The Numerology of Dr. Rashad Khalifa

This is the second of two related columns. The first, "Farrakhan, Cabala, Baha'i, and 19," appeared in the March/April 1997 issue.

In recent years the Muslim who worked the hardest in searching for instances of 19 in the Koran was the late Dr. Rashad Khalifa. After graduating from Ain Shams University in Cairo, where he ranked first in his class, he obtained a master's degree from the University of Arizona, and a doctorate in plant biochemistry in 1964 from the University of California, Riverside. After two years with the Egyptian government, he became a research assistant at the University of Arizona, followed by work for the Monsanto Company in St. Louis.

During 1975 and 1976 Khalifa was science advisor to the Libyan government. He was employed by the United Nations' Industrial Development Organization, in Vienna, before he became a senior chemist in Arizona's State Office of Chemistry in 1980. He published more than twenty scientific papers, a book titled *The Computer Speaks: God's Message to the World*, a 538-page new translation of the Koran, and numerous religious articles and pamphlets. His books and related publications are available from the International Community of Submitters (ICS), P.O. Box 43476, Tucson, AZ 85733.

In 1972 Dr. Khalifa privately printed a monograph titled *Number 19: A Numerical Miracle in the Koran*. He believed this booklet offered for the first time in history physical proof of God's existence. How? By showing beyond all doubt that the Koran must have been written by Allah, and that the text, unlike the Christian Bible, had been perfectly preserved. In a 1980 letter to me he said his results were "so overwhelming that they will inevitably shake the world," although Satan would do all he could to block the great revelation.

I have space for only a tiny selection of claims made by Dr. Khalifa. The Koran has $6 \times 19 = 114$ *suras* (chapters). The number of verses is $19 \times 334 = 6,346$, and the digits of that number add to 19. The Koran contains $19 \times 17,324 = 329,156$ letters. The invocation verse, called the *Basmala* ("In the name of Allah, most gracious, most merciful"), heads every sura except the ninth, but appears an extra time in the middle of Sura 27 (3×9). This invocation contains 19 Arabic letters. Its first word, *Bism*, occurs in the Koran 19 times. Its second word, *Allah*, appears $19 \times 142 = 2,698$ times. The third word, *Al-Rahman*, is repeated $19 \times 3 = 57$ times, and the fourth word, *Al-Rahmeen*, occurs $19 \times 6 = 114$ times. The sum of the verse numbers that mention Allah is $19 \times 6,217 = 118,123$. Thirty different numbers are mentioned in the Koran. These thirty numbers add

to $19 \times 8,534 = 162,146$.

Each of twenty-nine suras is prefixed by a mysterious set of either one, two, three, four, or five disconnected, seemingly meaningless letters. The significance of these letters has long been a mystery. Khalifa claimed to have decoded them, and that they, too, bristle with 19s. Dozens of other findings involving 19 derive from applications of the ancient Arabic gematria.

Dr. Khalifa's research used a computer program that counted the number of times each letter occurred in each sura of the Koran. On the traditional belief that Muhammad could neither read nor write, the embedding of 19 throughout the Koran is proof, Khalifa maintained, that the Koran was dictated by Allah.

Khalifa's writings on 19 sold widely throughout Islamic countries where they became strongly controversial, not only because his numerology tended to support the Baha'i heresy with its emphasis on 19 (see my March/April column), but also because Khalifa rejected the last two verses of Sura 9 as spurious. Why? Because in nine places they violated the secret 19-code. So much for his earlier claim that the text

Martin Gardner's latest book is The Last Recreations *(Springer-Verlag, Copernicus, 1997), a collection of twenty-three of his* Scientific American *columns from the last seven years before his retirement from the magazine in 1981.*

of the Koran had been miraculously preserved from corruption!

Attacks on Khalifa increased in Muslim nations. His writings were banned. Muslim scholars likened his numerology to Jewish and Christian *gematria*. But it was much more than that. Khalifa rejected *Hadith* (words attributed to Muhammad), *Sunnah* (practices said to have been initiated by Muhammad), and *Ijma* (the consensus of scholars about Muslim doctrines). In brief, he rejected Islamic tradition. Like his counterparts among Protestant fundamentalists with respect to the Bible, he held that the Koran was the only reliable source of Islamic beliefs. Islamic leaders were incensed by his demand that the last two verses of Sura 9 be removed. Their fury increased when Khalifa's egotism grew to the point of declaring himself the divine messenger of Allah foretold in the Koran (3:81). Death threats against him steadily mounted.

The Muslim Digest, published in South Africa, strongly attacked Khalifa as a sinister heretic. Its July/October 1986 issue disputed his word counts. The word *Allah*, it is claimed, is in the Koran 2,811 times, not 2,698 as Khalifa said. *Al-Rahman* is there 169 times, not 57 as Khalifa insisted. And so on. "Obviously," an editor wrote, "Dr. Rashad Khalifa's computer needs to brush up on its arithmetic." Earlier attacks on Khalifa are in issues July/August 1981 and March/April 1982.

In 1984 Khalifa initiated an unsuccessful lawsuit of $38 million against the National Academy of Sciences for publishing *Science and Creationism*, a booklet assuming that evolution was a Godless process. On the contrary, Khalifa argued, we know from the Koran and from laws of probability that life could not have arisen without the creative actions of Allah. Each species was independently created, with evolution operating only within a species. We can be certain that God created the first humans from mud because the Koran says so in 32:7 and 15:28.

In Tucson, Dr. Khalifa founded a *masjid* (mosque) where he served as the *imam* (minister). On January 31, 1990—note that the digits of 1990 add
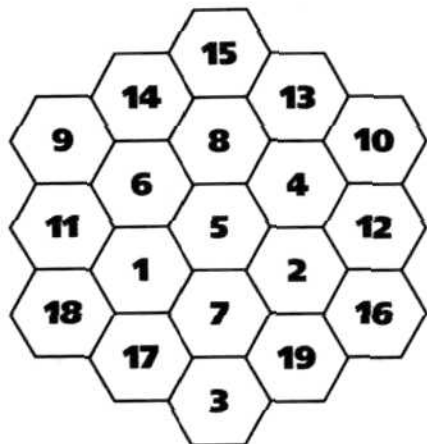

Figure 1. The only possible magic hexagon. Every straight row of cells adds to 38, or twice 19.

to 19—he was assassinated, dying in the mosque's kitchen from multiple stab wounds. He was fifty-four. The alleged assassins were Black Muslims from a fanatical sect called Fuqra. Four members of the sect were arrested in 1993 at their compound near Buena Vista, Colorado, and later charged with murder. One man, John Williams, was convicted. The others jumped bail and vanished. The sect had earlier been implicated in the firebombing of Hare Krishna temples in Denver and Pennsylvania, and a 1983 bombing of a hotel in Portland, Oregon, owned by followers of the East Indian guru Bhagwan Shree Rajneesh.

What is one to make of Khalifa's numerology? It is, of course, no surprise that many 19s would show up in a book as long as the Koran, but Khalifa's 19s exceed the bounds of chance. The most plausible explanation is that he deceived himself by unconscious fudging. The best account known to me of how easily he could do this is in *Running Like Zebras*, a 1995 book edited by Edip Yuksel, the nation's top Khalifite.

The book contains 19 × 6 = 114 pages (coincidence?) that reprint a debate on the Internet between Yuksel and Daniel (Abdulrahman) Lomax, a Muslim skeptical of Khalifa's findings. He accuses the chemist of careless computer searching, of rejecting two verses of the Koran as spurious because they don't fit his calculations, and of not revealing that versions of the Koran differ in their number of words and letters,

and in how they divide suras into verses. Above all, he accuses Khalifa of failing to make clear what he considers a "word."

Many Arabic words have multiple forms, and Khalifa is inconsistent in his counting rules. Sometimes he includes plural forms, sometimes not. Should a word with an affixed pronoun be called one word or two? In English the meaning of *word* is fairly clear because of spaces between words, but in Arabic there are no spaces. Even in English there is vagueness. Lomax's example is *truck*. In counting *truck* in a book should you include *trucks*, *trucked*, and *trucking*? One looks in vain for Khalifa's definition of *word*.

Lomax likens the doctor to those astronomers who once fancied they could see canals on Mars. He concludes: "Dr. Khalifa's claims, at best, fall into the category of pious fraud. . . . Had God intended the Qur'an to carry a code verifying its perfect preservation, he could have done it much more effectively and simply than the complex, arbitrary, and inconclusive 'code' claimed by Dr. Khalifa."

Yuksel, of course, believes he has completely demolished all of Lomax's objections. His curious book is available from his Monotheist Productions, P.O. Box 43476, Tucson, AZ 85733.

Now for some 19 number juggling, supplied in part by correspondent Monte Zerger. Nineteen is, of course, a prime. It is equal to $10^2 - 9^2$; to $1^2 + 3^2 + 3^2$; and to $3^3 - 2^3$. The number 1,729, or 19 × 91, was involved in a famous incident between the British mathematician G. H. Hardy and his friend Ramanujan, the Indian number-theory genius. Having taken a taxi to visit Ramanujan in a hospital, Hardy remarked that the taxicab number, 1,729, was a dull number. Ramanujan immediately replied, "No, it is an interesting number. It is the smallest number expressible as the sum of two cubes in two different ways [$12^3 + 1^3$ and $10^3 + 9^3$]." Note that the digits of 1,729 add to 19.

In 1989 (a multiple of 9) it was proved

that every integer is the sum of no more than 19 fourth powers. The smallest number requiring 19 such powers is 79, the sum of four fourth powers of 2 and fifteen fourth powers of 1. The repeating decimal of 1/19 is the $2 \times 9 = 18$-digit number 052631578947368421. Multiply it by any number from 2 through 18 and the product has the same 18 digits in the same cyclic order. Multiplying by 19 produces a row of $2 \times 9 = 18$ nines.

The Constitutional Amendment giving women the vote was the 19th. The 19th hole in golf is the bar where golfers sink drinks like they sink puts in 18 holes. Every 19 years all phases of the moon fall on the same days of the week throughout the year. The Psalms is the Bible's 19th book. Psalm 19 opens with "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork."

The numbers most often encountered in the Bible are 12 and 7. They are reflected in our calendar, with its seven days to a week and twelve months to a year. The sum of the two numbers is 19.

Figure 1 on page 17 reproduces a thing of strange beauty. The nineteen cells hold integers 1 through 19. Every straight row of cells adds to 38, or twice 19. It would make a wondrous amulet for the Baha'is.   □