

BUDDHIST RITUAL PRACTICES

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SCOPE AND PURPOSE

Scholars of Buddhism have historically chosen to concentrate on the word (*vacana*); - philosophy, concept, and doctrine -- as the primary means of explicating Buddhism. There is ample evidence, however, that Buddhists more often view their religion as a kind of *performance*. In this view, Buddhists are those who *do particular practices* as a means of fulfilling the promise of the Buddha's word (*buddhavacana*); the validity of the *word* is generally seen as axiomatic. As a means of gaining some insight into this view of Buddhism, this course explores some of the ritualized techniques that Buddhists have developed in order to negotiate the complexities and limitations of life. A variety of practices from several traditions is examined: meditation, visualization, liturgy, *mantra* and text recitation, image veneration, and initiation. In order to acquire a theoretical framework for exploring these practices, we will first engage in a sustained inquiry into the study of ritual *per se*. That is, we will examine critical strategies for understanding the structure, elements, modes, etc., of Buddhist practice by considering the insights of ritual theorists, such as Talal Asad, Ronald Grimes, and Catherine Bell.

REQUIRED TEXTS

*Course packet 1 and 2, available at Bel-Jean Copy/Print Center, 163 E. Broad Street, 548-3648.

*There will be multiple assignments requiring access to and printing capabilities of articles found in the GIL Course Reserves.

REQUIREMENTS

1. Attendance and participation. Obviously your participation grade requires at least one thing: that you are here. But participation does not simply equal being present; real participation means:

A: *Preparation*: you must *read, study, and think about* the contents of the readings. Although this may seem obvious to you, from an instructor's perspective, it is not to be taken for granted. Too many dull classes can be attributed to students who have not read, studied, and thought about the material. So, while preparing independently, you must *work* the reading contents. This includes:

1. making a list of the major concepts, principles, ideas, terms, etc.
2. preparing at least three specific questions on the reading
3. keeping a record of your reading responses or reactions. These may take any form, such as disagreement, bewilderment, surprise, shock, embarrassment, criticism, anger, insight.

Preparing in this manner will enable us to course on a lively, interesting, thought-provoking way.

- B: Listening and responding to your fellow students. Consistent participation in the form of *verbalized* questions, comments, and responses to me, and more importantly, to your classmates, is expected. (Since our main approach will be through primary texts and secondary articles, you must always bring the assigned readings to class.)

2. Evaluation:

A: *Attendance and Participation*. Attendance is mandatory. 25%

- B: *Echolots*. Try to think of a “test” neither as a test (you test the gadget to see if it’s working or to determine what is wrong with it) nor as an “exam” (you go to the doctor for an exam). Rather, think of it as an echolot. An echolot is a device used to gauge the depths of the ocean waters. I will give you countless opportunities to check the depths of your knowledge. We will have echolots frequently; these will contribute significantly to your grade. 20%

C: *Midterm*. 20%

- D: *Paper*. A ten-page paper will be due the last week of class. The guidelines for the paper will be given in early September. 15%

E: *Final Exam*. 20%

3. Grading: Below are some general guidelines that we will use for determining your final grade.

- A:
1. Be at virtually every class session (no more than two absences)
 2. Participate through questions, comments, and discussion in virtually every section. If you are hesitant to speak up – for whatever reason – this class is an opportunity to challenge yourself in this regard by developing the important intellectual skill of dialogue. Conversely, if you excel at speaking up, your challenge will be to do so in terms of companionable reflection.
 3. Demonstrate a flawless grasp of the course material in tests and the exam. You must also be able to go considerably beyond basic information (first order learning) to informed analysis (second order) and original thinking (third order).
- B:
1. Have no more than four absences.
 2. Participate through questions, comments, and discussion on a consistent basis (at least three times a week).
 3. Demonstrate a firm grasp of the course material in tests and the exam. You must also be able to demonstrate clearly an ability to do something with — analyze, evaluate, debate, etc. — the basic information, etc.
- C:
1. Unsteady attendance; more than five absences.
 2. Participate through questions, comments, and discussion on an occasional basis (once a week).
 3. Demonstrate more than a superficial grasp of the course material in tests and the exam. You must demonstrate some ability to do something with — analyze, evaluate, debate, etc. — the basic information, etc.
- D:
1. Regular absences (for example, at least once a week).
 2. Participate through questions, comments, and discussion on a rare basis (once every few weeks).
 3. Demonstrate at least a superficial grasp of the course material in tests and the exam, but demonstrate virtually no ability to go beyond basic information, etc.
- F:
1. Regular and numerous absences.

2. Virtually no participation (perhaps a couple of times throughout the semester).
3. Demonstrate little grasp of the course material in tests and the exam, and demonstrate no ability to go beyond basic information, etc.

* NOTE WELL! Honor Code. If you are not familiar with the University of Georgia's honor code, please go to: <http://www.uga.edu/ovpi/honesty/acadhon.htm>. All academic work must meet the standards contained in "A Culture of Honesty." Students are responsible for informing themselves about those standards before performing any academic work.

* Access. If you require special accommodations for any reason or have emergency medical information to give me, please make an appointment to see me as soon as possible.



The meaning of ritual is deep indeed. The person who tries to enter it with the kind of perception that distinguishes hard and soft, same and different, will drown there.
(Xun Zi)

In our present age of degeneration, it is through the skin that metaphysics must be made to reenter the mind.
(Antonin Artaud)

If I could explain it, I wouldn't have to dance it.
(Isadora Duncan)

I read somewhere of a shepherd who, when asked why he made, from within fairy rings, ritual observances to the moon in order to protect his flock, replied: 'I'd be a damn fool if I didn't!'
(Dylan Thomas)

The inability to enter into communion with God is a function of untaught bodies.
(Talal Asad, *Geneologies of Religion*)

The world is my hallucination.
(Alfred Jarry)

The practitioner is at bottom, and always, an inveterate believer in *transubstantiations* of some sort. The sign must *be* the signified under forms of her particular practice.
(David Jones)

Ritual is *work*.
(J.Z. Smith)

OUR MOTTO

**DISCOURSE CHEERS US TO COMPANIONABLE REFLECTION.
SUCH REFLECTION NEITHER PARADES POLEMICAL OPINIONS
NOR TOLERATES COMPLACENT AGREEMENT.
THE SAIL OF THINKING KEEPS TRIMMED HARD
TO THE WIND OF THE MATTER.
(MARTIN HEIDEGGER, *POETRY, LANGUAGE, THOUGHT*, 6)**

∞ **CLASS SCHEDULE AND READING ASSIGNMENTS** ∞

On Ritual

[Wittgenstein has said that “there is no seeing; only seeing *as*.” For our purposes, this can be understood to mean that what we see is always framed within a quite particular, culturally determined grid, like this. So, in this section, we will be collecting conceptual resources for analyzing and understanding the kinds of human actions referred to, since only quite recently, as “rituals.” We will be creating a framework for *seeing* these actions in a very particular manner, namely *as* ritual.]

JAN 8 – FEB 19

RITUAL – M. ELIADE (1)

TOWARD A GENEALOGY OF THE CONCEPT OF RITUAL – ASADI (23)

EXPLORING THE NATURAL FOUNDATIONS OF RELIGION – BARRETT (37)

RELIGIOUS THOUGHT AND BEHAVIOR AS BYPRODUCTS OF BRAIN FUNCTION – BOYER (43)

RITUAL REIFICATION – BELL (49)

ON RITUAL KNOWLEDGE – JENNINGS (59)

PERFORMANCE – BELL (71)

RITUAL SYMBOLS, SYNTAX, AND PRAXIS – BELL (83)

MODES OF RITUAL SENSIBILITY – GRIMES (87)

MAPPING THE FIELD OF RITUAL – GRIMES (97)

DEFINING NASCENT RITUAL – GRIMES (105)

RITUAL METAPHYSICS – SCHILBRACK (127)

ANAPANASATI SUTTA (157)

OUT OF AFRICA – BOYER (179)

Memory Studies

[Gaining perspective on memory’s influence and role will aid us in understanding ritual practices.]

FEB 24 – MARCH 3

RITUAL AND MEMORY – MCKAULEY AND LAWSON (115)

MEMORY – RATEY (137)

REMEMBERING RESUMED – CASEY (GIL COURSE RESERVES)

Crash Course in Buddhism

[Our goals in this section are: (1) to refresh our knowledge of central Buddhist doctrines; (2) to revisit these in light of our new theoretical knowledge of ritual practice; and (3) to prepare for the dialogue between the two in the next section – i.e., for the application of these theories to actual Buddhist ritual practices.]

MARCH 5 – APRIL 2

LEGEND OF THE BUDDHA SHAKYAMUNI (1)

SETTING IN MOTION THE WHEEL OF TRUTH (19)
IN SEARCH OF A POST-MODERN MIDDLE – JACKSON (25)
THE BUDDHA COUNSELS A THEIST – WALLIS (43)
BURNING (71)
RELIGIOUS READING – GRIFFITHS (73)
THE BUDDHA AND THE BOOK (91)

Buddhist Ritual Practices

[General goal: to apply the various theoretical strategies, conceptual tools, and analytical categories acquired in the previous sections as a means of examining selected Buddhist practices. Questions: what are these rituals about – what do they do, what do they accomplish? do they construct life-worlds? what are they a means to? what is their internal logic? are they primarily instrumental, magical, causal, constructive, etc., in nature? how are they structured? what are their basic gestural components? what do they yield when interpreted phenomenologically? structurally? socially? politically? psychologically?]

APR 2 – APR 28

INITIATION (115)
THE FIVE PRECEPTS (132)
THE STILL POINT: ZAZEN – LOORIE (133)
MEDITATION (139)
WISDOM (149)
SITTING AND EATING – GRIMES (151)
MODES OF ZEN RITUAL – GRIMES (158)
THE MAGIC OF WORDS AND THE POWER OF SPEECH – GOVINDA (175)
MANTRAS – WALLIS (188)
LITURGY (189)
WORSHIP – BEYER (199)
MAKING VISIBLE THE INVISIBLE: LITURGY – LOORIE (213)
BODHICARYAVATARA (223)
HOW DO I KNOW THEE? LET ME COUNT THE WAYS – ROSCH (225)
BODY AND RITUAL IN BUDDHIST MUSICAL CULTURES (247)
BUDDHIST VISUALITY IN HISTORY AND METAPHOR – MCMAHAN (255)
TABLE TO THE WINGS TO AWAKENING (271)
DON'T READ BOOKS! (272)
THE SACRED ART OF DYING – KRAMER (273)