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The Shamanism Magazine

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We hope you enjoy reading the article. Nicholas Breeze Wood (editor)

First... thread your needle!

A Beginners Guide to Peyote Stitch Beadwork

By Nicholas Breeze Wood

Peyote, or gourd stitch is the best way to build up beautiful kaleidoscopic patterns of coloured beads on round-section objects like rattle and fan handles, talking sticks and feather quills.

In this stitch, the beads are fastened one by one into a net of thread, which forms a separate tube around the leather on the object. This net is only fixed to the leather at the start and end of each length of thread.

The smaller the beads you use the finer the end design will be, but it is also true to say the smaller the beads you use the harder the beadwork will be to do - a fact you should bear in mind if you are a total newcomer to beadwork. I would suggest you begin your adventures in beadwork with size 10 beads (the normal size of bead found in most craft and sewing shops), or possibly size 11 (see the list of suppliers at the end of the article,) but no smaller.

Once you have your object to bead and it is covered with a layer of buckskin or other soft leather, to act as a bed for the beads to sit on, you can begin.

Start by threading your beading needle, which is often a task in it's own right. Beading needles have extremely small holes, and the best way to thread them is to hold a clean cut end of the thread so far down between your thumb and finger that you can barely see it. Once you have done this, you carefully push the eye of the needle over the thread (which is opposite to the normal method of threading a sewing needle where you push the thread through the eye of the needle). It is a good idea to keep your thread fairly short (about 40cm) as that makes it less likely to get tangled. If it does get tangled, take your time and if you can, unravel it. Tangles are good for the soul!

Once you have the needle threaded,

fasten the thread to the leather approx. 8mm *above* where the beadwork will finish at the base of the object you are beading. With this thread, stitch one bead at a time onto the leather, to form a ring around the object, leaving a gap between each bead big enough to place another. This is the first row of your beadwork (row A).

For the sake of these instructions we will say this first row has 12 beads; the actual number in your beadwork may vary from this, depending on the diameter of the quill and leather, but any number will do except a prime number (i.e. do not use 5, 7, 11, 13, etc.).

Once row A is completed, you can begin row B. Row B beads sit between the beads you put on in row A.

To describe this in more detail: once row A is completed, pass the needle and thread back through the first bead in the row (A1). The first bead of row B (B1) will now sit between beads A1 and A2.

The thread will pass through A2 and bead B2 will sit between A2 and A3 and so on. At the end of the second row, the needle and thread will pass through two beads, A12 and B1.

Your needle and thread will now be in a position to place the first bead of the next row (C1) in between beads B1 and B2 in the gap.

At the end of each row the thread will always pass through 2 beads, to put it in position to start the next row.

TIPS AND PROBLEMS.

The main problem with peyote stitch is that it is easy to forget to go through two beads at the end of each row. This is vital, and care must be taken to remember to do it.

Also, do not start a row unless you have enough thread to finish it. Finish

your old thread by sewing into the leather a few times and cutting off the remainder. As the beadwork continues up the object, it will cover this thread end and hide it.

A newly-threaded needle can be fastened into the leather and passed through any 'up' bead. This will enable you to start the new row in the proper way.

CREATING PATTERNS

Once you understand the basic method, striking geometric designs can be made fairly simply in the beadwork. Patterns are based on units of numbers. These units are determined by the number of beads in each row. In this example, as we are using 12 beads in our row, our pattern units can be any number which will divide into 12, (i.e. 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6). If our example had 9 beads in each row, then our pattern units would be 1, 3 and 9. This is the reason we should avoid a prime number such as 7, as we can only have units of 1 and 7 which greatly limits the pattern potential.

I suggest for a first venture you attempt nothing more complicated than a 2 unit pattern (an up-down zig-zag), for which you will need a number of beads in the first row of your beadwork divisible by 2 (e.g.: 8, 10, 12, 14 beads etc.).

This is best started after a few rows of single colour beadwork have been put onto the bottom of the object. Begin by putting the first bead of the new row in a new colour. The next bead should be the old colour, and the third bead in the new and so on. Continue until the whole row is completed with alternating colours. This 1-2, 1-2 (new-old, new-old), is what makes this a 2-unit pattern. (A 3-unit pattern would be 'new-old-old' etc.)

The next row is done in the same way, except that every bead put in is the new colour. The third row of the pattern, completes the zig-zag, and starts the next one by introducing another new colour. This set of steps can be repeated for as many zig-zags, as you wish.

Once a few rows are completed, it should become clear that there is a definite pattern of up and down to the beadwork structure, which is most evident along its working edge.

This is a very simple pattern, more complex patterns need a certain amount of forethought to get right, but if you have a good selection of different coloured beads wonderful effects can be created.

When the beadwork is completed, it can be finished off by passing the thread through each up bead (i.e. the last row you put on), and pulling it tight. This

makes the thread act like a draw-string which pulls the net of beads tight to the leather. The thread can then be passed back through the leather, underneath the length of beadwork. Make a few small fastening off stitches into the leather in such a way that the beadwork hides them.

My first attempts at this beadwork were awful, and yours will probably be too - save those really special feathers you've been keeping to make that special fan until you have made a few others that matter less. The main thing is not to panic or get exasperated with it. It is not initially easy, or quick, but it is worth persevering with, as the end result can be very beautiful, and once you have mastered it's structure you will understand how it is constructed and be able to work with it creatively.

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RIGHT:
Diagram showing how patterns in peyote stitch can be developed. Beginning at the bottom with a band of single colours, the next pattern is a simple 2 unit zig-zag. Beyond that the pattern gets more complex.

By making a graph-like chart of beads on a piece of paper, you can design



LEFT:
Three sizes of seed beads, shown full size. Top - size 10. Centre - size 11. Bottom - size 13.



BELOW:
Diagram of the first three rows of a piece of beadwork showing the characteristic 'up-down' pattern of peyote stitch. The black line represents the thread and shows the way it passes through each bead.

The red row is 'Row a', the blue 'Row b', and the green 'Row c'. The thread under 'Row a' is stitched into the buckskin (represented by the yellow line in the



RIGHT:
Part of a feather fan handle beaded in peyote stitch using size 11 beads shown considerably larger than life size.

BELOW:
Detail of the

