

Invitation to College and University Faculty to attend the NEH Summer Institute:  
“Ritual Arts in Hinduism and Buddhism”

June 19-July 3, 2022



As the director of this two-week Summer Institute, I want extend my personal invitation to submit an application. There are many reasons why this program can be valuable to you due to its academic content, experiential learning, and residential experience. NEH pays each person attending a \$2200 stipend to cover expenses.

The rationale for this Institute stems from the fact that most of us who teach Asian religions were trained primarily to focus on the texts and doctrines central to the major traditions, with little coursework or experience regarding the history of praxis. Yet for grounding our own and our students’ understanding of these traditions, one must know how the doctrines affected the lives of Buddhists and Hindus, and how they expressed their devotion. Such a holistic perspective is particularly important to avoid reducing these traditions to merely philosophy or confining

student learning to only what the small literate elite did or thought.

For getting to this point, familiarity with rituals and art is essential. Through doing daily temple and home rituals, taking part in the yearly round of festivals, performing life-cycle rites, and seeing the context of basic meditation practices, householders *acted upon* their beliefs; through their doing so, they sustained these traditions materially throughout their history. Ritual arts are at the center of living Buddhist and Hindu cultures; shrines, statues, paintings, and texts are focal points where devotees seek to meet both their transcendental goals and pragmatic needs.

Over two weeks, “Ritual Arts in Hinduism and Buddhism” will cover topics relating to these themes. Through workshop presentations, an art gallery exhibition, and field trips, our Institute will highlight case studies in art objects and rituals, as



these can add new content and vitality to courses and open pathways to greater student insight about these traditions. Appreciating the sensory richness of ritual actions and art objects for devotees, instructors can open deeper connections with the humanity of typical adherents.

I am especially excited about the institute's immersing faculty participants with experts in the large Saturday community gathering in a vibrant regional Hindu temple near Boston, for attending a monastic ritual chanting festival in a large Thai Buddhist monastery, and being participant-observers of several characteristic Indic Mahayana rituals. There will also be exposure to original art in several “behind the scenes” workshops with experts in two of the great Boston museums (Harvard Art Museum; The Museum of Fine Arts); we will also introduce a range of popular ritual and art objects in an exhibition for our program in the Holy Cross Cantor Art Gallery.

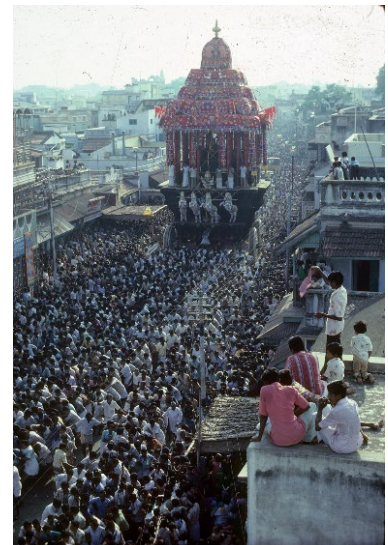


Nepal’s pre-eminent scholar-practitioner, Naresh Bajracharya, will do lecture demonstrations showing the construction of a sand mandala, a ritual of Buddha image consecration, and lead in a group clay *caitya* making ritual, as well as doing a Buddhist homa sacrifice.

The academic center of the Institute will be presentations by the world’s leading experts on Hindu ritualism, South Asian and Tibetan ritual art, Theravada praxis in Thailand and Sri Lanka, Tibetan meditation, and the ritual use of Mahayana/Vajrayana texts. (Jinah Kim, Ariana Maki, Charles Ramble, Justin McDaniel, John Holt, Shree Padma Holt, Richard Davis, Gloria Chien.)

Since our program is multi-disciplinary, and the academic content of the Institute will be of interest to a variety of scholars, I invite instructors in Asian art history, studio art, history, philosophy, and religious studies to apply. “Ritual Arts in Hinduism and Buddhism” will build upon and be enriched by the resulting variety of these various disciplinary perspectives.

This institute reflects several arcs in my scholarly career, and I am eager to share what I have learned on the ritual



history of Hinduism and Buddhism, the role of art in the enculturation of these traditions, and what enhances pedagogy in Asian religions. These are subjects I have researched and written about in recent years. I am also looking forward to introducing participants to the Sanskrit Mahayana traditions still vibrant among the Newars of Kathmandu, the last surviving community still reading texts and doing rituals that were once common across the upper Gangetic and northern Indus regions over a thousand years ago.



Finally, and on a personal level, prospective applicants should know that this is the seventh NEH summer institute that I will direct. By now, I understand the art of integrating formal presentations with field trips and participant-observation experiential learning. I have also learned how to manage pleasant

residence for those attending; the Holy Cross campus (40 miles west of Boston) has won many awards for its grounds and its new Joyce Wellness Center, and its staff are known for welcoming scholars in my programs.

Being funded by NEH repeatedly reflects our record of achieving my own high standards of excellence, and you can be sure that I will do everything necessary to stage a great Institute for summer of 2022.

The Institute web page for the institute, “Ritual Arts in Hinduism and Buddhism” includes the syllabus of the program details of eligibility, the online application, logistics of campus residence, and resumes of our distinguished faculty.

<https://hcnehinst.wpengine.com/>

Please email me with any questions at all on technicalities of NEH programs or the subject matter that will be covered.

*John D. Lewis*