

The meaning of 3

a) Short blurb

Numbers have been part of the human world for at least 35.000 years. The earliest evidence we have for that are tally marks in bones that date back to the Old Stone Age. However, the first mathematic systems only occurred about 3.500 BC. The number of three has a multifold meaning within the numeral system. It plays an essential role in our most important sciences like philosophy, religion, mathematics, astrology, linguistic, history, politics, biology, chemistry, physics, anatomy, sports, technology, geography, anthropology, art, culture, literature, music, film, mythology or even games.

b) Longer summary

The number of three can be found in all of life's areas. If we start with human beings' perception of the world we will have to acknowledge that it is a three-dimensional world we live in. Besides, our planet can be divided into three major parts (earth, water and sky) and matter exists either in a mineral, a vegetable or an animal form. A closer look at social structures shows that the definition of a group starts with its smallest number of members: three. And the prototype of a family consists of father, mother and child. Most democracies have a threefold political system with a legislative, a judicial and an executive power. With regard to philosophy a system of trichotomy plays an important role.

Aristoteles described the number of three as the first number with a beginning, middle and an end. This is also true for stories, tales, films, plays, books and other written works. Fairy tales in detail also work with the number of three as a magical symbol as well as literature does in general. For example there are three witches in Macbeth, three musketeers in Dumas' famous novel and often the protagonists in tales have three wishes or three tests to pass.

Regarding time there are also three dimensions: the past, the present and the future. Within language the three persons in grammar (split into singular and plural) as well as the different use of these persons (me, myself and I) are threefold as well. Even many words are connected with the number of three like tribunal, trilogy, triathlon, trichotomy and others.

In mathematics the three is the first odd prime number and a triangle represents the simplest geometric form in a plane. Chemistry tells us that atoms consist of protons,

electrons and neutrons. In anatomy we learn about the three semicircular canals of a human ear. And in color theory there are three primary colors: red, blue and yellow.

When it comes to religion and mythology, the number of three is also omnipresent. The Star of David, one of the main Jewish symbols, consists of two interlaced equilateral triangles. Within the Christian faith the doctrine of Trinity (Father, Son and Holy Spirit) plays a central role. Muslims have three sacred cities (Mecca, Medina and Jerusalem) and there are three main Abrahamic religions (Christianity, Judaism and Islam). Besides, Buddhism has Three Jewels and Hinduism uses the concept of Trimurti (three forms). In some cultures the number of three is regarded as a lucky number, while others believe it to be an unlucky one. Furthermore, many sayings include the three, like “All good things come in threes” or “On the count of three”.

c) Provocative questions

1. Are numbers a part of a bigger system which holds the key to the meaning of our universe?
2. Why did numbers evolve and why do ancient Asian numbers as well as Roman numbers share a similar outlook?
3. Why has the number of three such a complex meaning throughout all fields of sciences?
4. Have numbers been invented by human beings or did they already exist before our ancestors populated the planet?
5. Are numbers relicts of a prehistoric game that supernatural powers used to play?

d) Clearly defined who / what / why / when / where entries

- **Who:** Human beings of the Old Stone Age and high cultures 3.500 BC started using numbers.
- **What:** Tally marks in bones as well as inscriptions later on.
- **Why:** Keeping track of events, counting days and later on for mathematical and other scientific explanations.
- **When:** Simple use since 35.000 years and a more complex meaning since 3.500 BC.
- **Where:** all populated countries and continents of our planet Earth.

e) Links to other artifacts:

Within numerology a couple of other numbers than three are of great importance as well. Besides, there are specific artifacts where numbers play an essential role.

- 1) The number of eight

- 2) The number of six
- 3) The Ancient Dice

f) references/credits

1. <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drei>
2. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/3_%28number%29
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6. <http://www.greatdreams.com/three/three.htm>
7. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Three_wise_monkeys
8. <http://www.vic.australis.com.au/hazz/number003.html>
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