

*Note: This file attempts to describe an intricate and complex process, that is best served by video or personal encounter. If you experience any difficulty or confusion, please let me know via e-mail [by clicking here](#).*

*Very extra special thanks to Patricia VanderLaan who supplied the photos on this page. Many years!*

## **How to tie an Orthodox Prayer Rope knot**

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The Orthodox prayer rope is a frequent sight. Sometimes called a Rosary, they are substantially different from the Roman Catholic Rosary. They are aids to prayer, and typically come in three lengths: 33 knot, 50 knot, and 100 knot. Typically there are beads to designate every 25 knots, on ropes longer than 33 knots.

The tying of these knots is somewhat of an art. Mother Apolonaria of the Dormition of the Theotokos Monastery in Rives Junction, Michigan, USA, taught a disciple to tie the knot, and she produced a video tape. This is how I learned to tie the prayer rope knot, and is the basis for the information found here. The tape is available from [Firebird Video](#), at [the page for the prayer rope video itself](#).

I have prepared a short (5 minute) video that describes this process. The file is a streaming media file, and about 3.7 MB in size (not for the faint of heart). The quality isn't great either. Click [here to VIEW THE VIDEO](#).

You may also see the video in Real Media format (appx 1.4 MB) - Click [here](#) or to view in MPEG format (17.1 MB), click [here](#). Please note I have retained the copyrights to all the videos. They may be freely distributed only - collection of any fees (including media or duplication fees) will be a violation of the copyright.

I would suggest strongly printing this page out and reading over it thoroughly before beginning. Choice of materials, and other issues encountered later in the process, will to some degree be determined at the beginning of the process.

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## **MATERIALS**

There are two basic materials used in making most prayer ropes. Yarn is cheap and available, but I find it difficult to work with. I prefer to work with a satin trim material called "Rattail", which is available for under \$0.40 per yard at craft and fabric stores. A 33 knot rope of size 2 rattail (which is 2mm thick) makes a rope that will fit the typical man's wrist (the rope will be about 8 inches inside circumference). Using size 1 (1mm) rattail reduces the size significantly, about 5 3/4 inches inside circumference, but is perfect for

smaller wrists, particularly ladies' or children's. Using #2 rattail makes a knot 3/8 inch wide by 1/4 inch long. The #1 rattail is about a 1/4 inch knot. The smaller size can be a problem for larger fingers.

One can also use yarn, preferably cotton or acrylic 4-ply. If you do so, the amount of material will need to be doubled. In order to get the thickness necessary to make the knot, you use two strands of yarn as you would one strand of rattail. Later on, during certain stages of the knot construction, you will find that you must locate two strands and pull them through the knot (like weaving), rather than one strand. The satin material of rattail is easier to work with, I find, as well.

You will also need some beads, typically called "pony beads", of a size consistent with the knot sizes. I like wood or metallic material, personally, but plastic is OK too -- get creative! Pony beads (6mm x 9mm) work well for #1 rattail, but larger material (like #2 rattail) can be difficult to insert. For longer ropes, you will insert one bead after every 25 knots, and insert two strands -- not a problem. But after the rope is formed to a circle, you will insert 4 strands of material (still not a problem for #1 rattail, but difficult for #2 rattail). If you can find beads with a hole larger than 6mm, it might be more useful -- #2 rattail, 4 strands, will be 8mm thick. Check out the jewelry making section of the craft store for bead selection.

You will also need a yarn needle, a sewing needle, and thread the same color of the material being used. Tassels can be made of the rattail material, or alternatively, embroidery thread of the same color works well in forming a tassel (embroidery thread is my preference). The tassel can be eliminated entirely, if you desire. Fabric glue (permanent, washable, and colorless) can be used in parts of the cross and tassel, and is handy to have around.

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## AMOUNT OF MATERIAL

Using rattail, it takes about 8 yards (7.32 m) of material to make a 33-knot rope, including the cross at the end of the process. It will take about 12 yards (10.97 m) to make a 50 knot, and 24 yards (21.95 m) for 100 knot. Get a yard or two extra when you start -- excess isn't typically a problem, and if you end up with material too short, there is NO way to "splice" in additional material.

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## KNOT CONSTRUCTION

While the construction of a prayer knot is called "tying", I find it more helpful to think of it as "weaving" a prayer knot.

Begin by asking God to bless the work you are undertaking.



To begin, take the length of material and double it. Tie a regular loop knot (one that is easily removed) about 12-24 inches (0.3 m to 0.61 m) from the "connected" end of the two strands of material. The length left (12-24", or 0.3 m to 0.61 m) is based on the method of joining the two ends of the prayer rope together to make a loop, once all the knots are tied.

These instructions refer to using your left hand to wrap the knot, although I don't know why it shouldn't work on the right hand as well. In these instructions, however, the "left side" and "right side", as well as "clockwise and counterclockwise" will be reversed if the right hand is used.

Place your index finger in front of this simple knot, with both strands running down your palm, one on either side of your index finger. The simple knot will be behind your index finger at this point.



Take the strand on the right and wrap it around the thumb, clockwise. This wrap will go to the left of the thumb in front of it, and come out from behind the thumb on the right side. After this is completed, the strands will be dangling, the one on left will be "on top" of the cross strand, the one on the right will be "underneath" the crossing strand. There will be loose loops around the index finger and thumb at this point.

Holding your hand palm facing toward you, after the first wrap clockwise across and behind the thumb, you should have the two loops you mentioned -- one around the thumb and one around the index finger, with the "dangling" ends (the long ends both emerging from the back side of the hand, down across the center of the palm. The loops will be on the outside of the two strands, i.e., the two "dangling ends" will be in the center, with neither loop in between the two dangling ends.



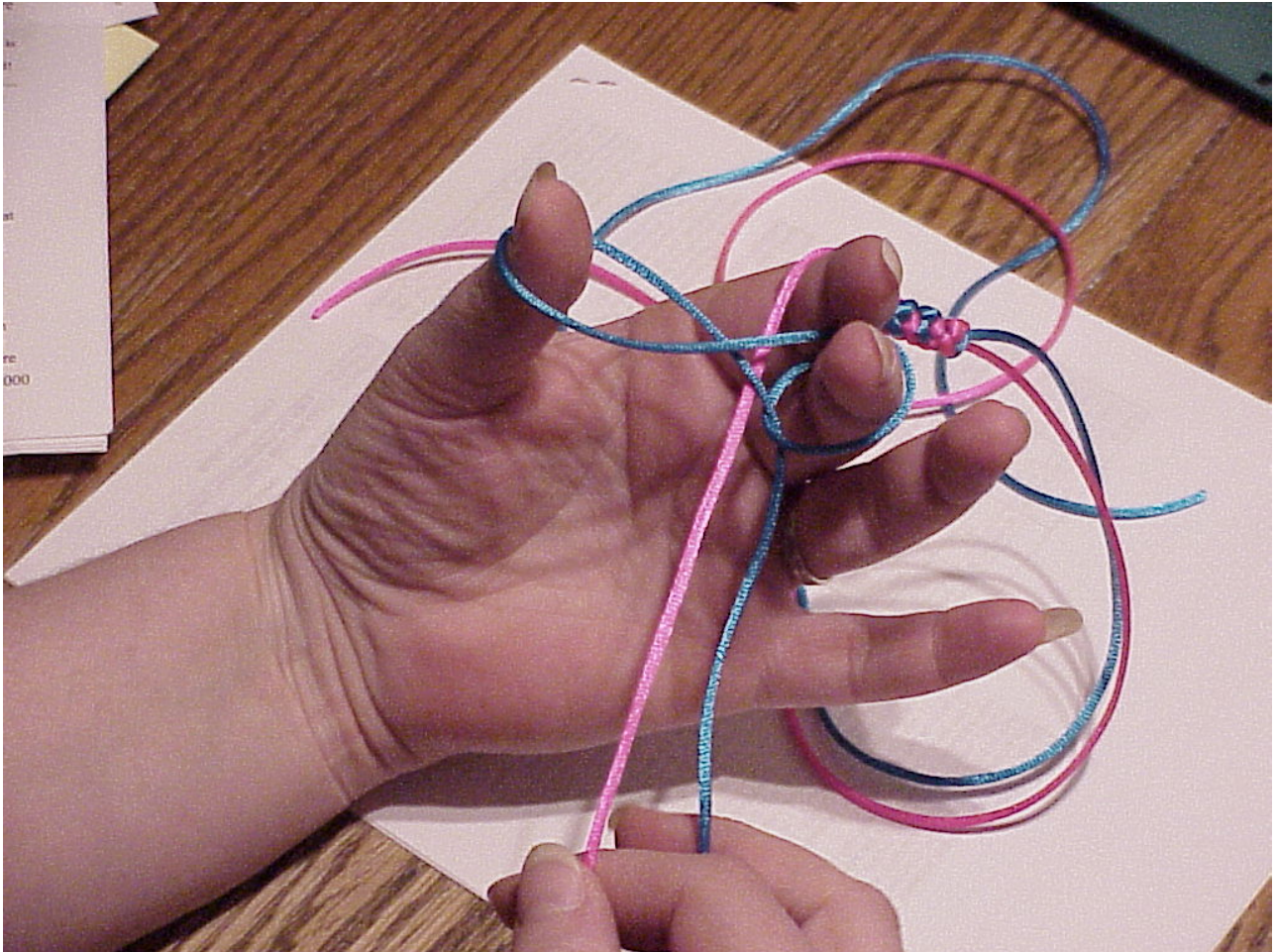
Still holding the palm facing toward you, notice the two dangling ends. The left dangling end will be the one running from behind the thumb. At the base of the thumb, grasp the looped strand (just to the left of the leftmost dangling end) with your right hand. Your right palm will be facing away from you as you grasp this strand, and your left palm will be facing toward you.

Now, make sure your fingers are loose enough to allow the material to slide freely. By pulling on the strand you are now grasping, pulling it away from your left palm toward your body, you will notice the left dangling end moves -- gets shorter. This is correct.

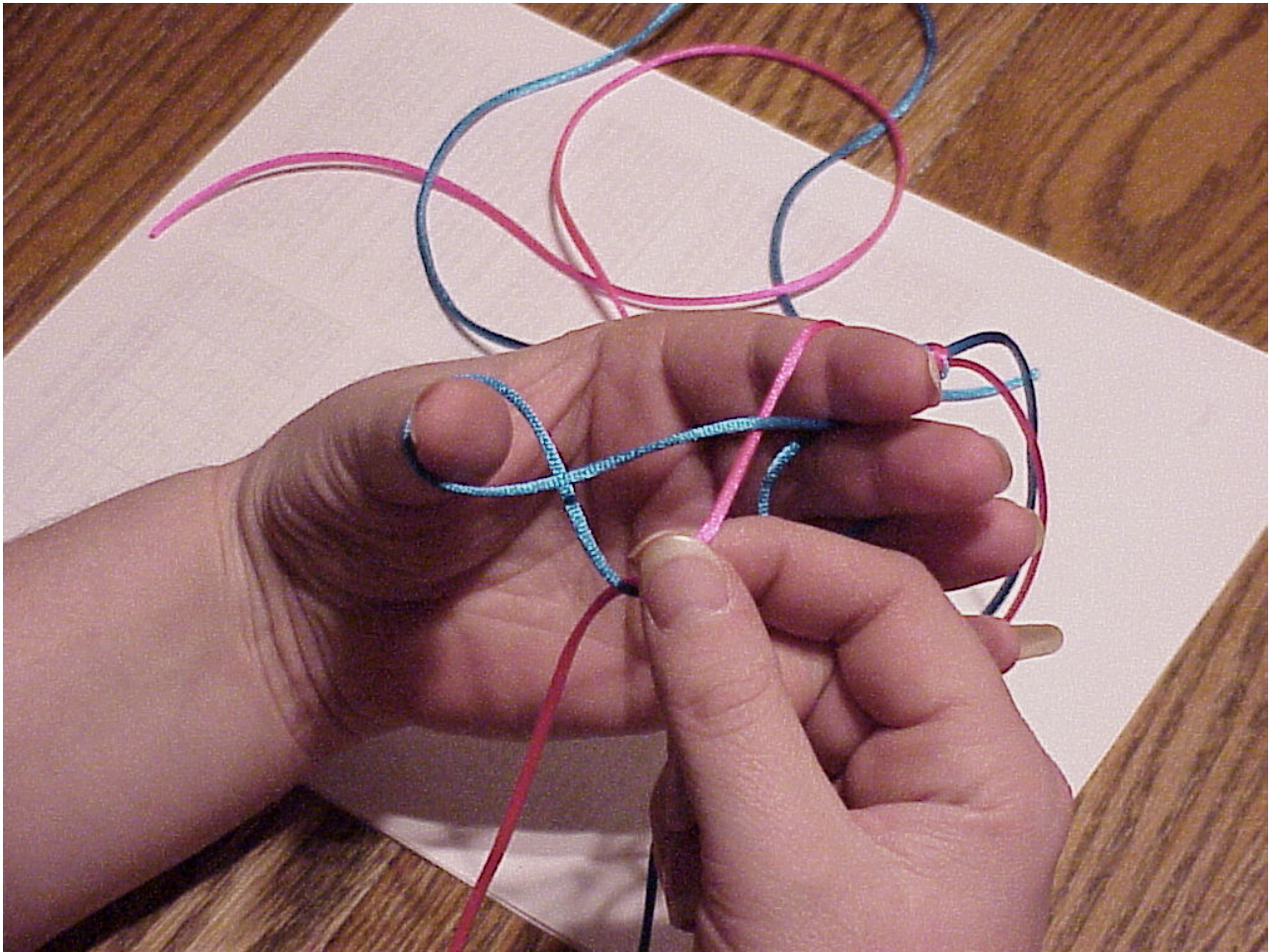
Having pulled on the material you are grasping, giving yourself plenty of slack in the material, and without releasing the strand you are grasping in your right hand, rotate your right hand to where the palm is facing toward



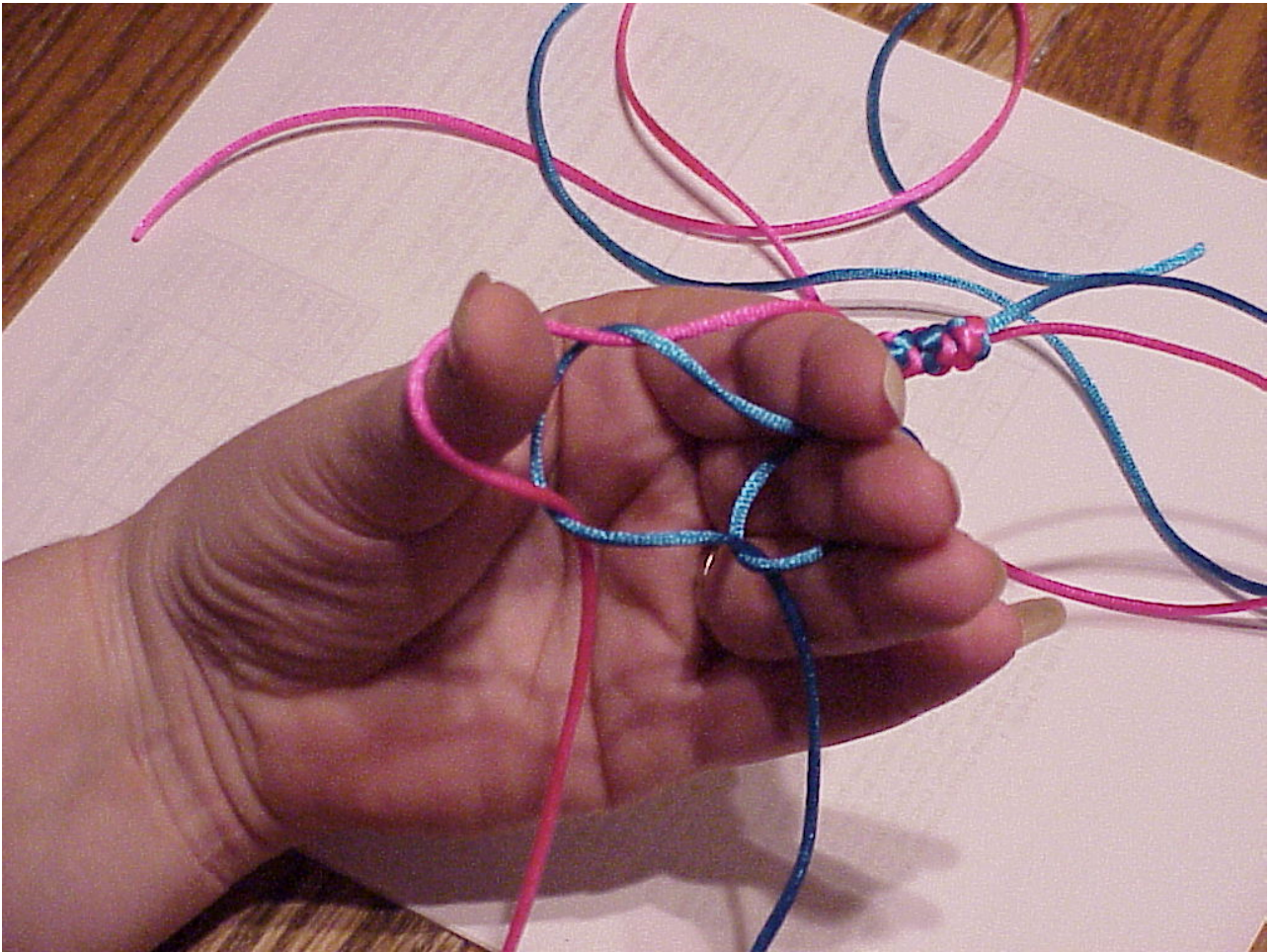
you, rather than away from you as it was when you first grasped the strand. The fingers of your other (left) hand do not need to be pressed together, but rather like you were going to catch a ball with it -- loose. By running the right hand behind and down the middle finger, still holding the strand you picked up at the base of the thumb, you will get the material behind the middle finger. This particular strand does not loop around the middle finger, but after the strand is placed behind the middle finger, a loop will form, looking somewhat similar to a slip knot at the base of the middle finger, palm facing toward you.



On the right side of the "X" formed in the palm (you may have to bend your thumb slightly downward to see the "X" formed), one strand will be dangling. Reaching through the right side of the "X", grasp this strand. Holding onto this strand, drop the strand running around the thumb, and place the strand that you are holding behind the thumb. When this process is complete, you should have a square formed in the center of the palm. If you do *\*not\** have this square, stop, and start over. Nothing else will work. This is the "beginning position".







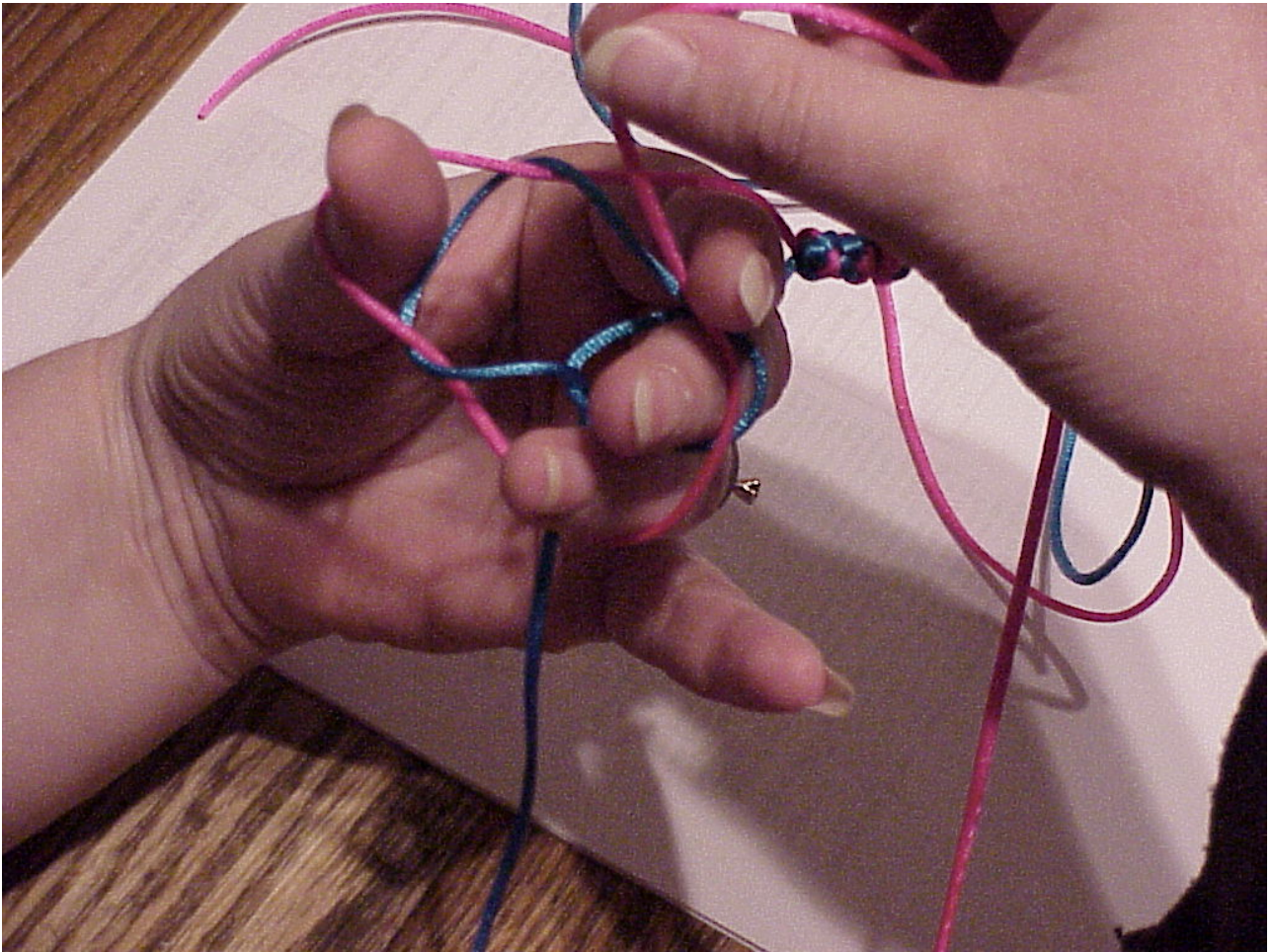
At this point you will have a square in the center of the palm, one "dangling" strand running to the floor (or your lap) from the middle finger, and one from (roughly) the thumb, on the left side. You are now ready to begin the wrapping phase.

REMEMBER! If you are using yarn, rather than rattail, the lengths must be doubled, and everything is doubled. The two strands will become four strands, and after placing the starting knot behind the index finger, each two strands on either side of the index finger will be moved together, as one strand!

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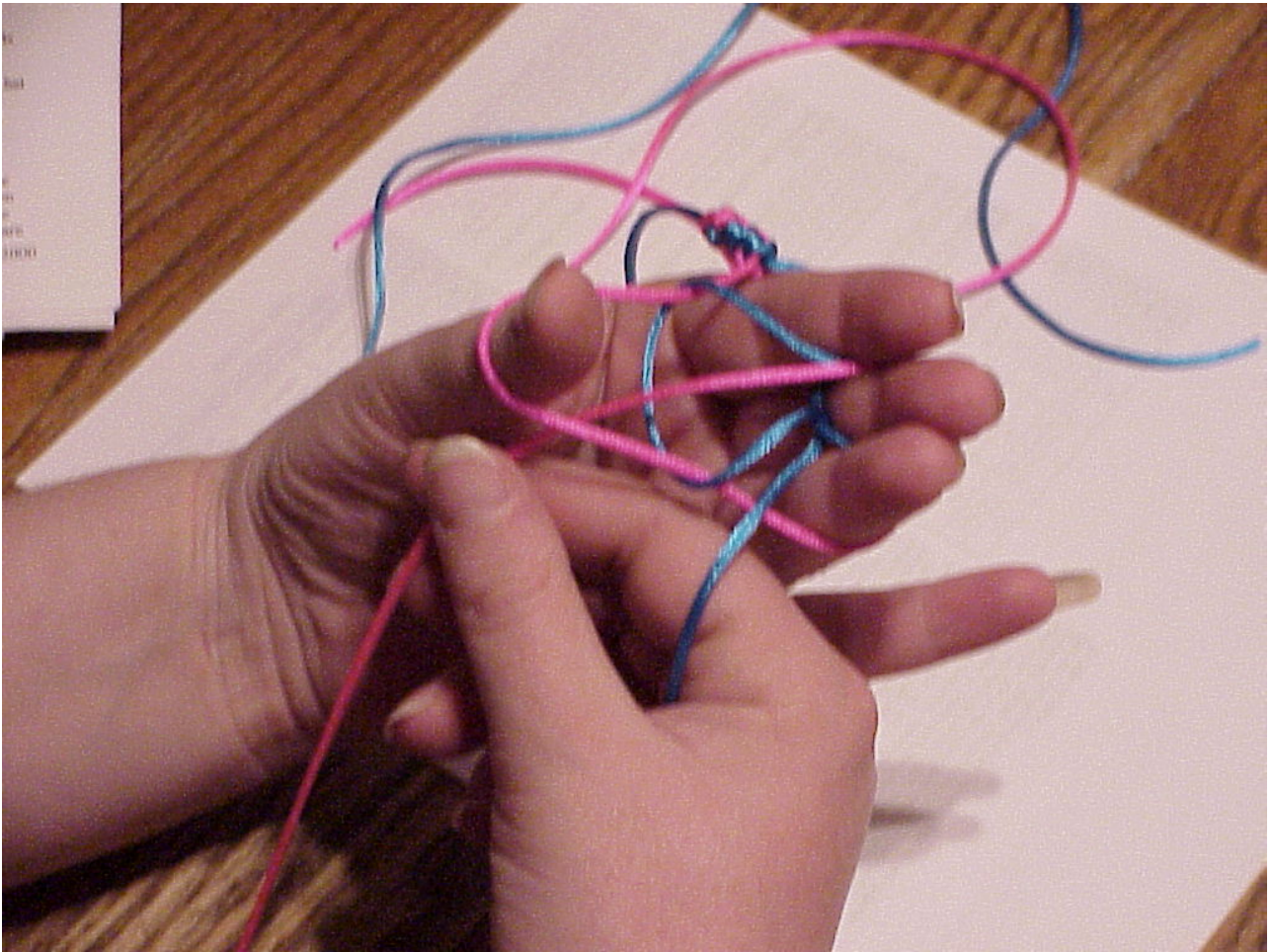
## WRAPPING

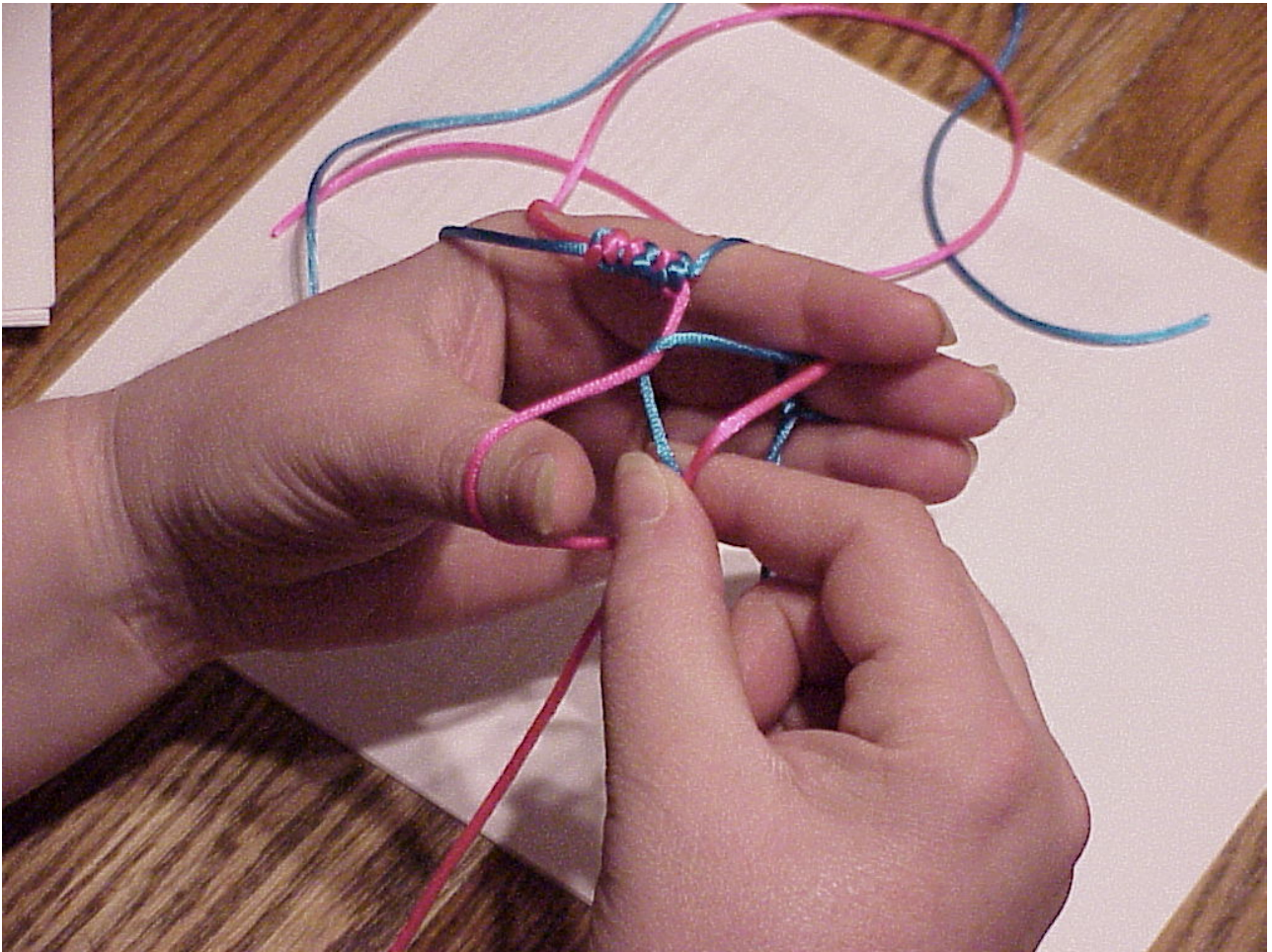
Reach behind the right dangling strand, and grasp the left dangling strand. Take the strand you are grasping and go across the palm, between the ring and pinky fingers, behind the ring and middle fingers, and back out between the middle and index fingers. This strand should cross on top of all other strands, and is tucked under the single strand running in front of the thumb. Pull the loose ends snug, but not too tight.



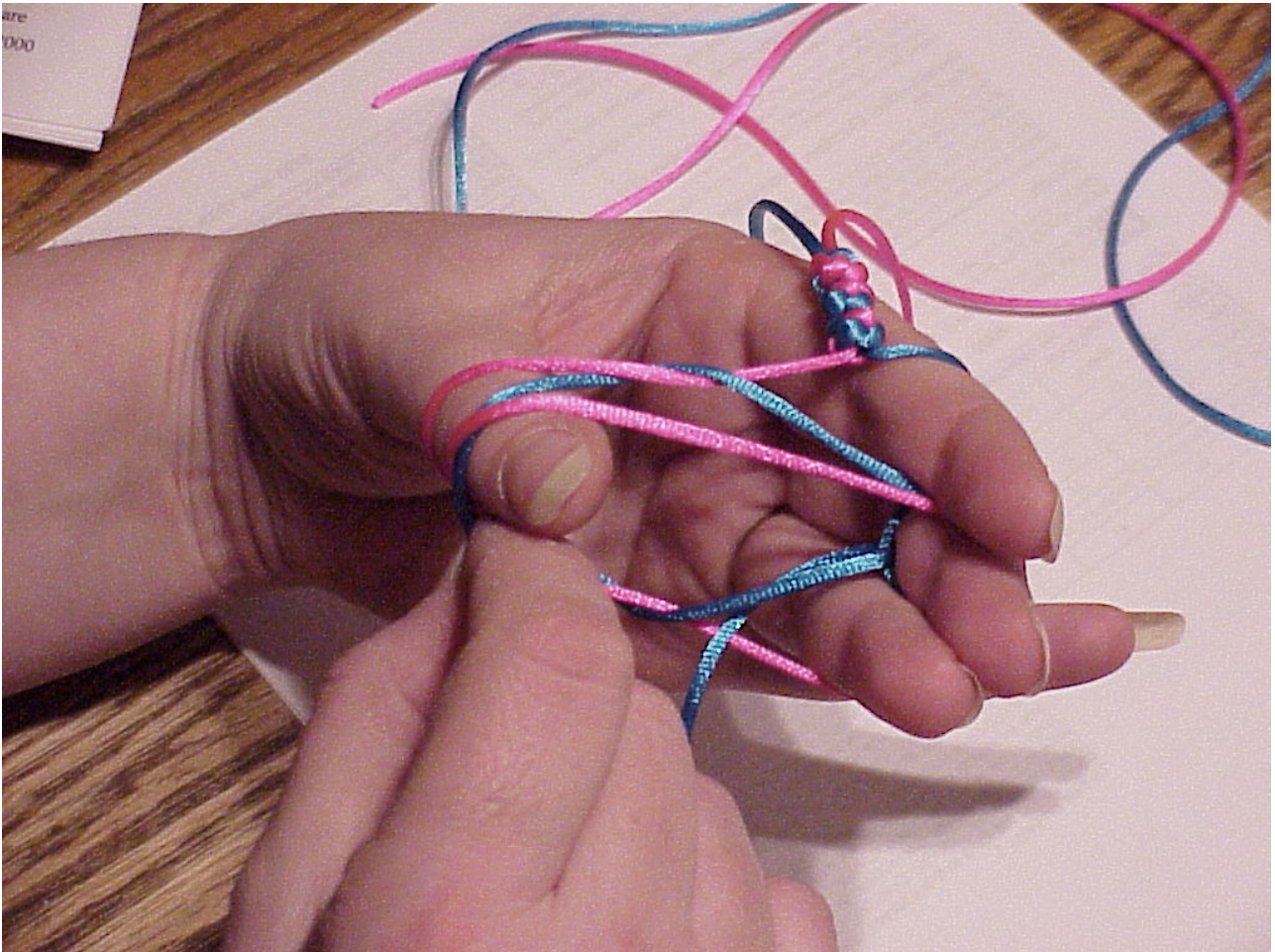
If you look in the center of the palm, you should now see another "X" formed. Grasp both strands that form that "X" on either side. Add these strands to the single strand behind the thumb, **WITHOUT** dropping the single strand behind the thumb. It is important that you grasp the sides of the "X", not the "top/bottom" of the X.



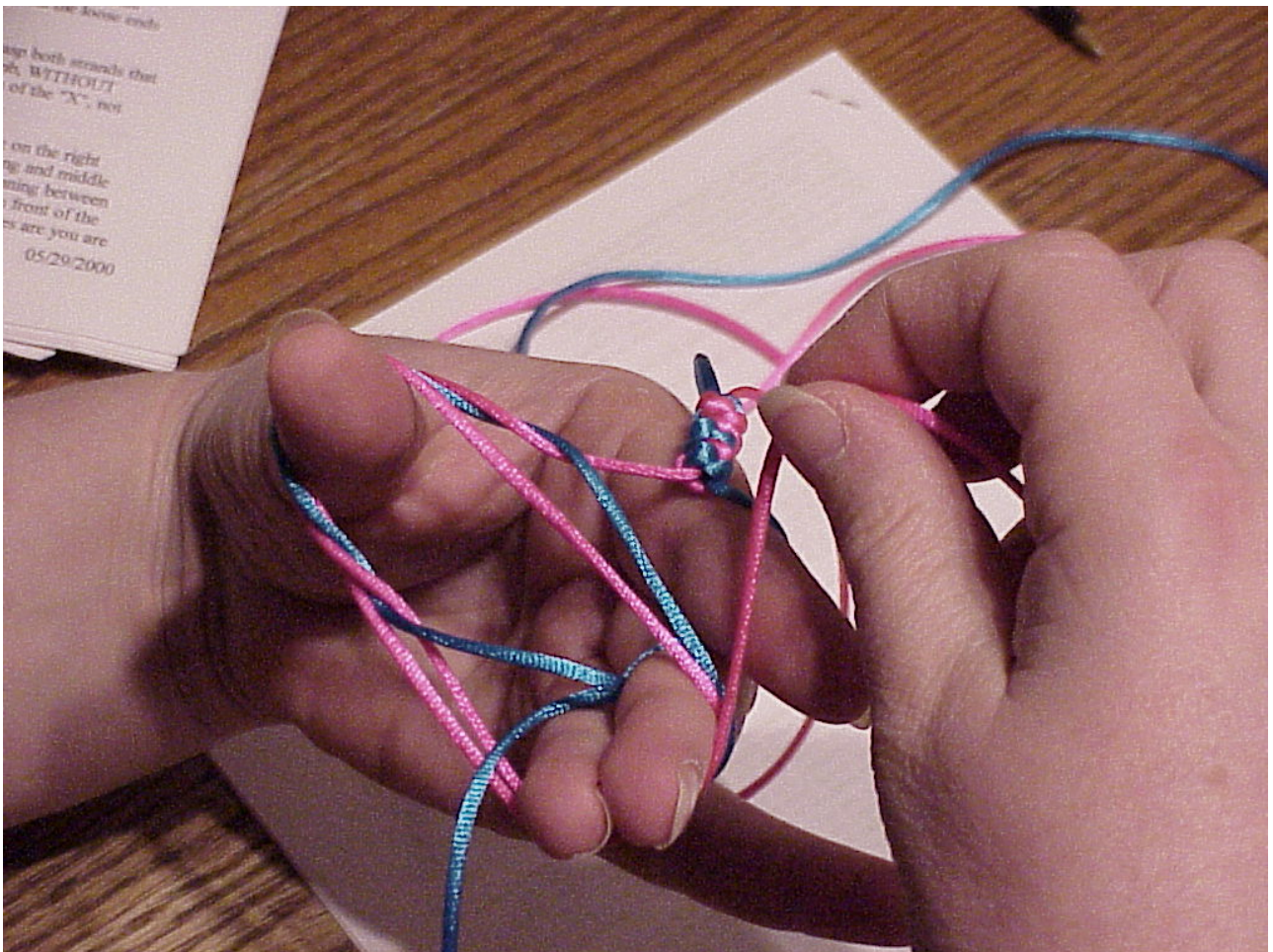




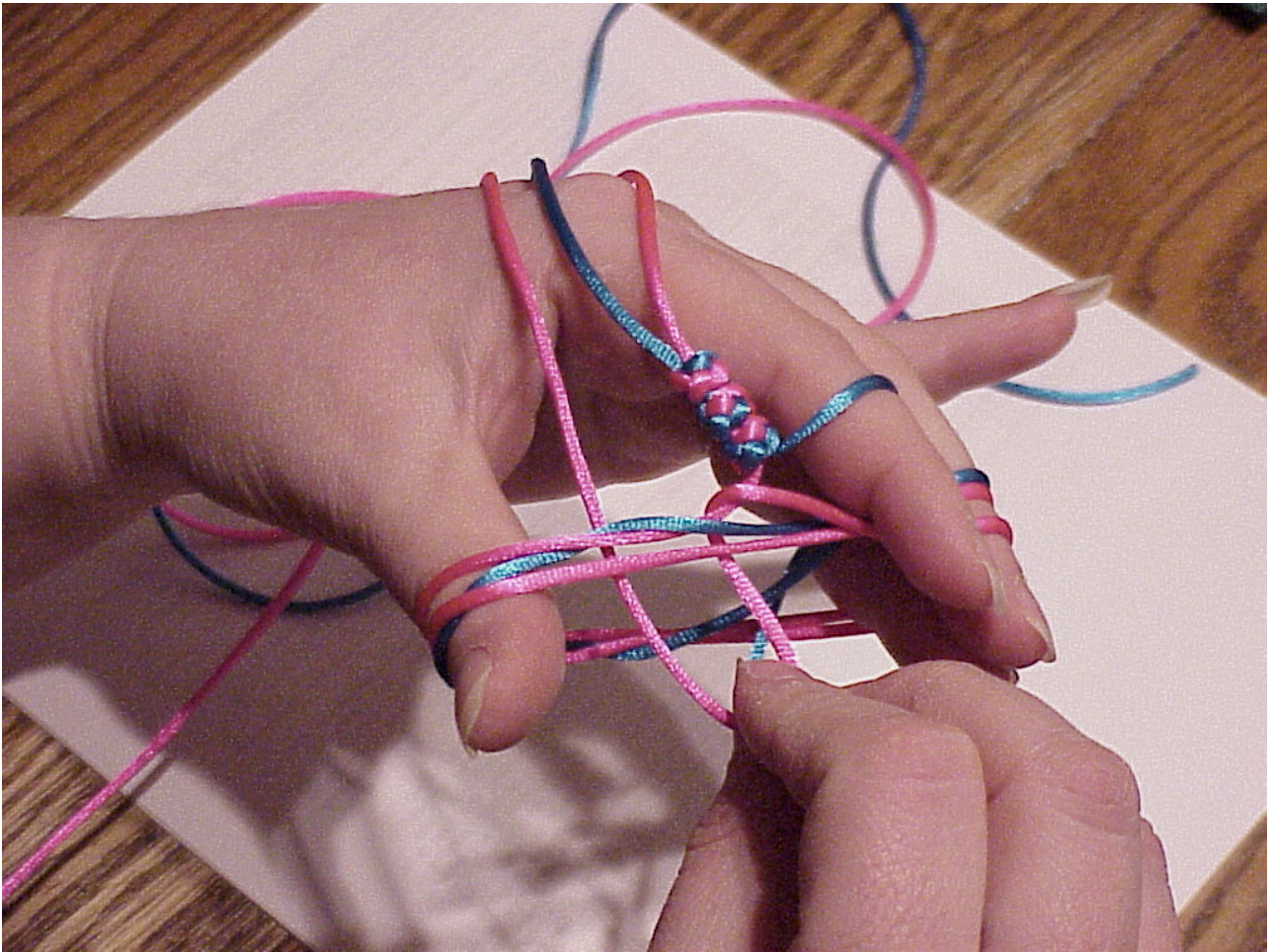




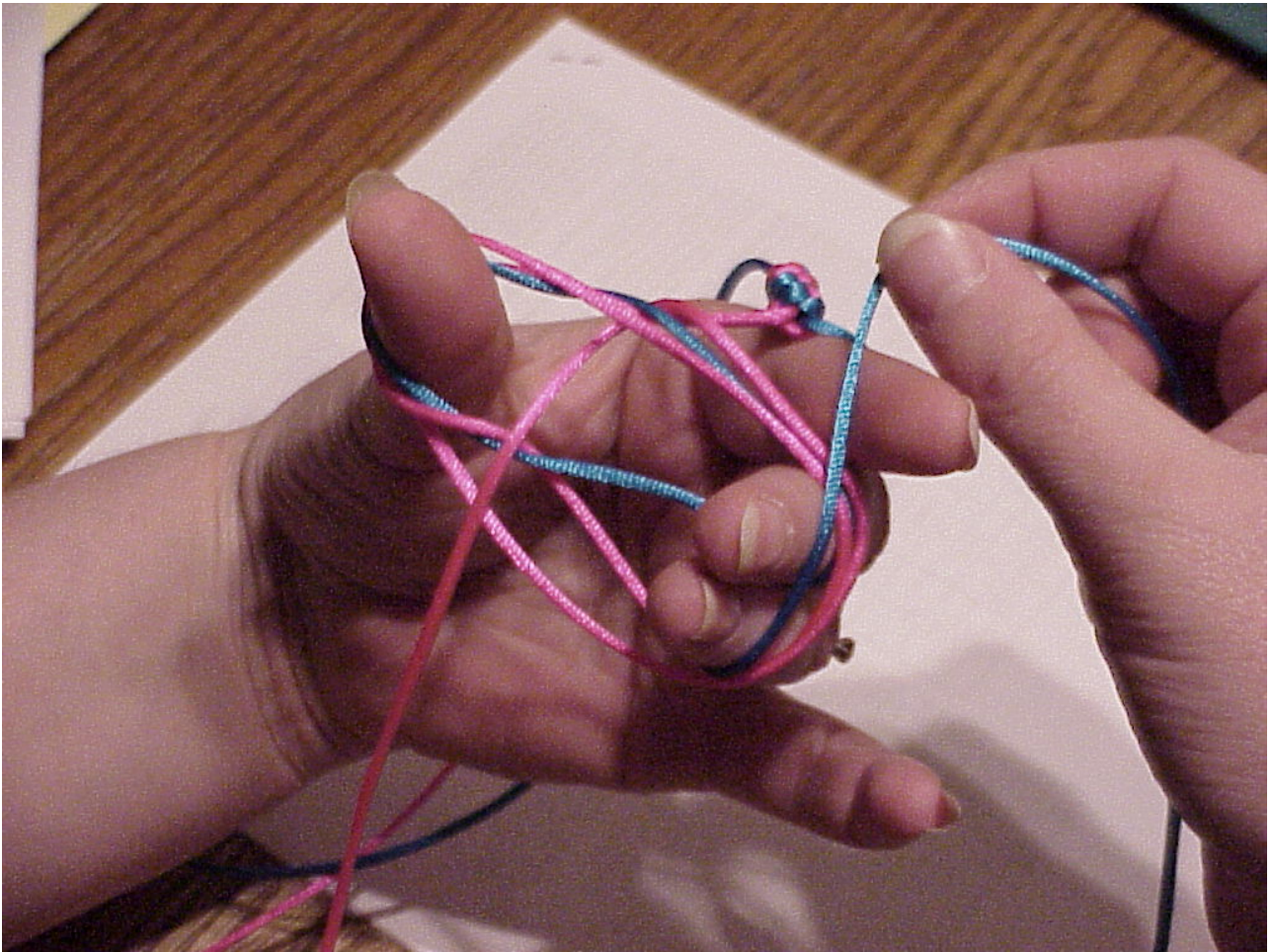
The next wrap is similar to the first, but simpler. Take what is now the strand dangling on the right side of the hand, go from the palm side through the ring finger and pinky, behind the ring and middle fingers, and out between the middle and index fingers. Locate the three strands now running between the index finger and thumb. One of these strands runs behind the index finger, two run in front of the index finger. Take the strand you just wrapped behind the ring and middle fingers (chances are you are still holding it), and wrap it around these three strands, going away from you across the top, behind the three strands, and toward you underneath the three strands. Let the end now dangle.



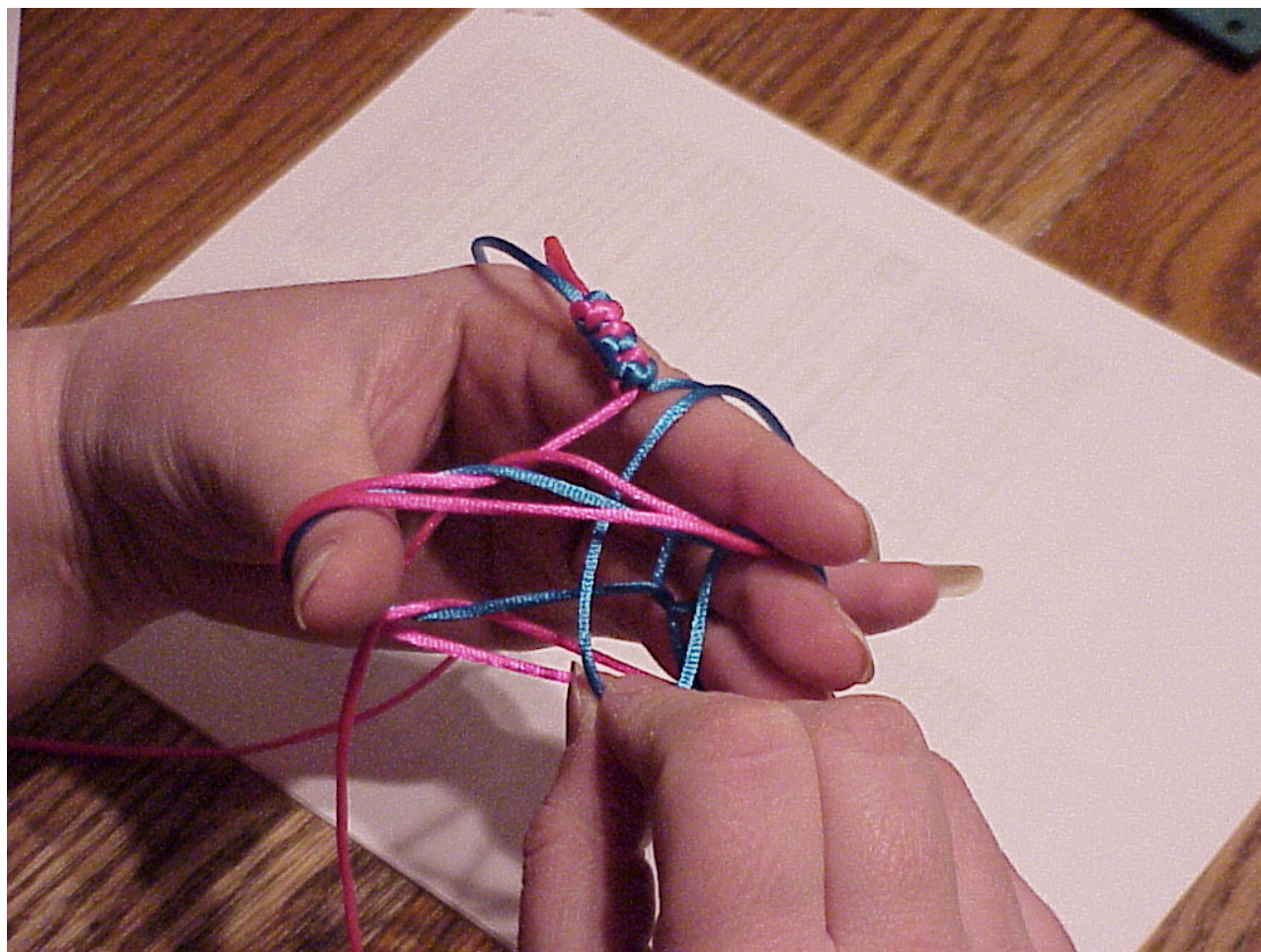


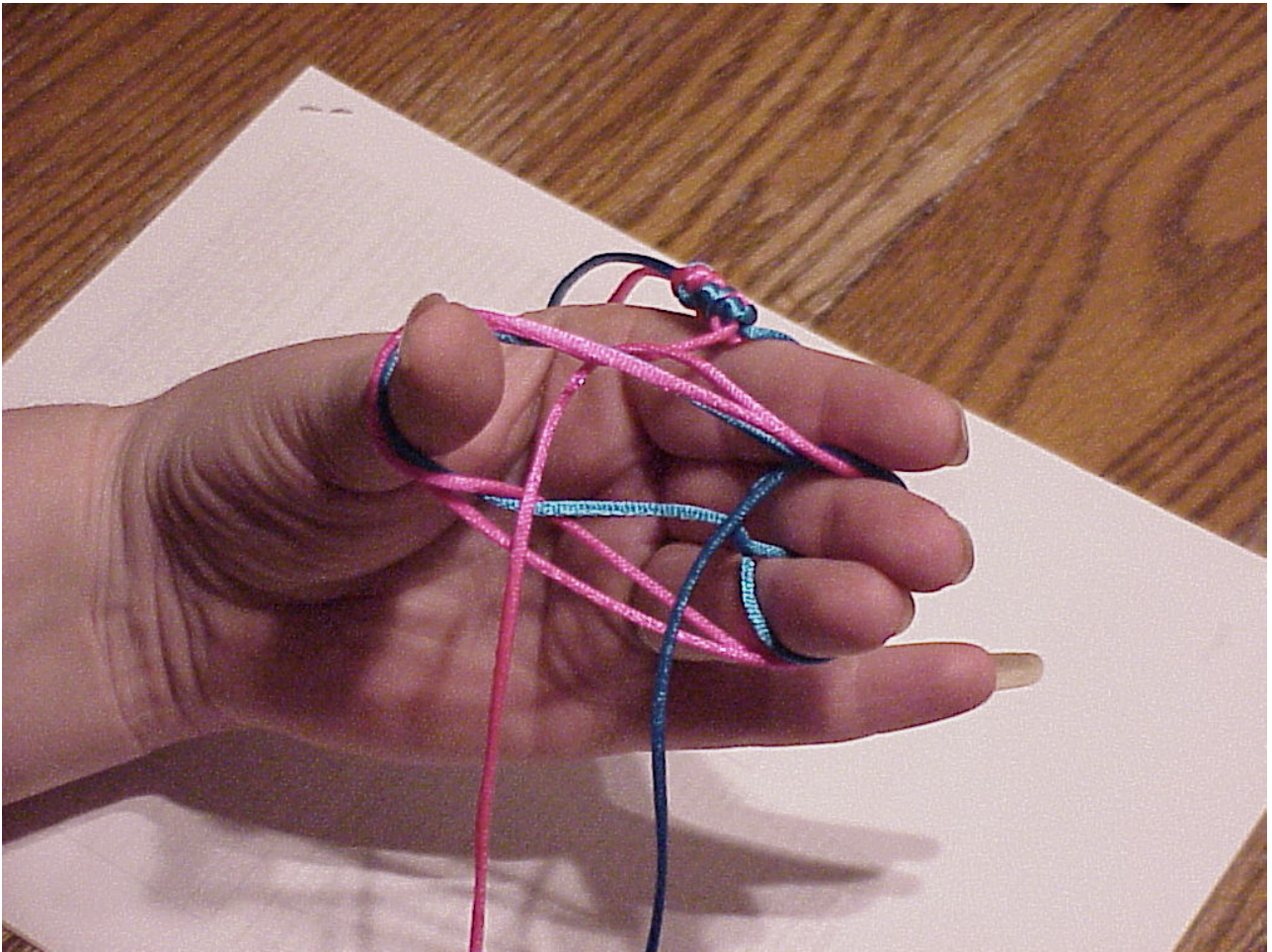


The final wrap is similar to the second wrap. Reach behind the end you just wrapped, and grasp the dangling strand that runs behind the thumb. Go from the palm side through the ring finger and pinky, behind the ring and middle fingers, and out between the middle and index fingers, as you did before. Locate the three strands now running in front of the index finger. Take the strand you just wrapped behind the ring and middle fingers, and wrap it around these three strands, going away from you across the top, behind the three strands but in front of the index finger, and toward you underneath the three strands. Let the end now dangle.









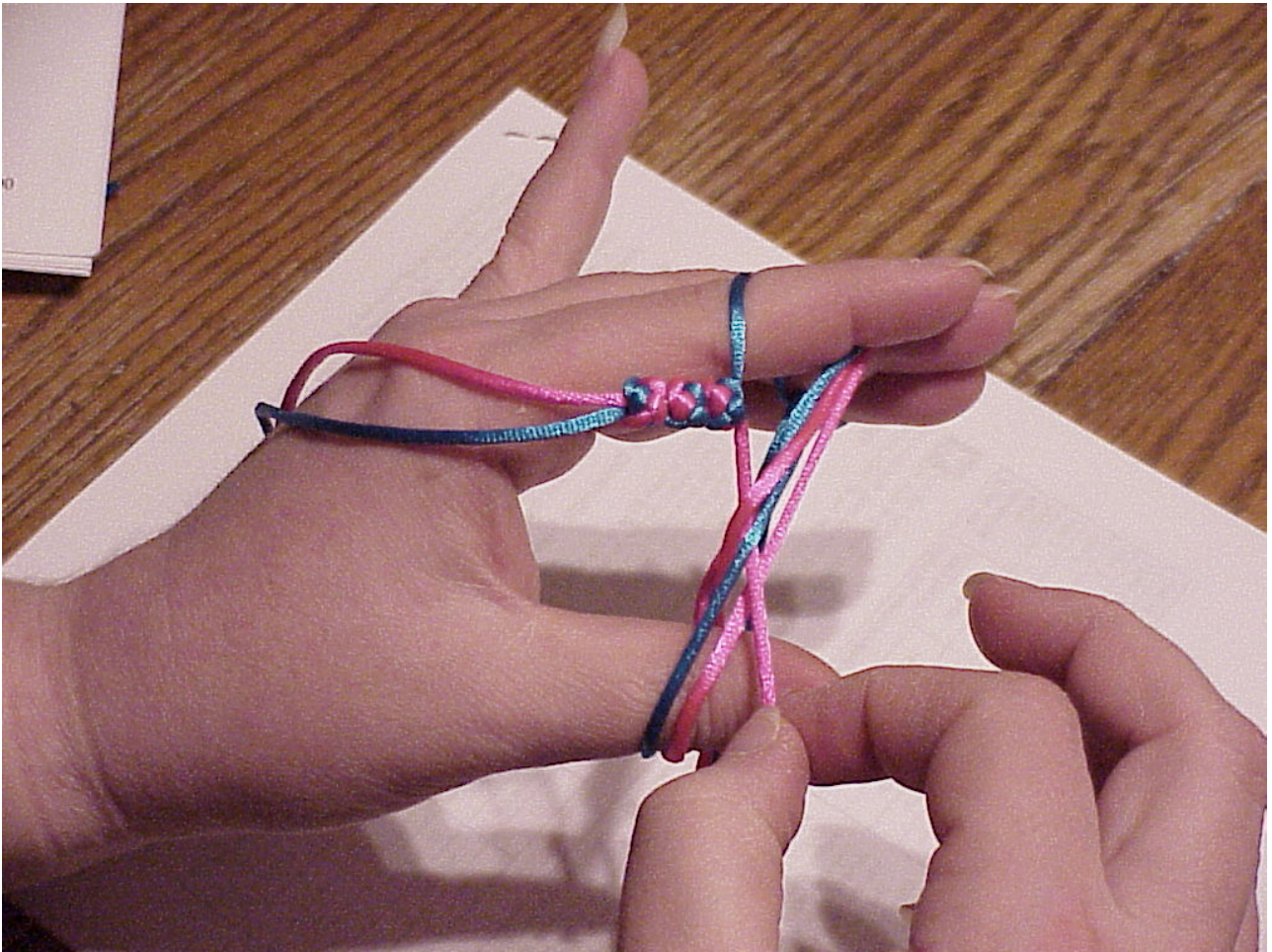
This completes the wrapping phase of knot construction. Next, we must remove the knot from the fingers.

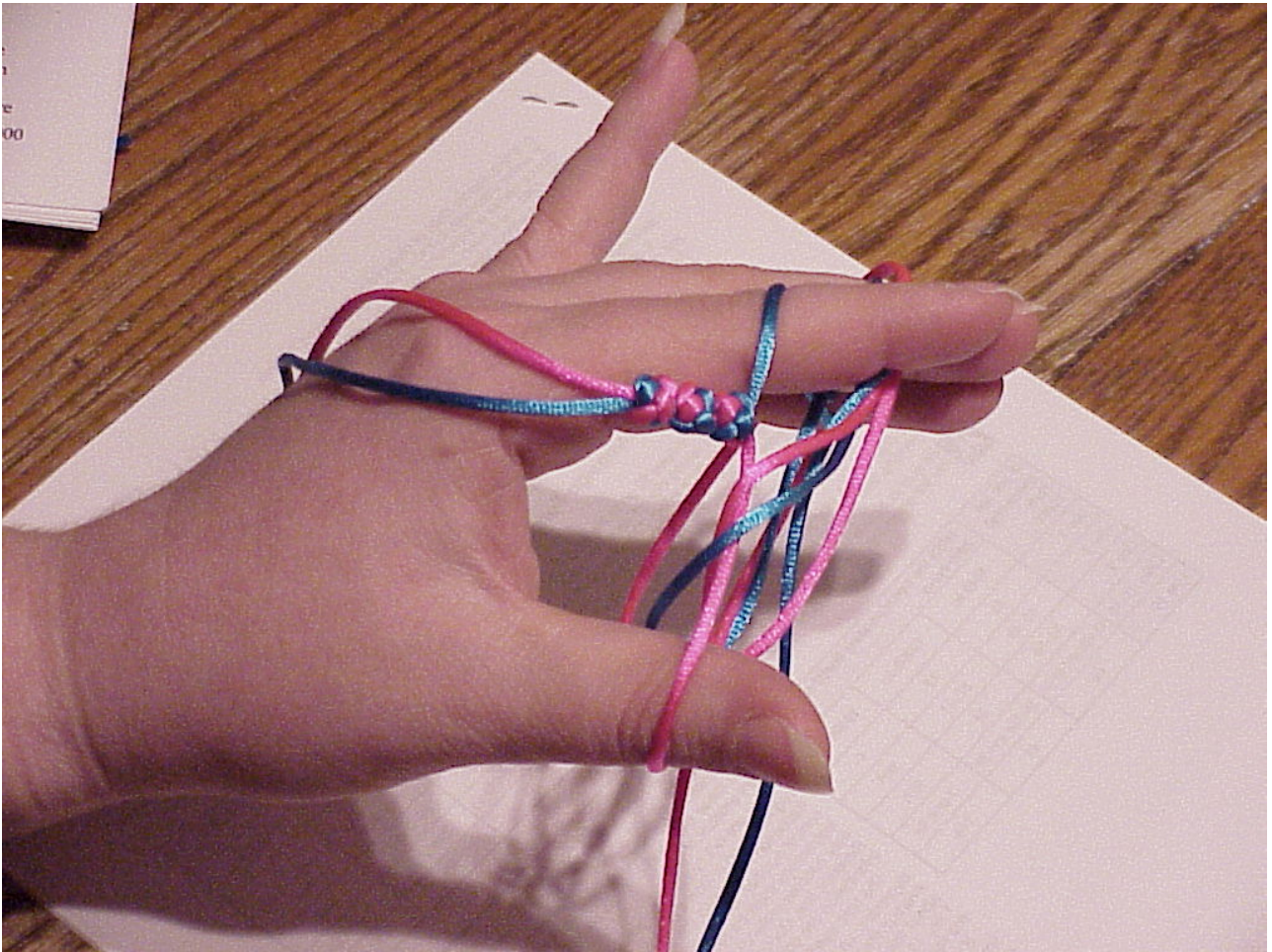
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## **REMOVING THE KNOT FROM THE FINGERS**

Locate the strand running from the starting knot that runs continuously behind the thumb. Grasp that strand on the front side of the thumb, after it has run behind the thumb. If you have the correct strand, you can pull gently and the starting knot behind the index finger will move slightly. Take this strand and hold it. Pull your thumb completely out of all the loops. Take the strand you are holding and replace it around the thumb.

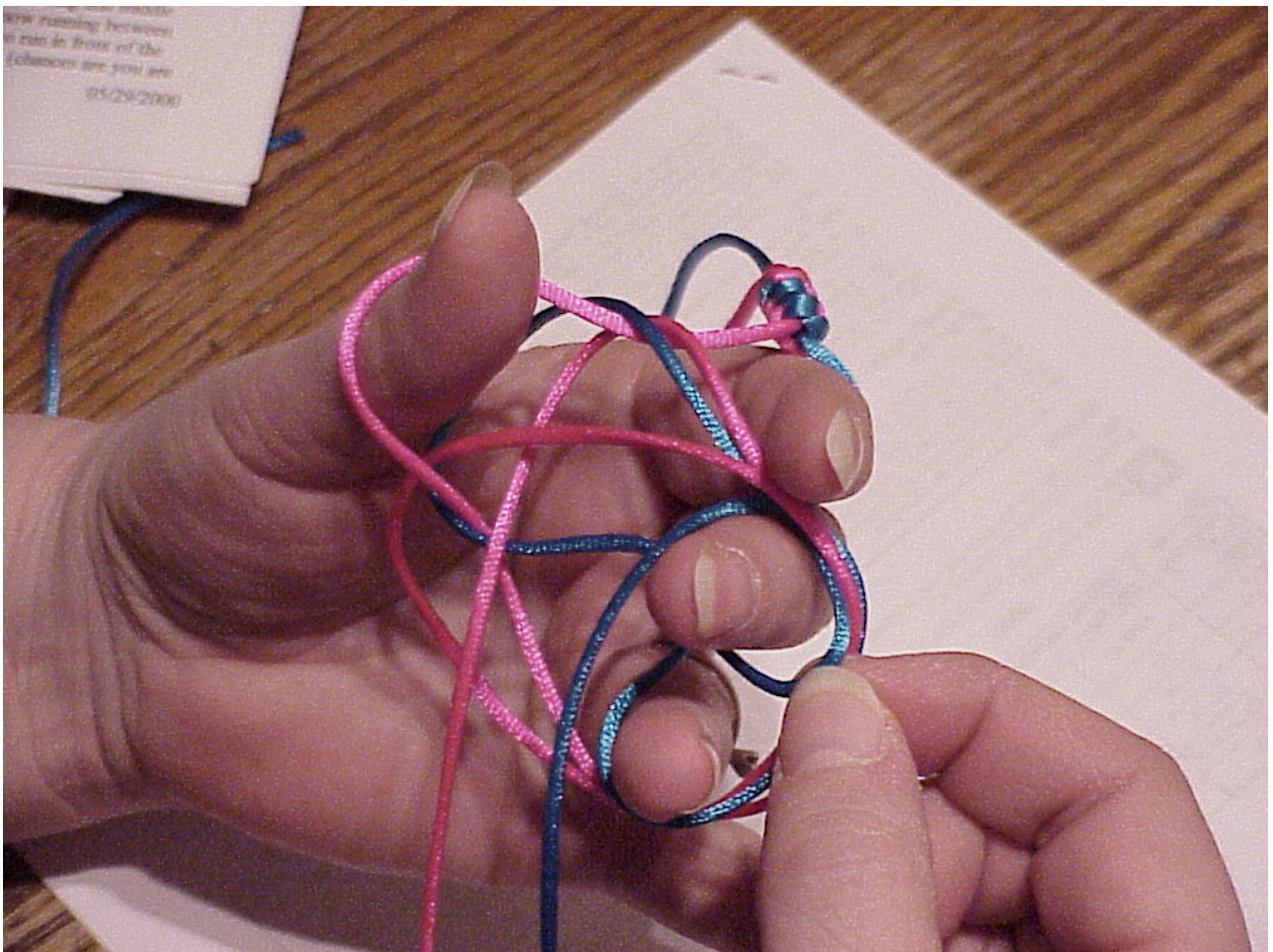


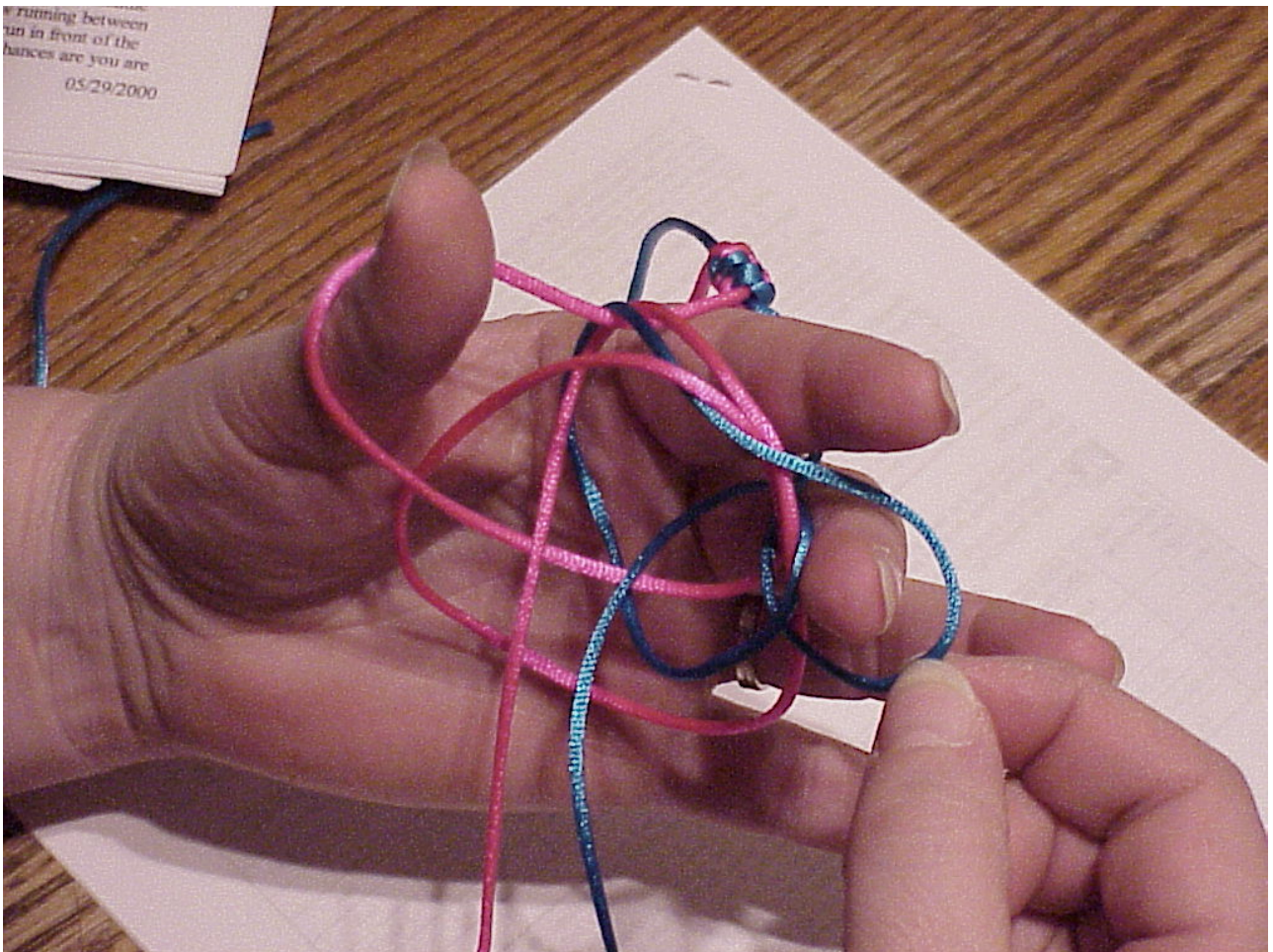




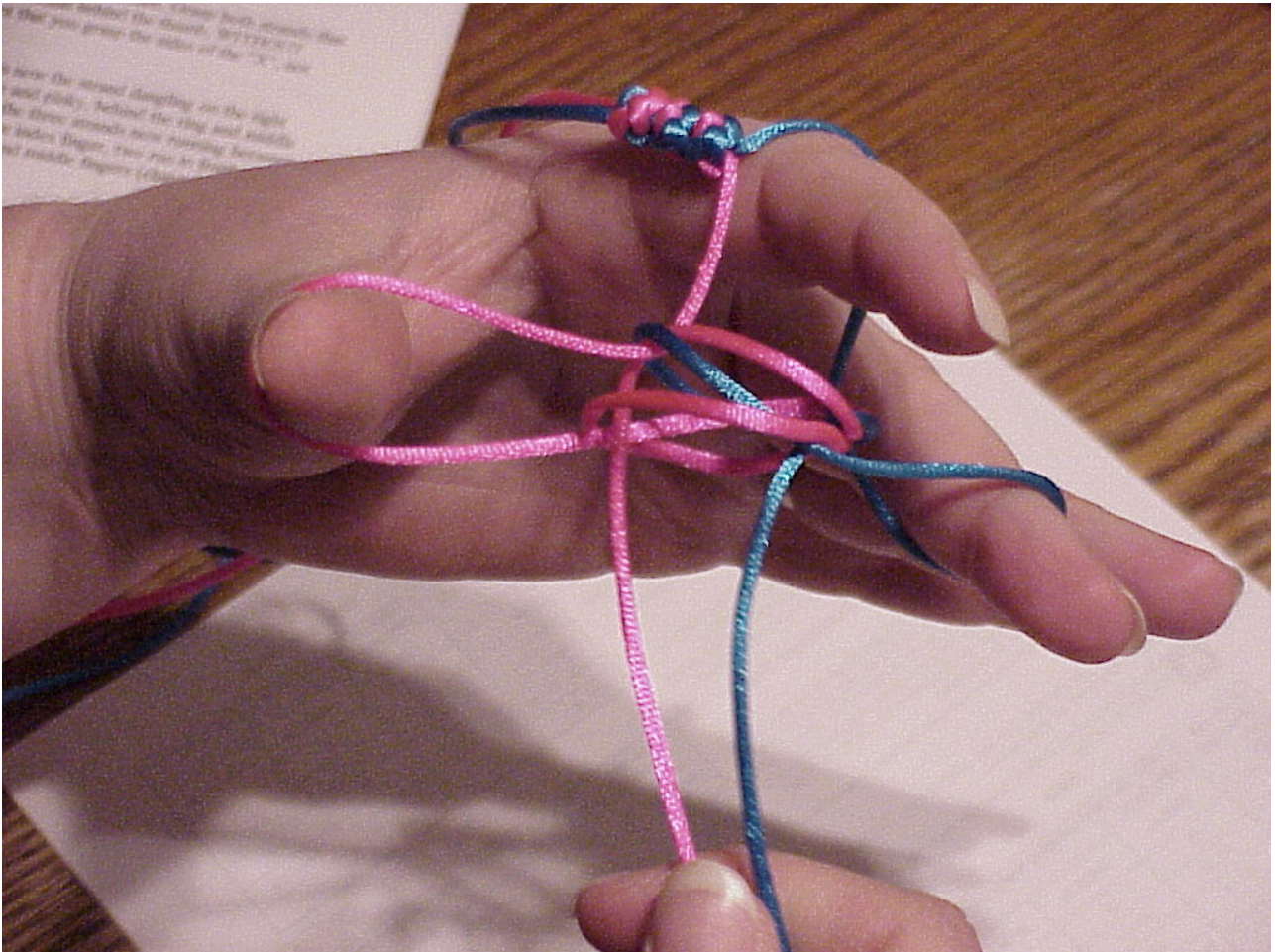
Now, locate the strand that runs between the middle and ring fingers -- there should be only one, and it will appear to make a "ring" around the middle finger. Grasp this strand. Drop all the strands from all the fingers except the thumb and index fingers, and once the fingers are free, place the strand you are grasping around the middle finger once again.





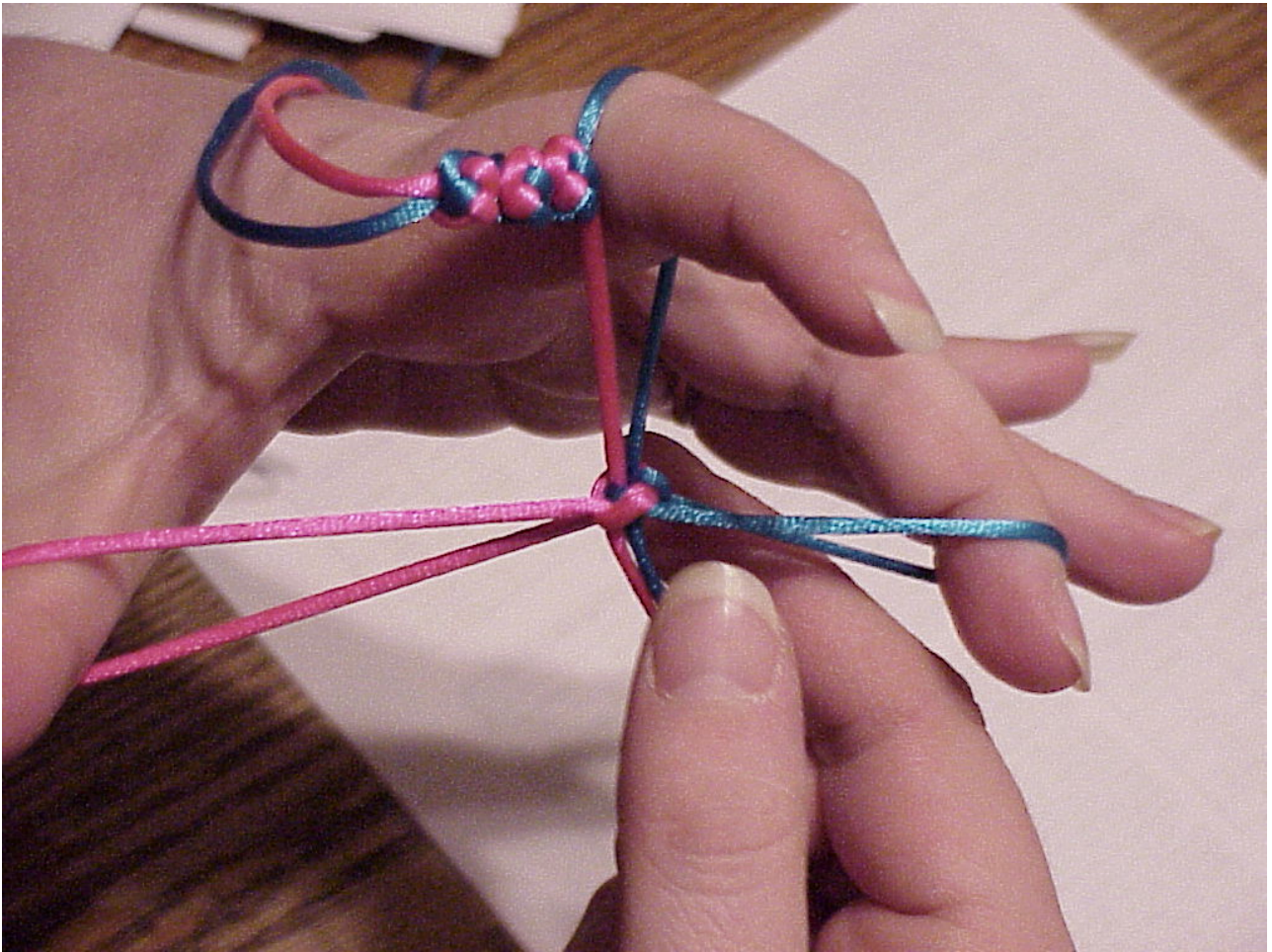






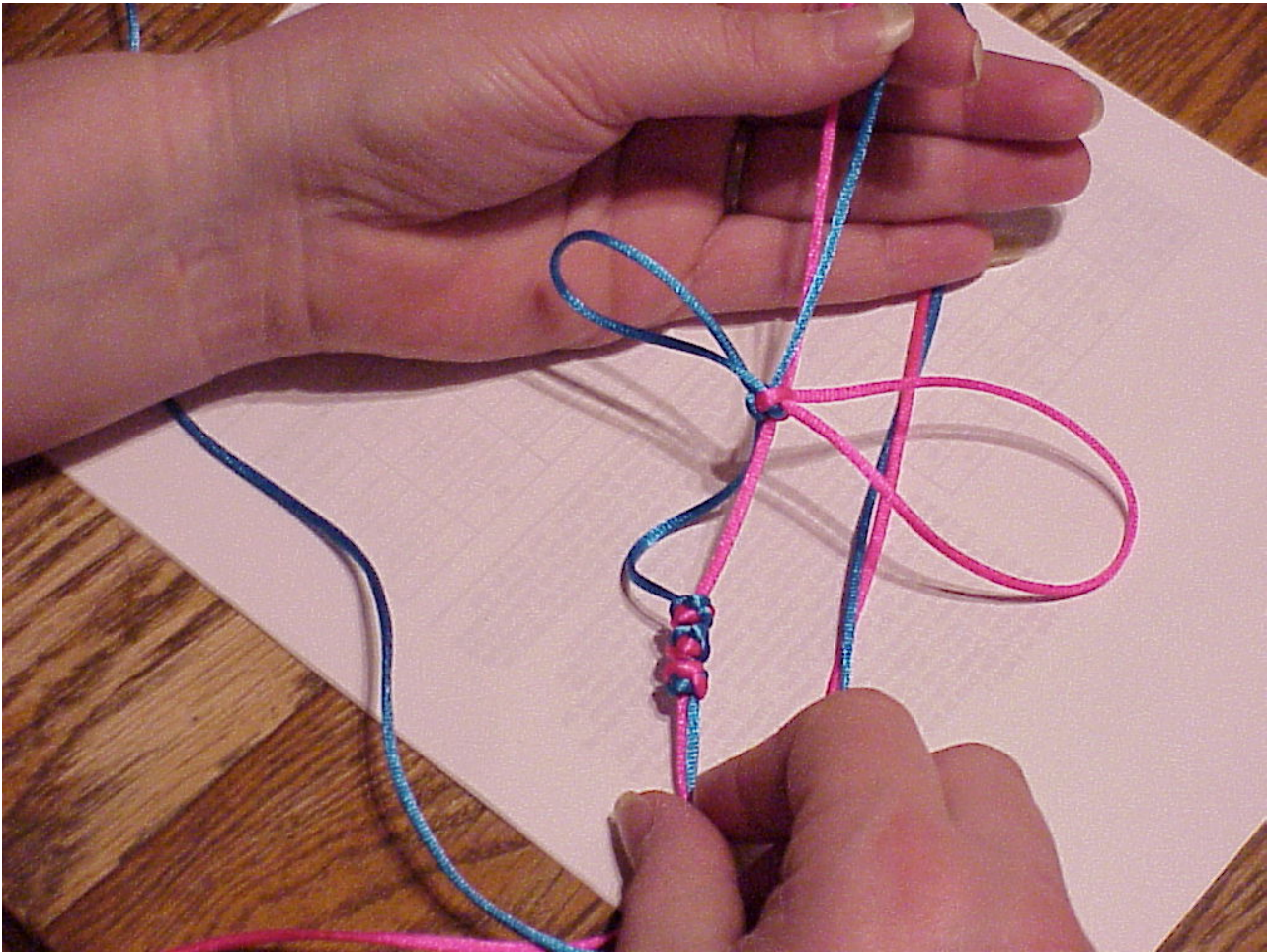
Pull gently on the two dangling ends, and the knot will begin to tighten up. Pull first on the left dangling end, to "untangle" a bit, then tighten both ends gently. This will form the basis for the finished knot. Pull the ends until the knot is snug, but NOT tight. The correct tension only comes with practice. The only impact is how easy or difficult it is to pull the loops through in the next phase. You want enough tension to where the material slides when pulled, but remains secure if not pulled.

You now should have a knot in the center of your palm, with loops around the thumb, index, and middle fingers, and two dangling ends. Ensure you keep the loops around the thumb and middle fingers straight (as to which loop is which) as you begin the next phase.



Remove the entire "assembly" from your hand. By tugging gently on one side of each loop (left and right), you will notice some free play. Tugging the other side of each loop will tighten the knot -- don't pull this side!





Grasping the "movable" side of the left and right loops, and pulling them gently, you will see the entire knot beginning to move upward, shortening the top loop, moving toward the starting knot. This is called the "pushing up" part. Push the knot up by pulling on the movable strands of the loop until the knot is snugly against the starting knot. The prayer rope is much neater the tighter the knots are together. You are now ready to do what is called "Pulling through the loops", the final step in knot construction.



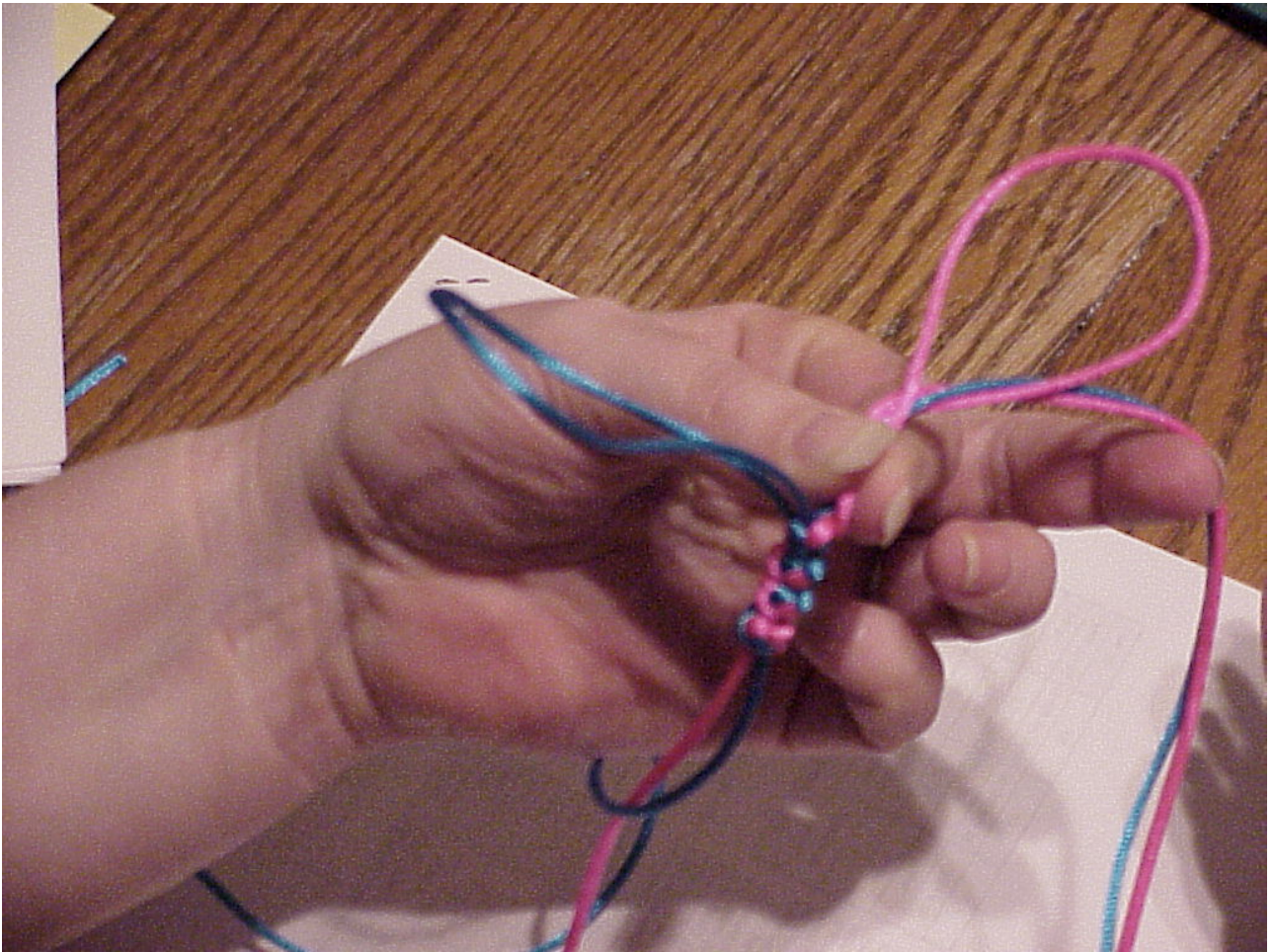
If anything up to this point has not gone particularly well, if you find it impossible to push the knot upward by tugging on the loops, don't be afraid to undo the entire thing and begin again. I had to "retie" several before I got the hang of it.

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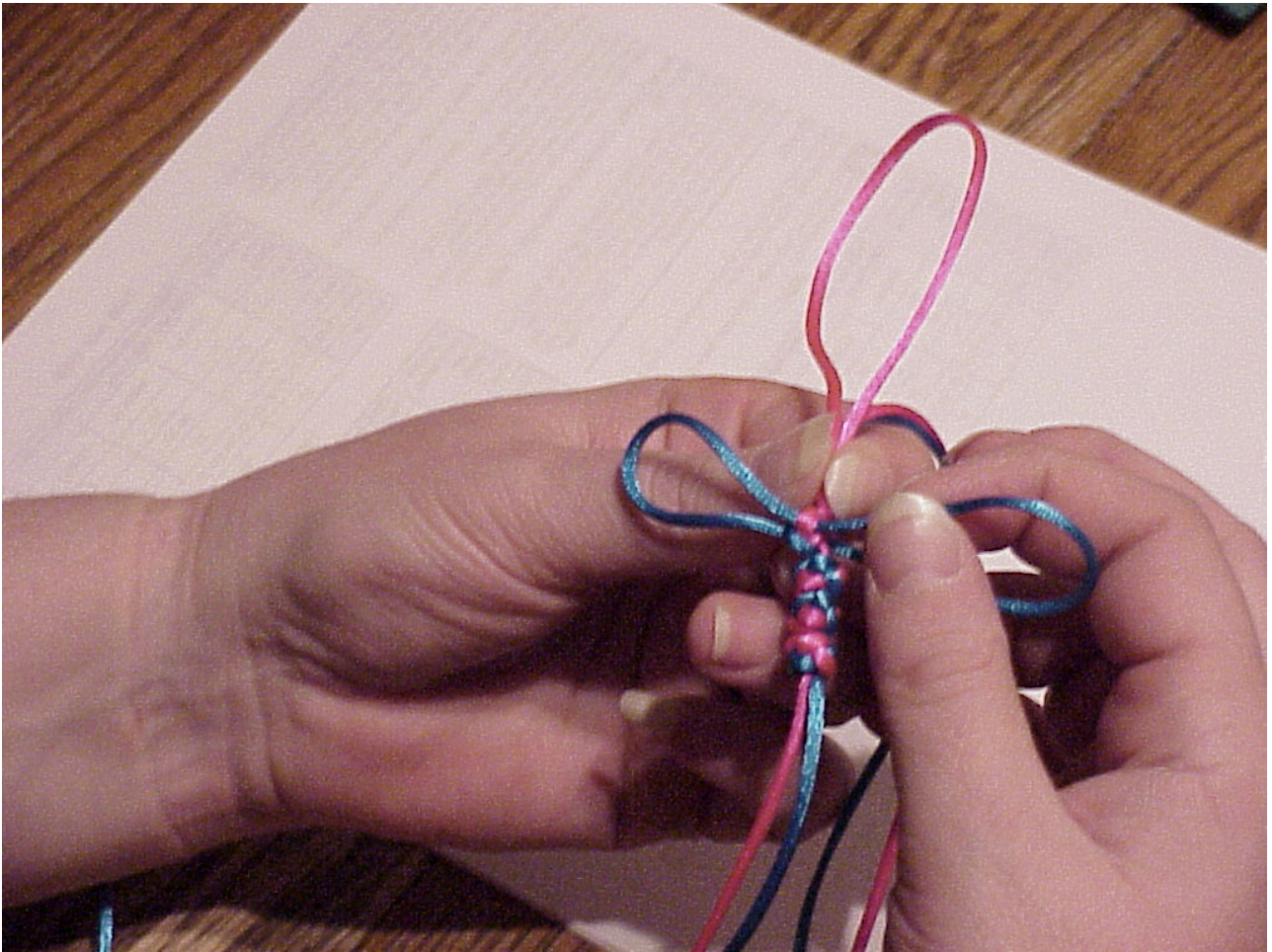
### **PULLING THROUGH THE LOOPS**

Place the right loop (the one formerly around the thumb) and the two dangling ends in your left hand and grasp the knot between the index finger and thumb of the same hand.



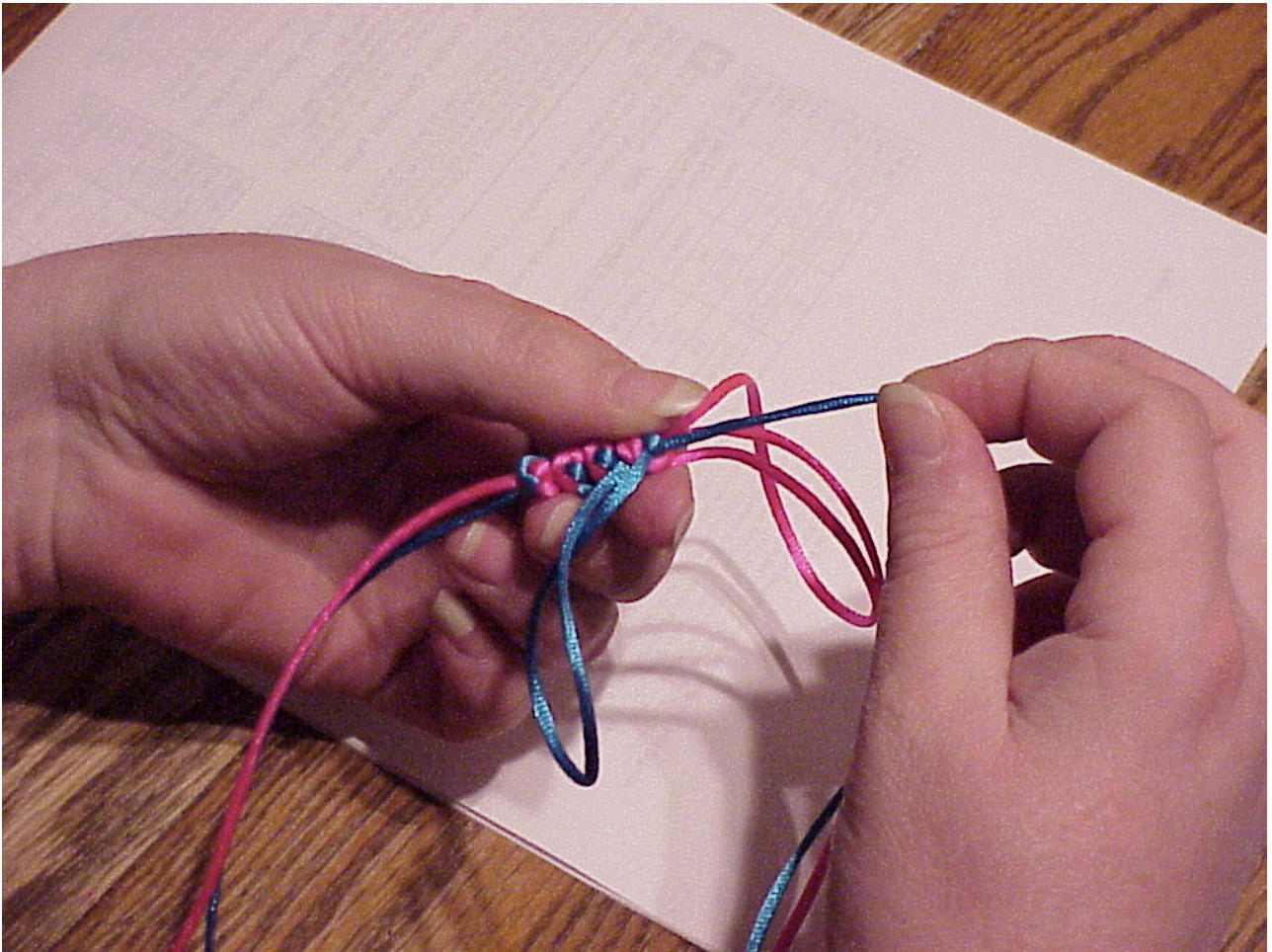


Examine the loop -- you will notice it exits the knot, forms the loop, and goes under a strand before re-entering the knot. This is where you begin "weaving" or "sewing" the knot. After the loop goes under the strand before re-entering the knot, grasp the continuation of the loop strand. A yarn needle is helpful here to loosen this particular strand. Pulling gently with the fingers, the loop will shorten, and a new loop will be formed from the strand you are pulling on. You will generally be pulling in the direction of the short end of the rope, toward the starting knot ("up"). Pull until the original loop is completely gone.

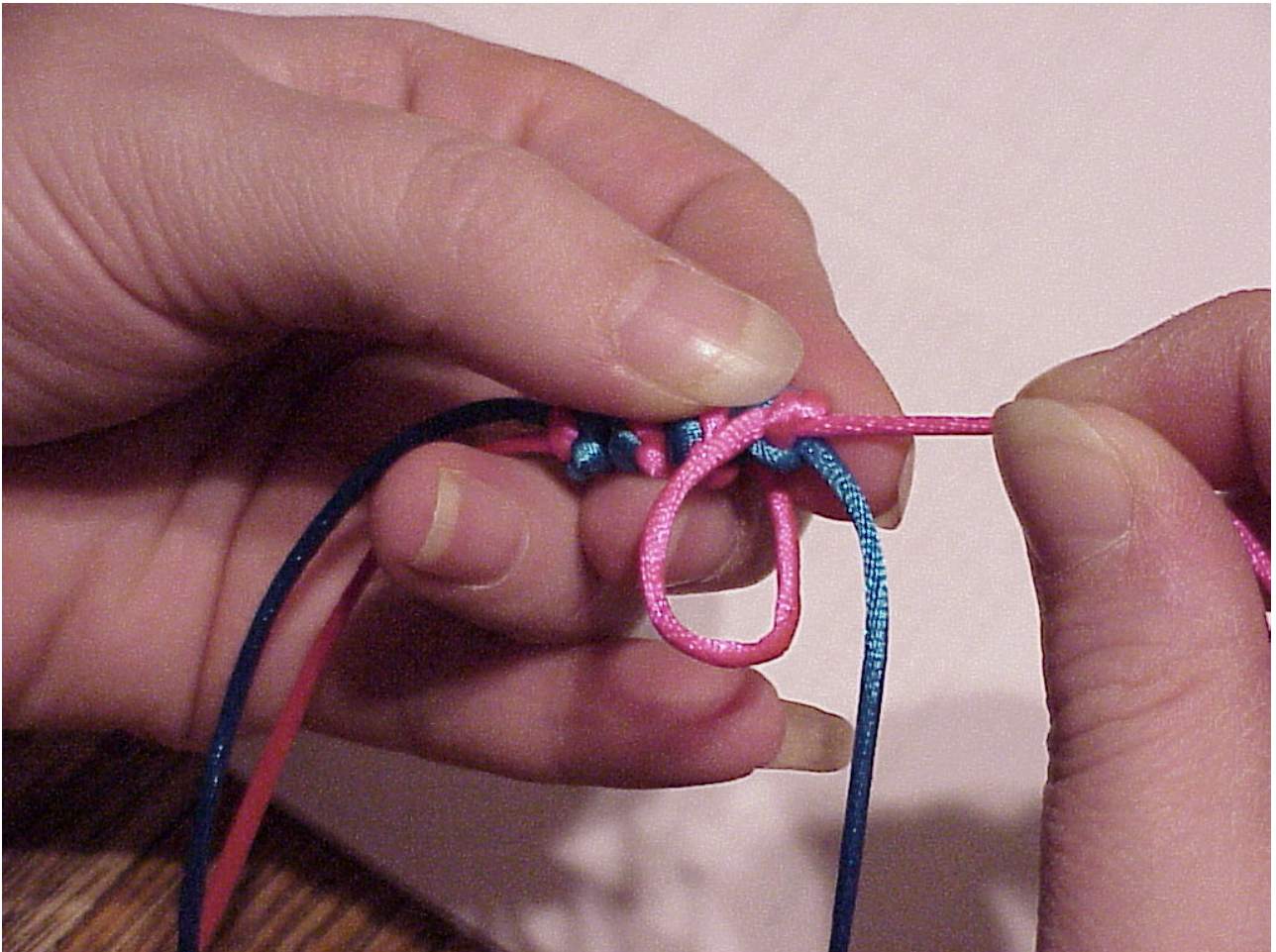


Rotate your hand 1/2 turn away from you, and notice where this new loop re-enters the knot. Do the same thing as before -- grasp the continuation of the loop, after it goes under the strand that is in the knot itself, and pull gently. Again, the yarn needle can help loosen the strand to pull on. Pull completely through, and generally you will be pulling in the other direction than the first (i.e., away from the starting knot, or "down").





Now, rotate your hand back toward you and repeat the process for the final time -- grasp the continuation of the loop, after it goes under the strand that is in the knot itself, and pull gently. Again, the yarn needle can help loosen the strand to pull on. Pull completely through, and generally you will be pulling in the same direction than the first (toward the "top" or starting knot).



You will now notice that pulling slightly on one of the dangling ends in the palm of your left hand will cause this loop to shrink. DON'T pull this completely through yet! In fact, don't pull it through at all, just notice that the end you pull, if you have done this correctly, will cause the loop to shrink.

Now, repeat the procedure with the other loop. Take the loop you just finished pulling through, and the dangling end strands, and place them in your left hand, grasping the knot with the index finger and thumb of your left hand. This leaves the other loop free to pull through.

Examine the loop -- you will notice it exits the knot, forms the loop, and goes under a strand before re-entering the knot. After the loop goes under the strand before re-entering the knot, grasp the continuation of the loop strand. Pulling gently with the fingers, the loop will shorten, and a new loop will be formed from the strand you are pulling on. You will generally be pulling in the direction of the short end of the rope, toward the starting knot ("up"). Pull until the original loop is completely gone.

Rotate your hand 1/2 turn away from you, and notice where this new loop re-enters the knot. This time, the loop actually goes under one side of the loop you are holding in your left hand! Do the same thing as before -- grasp the continuation of the loop, after it goes under the strand that is in the



knot itself, and pull gently. Pull completely through, and generally you will be pulling in the other direction than the first (i.e., away from the starting knot, or "down").

Now, rotate your hand back toward you and repeat the process for the final time -- grasp the continuation of the loop, after it goes under the strand that is in the knot itself, and pull gently. Again, the yarn needle can help loosen the strand to pull on. Pull completely through, and generally you will be pulling in the same direction than the first (toward the "top" or starting knot).

Having done all these steps, offer thanks to God, and pull the two ends to tighten the knot completely and eliminate the remaining loops. You can use your fingers to "shape" the knot as you tighten, in order that it become round or oval shape.

After you tighten the knot down, CONGRATULATIONS! You've successfully made your first prayer rope knot. The "starting" or loop knot can be removed at this point -- the first knot will become the reference point.



Repeat the process for each knot you wish to tie. If the knot is misshapen, or isn't as tight as you'd like against the previous knot, feel free to untie it carefully and begin again. Part of the process is patience, and repeating a

knot is not a sin!

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## THE JOINING KNOT

After completing the desired number of knots, inserting beads where appropriate, you have a nice, neat row of knots. Nothing more. How do we get this into a circular form?

We do this through what is called a joining knot, and there are two basic ways of forming the knot. Note that the joining knot is traditionally *\*not\** counted as a part of the number of knots in the rope. A 33-knot prayer rope has 33 knots *\*PLUS\** a joining knot.

The easiest way is to make a knot as usual, but stop before removing the knot from the fingers. At this point, take the short ends from the first knot, and slip them through the center of the square, from behind the index finger. Continue as normal to remove the knot from the fingers, and when pushing the knot up, pull on the loops and on the two strands from the other end of the rope.

The more difficult way, but perhaps the more secure method, is to use the strands from either end as one strand, and tie a double-sized, double-stranded knot. In this method, everything is as normal, except you begin with both the first and the last knot behind your index finger, and make the knot using two strands (four if using regular yarn) as one strand.

The second method will not work if you haven't left yourself plenty of room, material wise, before beginning (it takes about 24" of material length, two strands, left before the first knot is tied, in order to easily tie a doubled joining knot).



After this knot is made, put the ends through one of the beads, and begin to think about making the cross.

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## THE CROSS

From this point forward, you will have four strands (ends) of material to deal with rather than just two. The basic method is to use the same practice as method 1 of the joining knot -- to keep the short ends out of the knot construction process until immediately after wrapping, and inserting the two loose ends from behind the index finger through the center of the knot, then continue removing from the fingers, pushing up, and pulling through. This will be done for ALL knots subsequent to the joining knot, excepting the crossbar of the cross.

Think now, after the joining knot, bead, and first cross knot about how the cross is to be formed. There are two basic ways, and no one way is preferred.

The first way is to take about one yard of material, double it, tie a loose knot, and make a knot. This will form the first part (one half) of the crossbar of the cross. Insert the two ends between the four strands of the main rope, then tie another knot (don't forget to insert the short ends!) in the main rope.

After pulling the knot up tight and finishing it, take the loose ends of the crossbar, pull it through tightly, and make the other side of the crossbar of the cross.

The number of the knots can vary, and depends on your personal taste. On short ropes (33knots) I prefer a small cross, one or two knots with a one knot on either side crossbar, with two or three knots below (two with a tassel, three without a tassel).

My favorite is with a 100-knot prayer rope, which was made in a monastery, and has two knots above, two on either side for the crossbar, two below, a bead, and three additional below, with a tassel made of embroidery thread or very thin cotton yarn.

The other way of forming a crossbar is to take 8-12 strands of material and insert them into the appropriate place on the cross, and continue tying knots. After the knots are completed, the ends of the strands can be trimmed to desired length. In addition, wrapping and sewing regular thread around either side of this "bunched" crossbar, on either side of the main rope, and wrapping tightly, will not only secure the material more, but will also create a very attractive "fanned" shape on either side of the cross. Typically, each side of the crossbar will only extend 1/4 to 1/2" (0.5-1.0 cm) from either side.

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## TASSELS

Tassels are again a matter of taste. When you complete the prayer rope and the cross, you should have material (four strands) left hanging. Either take short lengths of the same material (like what was done in the crossbar), or use a different material of the same color (embroidery thread works really nice). Center the material on the bottom of the cross and use two of the excess lengths to tie it into place, using a square knot. You might want to sew the knot together, to keep it from coming apart. Trim the lengths of the prayer rope material (the four strands) so that they are not seen. Fold the tassel material over on itself, and use normal thread to wrap around the tassel material to form the tassel. If you use the same material as the prayer rope (rattail or yarn), you don't have to sew or trim, these pieces of excess form part of the tassel itself, and you simply need to wrap the tassel with thread after tying the short pieces on. Trim to length.

If you tie knots for the crossbar of the cross, there will be excess material (two strands) on each side. I recommend waiting about an hour (the knots will have a tendency to loosen a bit), then trimming them as close to the knot as possible. A dab of fabric glue on the ends, where the strands come out of the knot, will help hold them in place. Same procedure can be used if you choose not to use a tassel, and need to do something at the bottom of the cross -- a dab of fabric glue works wonders.





Enjoy the prayer rope!

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