



Prayer Beads - A New Approach

Across the ages there has clearly been some mystical power imbued in the soothing sensation of running one's fingers over a string of small beads. The derivation of the word "bead" comes from the Anglo-Saxon "bede" which translates to "prayer."

A Short History of Prayer Beads

The earliest known use of prayer beads was by the Hindus and Buddhists who use strings of 108 beads called "Japa Mala" to count the repetition of a sacred word (mantra). In the Muslim tradition strands of 99 beads called "tasbeih" are used to represent the 99 names and virtues of Allah. In the Christian faith the use of prayer beads began between the 3rd and 4th centuries with the Desert Fathers, originally as pouches of small stones or knotted cord used to count their prayers. During the Middle Ages these pebbles and knots evolved into sets of 150 strung beads used to mark each of the Psalms to be recited during the week. Tradition has it that in 1208 the Virgin Mary

appeared to St. Dominic and presented him with the Rosary, and it is believed that is how the beloved Catholic devotion originated. And this is just a small sampling of the ways in which people of all faiths engage in tactile, kinesthetic prayer.

And today I'm going to present still another way.

Here's How it Started

In my personal prayer life I sometimes became overwhelmed with the number of people, causes, and concerns I wanted to pray for. Friends would ask me to pray for the hurting people in their lives, and of course I'd vow to do so, lifting up the small personal concerns, as well as the big ones. Then, moving out in ever widening circles, were the concerns of community, country, and world, the earth, and all

those suffering on it - the hungry, the orphaned, the homeless, marginalized, addicted, the victims of violence, racism, sexism...When I was able to stay on track long enough, my "prayers" seemed a grocery list I recited to God. (I often wondered what it must have felt like to be God on the receiving end of each



tall order.) I realized I needed some other way to bring awareness and intention to these prayers. To invite God in in a more mindful, mature way that would go beyond a sacred "ask list." After a lot of reflection, I realized that I didn't need to direct God to all these concerns because this God of love already is present in all of them. **Where the prayers get stuck isn't on God's end, but on ours.** So, I began to pray in what I'd hoped was a more expansive way...*Lord, open the hearts of your people, so they can experience your love and mercy.* That's how it started. But, this kind of "umbrella prayer" also felt a little like a short-cut. So, not so much for God, but for myself, I decided I wanted something to mark and delineate all of those in my world who needed prayer. Hence, my prayer beads!

Here's How it Works

- Get some cord or sturdy string - I used rawhide.
- Collect some interesting beads. Be sure the beads have openings wide enough to accommodate your cord!
- (Michael's Crafts or Etsy both offer a wide variety of cord and beads)
- Cut a decent length of cord (mine, pictured previous page, was 30 inches).
- Think about who/what you want to lift up in prayer and *designate one bead to represent each.*
- As you slip each designated bead on the cord, name the who/what it represents. Ex. *This bead is for my grandsons, this for the hungry in the world, etc.*

- I used a smaller bead through which I threaded both ends of my rawhide to hold my prayer beads in place. (See photo, previous page) Or, you can simply knot the end.

- I hold the beads while I meditate, and also lift them up from time to time, and recite the following:

Lord, every prayer I ever prayed, I lift to you again this day. Open the hearts of your people, so they can experience your love and mercy.

- Add beads as needed, and when full, start a brand-new strand.
- Hang them in a visible spot, and every time you see them, you're praying anew.

Barbara Mariconda

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