

## THE HIDDEN MEANING OF NUMBERS IN SUFISM AND THE POETIC WORLD OF ALISHER NAVOI

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15662143>

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### **Abstract**

Throughout the history of humanity, numbers have held deep symbolic and metaphysical significance, particularly within religious, mythological, mystical, and literary traditions. This study explores the symbolic essence of numbers in the spiritual worldview and literary creativity of classical Eastern poets, with a focus on Alisher Navoi. It highlights the cultural and philosophical importance of numbers – especially the number seven – in Islamic mysticism (Sufism), mythology, and cosmology. By examining Navoi's work "Saba'i Sayyor" ("Seven Planets") and its allegorical structure rooted in the mystical and sacred connotations of the number seven, the study reveals how numbers function not merely as mathematical entities, but as carriers of metaphysical meaning. The paper also delves into the broader Sufi symbolism of numbers such as three, four, six, eight, and nine, exploring their connections with elements of existence, levels of the cosmos, human nature, and divine order. References to the Holy Quran, early Sumerian beliefs, and Islamic cosmology further support the claim that numbers are essential to understanding the spiritual and poetic imagination of Navoi and his contemporaries. The research underlines the necessity of decoding the numerical metaphors in classical literature to uncover deeper philosophical and esoteric truths embedded within.

### **Key words**

Alisher Navoi, Sufi poetry, islamic mysticism, perfect human, seven heavens, spiritual journey, nafs (ego), divine light

Many secrets from the history of mankind still remain hidden. One of them is the essence of numbers and their significant aspects. Numbers occupy a special place in the spiritual life, mythology, religion, and philosophical views of peoples around the world.

Our classical poets usually expressed their thoughts, feelings and experiences in a symbolic and figurative way. In this regard, the experience of turning to

numbers, expressing thoughts through numbers, using numerical symbols and their essence is noticeably noticeable. In the history of literature, such views and separate religious and philosophical movements have emerged, whose representatives, believing in certain events or things, tried to look at the world through them. One of such movements is Hurufism, which promotes the sanctity of Arabic letters and believes that the secrets of the universe are hidden in the Arabic letters. Although the use of numerical symbols and the promotion of various views through numbers did not give rise to a specific movement, expressing their thoughts with the help of numerical symbols is found in the work of almost every poet. That is why we believe it is necessary to study the truths associated with numbers and try to uncover their symbolic and metaphorical secrets. In order to clarify the truths hidden behind numbers, and to correctly interpret and study them, it is necessary to pay attention to the position and essence of numbers in mythology, religion, mysticism, and cosmogony.

The connection of Alisher Navoi's worldview with the philosophy of Sufism, which is widespread and deeply rooted in the socio-cultural and literary life of the peoples of the East, including the Persian-Tajik and Turkic peoples, encourages us to take a deeper look at their inner meaning when studying the poet's gazals. It requires not only paying attention to the image - the image or the applied artistic art, but also to the symbolism, to examine not only the external content, but also the internal - inner content. Because "the poetic world is a model of real existence, but it is connected with this world in an extremely complex way.

Alisher Navoi's work "Saba'i Sayyor" is the third epic poem included in the "Khamsa" collection, and was completed in 1484. In its introduction, Navoi describes how one day he saw seven strange domes in a dream, each of which was painted in a different color, and how the travelers inside each told the poet a story. The oneirocritic, who interpreted his dream, says that now he should write a work that describes stories, that this is his destiny. A pir had hinted to him in a dream. At the end of the work, Navoi also talks about the creation of his epic poem:

*Лутф бу назм аро бағоятдур,*

*Ғараз амо етти ҳикоятдур. [1]*

*(This poem is filled with abundant grace,  
Yet its true intent consists of seven tales.)*

Why seven planets? The fact is that this number is the most famous of the magical numbers, and is especially revered in the East. In explaining the origin of the number "seven" and its connection with the planets, S. Hasanov explains that it is associated with the religious beliefs of the Sumerians, who lived south of Babylon.[3] Zoir Ziyotov, in his book "The Sumerians and the Peoples of Turan",

puts forward the idea that the Sumerians were actually the ancestors of the peoples of Central Asia.[4] In the epic poem "The Unknown", which is considered an example of the creativity of this people, seven is one of the most important images. For example, "In Sumerian epic poetry, the goddess of love Inanna passes through seven gates to the underworld, the priests in the religious temple are divided into seven ranks, and so on. At this time, the powerful culture of Babylon, with its famous seven planets - the idea of seven main gods, had not yet been formed. In Sumerian religious views, the husband and wife gods of Heaven, Earth, the moon god Sin, and the goddess of love Inanna occupied a central place.

It is also quite difficult to analyze the attitude towards numbers based on religious views without relying on the Holy Quran. Because the Holy Quran mentions 30 types of numbers, and Professor Klaus Schedl, who conducted special research on this subject using computer technologies of the 70s-80s of the XX century, noted that there is a mysterious divine connection between the words and numbers in the Holy Quran that cannot be explained, while Harun Yahya provides the following information in his book "The Miracles of Allah in the Quran":

"The Quran also has ... "mathematical miracles". Many examples can be given of this wonderful aspect of the Quran. An example of these miracles is the repetition of certain words in the Qur'an. Some words are surprisingly repeated in the same number of times"[5] The scholar gives a number of examples of the repetition of words or concepts in the Holy Quran in the same number of times, noting that the number of heavens and the creation of the heavens are used seven times, and the words "paradise" and "hell" are used seventy-seven times.

In fact, one of the reasons for the special attitude towards the number seven in the Islamic world and the most important is that the first chapter of the Holy Quran, Surah "Al-Fatihah", consists of seven verses. "We have divided the great Quran into seven parts," it is said in the Quran (18/77).

According to scholars, the fact that the Holy Quran, which is the word of Allah, consists of a total of 77,000 words, means a lot. The seven circumambulations of the Kaaba during the Hajj, the seven runs between Safa and Marwa, the seven years of Prophet Joseph's imprisonment, the terrible plague sent to the people of Aad The fact that the storm lasted seven nights and eight days proves that this number, like the seven gates of hell, has a special place in the Holy Quran. One of the proofs given in the verses about the universe and its structure is that the heavens were created in seven layers. "It is He who created for you all that is on the earth. Then He turned to the heaven and made it seven heavens. He is the All-Knower (All-Wise)" [6]. As stated in the verse of Allah, the heavens consist of seven layers. In several places in the Holy Quran, one can come across such information

about the heavens and their number. The word "heavens" found in several verses of the Quran is used in relation to the sky above the earth and the entire universe. From this meaning of this word, it can be understood that the sky or atmosphere of the Earth is created in seven layers. Indeed, it has long been confirmed in the science of astronomy that the atmosphere consists of different layers lying on top of each other. It has also been proven that the seven layers of the Earth's atmosphere differ from each other in terms of their chemical composition [7].

"Seven stars", "seven planets", "seven climates", "seven rivers", "seven natures", which are widely used in classical literature, are widely used in Sufism literature to understand the problem of the perfect human being. It is required to know the symbolic meaning and essence of dozens of phrases such as "seven spirits", "seven signs" [8].

In Sufi literature, in the expression of thoughts related to the process of creation of the universe and man, numbers are used as a metaphor to explain the philosophy of existence. True, not all numbers in the counting system are needed to express such thoughts and views. However, the expressions of the three elements of the universe, the elements of the universe, the air of the universe, the six elements of the universe, the seven elements of the universe, the eight paradises, and the nine heavens cannot be imagined without numbers. The three levels of existence are the human race, plants, and animals; the five senses are sight, hearing, taste, touch, and smell; the six directions are south, north, east, west, high, and low; the eight paradises are the paradises of Firdaws, Eden, and Ma'awa, Na'im, Khuld, Qaraq, Darus-Salam, and Darul Muqama; nine heavens - the heavens where the seven planets such as the Moon, Mercuriy, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter, and Saturn are located, as well as the sky of the constellations and the nine heavens called the four elements or elements are widely found in literary texts. Alisher Navoi considers the basis of the entire universe to be four elements, six aspects, and seven heavens:

*Тўрт унсур, етти кўк, олти жиҳот -*

*Нодуру олий асоси коинот.*

*( Four elements, seven heavens, six directions*

*- the rare and supreme basis of the universe)[9]*

Some representatives of Sufi literature, describing the process of a person's transition from the metaphysical world to the physical world, try to present this process in connection with the four elements, six aspects, and nine heavens.

The idea of the four elements was also supported by Eastern scholars, including Ibn Sina's "Canons of Medicine" which put forward the idea that there are four types of clients in a person, corresponding to the four elements [10].



“Relying on the beliefs that man is created from four elements, Sufi figures discovered several “fours” that shed light on his most important qualities and actions. For example, in accordance with the four elements, man has four souls:

1. The spiritual soul. 2. The physical soul. 3. The animal soul. 4. The human soul. Man is given four organs related to these four souls: the ear, the nose, the eye, and the mouth. The human soul. Man is given four organs related to these four souls: the ear, the nose, the eye, and the mouth. There are four representatives for these four organs: the Nafsi ammara - the soul that commands evil, the Nafsi lavwama - the soul that begins to understand its mistakes and shortcomings and criticizes itself, the Nafsi mulhama - the soul that perceives some of the beauties of spiritual life and receives some inspiration from Allah, the Nafsi mutmainna - the soul that finds peace. There are four worlds for these four souls: Shuhud, Malakut, Jabarut, Lahut. Four angels, that is, powers, were created for these four worlds: Hiss touch, smell, see, taste[11].

In terms of material structure, man was given the name "alami sugro" (small world) due to the fact that he embodies the four elements that exist in the world. Taken from the epic “Lison ut-Tayr” by Navoi:

*Сунъидин кўргилки мундоқ тўрт зид,  
Бўлуб инсон хилқатида муттаҳид  
(Look at the four opposites in this world.  
Being united in human nature)*

This verse refers to the four elements called “four opposites” - “anāsīrī arbā’a”. Four characteristics that are mutually exclusive and contradictory emerge from these four elements. “According to the philosophy of Sufism, four characteristics, four states, four inclinations and four qualities emerge from each of these four elements. 1. From soil – patience, hope (for God’s mercy), good character and kindness. 2. From water – joy, generosity, gentleness, unity. 3. From wind – lies, hypocrisy, impatience, stupidity. 4. From fire – self, arrogance, greed, envy...earth and water are the realm of Paradise, wind and fire are the things inside Hell”[12].

In Eastern literature, and in Sufi literature in general, the idea of seven hells, that is, seven hells, is quite stable. In one of his ghazals of praise, the great poet Alisher Navoi prays to the Creator, asking to destroy the seven hells:

*Элга махлас истасанг, етти тамуғни айла кул,  
Айлабон бир шуъла бу оҳи дурахшондин жудо [13]  
(If you want to be a part of the people, you must burn seven embers,  
A single ray of light is separated from this bright light.)*

**Conclusion.** The symbolic use of numbers in classical literature and religious philosophy, particularly within Sufism and the works of Alisher Navoi, represents a profound and intricate system of metaphysical expression. Numbers like seven serve not merely as decorative motifs, but as carriers of deep spiritual meaning, reflecting the structure of the cosmos, human psychology, and the path to divine truth. By examining mythological, religious, and literary contexts—from ancient Sumerian traditions to Quranic numerology and Sufi epistemology—this study underscores the universal human impulse to find meaning in numbers. In Navoi's works, especially *Saba'i Sayyor*, numerical symbolism becomes a bridge between the seen and unseen worlds, guiding the reader toward an understanding of existence that is both poetic and profoundly spiritual. Therefore, a serious engagement with the philosophy of numbers is indispensable to unlocking the layered truths embedded in the literary and mystical heritage of the East.

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