

Naam Simran: Numerology has no Significance

[In response to "Significance of Mala (Rosary) published in *The Sikh Review* – March 2008, article by Sr Khushwant Singh and July 2008 by Jagdev Singh Kainth]
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A rosary is a string of beads put together to keep count of the number of times a person has repeated a mantra. The rosary also called *mala* has normally 108 beads. The source of beads could be *rudraksh* (seeds of the tree *Elaeocarpus ganitrus*), *tulsi*, coloured glass, and pearls, precious and semi-precious gems. A rosary made of *rudraksh* is considered best by many. Beads with varying numbers of beads are used by other religious faiths. For example, in Islam prayer beads are referred to as *Misbaha* or *Tasbih* and contain 99 beads, corresponding to the 99 names of Allah.

Why 108 Beads:

Prem P Bhalla, in his book: "*Hindu Rites, Rituals, Customs and Traditions*", explains: It is believed that a rosary of 108 beads is related to the frequency of our breath. In 24 hours, one breathes 21,600 times. 12 hours are spent in the daily routine, leaving the remaining 12 hours for devotion to God. This means that 10,800 times breathing should be utilized for devotion to God. Since this is not possible, the two zeros are removed. Therefore, breathing 108 times is considered appropriate during prayers.

Another explanation pertains to the sun. It is said that in one year the movement between the sun and the earth is 216,000 degrees. For 6 months the northern part of the earth faces the sun and for the next 6 months the southern part of the earth faces the sun. For this reason, the number is reduced to half, that is, 108,000 degrees. The three zeros are omitted, the remainder is 108.

A third explanation is based on astrology. The universe is divided into 12 segments, each representing a sign of the zodiac, In Hindu religious texts there are 9 *Navgrahs* (nine planets) that affect us. With 12 segments and 9 planets, when the two are multiplied we get the figure 108.

As per another explanation, ancient sages in India located 27 constellations, each of 27 stars. Since each constellation has 4 steps, 27 multiplied by 4 is 108.

For Sikhs in Particular:

Some use *mala* with 108 beads, or use a prayer string made of wool with 99 knots rather than beads. Bhagat Kabir at the beginning of his *Slokas* (SGGS: 1364) has stated:

ਕਬੀਰ ਮੇਰੀ ਸਿਮਰਨੀ ਰਸਨਾ ਉਪਰਿ ਰਾਮੁ ॥ [SGGS: 1365]

Kabir my rosary is my tongue, on which is the Lord's Name.

Kabir's *Simrani* is the best. Unlike the rosaries of 108 beads or less, Kabir's *Simrani* will not break, the beads will not spill out and neither will one forget for having misplaced it.

Guru Arjun Dev ji's advice to his devotees is, ਸਾਸਿ ਸਾਸਿ ਸਿਮਰਹੁ ਗੋਬਿੰਦ ॥ [SGGS: 295] - with every breath meditate upon the Lord. So, is it necessary to keep a count?

