

# Mayan Philosophy of Numbers

by Kenneth Johnson

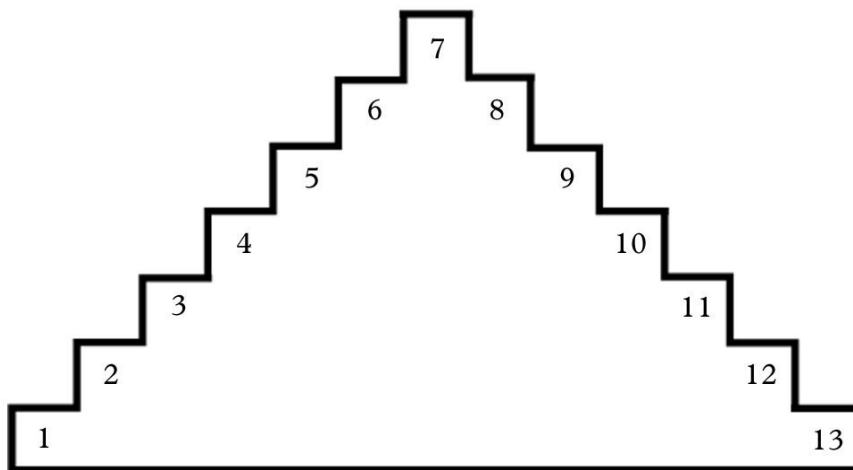
A great deal of silliness has been written regarding the 13 numbers. Essentially, one should remember that all the numbers are feminine, and may be regarded as the “wives” of the 20 day-signs (who are male). The interaction between numbers and day-signs is in the manner of a “sacred marriage,” in much the way as this concept is understood in alchemy.

There are 13 heavens in the ancient Mayan Otherworld, thus 13 is the number of Heaven.

There are 13 major joints in the human body. These are: the ankles, the knees, the hips, the wrists, the elbows, the shoulders, and the neck. Thus 13 is also a number of humanity (so is 20, for we have 20 digits altogether).

Not counting various individual markings or protrusions, there are 13 rectangles on the shell of a turtle. Thus 13 is also the number of Turtle Island, the American continent. There are also 13 rattles in a rattlesnake’s tail, and here there may perhaps be some connection with the Pleiades, which are known as the rattlesnake’s tail in Yucatan.

The *trecena* periods are essential to an understanding of the Calendar. The number cycle runs from 1 through 13, then returns to the number 1 again. Each time the number 1 recurs, it will do so on a different day-sign. The *trecenas* are the essential component of what we may call “living the Calendar.” They set the clock for the major rituals of Mayan life. The Daykeepers of Guatemala say that low numbers are “weak” and lack strength, while the middle numbers -- 6, 7, 8, and 9—represent the days of balanced energy and power. The final days, 10 through 13, are “too strong,” so powerful as to be potentially dangerous. Therefore, all major rituals are performed on the days of balanced power at the center of each *trecena* (usually 6 through 9). The cycle of the *trecena* can best be shown as a pyramid, equivalent to the pyramid of the 13 Heavens which was part of the cosmology of ancient Mexico.



## *The Pyramid of Time*

Each *trecena* cycle may be regarded as a particular quantum of energy, an energy that travels in a wave-like motion. Precisely like a wave, it begins as an underground surge, symbolized by the sun's emergence from the Underworld on the first day of the cycle. This wave of energy grows in power until it crests. Then it begins to descend, discharging its quantum of energy in a thundering crash to the shore. As the energy inherent in the wave trickles away into the sand on the night of the thirteenth day, a new wave cycle has already begun farther out at sea.

Yet it is much too simple to simply say that low numbers are weak, middle numbers balanced, and high numbers too strong. This may be true in a very general way, but the numbers all have their individual characteristics. I cannot go into the meaning of each number here, but a few remarks may be helpful.

First of all, let us remember this: Although each number has both its positive and challenging aspects, the even numbers find it easier to bring their positive qualities into manifestation. Odd numbers are regarded as more intense; it takes us a bit more work to help them manifest their positive qualities.

The number 1, not surprisingly, symbolizes beginnings, unity, the original energy of creation. Even though it is a low number, it is powerful, for it has to do with the energy of the new *trecena* which is making its arrival. Therefore Daykeepers always do ritual on a 1 day, and in some traditional communities like Momostenango, there is a special shrine dedicated to the number 1.

The number 2 is a symbol of duality. Much like Taoists, the Maya think in terms of cosmic polarities. This is embodied in their mythology: there are two Hero Twins, two principal Lords of the Underworld, as well as the two monkey twins who represent the day-sign Chuen. There is the eternal dichotomy of this world and the Underworld, day and night, darkness and light. These themes run like a common thread in all of Mayan myth, especially in their sacred book the *Popol Vuh*.

The number 4 symbolizes wholeness. This is why December 21, 2012, is a 4 day. The number 4 is associated with Ahau, the Sun God as cosmic lord (the word *ahau* literally means lord). Why is this a solar number? The word for day is the same as the word for sun; a day is a complete passage of the sun. The sun or the day has four stations: dawn, noon, sunset and midnight. These four components of each day, each "sun," can be conceptually expanded to include the solstices and equinoxes; thus the year is also a 4. There is evidence that the Classic Maya also divided the universe into four sections marked by the two intersections of the Milky Way with the ecliptic. Thus we live in a fourfold universe. The cryptographer who stars in all of Dan Brown's books would call this symbol of the fourfold universe a "quatrefoil," though to us it may look like a cross, and it is commonly found in Classic period hieroglyphs, including the one for *k'in*, meaning "day" or "sun." The Maya still lay out their ritual altars in a fourfold pattern.

The number 7 may confuse some people, for it sometimes represents death, or at least "endings." The reason for this may not be readily apparent. After all, isn't 7 the middle number? If we arrange the numbers on a pyramid, in accordance with the 13 Heavens of ancient myth, is 7 not the very apex of the pyramid?

Yes, but many Daykeepers see it from a different point of view. In order to illustrate this, we may take a look at any *tzolk'in* diagram. If it is in a standard "New Age" book, the day-sign

at the top of the list will be Imix, but if it is in a contemporary Mayan almanac, the first day-sign will be B'atz' (Chuen in Yucatec). It doesn't matter. What we are looking for is the sequence of numbers in the top row. It will be like this:

1, 8, 2, 9, 3, 10, 4, 11, 5, 12, 6, 13, 7

Any day-sign sequence beginning with 1 will end in a 7. This is why 7 is so often considered a symbol of endings. In the *Popol Vuh*, the Hero Twins are named 1 Hunahpu and 7 Hunahpu, while the most important Underworld Lords are named 1 Death and 7 Death. When 1 and 7 are paired together in such a fashion, it is as if we were saying: "The beginning and end of the Hero Twins archetype," or "The alpha and omega of the Death archetype." The totality of the archetype, with all its attendant symbolism, is always implied when the *Popol Vuh* expresses itself in terms of "1 and 7."

The number 7 also illustrates how, to the Maya, a number may have one meaning in terms of its core symbolism, and another meaning in terms of personal astrology. To be born on a 7 day is not inauspicious – it does not signify death. Instead, the meaning in this context relies upon 7's place in the middle of the sequence. Being able to see both backwards and forwards, people born on a 7 day may be indecisive, uncertain of which way to go. They can see the value in both ways. In other words, being a 7 is a bit like being a Libra in Western astrology! In much the same way, if natives of a 7 day can learn to take action, then their ability to see things from all sides – their view from the apex of the pyramid – makes them capable of amazing creativity and power.

If 1 and 7 are the beginning and the end, then  $1 + 7 = 8$ , making 8 a number of completion or wholeness, much like the number 4. This is why there is some sort of ritual for almost every 8 day, and why some extremely traditional communities like Momostenango have a special local shrine dedicated to the number 8. Of course,  $4 + 4 = 8$ , so the wholeness implied in the number 4 is doubled here, as if the wholeness of the fourfold universe were seen from the viewpoint of both polarities: night and day, light and darkness, sun and moon, yin and yang.

Though even numbers manifest their positive qualities more easily than odd ones, I have tried to stress that there are infinite variations within this general scheme. 9 is an excellent example, because even though it is an odd number, it is an extremely positive one, often used for ritual purposes. (Momostenango has community shrines for the numbers 1, 8, and 9.)

As noted in our general remarks about the wave of time, high numbers are considered "too intense." But there are exceptions even to this rule. Some shamans make special visits to local sacred mountains on certain 11 days (in some communities, this is done on Chicchan, Cimi, Manik, Ben and Ahau).

Likewise, 13 has special qualities, some of which are of great value – despite the fact that 13 is both very high and an odd number. On 13 days, the spirit world is closer. Hence a 13 day is the best day upon which to meditate, seek visions, and cultivate potential psychic gifts.

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