

Mala means “garland” in Sanskrit. Archaeological findings indicate the use of Mala in the Indus Valley and Himalayan regions at least 3,000 years ago. The purpose of the Mala is rooted in Hinduism and Buddhism. In those cultures, Mala were sacred objects used for meditation and other spiritual practices.

Mala can be made of various natural materials, from seeds to gems — traditional materials are rudraksha seeds, sandalwood and holy basil. Overhand Knotting is the traditional technique of stringing the beads.

The Tassel holds significance and multiple meanings— the strings come together as one to form the tassel, represents connection to the divine and to each other in studentship. It unites into the Guru Bead.

The Guru Bead symbolizes the Guru from whom the student has received a mantra being used or recited, and pay homage to the student-teacher relationship.

Mala is comprised of 108 beads plus one “guru bead,” which is larger than the rest. The Guru bead is both the origin and terminus of the Mala. As a starting point, the Guru bead carries or holds the intention for the dedication of the Mala meditation. As a completion point, it signifies the energetic cycle or the manifestation of the intention with the meditation. Functionally, it is a place marker for the fingers to feel for the end or the beginning of the garland.

The number 108 is recognized as a sacred integer in Buddhist and Hindu philosophies.

Some examples of the significance of 108:

- Language: The Sanskrit alphabet has 54 letters, or characters, each with a masculine and feminine energy:  $54 \times 2 = 108$
- Time: in the traditions of Hindu origin, humans have 108 feelings— 36 relating to the past, 36 relating to the present, and 36 relating to the future.
- Astrology: There are 12 constellations and 9 arc segments. There are 12 houses and 9 planets.  $12 \times 9 = 108$ . The 9 planets traveling through the 12 astrological signs constitute the whole of existence.  $9 \times 12 = 108$ .
- Science: The earth’s planetary cycle is thought to be 2160 years =  $20 \times 108$ . By scientific measure, the distance between the Earth and Sun is 108 times the diameter of the Sun. By scientific measure, the diameter of the Sun is exactly 108 times the diameter of the Earth. By scientific measure, the distance between the Earth and Moon is 108 times the diameter of the Moon.
- Archaeology & sociology: the pre-historic monument Stonehenge is 108 feet in diameter.
- 108 is a Harshad Number, an integer divisible by the sum of its digits. Harshad in Sanskrit means “joy-giver.”

108 refers to a spiritual culmination, completion of spiritual practice, fulfillment of a sacred process. Following that belief, a Mala represents a sacred path, comprised of 108 “steps”. In completing a Mala meditation, fruition is generated from “walking” the path of the Mala.

A simple, accessible way to experience the Mala is in linking with breath awareness. Follow the beads to coordinate breath with movement around the Mala.



