



Shogaku Zen Institute
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SYLLABUS:

“PREACHING THE DHARMA” PRACTICUM

Shogaku Zen Institute

6:00-7:30 pm PT, October 24, 2023 - January 9, 2024

Taught by Steve Kanji Ruhl and Daishin McCabe

\$600; SZI M Div students will earn 3 credits in the Preaching category

In a certain sense, we can't “preach” or “teach” the dharma to others; it's already alive within them, waiting to be discovered: “I do not say that there is no Ch'an; it's just that there are no teachers,” as one koan puts it. At the same time, “all things preach the dharma,” according to a popular paraphrase of Dogen's *Mujo Seppo*, or “Teachings of the Insentient” -- dharma teachings exist constantly and vibrantly all around us. If there are “no teachers,” and yet teachers surround us at every moment, what is *our* role in communicating the dharma to others, and what skills can we cultivate to do it?

In “Preaching the Dharma” we'll explore this together in a lively practicum that combines reading, videos, and group discussions with active experience. You'll learn skillful means for offering basic instructional talks in Zen-based and mindfulness-based dharma principles and dharma practices, whether the setting is one-on-one or with Buddhist sanghas, multi-faith groups, or the general public.

During this course, each participant will present three dharma talks: the first one will be 5 minutes long; the second, 10 minutes; and the third, 20 minutes.

There will be two papers due: the first, a reflection paper that responds to viewing the assigned videos; and the second, a final paper integrating in-class experience of dharma talk presentations, assigned video viewings, and assigned readings.

Note: when possible, scanned passages of assigned readings will be sent to participants as email attachments. Of course, participants also may order assigned books to read.

Assigned passages are listed below; the books from which the passages derive are: *Zen Ritual: Studies of Zen Buddhist Theory in Practice*, ed. Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright; *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dōgen*, ed. Kazuaki Tanahashi; and *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-Chi*, trans. Burton Watson.

Class Schedule

Tuesday, October 24: In class: Introductions. Personal backgrounds: what is your dharma practice; what brings you to this course; what has been your experience with preaching the dharma or hearing others preach it; which skills do you hope to develop? Teaching focus: how to choose a meaningful topic for a dharma talk; practical tips for drafting and rehearsing the talk; important considerations. Note: participants will be chosen for giving 5-minute talks on October 31 and November 7.

***Assignment for October 31: By class time on 10/31, read from *Zen Ritual: Studies of Zen Buddhist Theory in Practice*, ed. Steven Heine and Dale S. Wright, pages 83-112, “Chan Rituals of the Abbots’ Ascending the Dharma Hall to Preach,” by Mario Poceski.

Be prepared to discuss, among other possibilities: What does Poceski mean when he writes, “Preaching was among the primary means of communicating the teaching of Buddhism and propagating the religion in medieval China” (p. 85)? How does he support this? Elaborate, with evidence from the text. What was the format of Ch’an sermons in the T’ang Dynasty? How did they fit contextually with ceremonial rituals in Ch’an temples? What does Poceski mean by the “Iconoclastic Interlude”? What were the performative elements of Ch’an sermons during the Song Dynasty, and what does this suggest to us about the styles of Zen dharma talks that we’ve inherited in the West?

Also consider this passage from Ralph Waldo Emerson’s “Divinity School Address,” delivered to ministry students at Harvard Divinity School, 1838:

...I once heard a preacher who sorely tempted me to say, I would go to church no more. Men go, thought I, where they are wont to go, else had no soul entered the temple in the afternoon. A snow storm was falling around us. The snow storm was real; the preacher merely spectral; and the eye felt the sad contrast in looking at him, and then out of the window behind him, into the beautiful meteor of the snow. He had lived in vain. He had no one word intimating that he had laughed or wept, was married or in love, had been commended, or cheated, or chagrined. If he had ever lived and acted, we were none the wiser for it. The capital secret of his profession, namely, to convert life into truth, he had not learned. Not one fact in all his experience, had he yet imported into his doctrine. This man had ploughed, and planted, and talked, and bought, and sold; he had read books; he had eaten and drunken; his head aches; his heart throbs; he smiles and suffers; yet was there not a surmise, a hint, in all the discourse, that he had ever lived at all. Not a line did he draw out of real history. The true preacher can be known by this, that he deals out to the people his life, — life passed through the fire of thought. But of the bad preacher, it could not be told from his sermon, what age of the world he fell in; whether he had a father or a child; whether he was a freeholder or a pauper; whether he was a citizen or a countryman; or any other fact of his biography. It seemed strange that the people should come to church. It seemed as if their houses were very unentertaining, that they should prefer this thoughtless clamor....
<https://emersoncentral.com/texts/nature-addresses-lectures/addresses/divinity-school-address/>

Be prepared to discuss: As a Buddhist “preacher” delivering a dharma talk, how might you convey the dharma by sharing a “life passed through the fire of thought,” as well as through the fire of practice and realization? And how might you do so by converting your personal life experiences into truth, as Emerson advocates, without conveying too much, without making it all about you, and while balancing self-disclosure with maintaining proper boundaries?

Also: Participants selected to deliver the first round of 5-minute dharma talks should be prepared to share with the group.

Tuesday, October 31: Practical Matters in Preaching the Dharma

In class: (1) Group responses to readings of Poceski essay and Emerson paragraph.

(2) First round of dharma talks (5 minutes each) delivered by selected individuals, followed by question-and-answer and helpful group support. *These initial talks establish a baseline, serving for comparison as we proceed through later talks.*

***Assignment for November 7: By class time on 11/7, read dharma talks with questions-and-answers delivered in 9th century by Lin-Chi, pages 21-61, *The Zen Teachings of Master Lin-Chi*, trans. Burton Watson. Also a dharma talk with questions-and-answers delivered in 1231 by Dōgen, “On the Endeavor of the Way” (Bendowa) fascicle of *Shobogenzo*, pages 143-160 in *Moon in a Dewdrop: Writings of Zen Master Dōgen*, ed. Kazuaki Tanahashi.

Be prepared to discuss, among other possibilities: What do you notice about the individual rhetorical styles of Dōgen and Lin-Chi as they preach the dharma in their talks? What do you observe about how they answer students’ questions? How might familiarity with these ancient Ch’an and Zen dharma talks provide you with a foundation for creating talks of your own?

Also: Participants scheduled to deliver 5-minute dharma talks should be prepared to share with the group.

November 7: Historical Background in Preaching the Dharma in Zen Buddhism.

In class: (1) Group responses to Lin-Chi and Dōgen readings.

(2) Continuing the first round of dharma talks (5 minutes each) delivered by selected individuals, followed by question-and-answer and helpful group support. *These initial talks establish a baseline for the course, serving for comparison as we proceed through later talks.*

***Assignment for November 14: Watch the following videos of dharma talks. The 6 videos present a range of contemporary Zen and Vipassana speakers with a variety of techniques for preaching the dharma – informal delivery and formal delivery; extemporaneously and reading from notes; using slides and Power Point, etc.

Feel free to pace yourself over the week of viewing time, and also feel free to fast-forward the longer videos if you wish, once you feel that you have an adequate sense of the speaker and his or her presentation techniques.

Jan Willis, “Buddhism and Activism,” with Q & A, 11:21

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LnhG98yZnAc>

Toni Packer, "Starting from not knowing who or what we are", 30:38

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MjucWg7Sk5E>

Tara Brach, "Trusting Your Awakening Heart," 49:40

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lHYt1JuCEC4>

Joseph Goldstein, "Buddhism: The Essential Points" 1 hour

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LgkBnMu_cdM

Thich Nhat Hanh, "Freedom from Being Caught in Past or Future," 40:43

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDhn7e8MCWI>

Charlotte Joko Beck (no video dharma talks available, but this interview gives a sense of her presentation technique), 30:00

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dw3wv657gtQ>

Tuesday, November 14:

In class: Group discussion regarding shared responses to video dharma talks.

*** Assignment for November 21: watch the following 8 videos:

John Daido Looi, "Beginning Zen," 9:43

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E9b4FbGIVSE>

John Daido Looi, "21st Century Morality," 8:09

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DS4nxFVm6bE>

Joan Halifax, "Compassion and the true meaning of empathy," 13:18

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQijruP9c4>

Joan Halifax, "Compassion as the Radicalism of Our Time," 23:59

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YvtOOQHb5GQ>

angel Kyodo williams: "It's Not About Love After All," 20:13

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PztCw49OQ2g>

Jack Kornfield, "Wisdom, Compassion and Courage in Uncertain Times," 26:25

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1UQqKVpWXJQ>

Sharon Salzberg, "Loving Kindness," 28:58

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bQSWsOORBFY>

Shunryu Suzuki, “Zen Buddhism: Part 1,” 9:57

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XG84aYMQIHw&list=PL23289F77283DBB90&index=3>

Tuesday, November 21:

In class: Group discussion regarding shared responses to video dharma talks.

˘ *****Assignment for November 28:** By class time on 11/28, write and submit a three-page, double-spaced reflection paper giving your impressions of the speakers in the videos:

In your opinion, how effective are the speakers in clearly explaining a key point about the dharma? What do you notice about the effectiveness of different styles? Which appeal to you? Which do not? How is each speaker using body language, voice, and eye contact? What is the impact of using a particular form of language – formal, colloquial, slang – and of modulating various tones, such as solemn, humorous, inspirational? Does the speaker “hold the seat” with authority but without presenting as a guru? What is your sense of the speaker’s ability to generate a dynamic field of connected, engaged listeners? From which speaker or speakers do you think you’ve learned the most as you develop your own techniques for preaching the dharma?

Also: By class time on 11/28, participants chosen to give 10-minute dharma talks should be prepared and ready to present.

November 28: In class: Second round of dharma talks (10 minutes each) delivered by selected individuals, followed by question-and-answer and helpful group support.

*****Assignment for December 5:** By class time on 12/5/, participants who have not yet given 10-minute dharma talks should be prepared and ready to present.

December 5: In class: Second round of dharma talks (10 minutes each) delivered by remaining participants, followed by question-and-answer and helpful group support.

*****Assignment for December 12:** Watch the videos: Dalai Lama, “What Is It that Reincarnates,” 21:06 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vQ0CoQyle7Y>

Martin Luther King, “The Other America,” 47:57 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dOWDtDUKz-U> (Obviously this is not a dharma talk, but it qualifies as a sermon – one with political overtones. While some of Rev. Dr. King’s sermons were recorded in audio, it seems that none were videotaped, presumably because TV cameras were not permitted in the churches. This video depicts Rev. Dr. King presenting a speech that addresses a deep spiritual malaise in the American body politic – one that is still relevant today.)

Be prepared to discuss, among other possibilities: How would you compare and contrast the presentation styles of the Dalai Lama and Martin Luther King in these two video-recorded talks? What most moves you, or impresses you, or surprises you? Also, the talks by the Dalai Lama and Martin Luther King are very different, yet in both talks these teachers are speaking, without notes, not only from deep intellectual understanding but from a deep source of spiritual

wisdom – the Dalai Lama in explaining the complexities of arcane Buddhist metaphysics; Martin Luther King in explaining the complexities of centuries of social and political oppression. How might you access a deep wisdom source within yourself while speaking to an audience?

December 12: In class: Group discussion of Dalai Lama and Martin Luther King talks.

***Assignment for December 19: By class time on 12/19, participants chosen to give 20-minute dharma talks should be prepared and ready to present.

December 19: In class: Third round of dharma talks (20 minutes each) delivered by selected individuals, followed by question-and-answer and helpful group support.

***Assignment for January 2: By class time on 1/2, participants chosen to give 20-minute dharma talks should be prepared and ready to present.

December 26: No class.

January 2: In class: Third round of dharma talks (20 minutes each) delivered, followed by question-and-answer and helpful group support.

***Assignment for January 9: (if needed. depending on number of students in class) By class time on 1/9, remaining participants chosen to give 20-minute dharma talks should be prepared and ready to present.

Also: By class time on 1/9, final written paper is due. Five-to-10 pages, double-spaced. Demonstrate your integration of the required readings and video viewings, and provide your personal reflections on the experience of preparing and presenting your three dharma talks and of receiving questions and feedback from other students.

January 9: In class: If needed: Third round of dharma talks (20 minutes each) delivered by three individuals, followed by question-and-answer and helpful group support.

Final summation through group discussions and sharing. Final papers due.