

LĀMAIC ROSARIES.

The rosary is an essential part of a lāma's dress. As a Buddhist article, the rosary is especially peculiar to the Northern school of Buddhists and the outcome of the esoteric teachings of the Mahāyāna school, instilling belief in the potency of muttering mystic spells and other strange formulas. In the very complicated rosaries of Japan¹ it has attained its highest development.

It is not enumerated in the Southern Scriptures among the articles necessary for a monk. But incidental mention is made by Shway Yoe² of a rosary with 108 beads; and several of the Burmese monks I have met possessed a rosary called "Bodhī," consisting of 72 black sub-cylindrical beads, which I understood were composed of slips of leaf inscribed with charmed words and rolled into pellets with the aid of lacquer or varnish.

The rosary is not conspicuous amongst Southern Buddhists, but among Tibetans it is everywhere visible.

It is also held in the hand of the image of the patron god of Tibet—Ché-ré-si (Skt. *Avalokita*), and its use is not confined to the lāmas. Nearly every layman and woman is possessed of a rosary on which at every opportunity they zealously store up merit; and they also use it for secular purposes, like the sliding balls of the Chinese, to assist in ordinary calculations: the beads to the right of the centre bead being called *ta-thang* and registering units, while those to the left are called *chu-dó* and record tens, which numbers suffice for their ordinary wants.

DESCRIPTION OF THE ROSARY AND ITS APPENDAGES.

The vernacular name for the rosary is "*phreng-ba*,"³ pronounced *theng-wa* or vulgarly *theng-nga*, and literally means "a string of beads."

The rosary contains 108 beads of uniform size. The reason for this special number is alleged to be merely a provision to ensure the repetition of the sacred spell a full hundred times, and the extra beads are added to make up for any omission of beads through absent-mindedness during the telling process or for actual loss of beads by breakage; but the number is of mystic significance. Ché-ré-si and Dól-ma have each 108

¹ Note on Buddhist Rosaries in Japan. By J. M. JAMES, Trans. Jap. As. Soc., page 173, 1881.

² *The Burman: His Life and Notions*, I., page 201.

³ *phreng-ba*.

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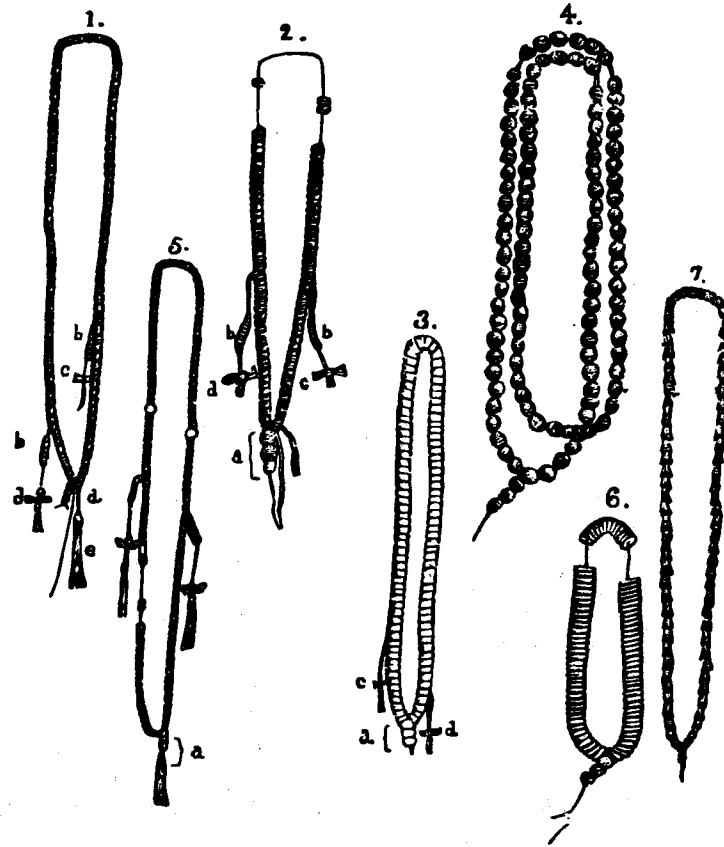


Fig. 1. The yellow wooden rosary of Geluk-pa sect.*
 „ 2. „ red sandal-wood „ for Tamdin's worship.*
 „ 3. „ white conch-shell „ „ Chéresi's do.*
 „ 4. „ *raksha* „ „ the Furies' do.
 „ 5. A layman's rosary (beads of unequal size).*
 „ 6. The human-skull (discs) rosary.
 „ 7. „ snake-spine do.

* a = *dé-dsin*.
 b = counters.
 c = bell-pendant.
 d = *dorje*-pendant.
 e = a tweezer and tooth-pick.

names; although it is not usual to tell these on the rosary. One hundred and eight is the usual number of lamps and cakes offered at great shrines; and in the later Kham editions of the lāmaic scriptures—the “*kah-gyur*”—the volumes have been extended from 100 to 108. The Southern scriptures state that 108 Brahmans were called by Gotama's father at the birth-feast to cast the embryo-Buddha's horoscope, and the Burmese footprints of Buddha sometimes contain 108 subdivisions.¹ This mystic number is perhaps borrowed, like so many other lāmaic fashions, from the Hindus, of whom the Vaishnabs possess a rosary with 108 beads.

The two ends of the string of beads before being knotted are passed through three extra beads, the centre one of which is the largest. These are collectively called dok-dsin² or “retaining or seizing bead”—*vide* “a” in figures. The word is sometimes spelt *mdo-hdsin*, and pronounced *dô-dsin*, which means “the union-holder.” In either case the meaning is much the same. These beads keep the proper rosary beads in position, and indicate to the teller the completion of a cycle of beads.

This triad of beads symbolizes “the Three Holy Ones” of the Buddhist Trinity, viz., Buddha, Dhārma (the Word), and Sangha (the Church, excluding the laity). The large central bead represents Buddha, while the smaller one intervening between it and the rosary beads represents the Church and is called “Our special Lāma-monitor,”³ the personal Lāma-guide and confessor of the Tibetan Buddhist; and his symbolic presence on the rosary immediately at the end of the bead-cycle is to ensure becoming gravity and care in the act of telling the beads, as if he were actually present.

The *ge-luk-pa* or “reformed” sect of lāmas usually have only two beads as dok-dsin, in which case the terminal one is of much smaller size, and the pair are considered emblematic of a vase from which the beads spring.

Attached to the rosary is a pair of strings of ten small pendant metallic rings as counters—*vide* “b” in the figures.

The counters. One of these strings is terminated by a miniature *dorje* (the thunderbolt of Indra) and the other by a small bell—in tantric Buddhist figures the *dorje* is usually associated with a bell. The counters on the *dorje*-string register units of bead-cycles, while those on the bell-string mark tens of cycles. The counters and the ornaments of the strings are usually of silver, and inlaid with turquoise.

These two strings of counters are called *ḍang-dsin*⁴ or “count-keepers,” but vulgarly they are known as *chub-shé*⁵ or “the ten

¹ *The Burman: His Life and Notions*, I. page 201.

² *rdog-hdsin*.
³ *rtsa-wahi ḍla-ma*.

⁴ *grang-hdsin*.
⁵ *lchu-bshad*.

markers." They may be attached at any part of the rosary string, but are usually affixed at the 8th and 21st bead on either side of the central bead.

They are used in the following manner:—When about to tell the beads, the counters on each string are slid up the string. On completing a cycle of the beads the lowest counter on the dorje-string is slid down into contact with the dorje. And on each further cycle of beads being told a further counter is slipped down. When the ten have been exhausted, they are then slid up again and one counter is slipped down from the bell-string. The counters thus serve to register the utterance of $108 \times 10 \times 10 = 10,800$ prayers or mystic formulas. The number of formulas daily repeated in this way is enormous. The average daily number of repetitions may in the earlier stages of a lāma's career amount to 5,000 daily, but it depends somewhat on the zeal and leisure of the individual. A layman may repeat daily about five to twenty bead-cycles, but usually less. Old women are especially pious in this way, many telling over twenty bead-cycles daily. A middle-aged lāma friend of mine has repeated the spell of his tutelary deity alone over 2,000,000 times. It is not uncommon to find rosaries so worn away by the friction of so much handling that originally globular beads have become cylindrical.

Affixed to the rosary are small odds and ends, such as a metal tooth-pick, tweezer, small keys, &c.

The materials of which the lāmaic rosaries are composed may to a certain extent vary in costliness according to the wealth of the wearer. The Khén-pos or abbots of large and wealthy monasteries have rosaries of pearl and other precious stones, and even of gold. Turner relates¹ that the Grand Tāshi Lāma possessed rosaries of pearls, emeralds, rubies, sapphires, coral, amber, crystal, and lapislazuli.

But the material of the rosary can only vary within rather narrow limits, its nature being determined by the particular sect to which the lāma belongs and the particular deity to whom worship is to be paid.

The yellow rosary or *Se-theng*,² vide fig. 1, is the special rosary of the ge-luk-pa or "reformed school," also called "the yellow-hat sect" (shā-ser). The beads are formed from the ochrey-yellow wood of the *chang-chhub*,³ literally "the Bodhi tree" or tree of supreme wisdom, which is said to grow in Central China. The wood is so deeply yellow that it is doubtful whether it be really that of the *pipal* (*Ficus religiosa*) which was the Bodhi tree under which Gautama attained his Buddhahood. These

¹ *Embassy to Tibet*, page 261, 1800. |

² Ser-phreng. |

³ byang-chhub.

beads are manufactured wholesale by machinery at the temple called by Tibetans *Ri-wo-tse-nga* and by the Chinese *U-tha-Shan* or "The Five Peaks," about 200 miles south-west of Peking. Huc gives a sketch¹ of this romantic place, but makes no mention of its rosaries. This rosary is of two kinds, viz., the usual form of spherical beads about the size of a pea, and a less common form of lozenge-shaped perforated discs about the size of a sixpence. This rosary is usable for all kinds of worship, including that of the furies.

The *Bo-dhi-tse*² rosary is the one chiefly in use among the *nying-mapa*, or "old (*i.e.*, unreformed) school" of *lāmas*. It is remarkable that its name also seeks to associate it with the Bodhi tree, but its beads are certainly not derived from the *Ficus* family. Its beads are the rough brown seeds of a tree which grows in the outer Himalayas. This rosary can be used for all kinds of worship, and may also be used by the *ge-luk-pa* in the worship of the fiercer deities.

The white rosary *tung-theng*,³ *vide* fig. 3, consists of cylindrical perforated discs of the conch shell (Tib. *tung*), and is especially used in the worship of *Ché-ré-si*—the usual form of whose image holds a white rosary in the upper right hand. This is the special rosary of nuns.

Crystal. The rosary of plain crystal or uncoloured glass beads is also peculiar to *Ché-ré-si*.

The red sandal-wood rosary—*Tsén-den mar theng*,⁴ *vide* fig. 2—consists of perforated discs of red sandal-wood (*Adenanthera pavonina*) or other wood of a similar appearance. It is used only in the worship of the fierce deity *Tam-din* (Skt. *Hayagrīva*), a special protector of *Lāmaism*.

The coral rosary *Chī-ru-theng*⁵ is also used for *Tam-din* and by the *nyingmapa* sects for their wizard-saint *Padma Sambhava*'s worship. Coral being so expensive, red beads of glass or composition are in general use instead. With this rosary it is usual to have the counters of turquoise or blue beads.

The rosary formed of discs of the human skull—the *thō-theng*,⁶ *vide* fig. 6—is especially used for the worship of *Dorje Jik-che* (Skt. *Yāmā*), one of the forms of the King of the Dead. It frequently has its discs symmetrically divided by *raksha* beads into four series. There is no rosary formed of finger bones as has been sometimes stated.

The "elephant-stone" rosary—*Lang-chhen dō-pa*⁷—is prepared from a porous bony-like concretion which is sometimes found in the stomach of the elephant. It also

¹ *Travels in Tartary, Tibet and China*. By M. HUC and GABET. Hazlitt's trans. I, page 79.

² po-dhi-tse.

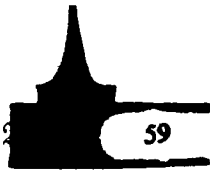
⁴ tsanden.

⁶ thod-phreng.

³ dung-phreng.

⁵ pyi-ru.

⁷ gl'ng-chhen grod-pa.



being suggestive of bone, is used in worship of Yāmā. The real material, however, being extremely scarce and expensive, a substitute is usually had in beads made from the fibrous root of the bow-bambu (Zhu-shing) which has on section a structure very like the stomach-stone, and its name also means "stomach or digestion" as well as "bow."

The *rak-sha* rosary,¹ *vide* fig. 4, formed of the large brown warty seeds of the *Elæocarpus Janitrus*, is specially used by the nyingmapa lāmas in the worship of the fierce deities and demons. The seeds of this tree are normally five-lobed, and it is interesting, from a botanical point of view, to find how relatively frequent is the occurrence of six lobes. Such abnormal seeds are highly prized by the Tibetans as being the offspring of the miraculous seeds of Padma Sambhava's rosary—the legend stating that the saint's rosary string broke while at his Halāshi hermitage, near the Kusi river in Nepal, and several of the detached beads remained unpicked up; and from these have resulted the six-lobed seeds. The demand for such uncommon seeds being great, it is astonishing how many of them are forthcoming to diligent search. This rosary is also commonly used by the indigenous Bon-po priests, and it is identical with the rosary of the Shivaic Hindus—the *rudrāksha* (रुद्राक्ष = Rudra's [*i.e.*, fierce Shiva's] eyes), from which the Tibetan name of *rak-sha* is supposed to be derived.

The *nang-ga pā-ni* rosary is only used for the worship of Nam-sé, the God of Wealth (Skt. *Kuvera*); and by the ngāk-pa or wizards in their mystical incantations. It consists of glossy jet-black nuts about the size of a hazel, but of the shape of small horse-chestnuts. These are the seeds of the *lung-thang* tree, which grows in the sub-tropical forests of the south-eastern Himalayas. They are emblematic of the eyes of the Garuda bird, the chief assistant of Vajra-pāni (Jupiter) and the great enemy of snakes—hence is supposed to be derived the Sanskrit name of the beads, from *nāga*, a serpent. Its use in the worship of the God of Wealth is noteworthy in the association of snakes—the mythological guardians of treasure—with the idea of wealth.

The rosary of *snake-spines* (vertebræ), *vide* fig. 7, is only used by the (ngāk-pa) sorcerers for purposes of sorcery and divination. The string contains about fifty vertebræ.

The complexion of the god or goddess to be worshipped also determines sometimes the colour of the rosary-beads. Thus a turquoise rosary is occasionally used in the worship of the popular goddess Döl-ma, who

Rosaries and complexion.

¹ rag sha.

is of a bluish-green complexion. A red rosary with red Tam-din, a yellow with yellow Jam-yang; and Nam-sé, who is of a golden yellow colour, is worshipped with an amber rosary.

The rosaries of the laity are composed of any sort of bead, according to the taste and wealth of the owner. They are mostly of glass beads of various colours, and the same rosary contains beads of a variety of sizes and colours interspersed with coral, amber, turquoise, &c.—*vide* fig. 5. The number of beads is the same as with the lāmas, but each of the counter strings are usually terminated by a *dorje*: both strings record only units of cycles, which suffice for the smaller amount of bead-telling done by the laity.

MODE OF TELLING THE BEADS.

When not in use the rosary is wound round the right wrist like a bracelet, or worn around the neck with the knotted end uppermost.

The act of telling the beads is called *tang-che*, which literally means "to purr" like a cat, and the muttering of the prayers is rather suggestive of this sound.

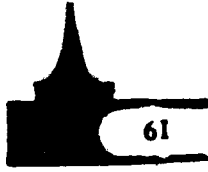
In telling the beads the right hand is passed through the rosary, which is allowed to hang freely down with the knotted end upwards. The hand with the thumb

upwards is then usually carried to the breast and held there stationary during the recital. On pronouncing the initial word "Om," the first bead resting on the knuckle is grasped by raising the thumb and quickly depressing its tip to seize the bead against the outer part of the second joint of the index finger. During the rest of the sentence the bead, still grasped between the thumb and index finger, is gently revolved to the right, and on conclusion of the sentence is dropped down the palm-side of the string. Then with another "Om" the next bead is seized and treated in like manner, and so on throughout the cycle.

On concluding each cycle of the beads, it is usual to finger each of the three "keeper-beads," saying respectively "Om! Ah! Hung!" the mystic symbols of the lāmaic trinity.

THE MYSTIC FORMULAS FOR THE BEADS.

The mystic formulas for the beads follow the prayer properly so called, and are believed to contain the essence of the formal prayer, and to act as powerful spells. They are of a Sanskrit nature, usually containing the name of the deity addressed, but are more or less wholly unintelligible to the worshipper.



The formula used at any particular time varies according to the particular deity being worshipped. But the one most frequently used by the individual lāma is that of his own *yi-dam* or tutelary deity, which varies according to the sect to which the lāma belongs.

The formulas most frequently used are shown in the following table:—

Name of Deity.	The Spell.	Special kind of rosary used.
1. Dor-je jik-che. ¹ Skt. <i>Yāma (antaka)</i> .	Om! Ya-mān-ta-taka hung phät!	Human skull or "stomach-stone."
2. Chā-na dorje. ² Skt. <i>Vajrapāni</i> .	{ Om! Bājrapāni hung phät! Om! Bājra dsan-da maha ro-khana hung!	Raksha. Do.
3. Tam-din. ³ Skt. <i>Hayagriva</i> .	Om! päḍ-ma ta krid hung phät!	Red sandal or coral.
4. Ché-ré-si or Thuk-je- chhenbo. ⁴ Skt. <i>Avalokita</i> .	Om! māni päḍ-me hung!	Conch shell or crystal.
5. Döl-ma jang-khu. ⁵ Skt. <i>Tāra</i> .	Om! Tā-re tut-tā-re ture swā- hā!	Bodhitse or tur- quoise.
6. Döl-kar. ⁶ Skt. <i>Sitatāra</i> .	Om! Tā-re tut-tā-re mama ā-yur punye-dsanyana pusphi- ta ku-ru swā-hā!	Bodhitse.
7. Dor-je phak-mo. ⁷ Skt. <i>Vajra varahi</i> .	Om! sar-ba Bud-ha ḍakkin-ni hung phät!	Ditto.
8. Ozer-chén-ma. ⁸ Skt. <i>Marici</i> .	Om! Ma-ri-taye mam swā-hā!	Ditto.
9. Gön-po nag-po. ⁹ Skt. <i>Kālānātha</i> .	Om! Śrī Ma-hā-kā-la hung phät swā-hā!	Raksha.
10. Nam-sé. ¹⁰ Skt. <i>Kuvera</i> .	Om! Bai-śrā-ma-na ye swā-hā!	Nangapāni.
11. Dsam bha-la. ¹¹ Skt. <i>Jambhala</i> .	Om! Dsam-bha-la dsalen-dra ye swā-hā!	Ditto.
12. Seng-ge-ḍa. ¹² Skt. <i>Singhānāda</i> .	Om! ā-hrih Sing-ha-nāda hung phät!	Conch shell or crystal.
13. Jam-yang. ¹³ Skt. <i>Manjughosa</i> .	Om! a-ra-pa-tsa-na-dhi!	Yellow rosary.
14. Dem-ohhok. ¹⁴ Skt. <i>Samvara</i> .	Om! hrih ha-ha hung hung phät	Bodhitse.
15. Päḍ-ma jung-né. ¹⁵ Skt. <i>Padma sambhava</i> .	Om! bājra gu-ru päḍma sid-dhi hung!	Coral or bodhitse.

¹ rdo-rje-ajigs-byeḍ.² phyag-na rdo-rje.³ rta-mgrin.⁴ grugs-rje chhen-po.⁵ sgrol-ma ljang-khu.⁶ sgrol-dkar.⁷ do-rje phag-mo.⁸ lod-zer-chan-ma.⁹ mgon-po nag-po.¹⁰ rnam-sras.¹¹ dsam-bha-la.¹² seng-ge-sgra.¹³ ljam-dbyangs.¹⁴ ḍde-mehhog.¹⁵ pad-ma lbyung-gnaḥ.

The concluding word *phät* which follows the mystic *hung* in many of these spells is cognate with the current Hindustani word *phat*, and means "may the enemy be *destroyed utterly*."

The laity through want of knowledge seldom use with their rosaries other than the well-known lamaic formula "*Om! mā-nī pad-me Hung*," i.e.; "Hail! to the Jewel in the lotus! *Hung*." This refers to the Bodhisatwa Chéresi (Skt. *Padmapāni*), the patron-god of Tibet, who, like Buddha, is usually represented as seated or standing within a lotus flower, and who is believed to have been born from such a flower. It has, however, many mystic meanings. And no wonder this formula is so popular and constantly being repeated by both laity and lāmas, for its mere enunciation is credited with stopping the cycle of re-birth, and reaching directly to Nirvana. Thus, it is stated in the *Māni-kah-bum* with extravagant rhapsody that this formula "is the essence of all happiness, prosperity, and knowledge, and the great means of deliverance," and that the *om* closes re-birth amongst the gods, *ma* among the Titans, *ni* as a man, *pad* as a beast, *me* as a "yidag," and *hung* as an inhabitant of hell. And in keeping with this view each of these six syllables is given the distinctive colour of these six states of re-birth, viz. *om*, the godly *white*; *ma*, the titanic *blue*; *ni*, the human *yellow*; *pad*, the animal *green*; *me*, the "yidag" *red*; *hung*, the hellish *black*. This formula is of comparatively modern origin; its first appearance seems to be in the legendary history (*bkah bum*) of King Srong-tsang-gam-bo, which was one of the so-called "hidden" treatises, and probably written about the 14th or 16th century A.D.¹ With this formula, which is peculiar to Tibet, may be compared the Chinese and Japanese spells "*Nāmo Butsu*" (= Skt. *Nāmo Buddhaya*, i.e., salutation to Buddha!) and *Nāmo O-mi-to-Fu* (= Skt. *Nāmo Amitābha*, i.e., salutation to the Boundless Light!—a fanciful form of Buddha). The Burmese, so far as I have seen, seem to use their rosary merely for repeating the names of the Buddhist Trinity, viz., "Phrā" or Buddha, "Tara" or Dharma, and Sangha. And the number of beads in their rosary is a multiple of 3×3 as with the lāmas. On completing the cycle the central bead is fingered with the pessimistic formula "*Anīsa, Dukha, Anātha*."—all is transitory, painful, and unreal.

¹ Since the above was in type, I find that ROCKHILL in *The Land of the Lamas*, London, 1891, page 326, notes that Wilhelm de Rubruk, writing in the second half of the 13th century, A.D. (Soc. de Geog. de Paris, IV, page 283) states regarding the Buddhist monks of Karakorum: "Habent etiam quocumque vadunt semper in manibus quandaun testem centum vel ducentorum nucleorum sicut nos portamus paternoster et dicunt semper hec verba *on man baccam* hoc est *Deus, tu nosti*, secundum quod quidam eorum interpretatus est michi, et totiens expectat, remunerationem a Deo quotiens hoc dicendo memoratur." Mr. Rockhill also independently arrives at a similar conclusion to that noted by me above, as to the relatively modern composition of the *Mani bkāh abum*.