical symbols are adopted in the Qur'an or not. In the present research, several cultural-ritual symbols were first extracted for each number and its numbered object. Then, focusing on the Qur'anic applications of these terms, the semantic relations between them were taken into consideration.

### 3. *The Scope of the Study*

Since the verb *khalaqa* (to create) and its derivatives is the most used verb in the creation verses, the numbers that have a semantic relationship with the verb *khalaqa* were regarded as the scope of this study. Table 1 shows the numbers used in the creation verses with the verb *khalaqa* (directly or effectively).

**Table 1.** The number words used in the creation verses with the verb *khalāqa* (directly or effectively).

	Number	Numbered object	Verse
1	<i>Wāḥidāh</i> (one)	<i>Nafs</i> (Soul)	O mankind! fear your Guardian Lord, Who created you from a single person, created out of it his mate, and from them twain scattered) like seeds (countless men and women (Q. 4:1).
2	<i>Wāḥidāh</i> (one)	<i>Nafs</i> (Soul)	It is He Who created you from a single person, and made his mate of like nature, in order that he might dwell with her (in love) (Q. 7:189).
3	<i>Wāḥidāh</i> (one)	<i>Nafs</i> (Soul)	And your creation or your resurrection is in no wise but as an individual soul: for Allah is He Who hears and sees (all things) (Q. 31:28).
4	<i>Wāḥidāh</i> (one)	<i>Nafs</i> (Soul)	He created you (all) from a single person (Q. 39:6).
5	<i>Mathnā</i> (Two by Two)	<i>Ajniḥāh malā'ikāh</i> (Wings of The Angels)	Praise be to Allah, Who created (out of nothing) the heavens and the earth, Who made the angels, messengers with wings,- two, or three, or four (pairs): He adds to Creation as He pleases (Q. 35:1).
6	<i>Tḥulāth</i> (Three by Three)	<i>Ajniḥāh malā'ikāh</i> (Wings of The Angels)	Praise be to Allah, Who created (out of nothing) the heavens and the earth, Who made the angels, messengers with wings, two, or three, or four (pairs) (Q. 35:1).
7	<i>Tḥalāth</i> (Three)	<i>Zulumāt</i> (Darkness)	In stages, one after another, in three veils of darkness (Q. 39:6).

	Number	Numbered object	Verse
8	<i>Rubā'</i> (Four by Four)	<i>Ajniḥab malā'ikah</i> (Wings of The Angels)	Praise be to Allah, Who created (out of nothing) the heavens and the earth, Who made the angels, messengers with wings - two, or three, or four (pairs) (Q. 35:1).
9	<i>Sittah</i> (Six)	<i>Ayyām</i> (Days)	Your Guardian-Lord is Allah, Who created the heavens and the earth in six days (Q. 7:54).
10	<i>Sittah</i> (Six)	<i>Ayyām</i> (Days)	Verily your Lord is Allah, who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and is firmly established on the throne (Q.10:3).
11	<i>Sittah</i> (Six)	<i>Ayyām</i> (Days)	He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in six Days (Q. 11:7).
12	<i>Sittah</i> (Six)	<i>Ayyām</i> (Days)	He Who created the heavens and the earth and all that is between, in six days (Q. 25:59).
13	<i>Sittah</i> (Six)	<i>Ayyām</i> (Days)	It is Allah Who has created the heavens and the earth, and all between them, in six Days (Q. 32:4).
14	<i>Sittah</i> (Six)	<i>Ayyām</i> (Days)	We created the heavens and the earth and all between them in Six Days (Q. 18:38).
15	<i>Sittah</i> (Six)	<i>Ayyām</i> (Days)	He it is Who created the heavens and the earth in Six Days (Q. 57:4).
16	<i>Sab'</i> (Seven)	<i>Ṭarā'iq</i> (Ways)	And We have made, above you, seven tracts (Q. 23:17).
17	<i>Sab'</i> (Seven)	<i>Samāwāt</i> (Skys)	Allah is He Who created seven Firmaments (Q. 65:12).
18	<i>Sab'</i> (Seven)	<i>Samāwāt</i> (Skys)	He Who created the seven heavens one above another (Q. 67:3).

	Number	Numbered object	Verse
19	<i>Sab'</i> (Seven)	<i>Samāwāt</i> (Skys)	See ye not how Allah has created the seven heavens one above another (Q. 71:15).
20	<i>Thamāniyah</i> (Eight)	<i>Azawāj</i> (Pairs)	He sent down for you eight head of cattle in pairs: He makes you, in the wombs of your mothers (Q. 39:6).

#### 4. Qur'anic and Symbolic Applications of Numbers

In this section, for each number in Table 1, the Qur'anic applications are examined with regard to literal meanings and ritual-cultural symbols.

##### 4.1. *Wāḥidah* (One)

In addition to the numerical sense of one, *wāḥid* and *wāḥidah* in the Qur'an have other senses in several verses (Q. 36:29;<sup>1</sup> 37:19;<sup>2</sup> 54:50;<sup>3</sup> 4:102;<sup>4</sup> 69:14;<sup>5</sup> 25:32<sup>6</sup>), implying slightness and ease (Mughniyyah 2004, 7:507) suddenness and abruptness (Tabataba'i 1996, 19: 87). Additionally, *wāḥid* in certain verses indicates being of one kind and one species:

For they said: What! a man! a Solitary one from among ourselves! shall we follow such a one?<sup>7</sup> (Q. 54:24).

And remember ye said: O Moses! we cannot endure one kind of food<sup>8</sup> (Q.2:61).

1. إِنَّ كَانَتْ إِلَّا صَيْحَةً وَاحِدَةً (يس/29)
2. فَإِنَّمَا هِيَ زَجْرَةٌ وَاحِدَةٌ (الصافات/19)
3. وَ مَا أَمْرُنَا إِلَّا وَاحِدَةٌ كَلَمْحٍ بِالْبَصَرِ (القمر/50)
4. فَيَمِيلُونَ عَلَيْكُمْ مَيْلَةً وَاحِدَةً (النساء/102)
5. فَذَكَّنَّا ذِكَّةً وَاحِدَةً (الحاقة/14)
6. لَوْ لَا نُزِّلَ عَلَيْهِ الْقُرْآنُ جُمْلَةً وَاحِدَةً (الفرقان/32)
7. فَقَالُوا أَمْ بَشَرًا مِمَّنَّا وَاحِدًا نَتَّبِعُهُ (القمر/24)
8. وَ إِذْ قُلْتُمْ يَا مُوسَى لَنْ نَصْبِرَ عَلَى طَعَامٍ وَاحِدٍ (البقرة/61)

In the first verse above, the Prophet’s “being of the same species” (being of the human race) with other human beings is a source of question and problem for the unbelievers, and in the second verse, the fact that the food was of one type and not diverse was considered a reason for the Children of Israel’s lack of patience.

The use of *wāḥidah* accompanied by *ummah* in verses like Q. 2:213<sup>1</sup> means that people did not have differences at the beginning of the formation of human societies. In other words, it can be said that *wāḥidah* in these verses refers to the sharing of people together. This commonality can exist in religion, ritual, customs, lifestyle, etc. In the verse Q. 13:4, it is mentioned about the sameness of vineyards, fields, and date trees in being watered with the same water:

And in the earth are tracts (diverse though) neighbouring, and gardens of vines and fields sown with corn, and palm trees - growing out of single roots or otherwise: watered with the same water<sup>2</sup> (Q.13:4).

Therefore, *wāḥid* in this usage can also be interpreted as being common and not different. Therefore, *wāḥid* and *wāḥidah* in the Qur’an, in addition to the numerical meaning, also have other meanings such as slightness, ease, suddenness, abruptness, common, and of the same species and type. In addition, there are many uses of *wāḥid* for God in the Qur’an (see Figure 1).

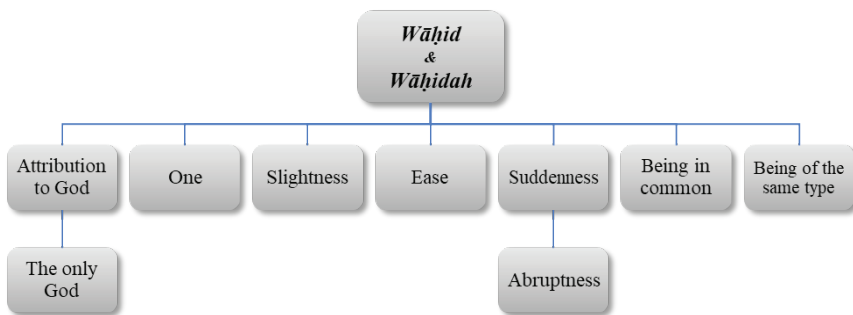


Figure 1. The applications of *wāḥid* and *wāḥidah* in the Qur’an.

1. كَانَ النَّاسُ أُمَّةً وَاحِدَةً (البقرة/213)  
 2. وَ فِي الْأَرْضِ قِطْعٌ مُتجاوِرَاتٌ وَ جَنّاتٌ مِنْ أَعنابٍ وَ زُرْعٌ وَ نَخِيلٌ صِنوانٌ وَ غَيرُ صِنوانٍ يُسقى بِماءٍ واحِدٍ (الرعد/4)



The symbols of the number one in different rituals and cultures include God, the universe of God, permanence, centrality, indivisibility, the driving force, the essence of everything, unity, mother, beginning, the creation of the primitive human and the standing human (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 2008, 5:638-643; Schimmel 2016, 54; Bruce-Mitford 2009, 23; Cooper 1987; Nooraghaei 2008, 29) (Figure 2).

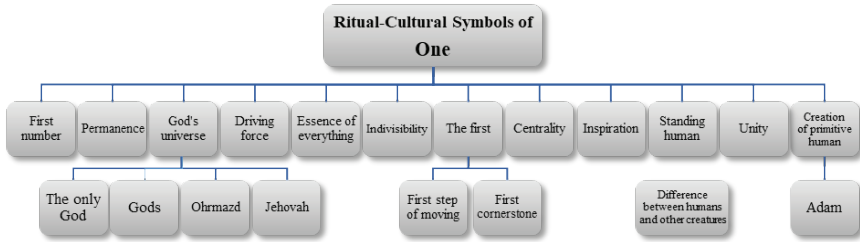


Figure 2. Ritual-cultural symbols of one.

#### 4.2. *Mathnā* (Two by Two)

The use of *mathnā* (Two by Two) along with *thulāth* (Three by Three) and *rubā'* (Four by Four) in the form of *m'dūlah* can be found in the verse (Q.35:1):

Praise be to Allah, Who created (out of nothing) the heavens and the earth, Who made the angels, messengers with wings, two, or three, or four (pairs): He adds to Creation as He pleases<sup>1</sup> (Q. 35:1).

According to the context and various parts of the verse that speak of greatness, increase and development, and with reference to expression, "He increases in creation as He pleases," (Ḥaqqī Brusawī n.d., 7:314; al-Ālusī 1984, 11:338; Hosseini Shah Abdulazimi 1985, 11:9; Ibn 'Āshūr 1999, 22:111), which the majority of commentators have taken to refer to the creation of angels and all other creatures, it is reasonable to consider the possible symbolic meaning of abundance for *m'dūlah* numbers of *mathnā*, *thulāth*, and *rubā'* (Fakhari & Besharati 2019).

It should be noted that *mathnā*, *thulāth*, and *rubā'* in the verse Q. 4:3, to express the number of women with whom it is permissible to marry, has been interpreted by the majority of commentators as the number

1. الْحَمْدُ لِلَّهِ فَاطِرِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ جَاعِلِ الْمَلَائِكَةِ رُسُلًا أُولِي أَجْنِحَةٍ مَثْنَى وَثُلَاثَ وَرُبَاعَ يَزِيدُ فِي الْخَلْقِ مَا يَشَاءُ (فاطر/1)

four, according to the jurisprudential approach of the context of the verse (unlike the context of the previous verse, which indicated creation) (Muqātil 2002, 1:357; al-Ṭūsī 2002, 3:107; al-Zamakhsharī 1979, 1:467; Sadeqi Tehrani 1986, 6:171; Tabataba’i 1996, 4:267).

In addition, several Hadiths also indicate the limitation of polygamy to the number of four. In addition, the plural nature of the verb and pronouns in the verse confirms the meaning of choice between two to four women. Therefore, these numbers were used in the same numerical meaning in the above verses, but in the first verse, which is one of the verses of creation, the concept of abundance is probable for them (Fakhari & Besharati 2019) (Figure 3).

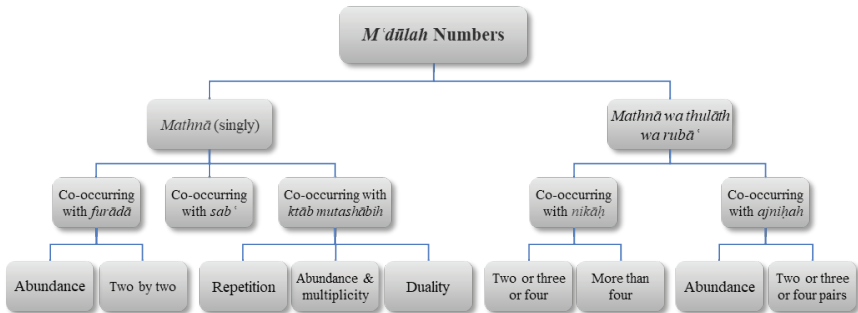


Figure 3. The numbers of m'dūlah in the Qur'an

The number two in different rituals and cultures is a symbol of division, duality, balance, plurality and diversity, femininity, being propitious, alternation, conflict, parallelism, and opposite poles (Shepherd 2014, 358; Levi-Strauss 1974, 161; Chevalier & Gheerbrant 2008, 257-261; Cooper 1987; Bruce-Mitford 2009, 24) (Figure 4).

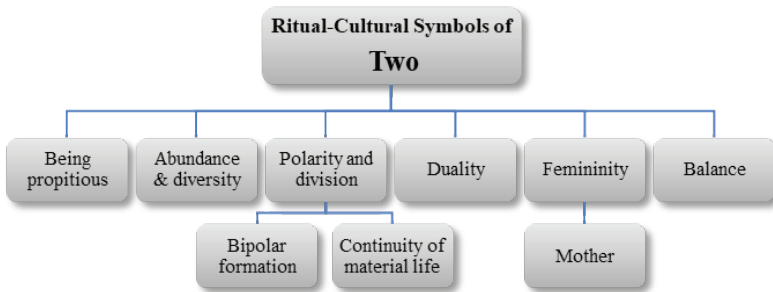


Figure 4. Ritual-cultural symbols of two.

### 4.3. *Thalāth* (Three)

*Thalāth* and *thalāthah* in the Qur'an, in addition to the numerical meaning, indicate the following symbolic meanings (Figure 5):

- Completeness and perfection:  
Depart ye to a Shadow in three columns<sup>1</sup> (Q. 77:30).  
If that is beyond your means, fast for three days. That is the expiation for the oaths ye have sworn<sup>2</sup> (Q. 5:89).
- The implicit meaning of holiness and mysteriousness:  
He said, "My Lord, grant me a sign." He said, "Your sign is that you will not speak to people for three days except in gestures"<sup>3</sup> (Q. 3:41).
- Abundance (in the form of *m'dūlah* number, i.e., *thulāth*):  
Who made the angels, messengers with wings, two, or three, or four (pairs)<sup>4</sup> (Q. 35:1).

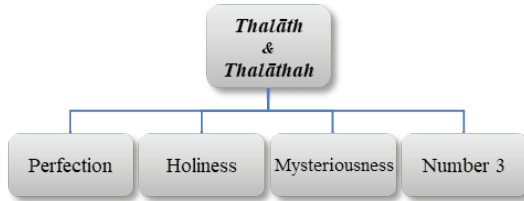


Figure 5. The applications of thalāth and thalāthah in the Qur'an.

The number three in different rituals and cultures is a symbol of perfection, holiness, abundance and growth, respect, and masculinity. In addition, the symbolic meaning of the Creator for the number three has appeared in the form of the idea of the Christian Trinity and the Hindu divine trinity (Lao-Tzu 1992, 42; Schimmel 2016, 73-76; Chevalier & Gheerbrant 2008, 3:663-672; Nooraghaei 2008, 39-41; Cooper 1987) (figure 6).

1. انْطَلِقُوا إِلَى ظِلِّ ذِي ثَلَاثِ شُعَبٍ (المرسلات/30)
2. فَمَنْ لَمْ يَجِدْ فَصِيَامُ ثَلَاثَةِ أَيَّامٍ ذَلِكَ كَفَّارَةٌ لِأَيْمَانِكُمْ إِذَا خَلَفْتُمْ (المائدة/89)
3. قَالَ رَبِّ اجْعَلْ لِي آيَةً، قَالَ آيَتُكَ أَلَّا تُكَلِّمَ النَّاسَ ثَلَاثَةَ أَيَّامٍ إِلَّا رَمْزًا (آل عمران/41)
4. جَاعِلِ الْمَلَائِكَةَ رُسُلًا أُولِي أَجْنِحَةٍ مَثْنَى وَ ثُلَاثَ وَ رُبَاعَ (فاطر/1)

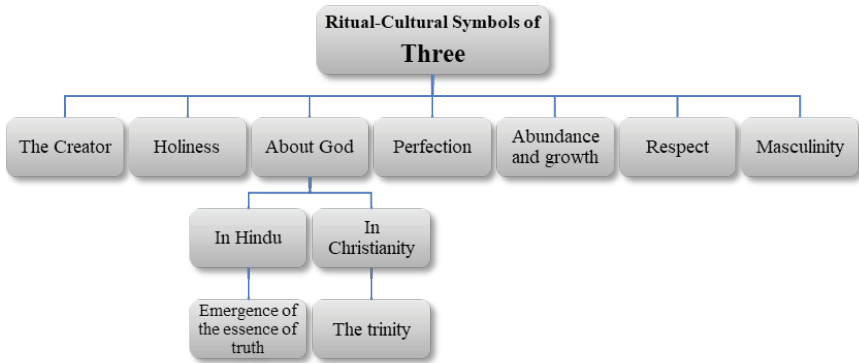


Figure 6. Ritual-cultural symbols of number three.

#### 4.4. *Rubā‘ (Four by Four)*

The *m‘dūlah* number *rubā‘* in the verses of creation was used in the phrase *mathnā wa thulāth wa rubā‘* (Q. 4:3) which, as said earlier about *mathnā* and *thulāth*, symbolizes abundance.

In various rituals and cultures, the number four has been a symbol of square, tangibility, establishment, uniqueness, discipline, completeness, abundance, femininity, great power, holiness, and forbidden number (Dantzig and Mazur 1982, 54; Chevalier & Gheerbrant 2008, 2:550-560; Shepherd 2014, 358; Bruce-Mitford 2009, 26-28) (figure 7).

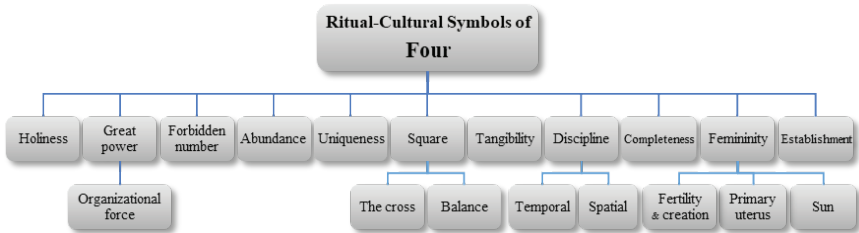


Figure 7. Ritual-cultural symbols of number four.

#### 4.5. *Sittab (Six)*

*Sittab*, *sādis* and *sudus* regardless of their numbered objects and in their absolute form, have numerical meanings and play no symbolic role in the Qur’an.

The number six has several symbolic meanings in various rituals and cultures, such as the creation of the world, felicity and misfortune, spiritual destiny, balance, harmony and unity of opposites, sin of the ancestors, fertility and wisdom, among which the most significant and well-known symbolic meaning is creation (Chevalier & Gheerbrant 2008, 4:55-59; Schimmel 2016, 137; Shepherd 2014, 359; Cooper 1987; Bruce-Mitford 2009, 30) (figure 8).

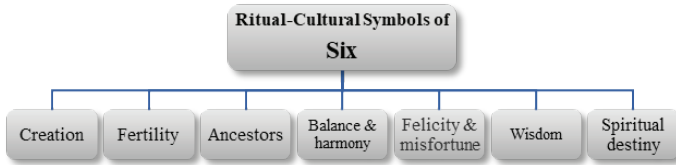


Figure 8. Ritual-cultural symbols of number six.

#### 4.6. Sab‘ (Seven)

Sab‘ and its derivatives in the Qur’an, in addition to the numerical meaning, also indicate the symbolic meaning of increase and exaggeration (Figure 9):

And if all the trees on earth were pens and the ocean (were ink), with seven oceans behind it to add to its (supply), yet would not the words of Allah be exhausted (in the writing): for Allah is Exalted in Power, full of Wisdom<sup>1</sup> (Q. 31:27).

The parable of those who spend their substance in the way of Allah is that of a grain of corn: it groweth seven ears<sup>2</sup> (Q. 2:261).

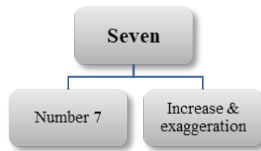


Figure 9. The applications of the number seven in the Qur’an.

1. وَ لَوْ أَنَّ مَا فِي الْأَرْضِ مِنْ شَجَرَةٍ أَقْلَامٌ وَ الْبُحْرُ يَمُدُّهُ مِنْ بَعْدِهِ سَبْعَةُ أُنْحُرٍ مَا نَفِدَتْ كَلِمَاتُ اللَّهِ إِنَّ اللَّهَ عَزِيزٌ حَكِيمٌ (لقمان/27)

2. مَثَلُ الَّذِينَ يُنْفِقُونَ أَمْوَالَهُمْ فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ كَمَثَلِ حَبَّةٍ أَنْبَتَتْ سَبْعَ سَنَابِلٍ (البقرة/261)

Seven in different religions and cultures is a symbol of perfection, holiness, abundance, immortality, unity of materiality and spirituality, complexity, finality, and magic (Eliade 1996, 33; Chevalier & Gheerbrant 2008, 557-572; Bruce-Mitford 2009, 30; Cooper 1987) (Figure 10).

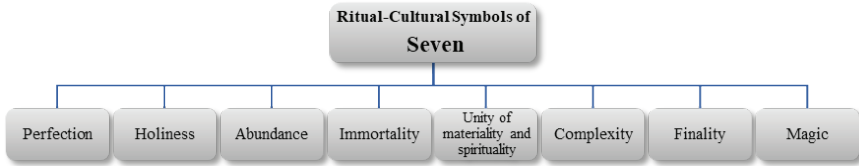


Figure 10. Ritual-cultural symbols of number seven.

#### 4.7. *Thamāniyyah* (Eight)

*Thamāniyyah*, in the Qur'an, in addition to the numerical meaning, indicates the following symbolic meanings (Fakhari et. al. 2018) (Figure 11):

- Balance and lawfulness:

(Take) eight (head of cattle) in (four) pairs: of sheep a pair, and of goats a pair... Of camels a pair, and oxen a pair<sup>1</sup> (Q. 6:143-144).

And He sent down for you eight head of cattle in pairs<sup>2</sup> (Q. 39:6).

The above verses refer to four pairs that have reached balance in the form of the number eight. In addition, pairing itself is a balanced relationship.

- Abundance:

which He disposed against them for seven grueling nights and eight days, so that you could have seen the people lying about therein prostrate as if they were hollow trunks of palm trees<sup>3</sup> (Q. 69:7).

- Restarting (only if the use of *wāw thamāniyyah* is accepted in some verses):

1. ثَمَانِيَةَ أَزْوَاجٍ مِنَ الضَّأْنِ اثْنَيْنِ وَمِنَ الْمَعْزِ اثْنَيْنِ ... وَمِنَ الْإِبِلِ اثْنَيْنِ وَمِنَ الْبَقَرِ اثْنَيْنِ (الانعام/143-144)

2. وَأَنْزَلَ لَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَنْعَامِ ثَمَانِيَةَ أَزْوَاجٍ (الزمر/6)

3. سَخَّرَهَا عَلَيْهِمْ سَبْعَ لَيَالٍ وَثَمَانِيَةَ أَيَّامٍ حُسُومًا فَتَرَى الْقَوْمَ فِيهَا صَرْعَى كَأَنَّهُمْ أُعِجَابُ سُخْرٍ حَافِيَةٍ (الحاقة/7)

(Some) say they were three, the dog being the fourth among them; (others) say they were five, the dog being the sixth - doubtfully guessing at the unknown; (yet others) say they were seven, the dog being the eighth<sup>1</sup> (Q. 18:22).

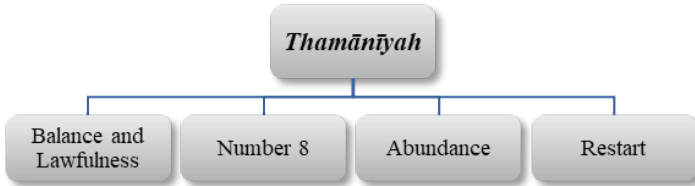


Figure 11. The applications of the number eight in the Qur’an.

The number eight in different rituals and cultures is a symbol of balance and lawfulness, holiness, abundance, and countlessness. In addition, the symbolic meaning of re-creation and restart in some rituals and cultures is in line with the use of *wāw thamāniyyah* in the Arabic language (Ali 1972, 15:39; Anonymous 1992, 1:214-215; Chevalier & Gheerbrant 2008, 5:546-549; Cooper 1987; Shepherd 2014, 259) (Figure 12).

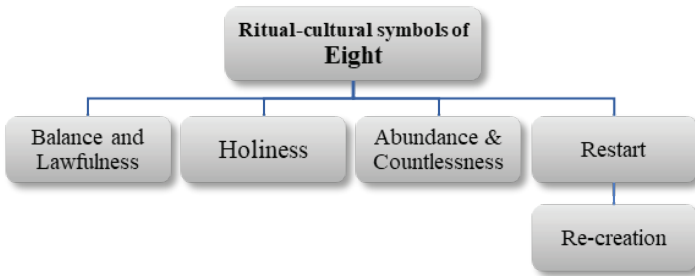


Figure 12. Ritual-cultural symbols of number eight.

### 5. Qur’anic and Symbolic Applications of the Co-occurring Words of Numbers

As mentioned earlier, the numbers one, two, three, four, six, seven and eight, were used in the creation verses in phrases such as *nafs wāḥidah*,

1. سَيَقُولُونَ ثَلَاثَةً رَابِعُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ وَيَقُولُونَ خَمْسَةً سَادِسُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ رَجْمًا بِالْغَيْبِ وَيَقُولُونَ سَبْعَةً وَثَامِنُهُمْ كَلْبُهُمْ (الكهف/22)

*ajniḥab mathnā wa thulāth wa rubā'*, *ẓulumāt thalāth*, *sittah ayyām*, *sab' samāwāt*, and *thamāniyah azwāj* (Table 1). The examination of the numbered objects of these numbers, including *nafs*, *ajniḥab*, *ẓulumāt*, *ayyām*, *samāwāt*, and *azwāj* from the literal and symbological point of view has been discussed in this section.

### 5.1. *Nafs*

*Nafs* has been used in various meanings in the Qur'an (Figure 13), such as:

- The essence of God Almighty:  
He has inscribed for Himself (the rule of) Mercy<sup>1</sup> (Q. 6:12).
- Human:  
Allah does not put a task on a person beyond his ability<sup>2</sup> (Q. 2:286).
- Soul and the source of life:  
It is Allah that takes the souls (of men) at death<sup>3</sup> (Q. 39:42).
- The interior and consciousness:  
Thou knowest what is in my heart, Thou I know not what is in Thine<sup>4</sup> (Q. 5:116).
- The forces of good and evil in human beings, which lead to the commission of evil or the prevention of evil, and the happiness or misery of human beings are connected with these inner forces:  
The (human) soul is certainly prone to evil<sup>5</sup> (Q. 12:53).

1. كَتَبَ عَلَى نَفْسِهِ الرَّحْمَةَ (الانعام/12)

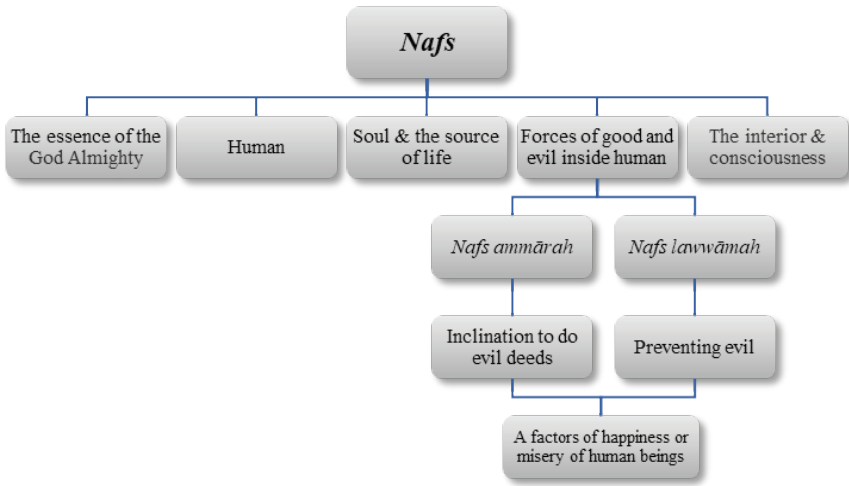
2. لَا يُكَلِّفُ اللَّهُ نَفْسًا إِلَّا وُسْعَهَا (البقرة/286)

3. اللَّهُ يَتَوَفَّى الْأَنْفُسَ حِينَ مَوْتِهَا (الزمر/42)

4. تَعْلَمُ مَا فِي نَفْسِي وَ لَا أَعْلَمُ مَا فِي نَفْسِكَ (المائدة/116)

5. إِنَّ النَّفْسَ لَأَمَّارَةٌ بِالسُّوءِ (يوسف/53)





**Figure 13.** The applications of the word ‘nafs’ in the Qur’an.

In various religions and cultures, the *nafs* has been usually confused with the *rūḥ*, and in most cases, only the symbols of the *rūḥ* have been reported. Since we are seeking only the terminological analysis of *nafs* and not *rūḥ*, we might consider the possible symbol of *nafs* in Arabic culture, which Jawad Ali interpreted as a bird growing inside the human body (Ali 1972, 11:139-141) (Figure 14). Therefore, for the symbology of *nafs* the ritual-cultural symbols of bird should be studied.

Bird in different rituals and cultures is a symbol of connection with God and his kingdom, spirit, being a messenger, good luck, and cruelty. Bird has a permanent and unbreakable relationship with the concept of flight. Flight is also a symbol of bird, lightness, freedom from matter, freedom of mind (thinking), and dynamism (Jung 2012; Chevalier & Gheerbrant 2008, 2:57-60; Shepherd 2014, 199; Bruce-Mitford 2009, 71-72) (Figure 15).

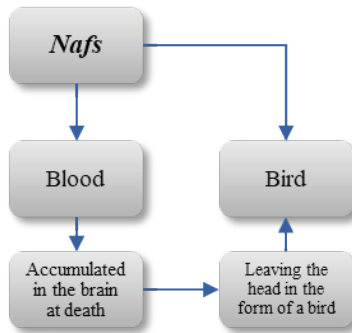


Figure 14. Making nafs tangible with a bird as a symbol.

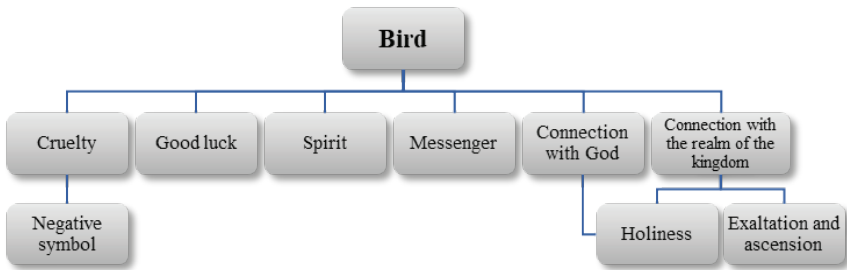


Figure 15. Ritual-cultural symbols of bird.

### 5.2. *Ajniḥab*

The Arabic root “J,N,Ḥ” and its derivatives in the Qur’an have various symbolic meanings (Figure 16):

- Inclination:  
But if the enemy incline towards peace, do thou (also) incline towards peace<sup>1</sup> (Q. 8:61).
- Means of humility:  
And, out of kindness, lower to them the wing of humility<sup>2</sup> (Q. 17:24).
- Means of shelter:

1. وَإِنْ جَنَحُوا لِلسَّلْمِ فَاجْنَحْ لَهَا (الانفال/61)

2. وَ اخْفِضْ لَّهُمَا جَنَاحَ الدُّلِّ مِنَ الرَّحْمَةِ (الاسراء/24)

And lower thy wing to the Believers who follow thee<sup>1</sup> (Q. 26:215).

- Means of ascension and exaltation:

There is not an animal (that lives) on the earth, nor a being that flies on its wings, but (forms part of) communities like you<sup>2</sup> (Q. 6:38).

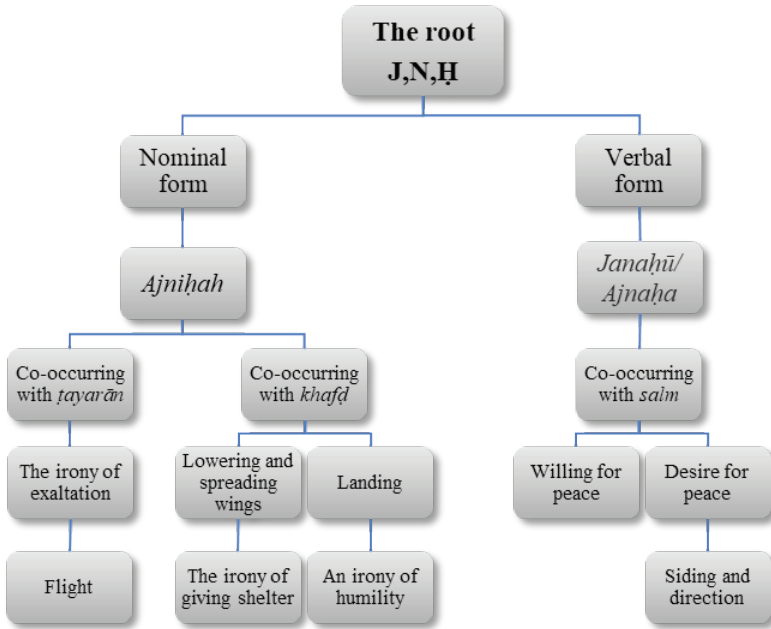


Figure 16. The root “J,N,H” and its derivatives in the Qur’an.

In various rituals and cultures, wing is a symbol of eternal power, connection with the upper world and exaltation and ascension, protection and peace, spiritual force or evil and negative forces (Champeaux & Sterckx 1966, 431; Chevalier & Gheerbrant 2008, 2: 57-60; Shepherd 2014, 199; Jung 2012) (Figure 17).

1. وَ اخْفِضْ جَنَاحَكَ لِمَنِ اتَّبَعَكَ مِنَ الْمُؤْمِنِينَ (الشعراء/215)  
 2. وَمَا مِنْ دَابَّةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا طَائِرٍ يَطِيرُ بِجَنَاحَيْهِ إِلَّا أُنْمِئَتْكُمْ (الانعام/38)

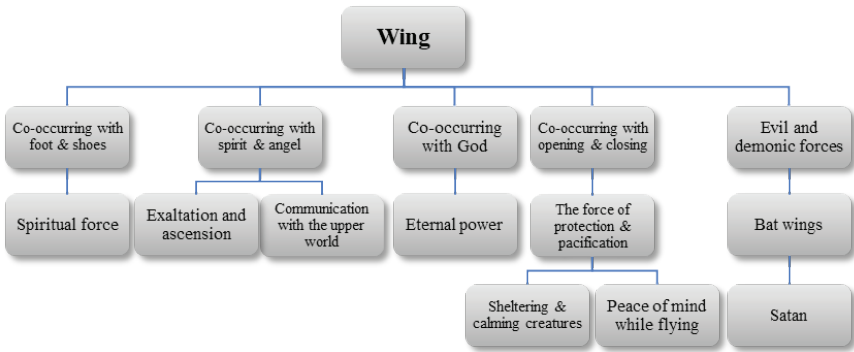


Figure 17. Ritual-cultural symbols of wing.

### 5.3. *Zulumāt*

In addition to the concept of darkness, the Qur'an employed the term *zulumāt* to refer to severe misguidance. God used light and the two verbs salvation and guidance in contrast to *zulumāt* and attributed them only to Himself (Figure 18).

Allah is the Protector of those who have faith: from the depths of darkness He will lead them forth into light<sup>1</sup> (Q. 2:257).

Say: Who is it that delivereth you from the dark recesses of land and sea<sup>2</sup> (Q. 6:63).

Or, Who guides you through the depths of darkness on land and sea<sup>3</sup> (Q. 27:63).

In some cases, the knowledge of *zulumāt* and the creature existing in it is attributed exclusively to God:

Not a leaf doth fall but with His knowledge: there is not a grain in the darkness (or depths) of the earth<sup>4</sup> (Q. 6:59).

1. اللَّهُ وَلِيُّ الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا يُخْرِجُهُم مِّنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ (البقرة/257)
2. قُلْ مَنْ يُنَجِّيكُمْ مِّن ظُلُمَاتِ الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ (الانعام/63)
3. أَمَّنْ يَهْدِيكُمْ فِي ظُلُمَاتِ الْبَرِّ وَالْبَحْرِ (النمل/63)
4. وَمَا تَسْقُطُ مِنْ وَرَقَةٍ إِلَّا يَعْلَمُهَا وَلَا حَبَّةٌ فِي ظُلُمَاتِ الْأَرْضِ (الانعام/59)

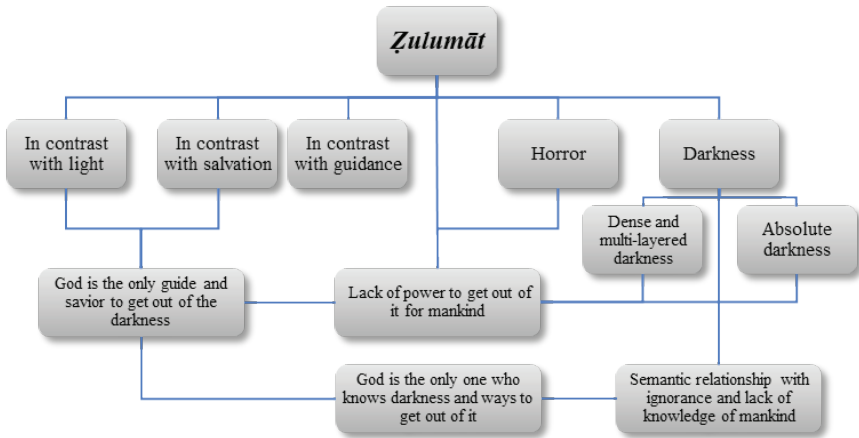


Figure 18. The applications of *Zulumāt* in the Qur'an

Blackness and darkness, in different rituals and cultures, symbolizes the formlessness, undifferentiated nature of the world before the creation, the embryonic stage of the world, the early instinctive world, birth, entering a new religion, life, growth, motherhood, fertility, and death (Servier 1964, 96; Chevalier & Gheerbrant 2008, 3:685-695; Cooper 1987) (Figure 19).

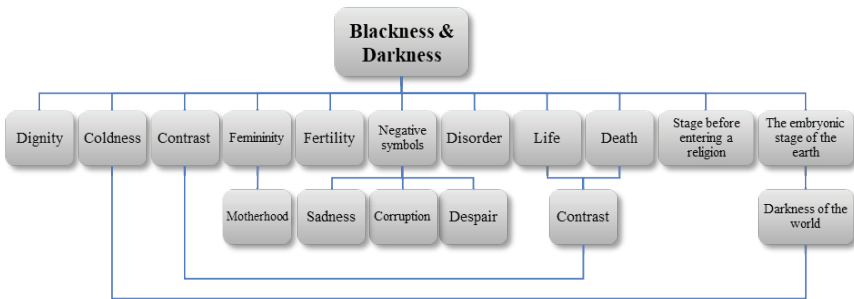


Figure 19. Ritual-cultural symbols of blackness and darkness.

### 5.4. *Ayyām*

*Ayyām* and its singular *yawm*, in the Qur'an in many cases, indicate the Day of Resurrection, which is accompanied by various words such as *yawm al-qiyāmah* (Day of Resurrection), *yawm al-dīn* (Day of the Religion), *yawm al-ākhir* (Final Day), *yawm 'azīm* (Great Day), *yawm al-faṣl* (Day of Separation), *yawm al-waqt al-ma'lūm* (Day of Specific

Time), *yawm al-jam'* (Day of Gathering), and *yawm al-wa'id* (Day of Promise). This word means the common day (sunrise to sunset) sometimes accompanies with some days of the week such as Friday and Saturday (Q. 62:9; 7:163) and certain days of Hajj and Ramadan (Q. 2:184; 22:28). In addition to the conventional meaning, it has also been used to mean duration or periods of time (Figure 20):

If a wound hath touched you, be sure a similar wound hath touched the others. Such days (of varying fortunes) We give to men and men by turns<sup>1</sup> (Q. 3:140).

Some commentators have interpreted this word as an ironic meaning of power and dominance (al-Maraghi n.d., 4:80; Mughniyyah 2004, 2:163; Fadlallah 1999, 6:284).

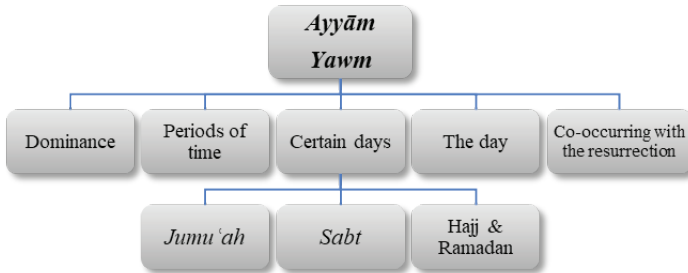


Figure 20. The applications of ayyām in the Qur'an.

Day is a symbol of time and periods of time, gradualness, God's rest, human movement and activity, the ascension of the soul, the hereafter, religious holidays and historical events (Léon-Dufour 1973, 2:833-834; Chevalier & Gheerbrant 2008, 3:388-390; Cooper 1987) (Figure 21).

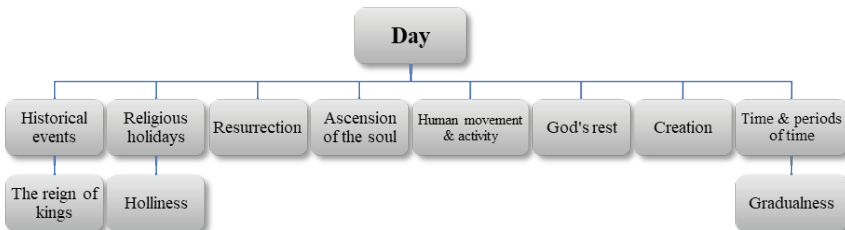


Figure 21. Ritual-cultural symbols of day.

1. إِنَّ يَحْسَبَنَّكُمْ فَرِحَ فَقَدْ مَسَّ الْقَوْمَ فَرِحَ مِثْلُهُ وَ تِلْكَ الْأَيَّامُ نُدَاوِلُهَا بَيْنَ النَّاسِ (آل عمران/140)

### 5.5. *Samāwāt*

*Samāwāt* and its singular *samā'* occur in the Qur'an in several meanings, such as the atmosphere of the earth (Q. 30:48)<sup>1</sup>, rain (Q. 71:11)<sup>2</sup>, heavenly bodies or the space containing them (Q. 22:65;<sup>3</sup> 25:61<sup>4</sup>), the spiritual heaven (Q. 7:40)<sup>5</sup>, and the collection of all the heavens (Q. 14:32),<sup>6</sup> which all indicate the concept of elevation and relative exaltation (Figure 22).

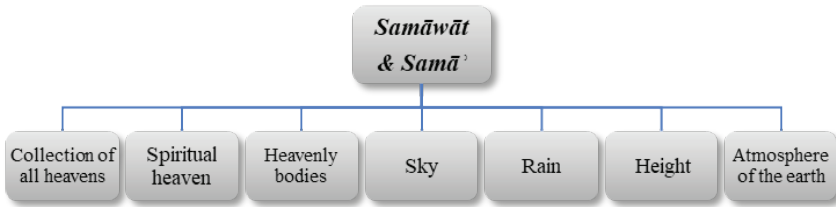


Figure 22. The applications of *samāwāt* and *samā'* in the Qur'an.

Sky in different religions and cultures, is a symbol of connection with the upper world, the unseen, the kingdom, power, sovereignty, supremacy, spirit, holiness, awe, human aspirations, boundlessness, height, heaven, the realm of happiness, the order of the world, God's sky, ability and wisdom (Harva 1959, 43; Eliade 1949, 46; Chevalier & Gheerbrant 2008, 1:187-197; Cooper 1987) (Figure 23).

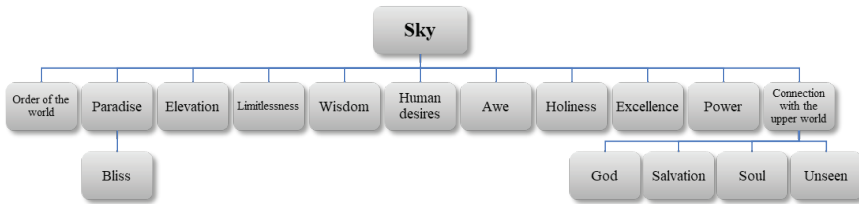


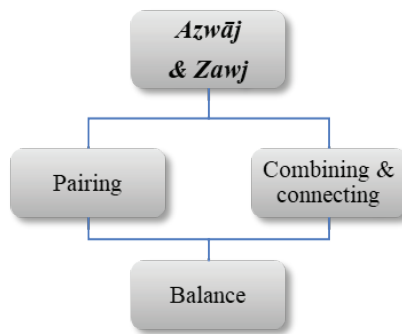
Figure 23. Ritual-cultural symbols of sky.

1. اللَّهُ الَّذِي يُرْسِلُ الرِّيحَ فَتُبْرِئُ سَحَابًا فَيَبْسُطُهُ فِي السَّمَاءِ كَيْفَ يَشَاءُ (الروم/48)
2. يُرْسِلُ السَّمَاءَ عَلَيْكُمْ مِدْرَارًا (نوح/11)
3. وَ يُمَسِّكُ السَّمَاءَ أَنْ تَقَعَ عَلَى الْأَرْضِ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِهِ (الحج/65)
4. تَبَارَكَ الَّذِي جَعَلَ فِي السَّمَاءِ بُرُوجًا وَ جَعَلَ فِيهَا سِرَاجًا وَ قَمَرًا مُنِيرًا (الفرقان/61)
5. إِنَّ الَّذِينَ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا وَ اسْتَكْبَرُوا عَنْهَا لَا تُفَتَّحُ لَهُمْ أَبْوَابُ السَّمَاءِ (الاعراف/40)
6. اللَّهُ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَ الْأَرْضَ (ابراهيم/32)

### 5.6. *Azwāj*

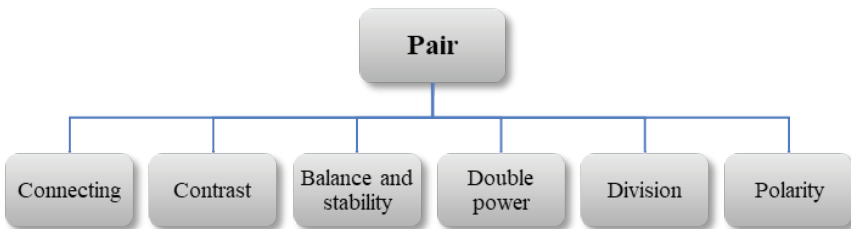
The Qur’anic term *azwāj* and its singular *zawj* indicate, in addition to the common concept of a pair, the union of two objects, which, despite their differences, achieve balance and peace through their juxtaposition (Figure 24):

And among His Signs is this, that He created for you mates from among yourselves, that ye may dwell in tranquillity with them<sup>1</sup> (Q. 30:21).



**Figure 24.** The applications of *azwāj* and *zawj* in the Qur’an.

Pair in different rituals and cultures is a symbol of polarity, division, double power, balance, stability, contrast, connection, and continuity of material life (Lévi-Strauss 1974, 161; Chevalier & Gheerbrant 2008, 3:268-269; Cooper 1987; Nooraghaei 2008, 35; Schimmel 2016, 68) (Figure 25).



**Figure 25.** Ritual-cultural symbols of pair.

1. وَ مِنْ آيَاتِهِ أَنْ خَلَقَ لَكُمْ مِنْ أَنْفُسِكُمْ أَزْوَاجًا لِتَسْكُنُوا إِلَيْهَا (الروم/21)



## 6. *Alignment of Qur'anic Applications and Ritual-cultural Symbols of Numbers*

The relationship between the symbol and the Qur'anic use of number words and their co-occurring terms reveals multiple examples of similarity and proximity of different meanings.

Among the Qur'anic uses of *wāḥid* and *wāḥidah* is the concept of insignificance, which is associated with the symbol of the creation of the primitive human being, who is an example of a person (least human).

The Qur'anic uses of *nafs* indicate a kind of connection with the upper world. *Nafs* in Arab culture is the symbol of a bird and in various religions and cultures, the bird has symbolic meanings of connection with God and the Kingdom. The Qur'anic use of good and evil forces within the human being which is associated with conscience and his inward nature has a meaningful relationship with the symbols of good will and cruelty for the bird, since the source of acquiring virtues and committing vices are the forces within man.

The Qur'anic reference to abundance for *mathnā* resembles the ritual-cultural symbols of the number two, such as polarity, division, and femininity, which indicate increase or reproduction associated with the concept of repetition and abundance in *mathnā*.

In addition to their numerical meaning, *thalāth* and *thalāthah* in the Qur'an imply completeness and perfection as well as holiness, which in these meanings correspond to the ritual-cultural symbols of number three.

The notion of abundance for *rubā'* in Qur'anic application matches the ritual-cultural symbols of the number four. In addition, the symbolic meanings of femininity, mother, and sun, which inspire the concept of fertility and thus reproduction, may also have an indirect semantic relationship to this Qur'anic usage.

The term *janāḥ* appears in the Qur'an with *khafḍ* as a means of support and with *ṭayarān* as a means of ascent and descent. The symbols of the wing in various religions and cultures denoting the means of protection and peace, ascension and exaltation, and communication with the upper world are consistent with the symbols of *janāḥ*.

The Qur'anic term *zulūmāt*, which means dark and frightening position, stands in opposition to knowledge, light, guidance, and salvation. Considering that all symbols of blackness and darkness originate from the formlessness and early darkness of the world before

creation, it is reasonable to assume a very close semantic relationship between these meanings and the Qur'anic use of *zulumāt*.

The Qur'anic uses of *sittab* are also consistent with the ritual-cultural symbols of the six in the concept of the creation of the universe.

The Qur'anic uses of *yaʾum* are compatible with ritual-cultural symbols of periods of time that inspire the concept of gradualness. In the Qur'an, this word is also associated with *al-qiyāmah*, which is in harmony with the ritual-cultural symbol of the Resurrection for *yaʾum*.

The Qur'anic uses of *samā'* and *samāwāt*, including the atmosphere, rain, celestial bodies, or the space containing them, the spiritual sky, and the collection of the heavens, all implying the concept of elevation and height, have a strong semantic relationship with the symbolic meaning of the sky, denoting height and connection with the upper world in various religions and cultures.

The Qur'anic use of *sab'* in the concept of abundance and exaggeration appears to be analogous to the ritual-cultural symbols of seven.

In parallel with its numerical meaning, *thamāniyyah* in the Qur'an carries the symbolic meanings of balance, harmony, and lawfulness, as well as increase and restart (under certain conditions), which may be viewed as analogous to the ritual-cultural symbols of eight.

The Qur'anic uses of *azwāj* confirm the meaning of pairing and connecting two objects to achieve balance, which is also consistent with the meanings derived from the symbols of *zawj* in various religions and cultures.

Consequently, in many cases, the Qur'anic application of number words and their co-occurring terms coincide with the symbols of these words in different religions and cultures, with some instances of a very strong semantic relationship between and among the aforementioned meanings.

## 7. Conclusion

As discussed above, the use of number words and their co-occurring terms in the verses of Creation appears to be compatible with the manifestations of these terms in various faiths and cultures, especially since there are certain instances that reveal an extremely close semantic connection between these connotations. The non-numerical meanings of number words in the Qur'an are not considered parables, as they were not used in the form of anecdotes. Considering that there are often

several non-numerical meanings for each number and its numbered object in the Qur'an, such a diversity of meanings is an indication that they should not be treated as metaphors and ironies, but as symbols. Thus, we can raise the possibility that the non-numerical meanings of numbers in the Qur'an represent symbols, and the alignment of these meanings with the symbolic meanings of numbers in different rituals and cultures cannot be attributed to chance. This can be a proof of the comprehensiveness and intelligibility of the Qur'anic language for all human beings, which needs to be taken into account in future research in the field of Qur'anic language.

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