



Ritual Craft as Transformative Practice

RALS-4301

3 Units

Starr King School for the Ministry - Graduate Theological Union

Fall 2021

Instructor Information

Taya Mâ Shere

tshere@sksm.edu

Meeting Dates and Times

Tuesdays (9:40 am -12:30 pm PT / 12:40 pm - 3:30 pm ET)

Location: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/5217103327>

Course Dates: September 14, 21, 28, October 5, 12, 19, November 2, 9, 16, 23, 30 Dec 7 (No class September 7 / Rosh Hashanah or October 26 / Reading Week)

Course Description and Objectives

Ritual Craft as Transformative Practice is an exploration into the art and technology of ritual craft. This course supports students in developing a nuanced understanding of successful ritual structures and empowers students in cultivating skills to create and guide ritual. The course itself is a ritual immersion, with each class meeting structured as a ritual experience. Students are encouraged to deepen their own ritual practices, to experience rituals in contexts new to them and to craft and guide ritual for community. Students will identify their strengths and edges in ritual craft and leadership and will receive structured support in enhancing their existing ritual strengths and in nurturing arenas in which they seek additional growth and experience.

Course Expectations

* Ritual experiences are impacted by the presence, attention and care of each participant. To best support the learning of each student and also the depth of the container of the class, students are expected to arrive on time, and to participate fully in class discussions, exercises and assignments. Students are expected to complete any assigned readings in advance of class, to attend all classes or communicate with the instructor promptly regarding absences.

*Sessions of Ritual Craft as Transformative Practice are structured as ritual, with ritual roles regularly assigned to class members. After an orientation to these roles, students are expected sign-up in advance for, and to participate in, each ritual role - Welcoming, Altar-Building, and Ritual-Activity - over the course of the semester.

* The Ritual Craft as Transformative Practice class attends monthly SKSM chapel services, which happen during our class time (Chapel is Tuesday @ 11 am), and we also lead the monthly chapel services, as small groups. Students are expected to participate in planning for their chapel service (outside of class time) and to be present in support of or in leadership at our class chapel.

* Over the course of the semester, students are asked to 1) create one ritual outside of class 3) offer an in-class ritual (10 minutes), as well as craft the class altar and leading the welcome

* Students are expected to write three reflection papers:

Paper 1 is on their strengths and growing edges in ritual (2 pages, due October 1).

Paper 2 is on the ritual students create outside of class (3-4 pages, due November 30).

Paper 3 is on students' ritual offerings (altar craft, welcome, in-class ritual, chapel participation) and growth over during the course of our semester (3-4 pages, due December 10).

Session 1: Welcome, Form & Flow

Welcome to Ritual Craft as a Transformative Practice. We will outline the ritual structures for our course, choose ritual roles and explore core concepts of form and flow in ritual craft.

Session 2: Intention, Communication and State Transmission

Setting clear intention is paramount in ritual craft. We will explore common categories of ritual intention as well as processes for clarifying ritual intentions and aligning ritual structures and content accordingly. We will explore state cultivation and transmission and its impact on ritual space. **This is a chapel week**

Session 3: Sacred Time and Pulse: The Rhythm of Ritual

How does ritual orient or shift our experience of time? How do we keep track or lose track of time in ritual space? We explore ways the rhythms of ritual shape our experience of the sacred.

Session 4: Ritual and the Body

Whether a ritual is designed toward immanence or transcendence, ritual begins in the body. We will explore the embodied nature of ritual as a radical act, as well as practices of inhabiting the body, leaving the body and tending the body in ritual space. We will explore ways of

crafting ritual so that all bodies - of varying strengths and capacities- are welcome and well-met.

Session 5: Ritual and Liturgy

What are the words and prayers and offerings that most deeply support ritual? How do we choose the language we speak to the divine and to our ritual participants or co-creators? How do our choices affect the power of the rituals we create and how can we give voice to our ritual language in a way that roots us in resonance? **This is a chapel week**

Session 6: Tending Sacred Space: The Temple of Ritual

How does the physical setting of ritual impact the ritual experience? We will explore elements in choosing resonant ritual locations, practices and customs of clearing, setting and tending sacred space, as well as creative practices for enhancing an experience of the sacred in spontaneous ritual settings. We will also explore the practice of setting and tending altars as a ritual tool.

Session 7: Ritual and the Earth

Working with elementals - earth, water, air and fire - is of great support in ritual craft. We will explore how the literal and energetic elements of earth, water, air and fire are engaged, explicitly and implicitly, in ritual craft and technology.

Session 9: Ritual and Revolution

How is ritual a radical act? How can we integrate counter-oppressive theory and practice into our ritual craft and how can we weave ritual to powerfully support political and social action.

Session 10: Ritual and Rite of Passage, Initiation and Life Cycle Ceremony,

How do rituals that occur regularly in time or place differ from rituals in service to initiation, life-cycle or rites of passage? We will explore cross-cultural initiation theory, impacts of initiation and rite-of-passage in our own lives, and how to tend rite-of-passage work with care and consciousness.

Session 11: Next Steps in Ritual Practice

We will inventory our own ritual craft and leadership strengths and edges. We will offer feedback to each other and experience a ritual playground to explore new ways of leading. We will identify next steps in ritual practice and leadership and craft structures and accountability toward meeting these next steps.

Session 12: Ritual Completion

How we complete and seal a ritual experience and close ritual space greatly affects the impact of a ritual. In this session, we will explore practices of ritual completing and sealing, and also embody the practice of ritual completion by tending the completion and sealing of the ritual container of our course.

Core Text: Ritual: Power, Healing and Community by Malidoma Some (ISBN-13: 978-0140195583; ISBN-10: 0140195580) \$13.99

Supplemental readings assigned as needed throughout the semester