



MANTRA  
MALA  
MANUAL

HOW TO USE YOUR TIBETAN PRAYER BEADS

*This e-book is  
dedicated to all sentient beings.  
May all find the path that leads to enlightenment.*

OM AH HUM



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*How to use Your  
Tibetan Prayer  
Beads*

*by Bruce Conway*

# MANTRA MALA MANUAL

*How to use your Tibetan Prayer Beads - A working method of Enlightenment*

The Hindu and Tibetan Buddhist malas are beaded rosaries or strings of prayer beads used during chanting or meditation. They are employed to focus one's awareness and concentration during spiritual practice. The word mala means "garland" or rosary in Sanskrit. Prayer beads have been used by practitioners from many disciplines for thousands of years. Buddha himself recommended the mantra mala practice as a path to enlightenment for ordinary people.

Although malas have been used in this way for thousands of years, it is only recently that they have become popular as fashion accessories. Tibetan jewelry, clothing and beliefs are presently in vogue worldwide. Many people have adopted these trappings as fashion statements, yet few realize the symbolic significance or esoteric origins of their trappings.

## CONSTRUCTION

Malas are usually made from sandalwood, bodhi seeds or semiprecious stone beads such as quartz, jade or amber. Like most tools made for spiritual practices, the finest materials and the craftsmanship are employed.

Though the number of beads varies from mala to mala, the most common ones are the 108 bead full mala and the 27 bead wrist mala ( $4 \times 27 = 108$ ). In addition, the malas always have a larger, more decorative meru (guru bead) and a spacer bead. There can also be one, two or four equally spaced divider beads. Additional silver or gold counters are attached to keep track of the hundreds and thousands of bhums (repetitions of 108).



*one full mala (108x) and two wrist malas*

A burgundy or maroon cord threads the beads together and also symbolizes the unbroken lineage teachings and bloodline of the Buddha.

Dacron fishing line wears well, but many are now stringing their bead malas with clear elastic cord. The mala is often finished with an ornamental, “endless” knot at the end of the guru bead (such as is on the cover of this booklet) and finished off with a maroon or gold tassel.

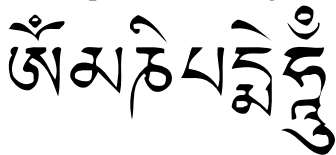
## USING YOUR MALA

Malas, rosaries and power beads are employed to count mantra recitations and to focus one's concentration during practice. Counting mantra mala occupies the hand (body), reciting mantra occupies the voice (speech) and visualization of the deity occupies the mind. By focusing these three aspects of ourselves onto the practice at once, the benefits are multiplied and the merit accumulates.

To use your mala, hold it in your left (receiving) hand, with the beads between your index finger and thumb. Hold the mala gently and with respect. Start counting with the first bead after the “guru” bead. Count a bead for each completed recitation.

Holding the beads and counting each one in turn as you recite a mantra, a vow or an affirmation helps keep the mind focused. One is less likely to become distracted by stray thoughts when counting mala.

When you complete either 108 or 27 recitations, do not pass over the “guru” bead. This is considered a symbolic no-no, as if we are stepping over our teacher. Instead, flip the mala around 180 degrees, and keep going the same direction. This takes practice to accomplish smoothly. Some practices require 100,000 mantra recitations to be completed.



*“Om Mani Padme Hum”  
in the Tibetan alphabet*

## THE SPOKEN MANTRAS

Mantras are sacred sounds chanted or spoken. They contain the essence of vast spiritual teachings condensed into concise syllables and phrases. Most of the Tibetan Buddhist mantras originated with the yogis, saints and bodhisattvas of India.

In Buddhism, the gift of the mantra mala was given to us by the historical Buddha over 2500 years ago. He said, "If you want to eliminate earthly desires and to put an end to suffering, make a circular string of 108 beads from the seeds of the bodhi tree." He then bestowed a short mantra of the Three Jewels (Buddha, Dharma and Sangha) and instructed those present in its use.

Although there are countless sacred mantras, the Mani Mantra is the most popular Tibetan Buddhist mantra. It is available freely for anyone's use, having been given to us by the great deity Chenrezi himself. Chenrezi (Avalokiteshvara in Sanskrit) is the Bodhisattva of compassion and is presently embodied by His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama of Tibet. This mantra is known to purify one's negative emotions, ease suffering for all beings and protect us from negative influences and illnesses. Best of all, the Mani Mantra increases compassion for ourselves and for others.

Some mantras can be freely given or shared. Other mantras should only be learned from a trained teacher or lama and always with the accompanying transmission, empowerment and teachings. These mantras are powerful and should be

kept confidential and practiced in private.

## THE TEACHER

A close relationship with the teacher or Lama builds a strong foundation for one's training and path. One should not attempt to learn secret mantras or practices without a teacher's blessings, empowerments and instructions. Their wisdom, experience, insight and protection are essential to one's own successes. We should consider the teacher to be the actual representative of Buddha and deserving of the same manner of respect as Buddha himself would receive. Although teachers are human and can be fallible, the teachings themselves are of divine origin and are flawless. The teacher is therefore revered for bringing and transmitting the holy teachings. Respect is always shown to a teacher.

## THE TEACHINGS

Many precious teachings have been transmitted from teacher to student in unbroken chains for thousands of years. Strict methods of transmission preserve these mind treasures and the integrity of the teachings. This systems has worked well and has been refined for thousands of years.

## PRELIMINARIES TO PRACTICE

Prior to beginning the recitation of a mantra, the practitioner should consider



his or her inner motivations, the reasons for wanting to do the practice. Compassionate and altruistic motivations are best. A core Buddhist goal is to be concerned for the welfare and happiness of others. If we do this practice to ease the suffering of all beings, the merit is multiplied and negativities becomes transmuted.

It is best to view all people as fondly as we would our own loved ones. When we bind these kind feelings with a promise to always work for the benefit of all beings, this is called the Bodhisattva Vow.

## PRACTICING THE MANI MANTRA

Begin by clearing your mind of stray thoughts. Breathe deeply. Center yourself and feel the grounding pull of the earth. Begin the practice when you feel well connected and grounded.

The Mani Mantra is the Sanskrit mantra of Avolokiteshvara, the Bodhisattva of compassion, known as Chenrezi in the Tibetan language. This mantra is practiced daily by Tibetan Buddhists. Often, a practitioner counts mala with the left hand, spins a mani prayer wheel with the right hand, chants with the voice and walks or circumambulates holy shrines, all at the same time!

The belief is that by reciting the Mani Mantra constantly, one occupies the mind with positive intention and action. This transmutes or burns off negative feelings and karma and can lead to a happier life and a better rebirth.

The Mantra is as follows:  
**OM MANI PADME HUM**

It sounds like this: “*ohm man-ee pad-mae hoom*”  
and translates literally into: “*Hail to the jewel in the lotus.*”

The jewel represents the goal, the attainment of full enlightenment. Delightful to the senses, the lotus metaphorically symbolizes the sensory bliss and the process of enlightenment. Starting from a small seed or inspiration it grows with proper cultivation and care, finally blooming into a radiant flower. The lotus grows out of the muck, yet remains unstained and pure.

It is best to say at least one whole Mala (108x), or “buhm” of your mantra. It is typical to recite ten full buhms (10 x 108) or more of the Mani Mantra per session.

As you recite the mantra, visualize Chenrezi, the deity of compassion in front of you (in your mind’s eye) just like in the picture. He is translucent and filled with light. Imagine Chenrezi’s boundless compassion radiating from his heart, overflowing with unconditional love. His light shines out to all beings.

The mantra OM MANI PADME HUM encircles his heart like a spinning flame. Compassionate rays of rainbow light radiate out from his blazing heart, transmuting the suffering of beings everywhere and then return with the blessings of all of the Buddhas and Bodhisattvas of the ten directions.

When chanting the Mani Mantra and visualizing Chenrezi, remember to engage your heart in the process. Practice without feeling is only an intellectual exercise and does little benefit. Heart energy energizes and drives the practice.

When finished, dissolve the visualization of smiling Chenrezi into a nimbus of laser-like light. These rainbow rays blend with your energy and the energy bodies of all other beings as a blessing from Chenrezi.

Sit quietly for a few minutes in the bliss of the mandala of Chenrezi.

## CLOSING THE MEDITATION

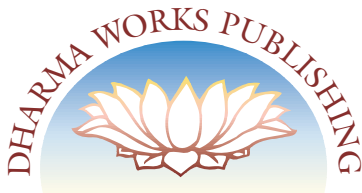
Tibetan Buddhists usually say closing, dedication and long life prayers after each practice. If you don't know any yet, just be grateful and respectful of the source and teachers of the practice; then dedicate the merit you have generated to



The Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara (Four-Armed Chenrezi)  
*image by Bob Jacobson • 1996*

all sentient beings. It is traditional to dedicate the merit generated by practice or by karma yoga (enlightened labor) to benefit all beings. In this way they will also benefit from the practice and may eventually find their own feet on the path that leads to complete enlightenment.

*If you desire to learn more about Tibetan Buddhist practices and traditions, there is a list of introductory texts published by Dharma Works on the following page. May our endeavors help you on your path.*



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