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Ancient Tradition of 108 Nāmajapa: Religious, Spiritual, Scientific, Psychological, and Astrological Perspectives

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Abstract

Nāmajapa—the repetitive chanting of the Divine Name—has been an integral practice in Indian spiritual traditions since ancient times. Among its various forms, the practice of chanting the Divine Name 108 times holds exceptional importance. This article presents a comprehensive and interdisciplinary study of 108 Nāmajapa, integrating religious, spiritual, scientific, psychological, and astrological perspectives. The study demonstrates that 108 Nāmajapa is not merely a ritualistic act, but a holistic discipline that supports mental health, spiritual growth, ethical living, and cosmic harmony.

Keywords: Nāmajapa, 108 repetitions, spirituality, psychology, neuroscience, astrology, holistic well-being

Introduction

In the Indian knowledge tradition, sound, repetition, and discipline are regarded as powerful tools for inner transformation. Nāmajapa occupies a central place among such practices due to its simplicity and universal applicability. The number 108, traditionally associated with japa mala beads, is deeply embedded in religious symbolism, cosmic calculations, and human psychology.

The aphorism “tat japaḥ tad-artha bhāvanam” from Patañjali’s *Yoga Sūtra* (I.28) explains the true method of mantra practice in yoga. It teaches that mantra repetition (*japa*) should be accompanied by contemplation of its meaning (*artha-bhāvanā*). The word *tat* refers to the Supreme Reality or Īśvara, symbolized by the sacred syllable *Om*. Patañjali emphasizes that mere mechanical chanting is insufficient for spiritual progress. When repetition is combined with awareness of meaning, the mind becomes focused and refined. This practice gradually removes mental distractions and inner obstacles. It leads to calmness, clarity, and inward awareness. Psychologically, it strengthens concentration and mindfulness. Spiritually, it deepens devotion and inner connection with the Divine. Thus, Patañjali presents mantra practice as a conscious and transformative spiritual discipline. An important question: Why exactly 108 times? This article explores why 108 Nāmajapa has endured for centuries and how it remains relevant in contemporary life.

Nāmajapa: Concept, Necessity, and Importance in Human Life

Nāmajapa (repetition of the Divine Name) is regarded in the Indian spiritual tradition as one of the simplest and most effective spiritual practices. It is not merely a religious ritual but a powerful method for mental, moral, and spiritual development.

Concept of Nāmajapa

The word *Nāma* refers to the Divine Name of God, while *Japa* means continuous repetition or remembrance. Thus, Nāmajapa is the devoted and regular remembrance of the Divine Name with faith and awareness. Scriptures proclaim that the Divine Name possesses infinite power and has the capacity to transform human life. Nāmajapa helps the practitioner internalize divine qualities and elevates consciousness.

The practice of Nāmajapa can be traced back to the Vedic period, where hymns glorifying divine names were central to spiritual life. The Upanishads further emphasized internalized

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worship through remembrance and meditation on the Absolute. The Puranas elaborated the power of the Divine Name as superior to ritualistic practices.

During the Bhakti movement, saints such as Narada, Vyasa, Chaitanya Mahaprabhu, Tulsidas, and Namdev propagated Nāmajapa as a universal spiritual path transcending caste, creed, and social barriers. The tradition emphasized devotion (*bhakti*), surrender, and constant remembrance of God through His Name.

Need for Nāmajapa

Modern human life is increasingly affected by stress, anxiety, fear, anger, and mental instability. In such circumstances, Nāmajapa becomes an essential spiritual remedy. The practice of Nāmajapa

1. Calms mental restlessness
2. Eliminates negative thoughts
3. Enhances self-confidence
4. Encourages moral and ethical conduct
5. Enhancing concentration and inner awareness
6. Fostering social harmony and compassion

Therefore, Nāmajapa is essential for maintaining mental balance, social harmony, and cultural values.

Importance of Nāmajapa in Human Life

Nāmajapa is not limited to spiritual liberation alone; it is equally valuable in worldly life. It influences multiple dimensions of human existence:

- **Religious:** Strengthens devotion and ethical discipline
- **Spiritual:** Promotes inner awakening and self-realization
- **Scientific:** Enhances neurological and physiological balance
- **Psychological:** Improves emotional regulation and mental health
- **Astrological:** Harmonizes karmic and planetary influences

Devotional scriptures declare that in the present age (Kali Yuga), chanting the Divine Name is the most effective spiritual practice. Thus, 108 Nāmajapa acts as a bridge between ancient wisdom and modern scientific understanding.

Religious Perspective of 108 Nāmajapa

From a religious standpoint, Nāmajapa is an act of devotion (*bhakti*) and surrender to the Divine. Hindu scriptures and Bhakti literature repeatedly affirm that remembrance of God through His Name purifies the heart and leads to liberation. The *Bhagavata Purana* declares that chanting the Divine Name alone is sufficient for spiritual upliftment in Kali Yuga (Bhagavata Purana 12.3.51).

The number 108 is considered sacred: there are 108 Upanishads, 108 names of major deities, and 108 beads in the traditional japa mala (Radhakrishnan, 1951) ^[9]. Chanting the Divine Name 108 times symbolically represents completeness and total dedication to God.

108 Nāmajapa represents structured devotion. The use of a japa mala helps maintain concentration and prevents mental distraction. Each repetition becomes an offering to the Divine, reinforcing faith (*shraddha*) and surrender (*bhakti*). The rhythmic chanting creates a sacred atmosphere that connects the practitioner to divine consciousness.

Religiously, Nāmajapa is believed to remove sins, purify karma, and awaken spiritual awareness. It nurtures virtues such as humility, patience, compassion, and self-control. Regular practice strengthens the devotee's relationship with God and promotes ethical living, which is fundamental in religious life.

In daily religious observances, 108 Nāmajapa is performed during morning prayers, temple rituals, festivals, and personal worship. It is practiced across sects and traditions, whether chanting names of Vishnu, Shiva, Rama, Krishna, Devi, or other deities. This universality reflects its deep-rooted religious acceptance.

Spiritual (Ādhyātmic) Perspective

Spiritually, Nāmajapa is a process of inner purification and self-realization. According to Vedantic philosophy, repeated remembrance of the Divine dissolves ego-centered consciousness and purifies latent mental impressions (*samskāras*) (Chinmayananda, 1996) ^[4].

Chanting 108 times allows the practitioner to move beyond superficial awareness into deeper meditative absorption, eventually leading to inner silence, detachment, and spiritual awakening.

In spiritual philosophy, the number 108 symbolizes wholeness and cosmic order. It reflects the connection between the microcosm (individual soul) and the macrocosm (universal consciousness). Performing Nāmajapa 108 times represents a complete cycle of spiritual focus, allowing the practitioner to transcend worldly distractions and experience inner harmony.

From a Ādhyātmic viewpoint, the mind is often clouded by desires, fears, and attachments. Repeating the Divine Name 108 times helps cleanse subconscious impressions (*samskāras*). The rhythmic chanting steadies the breath, calms emotions, and opens the heart to spiritual awareness.

Regular practice of 108 Nāmajapa fosters deep introspection and mindfulness. As the mind becomes absorbed in the Divine Name, the sense of separation between the individual self and universal consciousness gradually diminishes. This leads to spiritual awakening, self-realization, and a state of inner bliss.

Spiritually, 108 Nāmajapa serves as a bridge between devotional practice and meditation. Chanting with awareness naturally leads the practitioner into a meditative state (*dhyana*), where the mind becomes still and receptive. This state enhances intuition, spiritual clarity, and inner wisdom.

From a spiritual perspective, the ultimate goal of 108 Nāmajapa is inner transformation. It cultivates detachment, compassion, humility, and unconditional love. Over time, the practitioner experiences reduced ego, increased awareness, and a deeper connection with the Divine presence within.

Scientific Perspective

From a scientific viewpoint, repetitive chanting has measurable neurological and physiological effects. Neuroscience research indicates that focused repetition strengthens neural circuits related to attention and emotional regulation, demonstrating the principle of neuroplasticity (Doidge, 2007) ^[5].

Studies on mantra meditation show a shift from beta brain waves (associated with stress) to alpha and theta waves (associated with relaxation and meditation) (Travis & Shear,

2010)^[10]. Chanting also regulates breathing and activates the parasympathetic nervous system, reducing stress hormones and promoting cardiovascular stability (Benson & Proctor, 2010)^[11]. Completing 108 repetitions provides sufficient duration for these effects to manifest consistently. Scientific studies on mantra chanting and repetitive vocalization indicate a shift in brain activity:

- From beta waves (stress, alertness)
- To alpha and theta waves (relaxation, meditation, creativity)

Repeating Namajapa 108 times provides enough duration (approximately 8-12 minutes) to reliably induce these calmer brain-wave states, improving mental clarity and emotional stability.

Namajapa naturally synchronizes breath with sound. Slow, rhythmic repetition:

- Activates the parasympathetic nervous system
- Reduces heart rate and blood pressure
- Lowers cortisol (stress hormone) levels

Completing 108 repetitions ensures prolonged, steady breathing, which scientifically supports relaxation, anxiety reduction, and cardiovascular health.

From a cognitive psychology perspective, repeating a single word or phrase reduces mental noise and intrusive thoughts. The number 108 provides a structured cognitive boundary, helping the mind stay engaged without boredom or fatigue.

This structured repetition enhances:

- Attention span
- Emotional control
- Mindfulness and present-moment awareness

Scientific acoustics recognizes that sound vibrations influence bodily systems. Vocal chanting creates vibrations in the throat, chest, and cranial cavities, stimulating:

- The vagus nerve, linked to emotional regulation
- Resonance in facial and cranial bones, promoting relaxation

Repeating Nāmajapa 108 times ensures sustained vibrational exposure, amplifying these psychological benefits.

Behavioral research suggests that consistent, measurable repetition supports habit formation. Practicing 108 Nāmajapa daily builds discipline and routine, reinforcing positive behavioral loops such as calmness, patience, and self-control.

The fixed number helps track progress, giving the brain a sense of completion and reward.

Clinical studies on mantra meditation demonstrate benefits such as:

- Reduced anxiety and depression
- Improved sleep quality
- Enhanced emotional resilience

Completing 108 repetitions allows sufficient time for the stress-response system to downregulate, making the practice effective as a non-pharmacological mental health intervention.

Scientifically, 108 repetitions:

- Provide optimal time duration for neurological and physiological effects
- Balance attention without overload

- Enable rhythmic breathing cycles
- Ensure mental immersion rather than superficial repetition

Thus, 108 functions as a practical, effective repetition count, refined through centuries of empirical human experience.

Psychological Perspective

Psychologically, Nāmajapa functions as a structured attentional and emotional regulation technique. Cognitive psychology recognizes that repetition reduces mental noise and interrupts negative thought patterns (Beck, 2011)^[12]. The fixed count of 108 repetitions offers a sense of structure and closure, fulfilling the mind's need for completion and reducing restlessness. Regular practice conditions the mind to associate the Divine Name with calmness and emotional safety, enhancing self-control mindfulness, and resilience against anxiety (Kabat-Zinn, 1994)^[17].

Psychology recognizes repetition as a key mechanism for attention regulation. The human mind is naturally restless and prone to distraction. Repeating the same word 108 times narrows attention to a single mental object, reducing cognitive overload.

The number 108 is large enough to shift attention from superficial focus to deep mental absorption, helping stabilize wandering thoughts.

Modern psychology identifies excessive thinking, rumination, and worry as sources of mental distress. Namajapa works as a cognitive filter, replacing intrusive thoughts with a neutral or positive mental stimulus. Repeating the Divine Name 108 times gives the mind sufficient duration to disengage from negative thought loops and enter a calmer mental state.

Psychologically, rhythmic repetition soothes emotional reactivity. Chanting creates predictability and emotional safety, which reduces anxiety and emotional fluctuations. Over 108 repetitions, emotional intensity gradually diminishes, allowing feelings of calmness, reassurance, and emotional balance to emerge.

According to behavioral psychology, repeated actions form conditioned responses. Regular practice of 108 Nāmajapa conditions the mind to associate the Divine Name with peace and stability. Over time, even a few repetitions can trigger calmness due to learned psychological association.

The human mind seeks closure and structure. Completing 108 repetitions provides a clear psychological endpoint, creating a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction. This sense of completion reduces mental restlessness and enhances motivation to continue the practice.

Nāmajapa promotes mindfulness, a widely recognized psychological technique for stress reduction. Repeating the same word draws attention to the present moment—sound, breath, and rhythm—reducing anxiety related to past regrets or future worries.

Completing 108 repetitions sustains mindfulness long enough to produce noticeable psychological calm.

Psychological studies on repetitive focus techniques show decreased stress levels and improved emotional resilience. The steady rhythm of 108 Nāmajapa slows mental activity, lowers emotional arousal, and promotes psychological relaxation without effortful control.

Psychologically, committing to a fixed number like 108 strengthens self-regulation and impulse control. Regular

practice builds patience, perseverance, and inner discipline, which are crucial for mental health and emotional maturity.

Astrological Perspective

In Vedic astrology, 108 represents cosmic completeness. The number symbolically integrates 12 zodiac signs (Rāśis) and 9 planets (Navagrahas), resulting in 108 (12×9). Additionally, the 27 lunar constellations (*Nakshatras*), each divided into four padas, also total 108 (B.V. Raman, 1992) [8].

Chanting 108 times is believed to harmonize planetary influences and purify karmic tendencies. Traditional astrological texts regard Nāmajapa as a universal remedial measure (*śānti upāya*) that works subtly by elevating consciousness rather than directly altering fate.

Astrology views numbers as carriers of cosmic meaning. The number 108 holds exceptional astrological importance:

12 zodiac signs (Rashis) \times 9 planets (Navagrahas) = 108

This represents the complete influence of planetary energies on human life.

Performing 108 Namajapa symbolically balances all planetary forces acting on the individual.

Thus, chanting 108 times is believed to create harmony between personal karma and cosmic order.

In Vedic astrology, the Navagrahas govern physical, mental, and karmic aspects of life. Each planet influences specific psychological tendencies and life events.

Regular Nāmajapa is considered a subtle way to pacify adverse planetary effects (*graha dosha*), especially when combined with faith and disciplined practice.

There are 27 Nakshatras (lunar constellations), each divided into four padas (quarters), resulting in 108 padas, Chanting 108 times symbolically connects the practitioner to all lunar influences, which govern emotions, mind, and subconscious tendencies in astrology.

Traditional astrological texts state that in Kaliyuga, elaborate rituals and gemstone remedies may not always be practical or accessible. Namajapa is regarded as the most effective universal astrological remedy, as it:

- Requires no material objects
- Has no negative side effects
- Works gradually and holistically

Astrologers often recommend Nāmajapa to reduce the intensity of unfavorable planetary periods (*dasha* and *antardasha*).

Each planet is associated with a ruling deity. Chanting the corresponding divine name 108 times is believed to strengthen beneficial planetary influences. For example:

- Sun (Surya) - vitality and confidence
- Moon (Chandra) - emotional stability
- Jupiter (Guru) - wisdom and growth
- Saturn (Shani) - discipline and endurance

Thus, 108 Namajapa serves as a spiritually aligned astrological practice.

Astrologically, planets represent karmic patterns rather than fate alone. Nāmajapa is believed to purify karmic impressions (*samskāras*), thereby reducing the psychological and situational impact of planetary challenges. By elevating consciousness, Nāmajapa helps

individuals respond wisely to planetary influences rather than being controlled by them.

Astrology recognizes resonance between human consciousness and cosmic movements. Chanting the Divine Name 108 times is thought to synchronize personal vibrations with universal rhythms, enhancing spiritual receptivity and inner balance.

Conclusion

108 Nāmajapa is a time-tested, multidimensional practice grounded in religious devotion and supported by spiritual philosophy, scientific principles, psychological mechanisms, and astrological symbolism. Its simplicity, accessibility, and holistic impact make it especially relevant in the modern age marked by stress, distraction, and moral uncertainty. The practice of 108 Nāmajapa offers a balanced path toward inner peace, mental clarity, and harmonious living.

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