

Week 1 – Ritual: what why & how

Buddhism Level 2 – Buddhist Ritual

RESOURCES REQUIRED

Dedication ceremony handout
Vajra, flower in vase, t-light in holder

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Identify & voice feelings around ritual / devotion
Create safe place for people to feel happy try out ritual, in the knowledge they aren't expected to take to it.
Recognise many common rituals in our society as rituals
Start gaining a flavour of ritual as symbolic action.

SALUTE THE SHRINE

Very short explanation of what we're doing – orientating our selves towards the 3 Jewels, recognising our presence in a shrine room

MEDITATION (10 MINS)

Mostly just sitting
Towards end: "Become aware of how you feel about embarking on this module "

INTRODUCTION TO MODULE

Brief outline; flag up great difference from previous modules – lots of self-effort. This module bit of sitting back, let Buddha's work through us – we don't have to do it alone.
More hands on than previous modules.

Personal introductions

Exercise in 3s: hopes & fears in relation to module

Write them down.

Plenary

Get them up on flipchart, and address any issues possible.

Hopes- disabuse of any unrealistic ones

Fears – address them – make ground rules if appropriate (eg. no one has to do or say anything they're uncomfortable with)

Attitudes to set forth

Just try it & see

Don't have to do anything feel very comfortable doing

But maybe be willing to try out a bit of discomfort, see what it's about!

Don't have to enjoy it or get anything out of it – approach with open mind, and leave it for now if it doesn't do it for you – plenty more practices.

RITUALS WE KNOW

Maybe ritual isn't such a weird esoteric thing

Preliminary definition of ritual as “symbolic action” – ie not utilitarian, stands for something else.

Brainstorm examples in our culture

Baptism, Weddings, Funerals

Shaking hands, greeting kiss, waving goodbye, putting up Christmas decorations & giving presents?

WHAT IS RITUAL? – INPUT

Different ways of looking at it:

Symbolic action

Play action

Significant action, performed with mindfulness

Contemplation of Buddha – just holding him in mind, let him perfume our mind

Cultivation of sraddha

Fromm: “Shared action, expressive of common strivings, rooted in common values”

Brings out communal aspect – significant tho maybe not essential

TEA BREAK

WHY RITUAL? – INPUT

Exercise in 3s

Can you think of a ritual that you have experienced that felt meaningful: eg. your wedding, works leaving party, christening child.....

Can you say what effect it had on you?

Discussion

if we want to put into practice what we know to be right ... we have to enlist ...the cooperation of the emotions. This...is the central problem for most people ... of the spiritual life: to find emotional equivalents for our intellectual understanding.

Sangharakshitra, Right Resolve lecture 048.

Iceberg image

“We” are not just our conscious rational mind

Symbolism taps into deeper strata, talk to deeper parts of ourselves.

Ritual – as symbolic action – appeals to threefold division of us in terms of body/speech/mind, not just mind. Can bring whole of self to it (less, maybe rational side!)

Expression, externalisation to self & others

Maybe believe this or not

But fine to do puja just cos enjoy it, like the smells & bells, like making offerings, like being with others in that way; or just cos want to give it a go.

Probably only reason that's not valid is so don't incur disapproval of others!

HOW TO DO RITUAL

Some ingredients:

People – be aware of each other – in harmony with each other

The ritual space – be sensitive to it

Recitation, action (eg offerings), mantra, visualisation

DEDICATION CEREMONY

Preliminary ritual: tidy away chairs, tidy ritual space, walk around it, feel it. then find cushion & sit where feels comfortable.

Mandala – the symbolic ritual space

Explain symbolism of Lotuses, Vajras, Flames – in ritual we'll pass them around the circle - visualize them throughout remainder of session - -and course!

Do it!

Can light incense at end if you like.

HOME PRACTICE

Look for one or more objects you can put on the shrine next week that symbolise your highest values, aspirations or goals. You could look for something to represent Buddha, Dharma & Sangha if that's meaningful. You don't have to explain it, and you can take it away afterwards. Bring it with you.

FURTHER READING

The Psychology of Buddhist Ritual, Sangharakshita, in Ritual & Devotion or CD036.