Course description:

Though many claim (based on a selective reading of canonical Buddhist literature) 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 analyse 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 at Regenstein Library.

Schedule of Class Meetings:

Week One (1 April 2005): Introduction/Orientation

Week Two (8 April 2005): Ritual as an Interpretative Category: Genealogy and Utility
Readings: Bell, Ritual, pp. 1-89
Asad, “Toward a Genealogy of the Concept of Ritual”
Bell, “Performance”

Week Three (15 April 2005): Ritual in Buddhism: Approaches to the Theravāda Traditions
Readings: Spiro, Buddhism and Society, pp. 191-275
Trainor, “Relics and the Presence of the Buddha,” pp. 136-188
Bell, Ritual, pp. 91-137

Week Four (22 April 2005): Anthropology of Sherpa Ritual (Lay Ritual I)
Readings: Ortner, Sherpas Through Their Rituals, pp. 1-61, 157-169
Jackson, “A Fasting Ritual” in Tibet in Practice, pp. 271-292
Bell, Ritual, pp. 138-169

Week Five (29 April 2005): Daily Rituals (Lay Ritual II)
Readings: Sharkey, Buddhist Daily Ritual, pp. 1-63 and 269-297 (skim pp. 64-156)
Gellner, “A Newar Buddhist Liturgy”
Schopen, “On Marking Time in Buddhist Monasteries”
Tambiah, “A Performative Approach to Ritual”

Week Six (6 May 2005): Rituals of Place (Lay Ritual III/Elite Ritual I)
Readings: J.Z. Smith, To Take Place, pp. 96-117
Skorupski, “An Analysis of the Kriyāsaṃgraha”
Kriyāsaṃgraha, pp. 19-72
Handurukande, Three Texts on Caitya Worship, pp. i-xxv (skim), 102-129
Lewis, “Mahāyāna Vratas in Newar Buddhism”
Week Seven (13 May 2005): Rituals of Self (sādhana) (Elite Ritual II)  
Readings: Sarvadurgatipariśodhana Tantra, pp. 1-34.  
“Longevity Method of White Tārā”  
English, Vajrayoginī, pp. 109-204  
Decleer, “The Working of Śādhana”  
Jennings, “On Ritual Knowledge”

Week Eight (20 May 2005): Rituals of Other I (consecration/pratiṣṭhā) (Elite Ritual III)  
Readings: Bentor, Consecration of Images and Stūpas, pp. 1-89.  
Kriyāsāṃgraha, pp. 139-155  
Swearer, “Consecration Traditions in Other Buddhist Cultures”

Week Nine (27 May 2005): Rituals of Other II (fire rituals/homa) (Elite Ritual IV)  
Readings: Mahāvairocana Uttara Tantra, pp. 393-12  
Skorupski, “Tibetan Homa Rites,” pp. 403-417  
Strickmann, “Homa in East Asia,” pp. 418-455  
Verardi, “Homa and Other Fire Rituals in Gandhara,” pp. 1-55  
Granoff, “Other People’s Rituals”

Week Ten (3 June 2005): Presentation of Student Projects  
Readings: none

**Final Paper due Wednesday 8 June 2005 in Swift 201 by 3:00PM**

Course Reading Bibliography (n.b. newer editions may be available and/or used)


