

## An alleged ‘miracle’ in the Holy Quran

*Baseless argument presented to prove that Quran is a revelation*

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There is an article posted on various Muslim websites and Internet discussion forums arguing that the number of times certain words occur in the Holy Quran, for example ‘man’ and ‘woman’, or ‘month’, ‘day’, etc., has, in each case, a special significance and is a miracle showing that the Quran was revealed by God. The following are the webpages on some of the Islamic websites where this article is published:

[www.islamawareness.net/Miq/stat.html](http://www.islamawareness.net/Miq/stat.html)

[www.answering-christianity.com/equality\\_men\\_women.htm](http://www.answering-christianity.com/equality_men_women.htm)

[www.islamicway.net/firms.com/interesting\\_islamic\\_facts.htm](http://www.islamicway.net/firms.com/interesting_islamic_facts.htm)

The first example mentioned is that the word for ‘man’ (*rajul*) and the word for ‘woman’ (*amra*’ or *mar’a*) both occur in the Quran exactly 24 times each. The article claims this shows that man and woman are equal. However, at least two Islamic websites inform us that ‘man’ and ‘woman’ occur 23 times and they call this a miracle because they say that this is also the number of “the chromosomes from the egg and sperm in the formation of the human embryo. The total number of human chromosomes is 46; 23 each from the mother and father”. Please refer to these two webpages:

[www.miraclesofthequran.com/mathematical\\_01.html](http://www.miraclesofthequran.com/mathematical_01.html)

[www.muhammedhasenoglu.com/miracles\\_quran.htm](http://www.muhammedhasenoglu.com/miracles_quran.htm)

So, whether these words occur 24 times or 23 times, it is called a miracle in each case!

The whole argument is baseless in the first place. The number of times the words ‘man’ and ‘woman’ occur has absolutely no relevance to the teachings about men and women. Imagine that a book contains a sentence saying: “A man is vastly superior to a woman. A man has all rights, a woman has no rights at all.” The words ‘man’ and ‘woman’ both occur in this sentence the same number of times, but does that mean this sentence is saying that men and women are equal?

Coming to the counting, if you only count *rajul* (a man) and *imra’a* (a woman) then as far as I can see these do occur 24 times each, as

stated by these people. I admit that I wasted time in tracing these occurrences and these are as follows. *Rajul* occurs in the following verses: 2:282; 4:12; 6:9; 7:63; 7:69; 7:155; 10:2; 11:78; 17:47; 18:37; 23:25; 23:38; 25:8; 28:20; 33:4; 34:7; 34:43; 36:20; 39:29 (3 times); 40:28 (twice); and 43:31. *Imra'a* occurs in the following verses: 3:35; 3:40; 4:12; 4:128; 7:83; 11:71; 11:81; 12:21; 12:30; 12:51; 15:60; 19:5; 19:8; 27:23; 27:57; 28:9; 29:32; 29:33; 33:50; 51:29; 66:10 (twice); 66:11; and 111:4.

Certainly they do occur 24 times each *in this form* but these words occur *in other forms as well*. Also, there are other words in the Quran for 'man' and 'woman' apart from these two. The word *imra'a* has a masculine form *mar'*, and although it usually means human being (for example in 8:24 "Allah comes in between a man and his heart"), there are cases where *mar'* means specifically a male. These are:

1. "between a man and his wife", 2:102.
2. "If a man dies who has no son", 4:176.
3. "your father was not a wicked man", 19:28.
4. "The day when a man flees from his brother", 80:34.

So why is this word not counted as an occurrence of 'man'? It is most strange that they count the word *imra'a* for 'woman' and yet they do not count its masculine form (*mar'*) for 'man', when this form, on four occasions, can only mean a male human being.

Plurals are also not counted by them. Hence the words *rijāl* (men) and *nisā'* (women), occurring so frequently, are not included despite their usage in fundamental verses like 4:1 about men and women. The words *rajul* and *imra'a* also occur in dual forms *rajulān* (2:282, 5:23, 16:76, 18:32, 28:15) and *imra'atān* (2:282, 28:23) meaning 'two men' or 'two women'. They do not count these dual forms. But, interestingly, if they did include them then the question would arise whether each of these is to be counted as *one* occurrence or as *two* occurrences because the word means 'two', men or women!

Our readers will be surprised to know that one of the occurrences of *rajul* which they have counted is in the following text:

"And Moses chose out of his people *seventy men* for Our appointment." — 7:155.

Now you will ask why have they counted this because it reads ‘men’ and not ‘man’? It is because, due to Arabic grammar, the text says literally “seventy man (*rajul*)”. So they count it as an occurrence of ‘man’! It is most bizarre that where the Quran says ‘two men’, they don’t count it as an occurrence of ‘man’, but where the Quran says “seventy men” they count it as an occurrence. Again the question may be asked, how is one to decide whether to count this as *one* or as *seventy*?

A further point is that there are other words for ‘man’ and ‘woman’ in the Quran, for example the well-known *zakar* and *unth*. See 3:195, 92:3, and 4:11. Using these terms it is stated in 49:13: “We have created you from a male and a female”, from a man and a woman. Yet according to their way of counting ‘man’ and ‘woman’ in this very important and fundamental verse are *not* to be counted!

### Word ‘month’ occurring 12 times

Another example of a “miraculous” number of occurrences is claimed to be that the word for ‘month’, *shahr*, occurs 12 times in the Quran, and there are 12 months in the year. In a similar vein it is claimed that the word for ‘prayers’ (the plural word *ṣalawāt*) occurs 5 times because there are 5 daily prayers in Islam. This line of argument would suggest that as Islam teaches that there is only **one** God, and this is its most basic teaching, so the word *Allah* should occur in the Quran *only once*! And how many times should the word for ‘fasting’ occur? Thirty times for the thirty fasts, or once for one month of fasting? It actually occurs more than once but far less than thirty times.

These twelve occurrences of *shahr*, ‘month’, are in the following verses as far as I can trace them: 2:185 (twice), 34:11 (twice), 2:194 (twice), 97:3, 2:217, 9:36, 46:15, 5:2 and 5:97.

Again, they do not count the occurrences of the dual *sharain* (‘two months’, 4:92, 58:4) or the plurals *ashhar* and *shuhūr*. As with ‘man’ above, we have the bizarre situation that they *count* as one occurrence the ‘month’ in the following verses:

“...and the weaning of him is **thirty months**” — 46:15

“*Lailat-ul-Qadr* is better than a **thousand months**” — 97:3

because the word *months* occurs in the singular, but they do not count it in verses that have the words “four months” or “three months”

(2:226, 2:234, 9:2, 65:4) as the word happens to be in the plural. The most blatant example of this is the following verse:

“Surely the number of months with Allah is twelve months...”  
— 9:36

Just guess how many times the word ‘month’ they consider to occur in this text! The answer is *one occurrence* because in the construction “twelve months” the word ‘month’ is in the singular. The first ‘months’ here does not count as it is the plural *shuhūr*.

It could be asked: Instead of counting the number of times the word ‘month’ occurs, why not add up the total length of time represented by those months? First of all we have the 1000 months in 97:3, then the 30 months of 46:15, and so on. Does that total number have any significance?

### **Word ‘day’ occurring 365 times**

Before becoming ecstatic and jumping with joy that the word for ‘day’ (*yaum*) occurs 365 times in the Quran, the enthusiasts of this theory should have considered that Islam uses the lunar calendar of 356 days. Again the same considerations apply to ‘day’ as to ‘month’, since it also occurs in the dual (*yaumain*) and the plural (*ayyam*) which are not counted. If each occurrence of ‘day’ counts as one day towards the total of 365, then shouldn’t the dual ‘two days’ be counted as two days, rather than *not counted at all*.

Furthermore, the Quran talks about “a day (*yaum*) the measure of which is a thousand years as you count” (32:5) as well as “a day (*yaum*) the measure of which is fifty thousand years” (70:4). According to the upholders of this theory, the day of a thousand years and the day of fifty thousand years each count as just one day in their total of 365 days!

### **Word ‘prayer’ or ‘prayers’**

The crass ignorance of the promoters of this theory is shown by the fact that in some versions of this article we are astounded to read that the word *ṣalāt* (prayer) occurs in the Quran 5 times, and of course this is the number of prayers ordained for Muslims daily. Any reader of the Quran will immediately realize that the word *ṣalāt* occurs so frequently in the Quran that it is vastly more numerous than five. It seems to me that the original versions of this article did not mention *ṣalāt* but its

plural *ṣalawāt* as occurring five times, and some people copying the original versions have misread or misunderstood *ṣalawāt* as *ṣalāt*. But even if we consider the occurrences of *ṣalawāt*, we find that it does not always mean the five daily prayers. In 2:157 occur the following words:

“...on whom are blessings (*ṣalawāt*) and mercy from their Lord”.

Look in any English translation of the Quran (Pickthall, Yusuf Ali, and the recent one by Abdel Haleem) and you will find the word *ṣalawāt* in this verses translated as “blessing”.

In its occurrence in verse 22:40 this word refers to **Jewish synagogues!** Just read its translation:

“...cloisters, and churches, and synagogues (*ṣalawāt*), and mosques in which Allah’s name is much remembered...”

This proves the whole argument to be entirely nonsensical and shows that its proponents have not bothered to check the meaning with which this word is used in the Quran.

Another occurrence of *ṣalawāt* is in the verse “And those who keep a guard on their prayers” (23:9). However, in two other places the same expression is employed but using the singular word *ṣalāt*: “And those who keep a guard on their prayer” (70:34 and 6:92), the meaning being exactly the same as in 23:9. The two words are synonymous in this case, but this counting theory counts only the occurrence in 23:9.

In fact, on the very numerous occasions that the Quran uses the singular *ṣalāt* (‘prayer’) it most often means the five daily prayers and not one prayer. This is exactly the case in the frequently-occurring expressing “keep up prayer” (see for instance 2:3; 2:177; 4:162; 5:55; 6:72; 8:3; 9:11; etc.). The word *ṣalāt* here means not one prayer but the institution of prayer, consisting of the obligatory five daily prayers. But these occurrences are *not* counted by the originators of this theory.

I think I have now wasted enough space and time to demonstrate the absurdity of these claims that there is some special significance underlying the number of times these words occur in the Quran. In the first place, there is no rule or principle for determining which word or concept must always occur a special number of times. Secondly, the criteria for selecting which occurrences of a word should be counted

are highly subjective, dubious and always open to challenge. Most importantly, we gain no increased knowledge about, or insight into, any teaching of Islam from knowing the number of occurrences.