

Buddhist Medicine & Healing

Topics in Buddhist Practice HRPB-4558
Institute of Buddhist Studies

Professor Paula Arai
parai@shin-ibs.edu

Course Description

The primary question that drives this course is: What Dharma principles are applied and activated in the healing/medical paradigm?

Cross-cultural exploration of Buddhist medical paradigms and healing practices in historical and contemporary contexts. The perspectives of modern bio-medical (allopathic) medicine and various healing and spiritual practices will be the focus of our cross-cultural exploration. Analysis of cultural and religious influences on the concepts of illness and health and the relationship of body and mind will direct our inquiry. An "Integrated Model of Affliction and Healing" from Boston University Medical School will facilitate our cross-cultural understandings and discussions. Through field research interviews, we will investigate the relationship of healing and the root assumptions that undergird the treatments and activities thought to help one heal. The questions that will guide us on our quest include: How do the stories we tell affect our health? How does attitude and belief influence health and illness? What difference does culture make to your health? What did earlier people know about healing? How do Buddhist healing practices compare with modern western scientific medicine? Does a prayer a day keep the doctor away? Can gratitude be an important part of healing treatment?

Lectures on background materials will be provided. However, the primary format of the class will be discussions based upon the readings, analytical papers, and your questions. This will involve drawing upon your experiences, perceptions, and ideas. If you are uncomfortable discussing these due to the nature of the topic, please simply indicate so. This will not be held against you in terms of your class participation.

Three main kinds of intelligence will be cultivated in this course. 1) *Linguistic intelligence* is the ability to use written and oral language flexibly and productively. Poets, novelists, lawyers, orators are examples of those who use their linguistic intelligence. 2) *Interpersonal intelligence* is the capacity to understand other individuals, to work well with them, to motivate them. Teachers, therapists, actors, salespeople, and religious and political leaders require interpersonal intelligence. 3) *Intrapersonal intelligence* involves a correlative understanding of oneself: one's strengths, weaknesses, desires, fears and the capacity to use this knowledge to make judicious decisions about how to lead one's life. The Dalai Lama, Gandhi, and Mother Teresa are exemplars of intrapersonal intelligence. (This is based on Howard Gardner's scheme of seven different kinds of intelligence. "Cognition: A Western Perspective" in *MindScience: An East-West Dialogue*. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1991, pp. 82-84.)

Further aims of the class are to learn to think like a Buddhist scholar (“theoretical knowledge”) and develop many of the skills that are helpful in living in a multicultural world (“practical knowledge”). In exploring a range of historical and cultural lenses through which to examine Buddhist medicinal and healing paradigms, this course aims to expand our perspectives and increase our awareness of how people engage with Buddhist teachings. It will broaden the range of worldview assumptions regarding how cosmological orientations undergird aims in life; drive the practices engaged to reach those aims; and frame the nature of self in a range of historical and cultural contexts. Therefore, a more specific goal for the course is to try and see the world through the eyes of various people in sundry Buddhist contexts. Such insights can prepare a person to navigate a vastly diverse and ambiguous world. The course hones critical reading and thinking skills as it stresses analytical writing. These aims will be sought through cultivating the following skills.

•Discern and analyze root assumptions of a perspective by honing questioning skills.

For example:

- Who is understood to have agency? In what contexts? In what ways?
- What is the concept of medicine/healing?
- What activities support the medicine/healing paradigm?
- What is the relationship between the medicine/healing paradigm and Dharma?

•Learn criteria to analyze aspects of Buddhist experience.

For example:

- What are contours of the culture under examination?
- What is the historical background of the situation?
- What are the concerns of the people involved?
- What do the people do that exacerbates or ameliorates the situation?

•Apply Buddhist concepts/principles to a problem and analyze dynamics that might ensue.

Course Learning Assignments and Assessments

1. Active engagement in course (15%)

Every effort will be made to foster an environment in which each voice is heard and every person treated with dignity and respect. This will involve what Zen teacher Thich Nhat Hanh refers to as “mindful speaking” and “deep listening,” as well as the Buddhist “sublime virtues” of generosity, patience/tolerance), compassion, forgiveness, and non-harm.

Since this course runs as a seminar, individual preparation and participation are crucial to group success. Please be prepared to be fully present in class, which includes completing the reading assignments before class, deeply listening, respectfully discussing the material, and actively engaging in exercises. The success of the class depends on the thoughtful participation of each and every member.

Nonetheless, “life happens,” and certain situations might affect your attendance and participation in our class. Moreover, for a variety of reasons, some people find it easier than others to participate verbally during class sessions. If any of this is the case, or if there are

other situations that we should be aware of that might influence your participation, please be in touch with Professor Arai to discuss your individual circumstances.

Please be in communication with professor about questions and concerns related to course.

To foster our class as a community of people focused on honing scholarly skills in respectful, caring, and supportive relationships, in addition to time together during class, we will cultivate community through establishing pairs of “Class Kalyanamitra.” In Sanskrit *kalyana* means benevolent, virtuous, generous and *mitra* means “friend.” The *Pali Canon* says the Buddha taught that *kalyanamitra* are the whole of the path.

A “Class Kalyanamitra” is a person you can talk with about the course material, discuss readings, give feedback about writing, discuss how the course materials relate to current concerns and future aims, and be a partner in generating insights and inspiration.

During the first class we will sort out “Class Kalyanamitra” pairings.

•**Kalyanamitra Connections** (4%)

- For about 20 minutes once a week talk about course material.
- Meet at least 8 times over the semester (in addition to essay feedback exercise)
- In class, plan to share 6 brief overviews (up to 2 minutes) of topics or insights arose out of your interactions. (0.5%/sharing x 6 = 3%)

•**Facilitate class:** 60 minutes. (6%)

The aim of this assignment is to expand and diversify the approaches with which we engage the material. A successful facilitation aims to get us thinking as we exchange ideas and insights. Please do **not** use your time to do an overview (mini-lecture) of the material. You might prepare discussion questions you send out in advance, present them in class, break us up into small groups, create an exercise, or something else.

We will choose which date you will do during our first class session.

2. Short Analytical Essays

Write an essay based on the readings of that week to explore what Dharma principles are applied and activated in the healing/medical paradigm. Submit essays for **5** of the 10 units with which we engage during weeks 3-11. You **must** submit a paper for Week 3. You **must** also either submit a paper or feedback on a paper during Weeks 4 & 5. (7% each x 5 = 35% total)

•**Essay Feedback** (6%)

- For Week 4, one person writes an essay and the other person offers feedback.
- The draft must be given to the Kalyanamitra with enough time to provide feedback (48 hours before the essay is due).
- Both author and Kalyanamitra respectively submit their essay and feedback on Moodle.
- Follow the feedback guidelines (noted below).

- For Week 5, switch roles. One writes, the other gives feedback.

Guidelines for Essay Feedback

- Does the essay follow the assignment, that is by analyzing the reading rather than summarizing?
- Does the organization of material have logical flow?
- Is the content clear?
- Are there any points that need more development?
- Are there points that don't seem germane to the analysis?
- Is the essay persuasive/compelling?
- Are word choices specific and clear?
- Do verb choices drive the argument/analysis?
- Are there any notable grammar or syntax issues?
- Identify a strength of the essay in terms of the way it enhances/expands your understanding of the material.
- Other reflections, comments, concerns.

Except for those specified, you can choose which weeks to submit a paper. In addition to the depth of engagement with the material, assessment will consider the quality of written expression, that is, grammar, syntax, organization, clarity, and quality of vocabulary. Each of the nine essays is to be typed, double-spaced, 12-pt font, 1" margins, 300-350 words, and submitted on Moodle before class begins. Each essay is worth 6% for a total of 30%.

Each person will read their paper to the class. Afterwards we will weave into our discussion how the insights shared might be applied in ministry, chaplaincy, and your life.

3. Field Research Presentation (15%) & written analysis 20%

Based upon field research, do a practiced and polished presentation that clearly articulates your interpretation and analysis of the medicinal/healing paradigm of a person you interviewed. These are to be confidential, so use pseudonyms. **Dec. 9, 2025**

- Presentation: 10 minutes. Evaluation based on content/depth of analysis, preparation, clarity, enunciation, volume, speed, organization, and "presence"
 - Paper: 1,600-1,800 words. Evaluation based on demonstrated awareness of the complexities of the issues; reasoning used in context of tradition; analysis of assumptions in cultural context; coherence and logic of organization; skillful use of material from texts (if invoked); spelling, punctuation, grammar, and eloquence
- Choose a person to converse with about their healing experiences. You should try and answer the question: What is the healing process of my consociate?
 - It is imperative that you keep the identity of the interviewee confidential if they choose to remain unknown.
 - It is best that you talk with the person fact-to-face in a quiet and private place. Audio and Video calls are possible if the best person for you to work with is not local.
 - Interview someone at least for three 60 to 90-minute sessions.
 - Come up with questions for the interview.

- Record (with permission) or take copious notes right after you finish the session.
 - Analyze their healing paradigm in terms of the Dharma and the person’s specific worldview assumptions.
- You might consider keeping a modest field journal. Your journal is for exploring:
- Analyzing “What kind of a researcher am I?”
 - insights into the nature of field research
 - insights, frustrations, fears, delights about the interviewee relationship
 - salient issues and questions that have arisen in the interviews
 - insights into the healing process
 - insights into cultural context
 - complexities of the issues

Graded Assignment Breakdown

Course Engagement: 15%

5 Essays: 7% each, 35% total

Feedback on Essay: 6%

Facilitate discussion: 6%

Kalyanamitra Connections: 0.5%/sharing x 6 = 3%

Presentation of Field Research: 15%

Written analysis: 20%

Grade Values

A+ = 98-100	C+ = 79-77
A = 97-94	C = 76-73
A- = 93-90	C- = 72-70
B+ = 89-87	D+ = 69-67
B = 86-83	D = 66-63
B- = 82-80	D- = 62-60
	F = 59 and lower

Health Guidelines

When warranted, faculty and students will wear masks in indoor spaces. There is no eating in our common classroom space at any time. We ask that you be cautious when drinking fluids when masks are warranted. If you feel ill, please notify Professor Arai that you will not be in class, though you may attend on Zoom as you are able. Professor Arai will inform you no later than 7 am on the day of class if she is unable to meet in the classroom, and she will make every effort to hold class on Zoom. Class sessions held when someone is absent will be recorded, so that will help you keep up-to-date on class work if illness or suspected illness hinders your attendance. All recordings are to be deleted at the end of term.

Course Syllabus Modifications

If there will be modifications to this Course Syllabus, they will be made as to the selection of reading assignments and due dates in consultation with students. The above schedule and procedures in this course are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances.

Course Texts

All readings are posted on Moodle, except for two:

- Paula Arai, *Painting Enlightenment: Healing Visions of the Heart Sutra, The Buddhist Art of Iwasaki Tsuneo* (Shambhala Publications, 2019).
- Karen Derris, *Storied Companions: Cancer, Trauma, and Discovering Guides for Living in Buddhist Narratives* (Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2021).

Course Schedule

Week I (Sept. 2) Introduction to Course, Questions, and Buddhist Physician

- “The Chinese Biography of Jīvaka, Buddhist King of Physicians,” *Pacific World* (24 ms pages)

Week II (Sept. 9) Dharma Healing Stories

Karen Derris, *Storied Companions: Cancer, Trauma, and Discovering Guides for Living in Buddhist Narratives*. Somerville, MA: Wisdom Publications, 2021.

Week III (Sep. 16) Buddhist Healing in Texts, People, and Practices

- Pierce Salguero, ed., *Buddhism and Medicine: An Anthology of Premodern Sources*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2017, pp. 30-40; 49-60; 113-117; 170-179; 219-221; 252-285; 322-335; 358-362; 382-389; 478-485. (pdf)

Week IV (Sept. 23) Medieval China and Japan: Ghosts and Babies

- Pierce Salguero and Andrew Macomber, eds., *Buddhist Healing in Medieval China and Japan*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2020.
 - “Introduction,” pp. 1-22
 - “‘A Flock of Ghosts Bursting Forth and Scattering:’ Healing Narratives in a Sixth-Century Chinese Buddhist Hagiography,” pp. 23-56
 - “Empowering the Pregnancy Sash in Medieval Japan,” pp. 160-193

Week V (Sept. 30) Japanese Buddhist Healing Rituals

- Arai, Paula. *Bringing Zen Home: The Healing Heart of Japanese Women's Rituals*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2011, pp. 1-64. (pdf)

Week VI (Oct. 7) Healing Buddhist Art: Painting Enlightenment

- Paula Arai, *Painting Enlightenment: Healing Visions of the Heart Sutra, The Buddhist Art of Iwasaki Tsuneo*. Boulder: Shambhala Publications, 2019.

Week VII (Oct. 14) Buddhist Healing Goddesses

- Miranda Shaw, *Buddhist Goddesses of India*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006. (pdf)
 - “Parnaśavarī: Healing Goddess Clothed in Leaves,” pp. 188-202.
 - “Tārā: Mahayana Buddha, Universal Savior,” pp. 306-356.

*****Fall Break*****

Week VIII (Oct. 28) Tibetan Doctors Response to Mental Illness and Disaster

- Susannah Deane, “Mental Illness in the Sowa Rigpa Clinic: A Conversation with Dr. Teinlay P. Trogawa,” in *Buddhism and Medicine: An Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Sources*, edited by Pierce Salguero. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020, pp. 289-297.
- Sienna Craig, “Buddhist Healing Practices,” *Oxford Handbook of Buddhist Practice*, pp. 235-250. (pdf)

Week IX (Nov. 4) From the Psychosomatic to the Parliament

- Pierce Salguero, ed., *Buddhism and Medicine: An Anthology of Modern and Contemporary Sources*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020, pp. 38-51; 108-117; 158-176; 189-195; 204-214; 298-309. (pdf)

Week X (Nov. 11) Medicalization of Meditation

- Wakoh Shannon Hickey, *Mind Cure: How Meditation Became Medicine*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2019, pp. 1-17; 61 (Fig. 2.3); 69-79; 85-87; 123 (Fig. 4.2); 127-130; 135 (Fig. 4.3); 137-170; 187-217. (pdf)

Week XI (Nov. 18) Neuroscience and Buddhism

- Richard Mendius, *Buddha's Brain: The Practical Neuroscience of Happiness, Love, & Wisdom*. Oakland, CA: New Harbinger Publications, 2009, pp. 5-135. (pdf)

Week XII (Nov. 25) Gratitude Break**Week XIII (Dec. 2) Work on your research****Week XIV (Dec. 9) Field Research Presentations**