

More Information on Mala Beads

A Guide to Malas Mala beads can be stunning pieces of jewelry, usually in the form of necklaces and bracelets, but their meaning and usage has developed and adapted over time. More recently they have become almost a fashion accessory, with many people wearing them who do not follow the Buddhist faith. The Mala have a spiritual use, in meditation and in prayer and every part of the design of Mala beads has a reason - which we will get into later. The origins of Malas Mala actually originated in India and were used to keep track of the days and to keep accounts. This was a simple way of recording without writing things down, instead seeds were used. These seeds were most often Rudraksha seeds (which are still prevalent in "modern" Mala beads) and were either laid out in rows or strung up. Buddhism and Mala beads are used in prayer and meditation, similar to a rosary, but with mantras for each bead, rather than a prayer. The Mala are meant to help you to remain focused, they do this by being a tactile reminder of what you are meant to be doing - meditating. Buddhists do not always wear their beads, some actually prefer to keep them to themselves and use them only for meditation and prayer. Some Buddhists actually prefer to wear their Mala and see other people wearing them as a good thing, as it all draws more attention to Buddhism and helps people to remain aware. What are Mala beads made out of? If you have seen Mala beads before you will probably have noticed there are necklaces and bracelets. They are made predominantly from Rudraksha seeds or carved from sandalwood, however they can be made from gemstone beads too. Traditional Buddhists will most often use seeds or sandalwood Mala - crystals have been used more recently as people want to combine crystal healing properties with their meditation and intention setting. Mala necklaces these are often worn by Buddhists, or sometimes just carried as a personal symbol of their faith and are used as a form of prayer bead. Mala necklaces have 108 beads, a guru bead and a tassel; these are traditional known as Japa Mala. So what do the beads mean? 108 beads The main row of 108 beads are used when chanting or doing breathwork, they help you to keep track of your mantra/meditation process. When using Mala beads, each one will pass through your fingers as you chant aloud or in your mind. There are multiple opinions as to why there are 108 beads on the Mala necklace: 108 is an auspicious number. There are 108 energy lines leading to the heart chakra There are said to be 108 stages to the human journey 108 inhales and exhales each day will help lead to enlightenment. In the Sanskrit alphabet there are 54 female and 54 male characters. The beads represent 108 vexations - when you recite the name of a Buddha, you can eliminate one vexation or cast off a worry, so one cycle will rid you of all vexations Guru bead (above tassel) This bead signifies finishing a complete practice. Once you reach this bead, you can stop chanting or go again. If you are using the Mala bracelet alongside your meditation practice, you will repeat your chanting 18 times; one cycle for each bead. Tassel the tassel symbolizes eternity and is usually pointed towards you when you begin meditating with the Mala necklace. Alternatively, the tassel can symbolize a lotus blossom, which is a symbol of enlightenment. Mala bracelets often known as Arhat beads, these bracelets are usually made up of 18 beads and can be used in place of the necklace or alongside. As mentioned above, the 18 beads help you to keep track of 18 cycles of chanting (prayer) with the Mala bead necklace. Modern mala bracelets can be found made from many different crystal beads and wearing more than one bracelet can help to enhance your intentions. You can use the healing properties of crystals which match your intentions during meditation/prayer to help you to focus more and achieve enlightenment. How to use Mala beads start by holding the beads in your hand with the tassel facing you and the first bead next to the guru bead between your finger and thumb. Next run each bead through your fingers with your thumb (speaking or thinking your mantra), but do not use your index finger as this represents ego. When you get to the guru bead after a full cycle, take time to pause and reflect or continue your practice if you would like to do so. TIP: Traditionally you do not skip over the guru bead, so you flip the beads to go back the way you came before repeating another cycle. [This video shows how to flip the mala in your hand] Caring for your Mala it is best to wash your Mala occasionally to get rid of dust, dirt and grime that can build up on them over time and extended use. If you have a seed Mala, you may have to take extra care and use a cotton swab to get into all the nooks and crannies. Crystal bead Malas will need to be cleaned in accordance to the crystal's properties, some will be fine under running water, whereas others may not be suited to that method. You can use sage to cleanse your beads or Tingsha cymbals. Over time, the seeds of your Mala may get darker as they begin absorbing your natural oils and your energies. This is said to make the Mala stronger which is great if you have set an intention that might need a lot of hard work. If your mala does happen to break, it is a sign that your intention is no longer a one that you need in your life and it could be time to set yourself a new one.