

Keeping It Simple: Prayer Beads as Meditation

An Ancient Practice

To use beads with a prayer is to en flesh the words, make thought tangible

The use of beads is widespread - Christianity (*rosary*), Hinduism and Buddhism (*japamala*), and Muslim (*tashih*) - and can't be traced to any one particular religion. A practice based on beads is one of the oldest tools in humanity's quest for connection and meaning. Versions and variations abound, so developing a new practice is merely a continuation of an age-old process of evolutions and adaptation.

Modern Day Application

We don't have a theology; we don't have an ideology. We dance.

By looking at the form of the practice, rather than its content – at the *how* of it rather than the *why* or *to whom* – can point the way to a practice that is free from specific metaphors and images, not tied to any particular religious world view, and not demanding an adherence to any one set of religious symbols and expressions. The invitation is to define the divine for yourself through your own experiences rather, rather than seeking experiences that match someone else's definition.

You can't find out what “wet” feels like unless you get into the water

Because the idea of praying to something or someone is so ingrained in most of us, we often get hung up here if we're not entirely clear or prepared to address this. By focusing on the structure of prayer beads, it allows the relationship to find you, gradually revealing itself to us with each conversation. The invitation is to “simply do it and see what happens”

This is not a one-time event

The beads are strung in a circle to remind us that this is not a linear journey nor a one-time event; we end where we began, and then we begin again. The invitation is to engage it again and again, knowing that we will never be “there”, but using this practice as means to facilitate this journey into the innermost depths of one's own life, into the depths of Life itself.

Centering (1 large bead)

Do you have the patience to wait until the mud settles and the water clears on its own? This large bead is for centering yourself in preparation for the journey – it's like standing on a threshold of a temple or a serene woodland glade. Pause at this bead to breathe, notice your body, soften your gaze or just sit in silence until you feel ready to cross the threshold.

Entering In (4 Smaller beads)

The warm-up period or a time of stretching before taking a long run

These four beads are designed to limber you up and work out the “cramps” (caused by moving to quickly into prayer you’ve spent the bulk of your day maximizing our control over external situations). With each bead, you might recite one or four different mantras or phrases that serve to warm you up and clarify your intentions.

4 “Phases” of Prayer (4 medium beads)

Naming

The first of the medium beads is for “Naming the Holy”. This is your chance to give voice to what you consider to be divine. If you prefer not to imagine the Divine as personal, you might just connect with a feeling or use it to reflect on and name that which gives you the most joy and gives your life meaning and purpose. Simply put, this is your time to name whatever feeds your soul.

Knowing

The second medium bead is for knowing yourself. With this bead, you have the opportunity to reflect on your life as it is today, to acknowledge those places that call for recognition or reconciliation. It asks you to know yourself in all your subtle-shadings. If you feel you have a tendency to be overly critical of yourself, you might use this opportunity to balance out the equation with some recognition or gratitude for yourself and how you are in this world.

Listening

The third stop along the journey invites you to sit back and just listen; it is a place for revelation, not discourse. This is a place for you to be still and listen for the Divine “spark” and the inner wisdom that is inherent in us all.

Loving

This final bead allows us to follow prayer’s natural movement toward and ever widening concern for the wider world. It invites us to life up those we know and those we don’t and hold them in our consciousness, bringing them into your awareness.

Returning (4 small beads)

These are the four small beads that lead back to the centering bead and are a way of returning to the world. As they are a mirror of the entering beads, repeat the same prayers you used to enter, knowing that as you re-enter the world you are not the same as when you left.

Breath Prayers (5 small beads between each phase – 15 total)

These five small beads between each phase of prayer provide a link between the stages of the journey. With each of these beads, you might use a “breath prayer”, a two-line phrase that is said in rhythm with the in and out-breaths.