HREL 44701/SALC 44701: Ritual in South Asian Buddhism

Spring Quarter 2011
Tuesdays 15:00–17:50
Swift Hall, Room 403

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Office Hours Wed/Thu 15–16:00
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Course description:
Though some claim that the Buddha’s “original teaching” involved a rejection of ritual activity, actual Buddhists seem to have been engaged in a wide variety of ritual activities in every historical period of which we have surviving evidence. In this course, we will explore some questions surrounding ritual practice in Buddhism, and analyze a range of ritual activities attested in Buddhist communities of South Asia. An attempt will be made to link the results of this work with current developments in ritual studies more generally.

Course readings are available on electronic reserve via Chalk (http://chalk.uchicago.edu/).

Schedule of Class Meetings:

Week One (29 March 2011): Introduction/Orientation

Week Two (5 April 2011): Ritual as an Interpretative Category: Genealogy and Utility
Readings: Bell, Ritual, pp. 1–89
        Asad, “Toward a Genealogy of the Concept of Ritual”
        Sharf, “Ritual”
        Miner, “Body Ritual among the Nacirema”

Week Three (12 April 2011): Ritual in Mainstream and Southern Buddhism
Readings: Spiro, Buddhism and Society, pp. 191–275
        Trainor, “Relics and the Presence of the Buddha,” pp. 136–188
        Bell, Ritual, pp. 91–137
        Bell, “Performance”

Week Four (19 April 2011): Rites of Passage in Himalayan Buddhism (Lay Ritual I)
Readings: van Gennep, Rites of Passage, 1–25, 189–194
        Ortner, Sherpas Through Their Rituals, pp. 1–61, 157–169
        Jackson, “A Fasting Ritual” in Tibet in Practice, pp. 271–292
        von Rospatt, “The Transformation of Monastic Ordination into Rite of Passage”
Week Five (26 April 2011): Daily Rituals and Rituals of Time (Lay Ritual II)

**Readings:** Sharkey, *Buddhist Daily Ritual*, pp. 1–63 and 269–297 (skim pp. 64–156, if possible)
- Gellner, “A Newar Buddhist Liturgy”
- Brough, “Nepalese Buddhist Rituals”
- Schopen, “On Marking Time in Buddhist Monasteries”
- Bell, *Ritual*, pp. 138–169

Week Six (3 May 2011): Rituals of Place and Vratas (Elite Ritual I/Lay Ritual III)

**Readings:** J.Z. Smith, *To Take Place*, pp. 96–117
- *Kriyāsamgraha*, pp. 19–72
- Lewis, “Mahāyāna Vratas in Newar Buddhism”

Week Seven (10 May 2011): Rituals of Other I (consecration/pratiṣṭhā) (Elite Ritual II)

**Readings:** Bentor, *Consecration of Images and Stūpas*, pp. 1–89
- *Kriyāsamgraha*, pp. 139–155
- Swearer, “Consecration Traditions in Other Buddhist Cultures”
- Wallis, *Mediating the Power of Buddhas*, 87–126

Week Eight (17 May 2011): Rituals of Other II (e.g. homa) and Meaning in Ritual (Elite Ritual III)

**Readings:** Mahāvairocana Uttara Tantra, pp. 393–412
- Skorupski, “Tibetan Homa Rites,” pp. 403–417
- Strickmann, “Homa in East Asia,” p. 418–455 (skim)
- Staal, “Meaninglessness of Ritual”
- Penner, “Language, Ritual, and Meaning”

Week Nine (24 May 2011): Rituals of Self (sādhanā) and Transgression (Elite Ritual IV)

**Readings:** Sarvadurgatiparisodhana Tantra, pp. 1–34
- Wedemeyer, Making Sense of Tantric Buddhism, pp. 155–307
- Jennings, “On Ritual Knowledge”

Week Ten (31 May 2011): Presentation of Student Projects

**Readings:** none

**Final Paper due Monday 6 June 2011 in Swift 204 by NOON**
Course Reading Bibliography (n.b. newer editions may be available and/or used)


