



Altar Essentials

by Patty Slote

In this month's issue we focus on the guru and honor our own guru, Swami Chetanananda, who took *sannyas* (became a swami) in May of 1978. Contact with a *living teacher* is what awakens us and guides us in our spiritual life. *Daily practice* is what sustains us in this endeavor. Having a *dedicated space* at home, with objects that are meaningful to us, helps us keep our personal practice vibrant and on track.

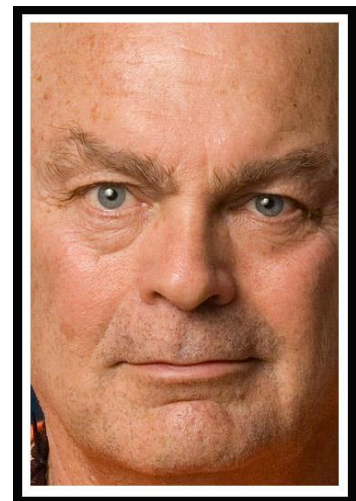
Your altar can be as simple as a bookshelf or side table by your favorite chair, or as elaborate as an entire room set aside for yoga and meditation practice. While altars vary widely in specifics, a few helpful aids to meditation are commonly found:

- A photo of your guru, to use as a point of contact in meditation and to help you with the eyes-open practice
- A statue of a saint (*murti*) or deity, to invoke their presence or evoke a particular energetic quality
- A mala to assist with mantra repetition and to represent your connection with your guru

It's also traditional to light a candle, burn some incense, and make offerings of fruit, flowers, drink, or other beautiful objects. Your altar is a personal, dynamic expression of your inner connection and devotion. Let your creativity shine in your sacred space.

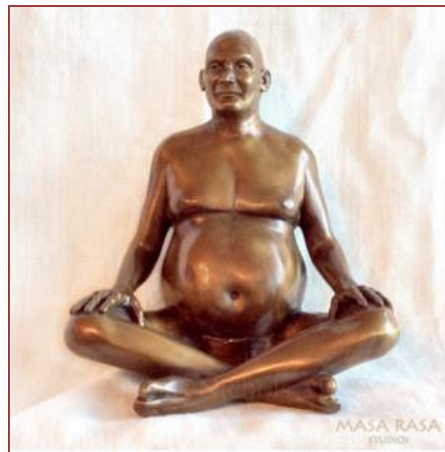
Teacher Photos

Because our core practice is an eyes-open meditation with a teacher, we offer an ever-changing array of photos of Swamiji (as well as photos of Rudi and Nityananda) that allow you to make that same contact even when you live far away. This month, by special request, we are offering one of the final portraits that professional photographer Barry Kaplan took of Swamiji a few years ago. This powerful image is perfect for your meditation. You can order it in two sizes (5x7 or 8x10) online from [SmugMug](#) or get an archival quality image from Rudra Press (you can also place a special order with us for larger size images). We will have copies of this photo available at the July retreat.



Murtis

A *murti* is a statue of a deity or saint that has been made in a special way and imbued with their life force during a ceremony called *pranapatistha*. The statues of Rudi and Nityananda in the meditation hall at The Movement Center are life size murtis of great power. It's now possible to get a small scale murti of Nityananda for your own altar, created by Masa Rasa Studios, which is also in the process of creating a murti of Rudi. Thanks to the generosity of Neil Levine, Masa Rasa will donate part of the proceeds of orders placed by our members back to The Movement Center. Follow [this link](#) to see the three murtis of Nityananda you can choose from and to learn how to place your order. We will let you know when the Rudi murti is available.



Malas

A *mala* (which literally means “garland”) is a string of prayer beads commonly used for the spiritual practice known in Sanskrit as *japa*, or mantra repetition. It is usually made of 108 beads, though



other numbers (commonly 21, 28, or 54) are also used. Malas help you keep count while reciting, chanting, or mentally repeating a mantra or the name or names of a deity. The choice of material, whether from animal (bone), mineral (stone), or plant (seed), is not simply aesthetic, but can vary according to the purpose of the mantras used. For instance, in the Tibetan tradition, pacifying

mantras call for a white mala; increasing mantras are done with malas made of precious metals; mantras to tame by forceful means should be recited using malas made of Rudraksha beads or bone. We are very fortunate to have artisans in our community—Laura Modena, Liza Bazzani, and Dan Sisco in particular—who make beautiful malas you can buy during retreats and intensives. When you acquire a mala and have it blessed and empowered by Swamiji (darshan provides the perfect opportunity), it takes on a specific vibration and becomes an important reminder of your deepest connection with your guru.



Other Altar Items

Next time you come to Portland for a meditation retreat or intensive, visit the store to see many practice support items, including malas, offering plates, altar cloths, vases, deity statues, minerals and

stones, incense, Tantric instruments, mini-thangkas, and teacher photos (old and new, large and small, formal and informal). Many of these items are unique, handmade, or “gently used” and are generously donated by other members of our community to support you in your practice. While we can’t guarantee exactly what we’ll have on hand, we can promise you that the table will be full of wonderful possibilities for you to explore and enjoy. If you have items you’d like to donate for the summer retreat, please contact the Rudra Press office.



Patty Slote is a long-time student and editorial director of Rudra Press.



Rudra Press is the publishing division of The Movement Center. We publish books by the teachers in the Movement Center lineage (Swami Chetanananda, Swami Rudrananda, and Bhagavan Nityananda), texts on the philosophy of Kashmir Shaivism, and video and audio products by Swami Chetanananda and Lama Wangdu Rinpoche. We also carry practice support items through our store. Proceeds from the sale of Rudra Press items support our efforts to document, preserve, and translate important tantric practices and texts of Kashmir Shaivism and Vajrayana Buddhism.

[Visit the online store.](#)

CONTACT: PO Box 13310 Portland, OR 97213-0310

PHONE: 503-236-0475

EMAIL: rudrapress@icloud.com