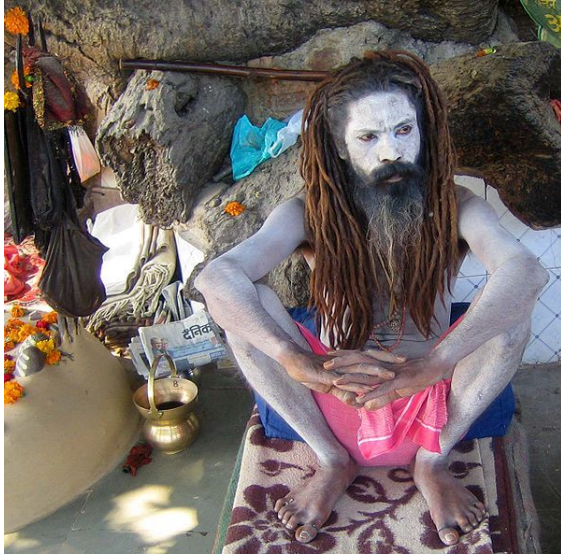


Dreadlocks a brief history

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A sadhu in India, with his hair in jata.

Dreadlocks, also **locs**, **dreads**, or in **Sanskrit**, **Jata**, are intentionally **matted** and sculpted ropes of hair. Various methods are used to encourage the formation of locks such as **backcombing**, braiding and rolling. While leaving long hair to its own devices – foregoing brushing, combing or cutting the hair – will generally result in tangles and mats, the formation of evenly sized ropes takes planning and maintenance, and kinkier hair is more suited to this process than straight hair. Uneven mats and ropes formed through neglect may be referred to by some as “natural”, “organic”, or “freeform method”. A common misconception is that those who have consciously formed locs do not wash their hair, but this is usually not the case; many dreadlock care regimens require the wearer to wash their hair as regularly as non-locked hair.^[1]

1 History

The first known examples of dreadlocks date back to North Africa and the Horn of Africa. In ancient Egypt examples of Egyptians wearing locked hairstyles and wigs have appeared on bas-reliefs, statuary and other artifacts.^[2] Mummified remains of ancient Egyptians with locks, as well as locked wigs, have also been recovered from archaeological sites.^[3]



*Over half of surviving Ancient Greek **kouros** sculptures from c. 615 – 485 BC wear dreadlocks*

Maasai men in northern **Kenya** say that they have been wearing dreadlocks for as long as they have survived. According to their **oral history**, the Maasai originated from the lower Nile valley north of **Lake Turkana** (Northwest Kenya) and began migrating south around the 15th century, arriving in a long trunk of land stretching from what is now northern Kenya between the 17th and late 18th century. Contemporary Maasai men still wear their hair in locks, with a tint of red color from the soil.

The Hindu deity **Shiva**, and his followers who choose the path of **asceticism** (**Sadhus**) are described in the scriptures as wearing “Jata”, meaning “twisted locks of hair”. Sadhus of other branches of **Hinduism** may also wear this style. The Greeks and several ascetic groups within various major religions have at times worn their hair in locks, including the monks of the **Ethiopian Orthodox Tewahedo Church**, the **Nazirites** of Judaism, **Qalandari Sufis**, and the **Dervishes** of Islam, among others. Some of the very earliest Christians also may have worn this hairstyle; there are descriptions of **James the Just**, first Bishop of



Spartan officer depicted with locked hair.

Jerusalem, who is said to have worn them to his ankles.^[4]

Pre-Columbian Aztec priests were described in Aztec codices (including the *Durán Codex*, the *Codex Tudela* and the *Codex Mendoza*) as wearing their hair untouched, allowing it to grow long and matted.^[5]

In Senegal, the Baye Fall, followers of the Mouride movement, a Sufi movement of Islam founded in 1887 by Shaykh Aamadu Bàmba Mbàkke, are famous for growing locks and wearing multi-colored gowns.^[6] Cheikh Ibra Fall, founder of the Baye Fall school of the Mouride Brotherhood, popularized the style by adding a mystic touch to it. It's important to note that warriors among the

Fulani, Wolof and Serer in Mauritania, and Mandinka in Mali and Niger were also known to have dreadlocks when old and cornrows when young for centuries.

2 By culture

There are many reasons among various cultures for wearing locks. Locks can be an expression of deep religious or spiritual convictions, ethnic pride, a political statement, or be simply a fashion preference. An alternative name for the style is *locks* (sometimes spelled “locs”).

2.1 Hinduism



The god Shiva is depicted with jata.

Similarly, among some Sadhus and Sadhvis, Hindu holy men and women, locks are sacred, considered to be a religious practice, an expression of disregard for profane vanity. The public symbol of matted hair, known as *jata*, is re-created each time an individual goes through these unique experiences. In almost all myths about Shiva and his flowing locks, there is a continual interplay of extreme asceticism and virile potency, which link the elements of destruction and creation, whereas the full head of matted hair symbolizes the control of power. Gangadhara Shiva captures and controls the river Ganges with his locks, whose descent from the heavens would have deluged the world. The river is released through the locks of his hair, which prevents the river from destroying earth.



Sadhvi or female Sadhu with dreadlocks at the Gangasagar Fair Transit Camp, Kolkata. Jan. 2014.

As the Lord of Dance, **Nataraja**, Shiva performs the **tandava**, which is the dance in which the universe is created, maintained, and resolved. Shiva's long, matted tresses, usually piled up in a kind of pyramid, loosen during the dance and crash into the heavenly bodies, knocking them off course or destroying them utterly.

Locks in South Asia are reserved nearly exclusively for holy people. According to the 'Hymn of the longhaired sage' in the ancient Vedas, long jatas express a spiritual significance which implies the wearer has special relations with spirits, is an immortal traveler between two worlds and the master over fire:

The long-haired one endures fire, the long-haired one endures poison, the long-haired one endures both worlds. The long-haired one is said to gaze full on heaven, the long-haired one is said to be that light ... Of us, you mortals, only our bodies do you behold. ...For him has the Lord of life churned and pounded the unbendable, when the long-haired one, in Rudra's company, drank from the poison cup (The Keshin Hymn, Rig-veda 10.136)

The Shaiva Nagas, ascetics of South Asia, wear their jatas in a twisted knot or bundle on top of the head and let them down only for special occasions and rituals. The

strands are then rubbed with ashes and cow dung, considered both sacred and purifying, then scented and adorned with flowers.

2.2 Buddhism

Within Tibetan Buddhism and other more esoteric forms of Buddhism, dreadlocks have occasionally been substituted for the more traditional shaved head. The most recognizable of these groups are known as the **Ngagpas** of Tibet. For many practicing Buddhists, dreadlocks are a way to let go of material vanity and excessive attachments.^[7]

2.3 Judaism and Christianity



Pictish carved stone from medieval Scotland depicting Samson with locked hair. In the *Book of Judges* 16:19 of the *Old Testament*, Samson loses his strength when his seven dreadlocks are cut from his head.

Several figures important in the Abrahamic religions wore dreadlocks.

Takers of the **Nazirite oath** in the *Book of Numbers* display their devotion to their religion by not cutting their hair, and possibly letting it grow into dreadlocks. This vow required the man or woman to:

- Abstain from wine, wine vinegar, grapes, raisins, intoxicating liquors,^[8] vinegar distilled from such substances,^[9] and eating or drinking any substance that contains any trace of grapes.^[10]
- Refrain from cutting the hair on one's head; but to allow the locks of the head's hair to grow.^[11]
- Not to become ritually impure by contact with corpses or graves, even those of family members.^[12]

The vows described in this part of the bible has a significant impact on the **Rastafari movement** of the 20th century, and is the source of the Rastafari affection for dreadlocks.

Samson was a judge of the ancient **Israelites** mentioned in the **Book of Judges** in the **Hebrew Bible** and is usually depicted wearing dreadlocks. According to the biblical account, Samson was given **supernatural** strength by God in order to combat his enemies and perform heroic feats^[13] such as killing a lion, slaying an entire army with only the **jawbone** of an ass, and destroying a **pagan temple**. Samson's one weakness were his seven dreadlocks, which led to his death when they were cut off. These dreadlocks are particularly prominent in medieval European depictions.

2.4 Africa and the Western World; Caribbean, North and South America



Reggae musician Omar Perry

Members of various **African ethnic groups** wear locks and the styles and significance may change from one group to another.

Maasai warriors are famous for their long, thin, red locks. Many people dye their hair red with root extracts or **red ochre**. In various cultures what are known as **shamans**, spiritual men or women who serve and speak to **spirits** or **deities**, often wear locks. In Nigeria,^[14] some children are born with naturally locked hair and are given a

special name: "**Dada**". **Yoruba** priests of **Olokun**, the **Orisha** of the deep ocean, wear locks. Another group is the **Turkana people** of Kenya. In Ghana, the **Akan** refer to dreadlocks as **Mpese**, which is the hairstyle of **Akomfoo** or priests and even common people. Along with the **Asante-Akan** drums known as **Kete** drums, this hairstyle was later adopted by Rastafarians, with its roots in Jamaica from the slave trade era.

Rastafari locks are symbolic of the **Lion of Judah** which is sometimes centered on the Ethiopian flag. Rastafari hold that **Haile Selassie** is a direct descendant of **King Solomon** and the **Queen of Sheba**, through their son **Menelik I**. Their dreadlocks were inspired by the **Nazarites** of the Bible.

2.5 Revival

When **reggae music** gained popularity and mainstream acceptance in the 1970s, the locks (often called "dreads") became a notable fashion statement; they were worn by prominent authors, actors, athletes and rappers, and were even portrayed as part of gang culture in such movies as *Marked for Death*. Dreadlocks aren't always worn for religious or cultural reasons. People may wear them just for style.

With the **Rasta style** in vogue, the fashion and beauty industries capitalized on the trend. A completely new line of hair care products and services in salons catered to a **white** clientele, offering all sorts of dreadlocks hair care items such as wax (considered unnecessary and even harmful by many),^[15] shampoo, and jewelry. Hairstylists created a wide variety of modified locks, including multi-colored synthetic lock **hair extensions** and "**dread perms**", where chemicals are used to treat the hair.

Locked models appeared at fashion shows, and Rasta clothing with a Jamaican-style reggae look was sold. Even exclusive fashion brands like **Christian Dior** created whole Rasta-inspired collections worn by models with a variety of lock hairstyles.

In the West, dreadlocks have gained particular popularity among **counterculture** adherents such as **hippies** (from the 1990s onwards), **crust punks**, **New Age travellers**, **goths** and many members of the **Rainbow Family**. Many people from these cultures wear dreadlocks for similar reasons: symbolizing a rejection of government-controlled, mass-merchandising culture or to fit in with the people and crowd they want to be a part of (such as those who are fans of reggae music). Members of the **cybergoth** subculture also often wear blatantly artificial **synthetic dreads** or "dreadfalls" made of synthetic hair, fabric or plastic tubing.

Since the rise of the popularity of dreadlocks, **Blacks** in the Americas have developed a large variety of ways to wear dreadlocked hair. In the late early 2000s dreadlocks became a trend in New Orleans and in other south-

ern states. Specific elements of these styles include the flat-twist, in which a section of locks are rolled together flat against the scalp to create an effect similar to the cornrows, and braided dreadlocks. Examples include flat-twisted half-back styles, flat-twisted mohawk styles, braided buns and braid-outs (or lock crinkles). Social networking websites, web forums, web-logs and especially online video-logs like **YouTube** have become popular methods for people with dreadlocks to transmit ideas, pictures and tutorials for innovative styles.

3 Methods of making dreadlocks

Traditionally, it was believed that in order to create dreadlocks, an individual had to refrain from brushing, combing or cutting. This method created dreadlocks that varied greatly in size, width, shape, length, and texture. The method has come to be known as the “Neglect” method. Other names for this method include “Organic” or “Patience” methods. Similarly, “Freeform” dreadlocks are created by allowing the hair to knit together naturally into locks of varying sizes. Freeform locks are patterned to a degree, as the hair is separated in “chunks” (not parted as with a comb) into fairly determinate sections after washing.



Salon dreadlocks created with two-strand twists.

A variety of other starter methods have been developed to offer greater control over the general appearance of dreadlocks. Together, these alternative techniques are more commonly referred to as “salon” or “manicured” dreadlocks.^[16]

Using beeswax to make dreads can cause problems because it does not wash out, due to the high melting point of natural wax. Because wax is a hydrocarbon, water alone, no matter how hot, will not be able to remove wax.^[17]

As with the organic and freeform method, the salon methods rely on hair naturally matting over a period of months to gradually form dreadlocks. The difference is in the initial technique by which loose hair is encouraged to form a rope-like shape. Whereas freeform dreadlocks can be created by simply refraining from combing or brushing hair and occasionally separating matted sections, salon dreadlocks use tool techniques to form the basis of the starter, immature, set of dreadlocks. A “matured” set of salon dreadlocks won't look the same as a set of dreadlocks that have been started with neglect or freeform.

For African hair types, salon, dreadlocks can be formed by evenly sectioning and styling the loose hair into braids, coils, twists, or using a procedure called **dread perming** specifically used for straight hair. For European, Hispanic, Asian, and Indian hair types, Backcombing and Twist and Rip are some of the more popular methods of achieving starter dreadlocks.

Regardless of hair type or texture and starter method used, dreadlocks require time before they are fully matured. The process hair goes through as it develops into matured dreadlocks is continuous.

There is also the ability to adopt different types of fake dreadlocks that may make the hair look as real as possible. This process is called synthetic dreadlocks. There are two different types of synthetic dreadlocks. The first is dread extensions, in which other hair can be infused with the wearer's own hair. The second is dreadfalls, in which one dread is tied into another with either elastic or lace. Both of these methods are used to make dreads look better and more appealing, and to achieve the desired effect of longer hair.^[18]

Dreads work well with natural thick hair. Some African-Americans prefer this type of hairstyle since their hair is naturally thick.^[19]

4 Recent methods

Bridging is a technique that was developed extensively in Montreal, Canada over the last decade.^[20] It consists mainly of covering hair loss with dreadlocks.

5 Guinness Book of World Records

On December 10, 2010, the *Guinness Book of World Records* rested its “longest dreadlocks” category after investigation of its first and only female title holder, Asha Mandela, with this official statement:

“Following a review of our guidelines for the longest dreadlock, we have taken expert advice and made the decision to rest this category. The reason for this is that it is difficult, and in many cases impossible, to measure the authenticity of the locks due to expert methods employed in the attachment of hair extensions/re-attachment of broken off dreadlocks. Effectively the dreadlock can become an extension and therefore impossible to adjudicate accurately. It is for this reason Guinness World Records has decided to rest the category and will no longer be monitoring the category for longest dreadlock.”^[21]

6 Notes

- [1] “making, growing, maintaining, and understanding dreadlocks. they used for ceremonial purposes in Jamaica.”. Retrieved 16 July 2012.
- [2] Image of Egyptian with locks.
- [3] Egyptian Museum - "Return of the Mummy. *Toronto Life* - 2002." Retrieved 01-26-2007.
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- [6]
- [7] The Dreadlocks Treatise: On Tantric Hairstyles in Tibetan Buddhism.
- [8] The New JPS translation is: “wine and any other intoxicant”. Classical Rabbinical interpretation permits non-grape alcohols.
- [9] Numbers 6:3. The Bible, King James Version
- [10] Numbers 6:3-4
- [11] Numbers 6:5
- [12] Numbers 6:6-7
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- [16] Ways to Make Dreadlocks
- [17] <http://www.dreadlockssite.com/forum/topics/dread-wax-why-ya-dont-want-it>
- [18] “Synthetic dreads”.
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8 External links

- Dreadlocks Story - Documentary by Linda Aï-nouche
- Guardian article
- Community for the discussion of the lifestyle and hairstyle of locs
- DreadlockTruth - database of information and on-line community

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