

# **Myanmar Buddhist Prayer Beads**

## **Seik Pa De (Garland from Above)**



**The Garland of Faith**

**A Gift of Dhamma**

## Preface



Pitaka Mae Daw

Most gratefully and most devotedly  
dedicated to matta Pitaka Mae Daw (Thondra Devi )

A Gift of Dhamma

Maung Paw, California

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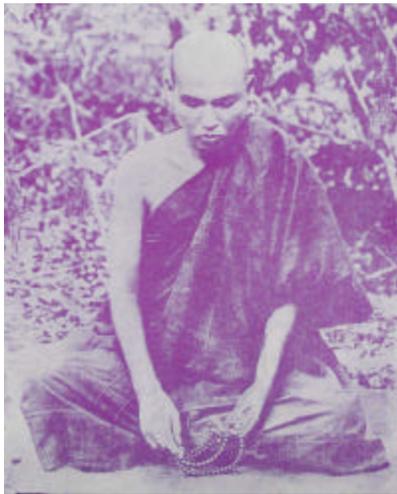
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# Burmese Buddhist Prayer Bead Seik Pa De (Garland from Above)

*“NAMO TASSA BHAGAVATO ARAHATO SAMMASAMBUDDHASSA*



**Ledi Sayadaw Maha Thera**



**Myanmar Prayer Beads**  
108 Beads string in Garland



**Mahayana Prayer Beads**  
4 x 27 Beads Sections = 108 Beads

**1.0 Introduction** – Some decades back in time, many Buddhist Monks in Myanmar and Lay Householders will carry their “**Prayer Beads**” called in Burmese “**Seik Pa De**” – when they are on pilgrimage or visiting monastery. The most eminent Buddhist scholar **Maha Thera Ledi Sayadaw** as shown in the picture was

proud to carry his prayer beads when taken this photo. It is a symbol of living a virtuous life style. Looking at the history of Prayer beads – **Seik Pu Ta** – meaning restraining one’s mind using the beads could achieve concentration of a single point. The name Seik Pa De comes from **Seik Pu Ta** - It is strictly considered as **Samatha** (Concentration) Practice and is not a **Vipassana** practice. Since the time of **Shin Araham Maha Thera**, many aspired to meet with the next **Ari Metreyya Buddha** and Maha Thera, then, practices **Samatha**. That was how his method of counting the Seik Pa De came about now, known as – **Shin Araham Prayer method**.

However, in recent days, for some strange reason, Monks and Lay devotees are seldom seen carrying their prayer beads. Perhaps, it is possible that Theravada Sect emphasized on the goal of attaining the Arahantship, instant Nibbana in this very life time, rather than taking the next rebirth either in the **Deva** or the **Brahma world**, which still is within the realms of suffering, the cycle of rebirth (*samsara*).

Some even feel little awkward to be called **Pa De Ta Mar** (one who practice Prayer Beads), which infers he is not striving to attain Nibbana in this very life time and that he is striving to take the next rebirth in either at the Deva or the Brahma world. Deva and the Brahma realms are still within the cycle of rebirth.

It is to be noted that in the era the post Sasana year 2500 years, Buddha said that Arahantship is very hard to attain as he prophesied that only those who lives homeless life style, like forest Monk, could attain Arahantship, if he strive hard. As for the lay householder, to achieve awakening in this very life is next to impossible. Then the question is what shall we do to attain awakening? The only pragmatic path is work hard to at least land in the Deva or the Brahma world where Deva and Brahma still have the hope of meeting the Buddhas:

- a. Ne Metha Myat Swa Phaya<sup>1</sup> – Miracle Buddha Image, or?
- b. Ari-Metreyya Buddha

Counting each bead of the 108 beads in total, one can concentrate on the **Mantra**<sup>2</sup> that he or she prefers to recite. The purpose of counting the beads is to culture one’s mind to a single point focus.

## 2.0 Prayer Beads Construction -

The standard construction of Buddhist prayer bead consists of 108 number of beads with each string in like a garland. The material of the bead may vary according to one’s preference.

- a. Sandal wood
- b. Boddhiseed

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<sup>1</sup> Ne Me Tha Myat Swa Phaya – Miracle Buddha – as prophesied in Anagatavamas Desana.

<sup>2</sup> Mantra – recitation of a specially formulated prayer

- c. Elepahnt task
- d. Rudrashka
- e. Burmese Terra Cotta Mala



Bodhi Seed

Sandal Wood

Rudraksha Beads - White Sandal Wood

### 3.0 The purpose of Prayer Beads:

The purpose of the mala from the point of view of the Buddhist traditions is for counting of sacred mantra (prayers) during a period of recitation. For example, one might recite, "Om" or "Arahan" for the young starter and a long prayer for serious practitioners. In Mahayana one might recite "Om Mani Padme Hum," or "Om Tare Tam Soha" and keep count of each mantra by moving your fingers over each bead. Of course, one can use the mala for any sacred prayer from any spiritual or religious tradition. One should keep the prayer beads with respect and care so as to accrue the magical power depending of the long duration of use.

#### 3.1 - Helpful to Concentration

Those who find it hard to concentrate in the mindful ness meditation, noting the in breathing and out breathing, might find using the prayer beads very helpful to do focus their mind to a single point.

Prayer beads can offer a focus point, a way of keeping the mind still while praying.

- ? Prayer beads can provide an "anchor," something solid to hold onto.
- ? Prayer beads are a way of allowing prayer to be physical, as well as mental and vocal.
- ? Prayer beads have been used in many religions and for hundreds of years. In using prayer beads we touch the traditions and heritage of the ages.
- ? Prayers with prayer beads can be ancient or modern, prepared or spontaneous, individual or communal; prayer beads do not limit our praying.

Although many of the prayers of prayer beads are repetitive, others are not. You can use prepared prayers if you like, but you can also compose your own spontaneous prayers for use along with prayer beads.

#### 4.0 Where to place the Prayer Beads

- a. Place the Prayer bead in clean and high places
- b. Do not let other handle your prayer beads out of curiosity except when it is to be blessed by holy person.
- c. Aspiration of all Buddhists – is "May all beings have prosperity and happiness." \

At the end of the completion of the recitation, we normally end the recitation – reciting - "**Anicca, Dukka Anatta**" ('All is transitory, painful, and unreal').

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#### 5.0 Preparation for Prayer

There is no special preparation recommended; however, one must select a suitable time and place to do prayer. It is important, to be clean and fresh before starting a prayer. Here are some of the recommended preparations:

- ? Physically comfortable state of mind and body
- ? Clean clothing
- ? Suitable time
- ? Proper and appropriate place
- ? Observe the five precepts
- ? Pray first to – **Buddha, Dhamma, Sangha, Teachers and Parents**
- ? Radiate and Transmit - loving kindness to all sentient beings in all directions
- ? Sit in the most comfortable position
- ? Pledge to count a minimum without interruption.

#### 5.1 Praying Position

- ? Sit as comfortable as possible
- ? Hold Prayer beads with both hand
- ? Count with faith – Sadha
- ? Avoid for any wish in return for the merit (**serious candidate only**), younger may make their own wish for desired result.

? Avoid wandering mind – focus on the recitation

## 6.0 Methods of Praying using Beads

There are two methods of praying using the prayer beads:

- a. Standard method – for starter
- b. Serious method – **praying with a vow**<sup>3</sup> to complete specific number of rounds.

The standard method is for starters who are at their younger age who cannot afford much time to do praying. They can do any number of rounds as they seem fit within the time permitted between their daily routine chaos's. The number of rounds can be once, three, five or nine rounds as time permit them.

The recitation of prayer can be as short as possible. The shorted prayer is – in honor of the Buddha – the blessed one, the self enlightened one, one free of all defilements, the most revered one the Buddha – **Ah Ra Han**.



## 6.1 Arahan Prayer

- a. Pray – **Ah Ra Han** - count one bead
- b. Pray - **Ah Ra Han** - count the second bead, and
- c. Pray - **Ah Ra Han** - 108<sup>th</sup> . Bead , thus completes a round.

The Burmese version of the prayer is as shown:

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<sup>3</sup> Vow – Adeilthan – Pa De - pledge to complete a specified number of rounds daily for a specified number of days.

အရဟံဂုဏ်တော်=

၁။ အရဟံဂုဏ်တော်=မြတ်စွာဘုရားသည် ကိလေသာတို့မှ ကင်းဝေးလေပြီ၊  
ကိလေသာတို့ကို ပယ်ရှားပြီးဖြစ်လေပြီ၊ သံသရာစက်၏  
အကန့်အထောက်တို့ကို ဖျက်ဆီးပြီးဖြစ်လေပြီ၊ လူ့သူလေးပါး မသိမမြင်နိုင်သည့်  
ဆိတ်ကွယ်ရာကို ရစေကာမူ မည်သည့်နည်းနှင့်မျှ မကောင်းမှုအလုပ်ကို မလုပ်  
တော့ပြီ၊ အလွတ်အမြတ် ပေးလှူပူဇော်မှု ဟူသမျှကိုလည်း ကောင်းစွာခံယူတော်  
မူထိုက်လေပြီ။ (သော ဘဂဝါ ဣတိပိ အရဟံ)

သောဘဂဝါ၊ ထိုမြတ်စွာဘုရားသည်။ ဣတိပိ၊ ဤသို့ ပူဇော်ဖွယ်အထူးကို  
ခံယူတော် မူထိုက်သော အကြောင်းကြောင့်လည်း။ အရဟံ၊ အရဟံ  
မည်တော်မူပါပေ၏။

သောဘဂဝါ၊ ထိုမြတ်စွာဘုရားသည်။ အရဟံ ဝတ၊ ပူဇော်အထူးကို  
ခံယူတော် မူထိုက်ပေစွတကား။

6.2 Serious Prayers

There are some who are in their middle or senior age, which can devote their time to praying, should do it with seriousness of purpose. The standard prayer is : **Shin Ah Ra Han Maha Thera** prayer:

1. *“Buddham saranam gacchami  
Nama rupa, Anecca, Dukha, Anatta*

' I take refuge in Buddha  
Mind & Matter, all is transitory, painful, and unreal'

2. *Dhammam saranam gacchami  
Nama rupa, Anecca, Dukha, Anatta*

I take refuge in Dhamma  
'Mind & Matter, all is transitory, painful, and unreal'

3. *Sangham saranam gacchami  
Nama rupa, Anecca, Dukha, Anatta*

I take refuge in Sangham  
'Mind & Matter, all is transitory, painful, and unreal'





## 6.4 Buddha, Dhamma & Sangha Refuge

*Having gone for refuge  
to the Buddha, Dhamma, and Sangha,  
you see with right discernment  
the four Noble Truths*

*stress,  
the cause of stress, the transcending of stress,  
and the Noble Eightfold Path,  
the way to the stilling of stress:  
That's the secure refuge,*

*that, the highest refuge,  
that is the refuge,  
having gone to which,  
you gain release from all suffering and stress.*

## 7.0 Praying to Deity

There are many kinds of prayer composed by various Sayadaws relating to praying to deities. One of the well known prayer, most often recited by students, is composed in paying tribute to **Tipitaka Mae Daw** – to receive blessing from the Goddess of wisdom. The Goddess in most cases blesses the student to pass the scholastic examination and helps difficulties that one faces in life. That was the reason why Tuyatadi Mae Daw (Pitaka Mae Daw) , Thondra Devi or Sarawati Goddess is so popular in Myanmar.

### Pray to Goddess of Wisdom – Tipitaka Mae Daw - Sarawati

This is the shortest version of Hindu prayer tribute to **Sarawatye** – Tipitaka Mae Daw

**Aum**

**Aing Sarawatye Namah**

**Aum**

Another longer prayer“

**Saraswati Namasthubhyam**

**Varade Kamarupini  
Vudhyarambam Karishyami  
Siddhir Bavathume Sadha**

**There is a Myanmar version of the same prayer that many young people are taught to recite. I will not present the Burmese version here to preserve the original Hindu version.**

## **8.0 Loving Kindness Prayer**

*'May peace harmonious bless this land;  
May it be ever free from maladies and war;  
May there be harvest rich, and increased yield of grain;  
May everyone delight in righteousness;  
May no perverted thought find entry to your minds;  
May all your thoughts e'er pious be and lead  
to you to Nibbana'*

**Sadhu, Sadhu, Sadhu,**

## Appendix - A

### Hindu Prayer Beads

Hindu prayer beads have 108 + 1 beads: 108 for the 108 names of God, and one to mark the beginning of the prayer cycle. Lutheran pastor Sam Schmitthenner writes: "Once, traveling on a train (in India), I was in a compartment with a Brahmin family. The daughter was a teenage movie star. Before going to bed her mother said, 'Remember to say Siva's names.' So the daughter sat cross-legged, yogi-style, folded her hands and said his 108 names, touching a bead for each one. 'Nata Raj, dancing Siva who shows his grace, peace and creative power, and destroys and treads the evil dwarf. Blue Throated One, he drank the poison churned up on the cosmic sea, saving the world. Source of the Ganges. Bairagi, smeared with ashes he dances in the graveyards. (etc.)' She knew them all. Her devotion was touching!"

### Moslem Prayer Beads

Moslem prayer beads are strung in 33- or 99-bead strands. Prayer of the Tasbih: 33 times: "Subhana-Allah" (Glory be to Allah), 33 times: "Alhamdu-li-Allah" (Praise be to Allah) 33 times: "Allahu akhbar" (Allah is great). Or pray the 99 names of Allah. Another source says: "What one should do is very simple. That person will use the biggest tranquilizer of Allah on this universe: He will say take his prayer beads and first will say the name of Allah who is All-Compassionate and All-Merciful and then he will do zikir through saying Allah, Allah, Allah... repeating the word of Allah with each bead. A five minutes of his zikir will certainly cause him to relieve, to relax, does not matter how big his pain is. Because Allah says in the 186th Verse of Bakara Surah that: 'When it is prayed to me I certainly to reply the invitation.' The word Allah in Arabic letters is seen very clearly on the heart of every human being. So, what Allah wants from us is connected to the beating of our heart as Allah. It is the subject [sic] that we repeat the word of Allah by each beat of our heart. We repeat it within ourselves i.e. as a type of inner speech. And this repetition does not prevent us from our works. Allahu Teala says in the 39th Verse of Necm Surah that: 'There is nothing else more valuable for the human being than his working.' "

### Christian Prayer Beads

Another name for prayer beads is the Rosary; this name is generally associated with Roman Catholics. The word Rosary comes from the Latin *rosarium*, meaning a wreath or chaplet of roses which was used to denote a collection of sayings and prayers. Actually, in Catholic parlance, "rosary" refers to the standard 5 or 15 decade prayer beads, and if a strand has any other number of beads, it is called a chaplet. One of the most common chaplets is the 10-bead ring or strand. By shifting the 10-bead chaplet from finger to finger on one's hand, one can easily count the 50-bead cycle. "Rosary" also refers to the prayer prayed with the prayer beads; one "prays" the "Rosary." If we Episcopalians know

anything about the Catholic Rosary, we usually know the prayer which begins "Hail Mary, full of grace..." Actually, that is only one of many rosary prayers.

**Greek and Russian/Eastern Orthodox** also use prayer counters, usually a knotted rope, called a prayer rope. Greek Orthodox prayer ropes are of 33, 50 or 100 knots. " The Rosary prayed by the Eastern Orthodox (the Chotk) is a string of 33, 100, or 300 beads on a string or knots made of wool; they are not divided into decades. On each bead or knot is prayed the following mantra: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me, a sinner.' The modern Chotki calls for a slightly different mantra: 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, a sinner,' derived from the Gospel story of the Pharisee and the tax collector." The Chotki has been used as a silent "breath prayer," with "Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God" prayed on inhalation and " have mercy on me, a sinner" prayed on exhalation.

Some Episcopalians, either fond of the Catholic heritage or not bothered by it, enjoy using prayer beads. The "Anglican Prayer Beads" have 33 beads, grouped in 7s rather than 10s as in the Catholic Rosary. " The most usual prayers used with Anglican Prayer Beads are based on Anglican incarnational theology. The prayer sequence begins with the cross, Then there is a large bead following the cross on the pendant, which is the Invitatory bead -- the invitation to praise and worship (as in the Daily Office). The circle itself is comprised of four sets of seven beads called 'Weeks' to represent the 7 days of creation / 7 days of the temporal week / 7 seasons of Church year, which are divided by four large beads called 'Cruciform' beads representing the centrality of the cross in our lives and faith. The total number of beads is 33-- the number of years of Jesus' life on this earth.

Anglican prayers used for the rosary vary. Praying Anglican Prayer Beads is relatively recent, having been developed in the 1980s. Our tradition is not of sufficient age for us to have an "official" set of prayers for the beads. One can use prayers such as the Triasgion, the Jesus Prayer, a set of thoughts from Julian of Norwich, or excerpts from the *Book of Common Prayer* , but others can be used