

Vancouver School of Theology

IPS/SP500 Spiritual Formation in Communities

Fall 2018: Three weekend classes, Thursday 6:00 – 9:00 pm, Friday 9:00 am – 4:00 pm
September 13-14, October 11-12, November 15-16

Description: This course explores spiritual formation within three different faith communities or wisdom traditions with a focus on the specific forms of spirituality brought by instructors from each of the communities or traditions. Study of specific spiritual practices will develop the student's skills in understanding the sources and practices of spirituality in general. Research shows this is the outcome in the study of cultural diversity: the skills of understanding transfer to a variety of settings although the cultural specifics change. Students will read or otherwise become acquainted with a variety of resources from the three traditions, cultivate experiential learning by interaction with contemporary practitioners, and document their learning in modalities not restricted to academic-paper formats.

Competencies:

1. Define the spirituality of each community/wisdom tradition with accuracy and respect.
2. Document the environmental, cultural, and historical influences on each of the spiritualities under study.
3. Relate the spiritual principles to other aspects of the community/wisdom tradition being studied, including land-theology, law, worship, national continuity.
4. Compare and contrast spiritualities from the locations and traditions of the student's own faith commitments.
5. Demonstrate respectful communication and capacities for inter-religious dialogue in interactions of learning in the classroom.

Format: Three weekend intensives, combining lecture, discussion, and class activities.

Weekend I: Buddhist Spirituality with Shinmon Michael Newton, September 13-14

Weekend II: Jewish Spirituality with Rabbi Laura Duhan Kaplan, October 11-12

Weekend III: Islamic Spirituality with Seemi Ghazi, November 14-15

Readings: Specified by instructors

Assignments: Attendance in accordance with VST Policies; thoughtful, generous, and engaged class participation; completion of assigned readings and writing assignments.

Writing assignment: Three five page papers, or their equivalents in modalities approved by the instructors, one corresponding to each weekend of the course. Each instructor will give specific directions for their weekend. Due dates of the three assignments are:

Weekend I: Assignment due September 28

Weekend II: Assignment due November 1

Weekend III: Assignment due November 30

COURSE POLICIES

1. **Attendance:** For this intensive course, VST requires 100% attendance.
2. **Reading and assignments:** Students are expected to read all required assignments before class and to complete all assignments as outlined in the syllabus within the specified dates of the course and term.
3. **Academic honesty:** Students are expected to adhere to VST's requirements for academic honesty as published in the Student Handbook.
4. **Inclusive language:** In speaking and writing, inclusive language is expected when making reference to humans and a variety of metaphors are anticipated when making reference to God.
5. **Assignment and Course Evaluation:**
 - Course evaluations at VST combine a letter grade system (A+ to B-; course failure is "Not Approved") including narrative comments based on the competencies of the course. No number grades or weights of assignments are calculated, nor are final grades given numerical equivalents.
 - Individual assignments within a course are given narrative evaluations, that is, APP (Approved) or INC (Incomplete) with narrative comments, based on the competencies and expectations set for that assignment. One re-write is allowed on any assignment that is INC. The re-written assignment is due two weeks after the work is returned. The final evaluation for an assignment can be APP or NAPP after a re-write.
6. For a passing grade in the course, all assignments must be Approved.
7. **Late assignments:** Submission of assignments on time is a part of academic, professional and pastoral competence and a part of every course at VST. All assignments in courses are due on the dates specified in the syllabus. Failure to submit an assignment on time will be noted in the narrative evaluation of an assignment.
8. **Limitation on use of social media:** Ordinarily, the use of electronic devices in the contexts of classrooms or meetings will be to support the learning, formation, or agenda at hand.
9. VST is committed to creating safe space and an inclusive learning environment. If you have a diagnosed or suspected learning disability, chronic condition, mental health concern, or physical requirement which you anticipate may impact your participation in this class, you are encouraged to discuss your needs with the instructor and the Dean within the first week of classes.

Buddhist Spirituality

Instructor: Michael Newton, mnewton@sfu.ca

Dates: September 13-14, Thursday 6-9pm / Friday 9am-5pm

PURPOSE: Buddhism is the only religion that was born in Asia and then following the famous Silk Road spread to every Asian country, playing an integral role in social, cultural and spiritual life of all Asian societies. The history of Buddhism in North America only traces back to the middle of the nineteenth century. Yet today, Buddhism exerts a strong influence on Western culture --including literature, art, psychology, and popular entertainment-- that is out of proportion to the number of self-declared Buddhists in Western society. What accounts for this popularity and what do the Buddhist teachings tell us about the human condition? How do the Buddhist practices and views help with our struggle with discontent, afflictive emotions and despair? This course will explore the core teachings and practices of Siddhartha Gautama, the Buddha, with special attention to the Buddhist understanding of reality, analysis of the human condition, and path to awakening from suffering. We will consider what the spiritual path as outlined in the Buddhist tradition offers us as we face the issues of modern society.

PREREQUISITES: none

COMPETENCE OBJECTIVES:

1. Recognize the complexity and diversity of the Buddhist tradition throughout the world.
2. Outline the distinct teachings, principles, and practices of the Buddhist tradition in general and the Mahayana stream in particular.
3. Examine the meaning and relevance of two sacred Buddhist texts and the commentaries of some contemporary Buddhist leaders.
4. Discuss the relevance of Buddhist practices and perspectives to issues facing modern society.
5. Apply the Buddhist understanding of reality and analysis of the human condition to common social view of suffering in the contemporary world.
6. Compare one's own assumptions and views of what it means to live a meaningful life to the Buddhist perspective

REQUIRED READINGS / TEXTS:

Thich Nhat Hanh *The Other Shore: A New Translation of the Heart Sutra with Commentaries*
Parallax Press (available at Amazon and Banyen Books in Vancouver)

Keown, Damien. *Buddhism: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford University Press (Amazon and maybe local bookstores)

Reading guidelines for both texts are on Canvas- you should answer the questions in point form, so you can easily discuss parts of both texts in class. Your written responses to the reading guidelines will not be collected. **Both texts should be read before the first class.**

CALENDAR: Subject to change as with all things (italics represents foundational practices)

"Buddhisms" and "Buddhas"

What is the nature of suffering?

The Four Noble Truths: What the Buddha Understood

Stopping and Calming

The nature of the world: Impermanence, Dukkha (dissatisfaction) and Non-self

Noble Eight-Fold Path: the journey

Karma, Karma, Karma

Contemplation as spiritual motivation

The Two Truths and Three Dharma Seals

Four Brahma Viharas.

Mahayana opening of Emptiness

Great Journey of the Bodhisattva

Six Paramitas (Perfections)

Meditation on Death

The Buddha Within

Who & What: Life Koans

What Happened to the Buddhist Tradition Here

EXPECTATIONS, ASSIGNMENTS AND EVALUATIVE CRITERIA

1. Class participation: Students are expected to participate in class discussions, and do adequate preparation of in-class discussion exercises. Evaluative criteria: comments and questions show adequate preparation, an understanding of the assigned readings and exercises, and a readiness to apply readings to interpretive questions and insights.
2. Please prepare a 1500-word paper exploring your response to a Buddhist spiritual practices and view of life as introduced in the course, referencing the assigned readings as well as class experience. An excellent paper will accurately describe the practice or idea, support the description and critical analysis from the readings and other research, and offer a personal insight in how this/these practices or views are relevant or not to contemporary issues. If there is another topic on Buddhist spirituality you want to write on, please clear it with the instructor first. DUE September 28.
3. Evaluative criteria:
 - Balanced understanding and analysis of the topic
 - Thesis: Central argument/stance of essay
 - Creativity and ingenuity/depth in analysis and argument

- Organization and structure
 - The mechanics of the paper: grammar, punctuation, spelling, etc
4. Audit students are required to do all the reading and participate in the class discussions and exercises.
 5. Certificate students are required to do all the reading, participate in the class discussions and exercises, and hand in a reflection paper on the topic of the course (3-4 pages).

SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

Buddhist Web Gateways

- [DharmaNet International .](#)
- [Buddhanet.net .](#)
- [Buddhist Resource File.](#)
- [The Buddhist Channel.](#)
- [Buddhism Portal E-Sangha.](#)

Online Buddhist Journals

- [Journal of Buddhist Ethics.](#)
- [The zen Site.](#)
- [Journal of Global Buddhism.](#)
- [Western Buddhist Review.](#)
- [Tricycle.](#)
- [Lion's Roar.](#)

Resources & Bibliographies

- [Buddhist Studies WWW Virtual Library .](#)
- [Resources for the Study of Buddhism .](#)
- [Tibetan Studies WWW Virtual Library.](#)
- [Bibliography of Buddhism in America.](#)
- [Buddhist Digital Library and Museum.](#)
- [JBE Online Books.](#)
- [Mandala.](#)

General Books on Buddhist Spirituality

Buddhist Philosophy: Essential Readings by William Edelglass and Jay L. Garfield

A Path With Heart by Jack Kornfield

A Wise Heart by Jack Kornfield

Eight-Fold Path by Bhikkhu Bodhi
Going to Pieces Without Falling Apart by Mark Epstein
Insight Meditation: The Practice of Freedom by Joseph Goldstein
Radical Acceptance by Tara Brach
Start Where You Are by Pema Chodron
Spirit of the Buddha by Martine Batchelor
The Miracle of Mindfulness by Thich Nhat Hanh
Thoughts Without a Thinker by Mark Epstein
Zen Mind, Beginner's Mind by Shunryu Suzuki

Weekend II: Jewish Spirituality, October 11-12, 2018

Instructor: Rabbi Laura Duhan Kaplan

Email: ldkaplan@vst.edu

Description: We will explore, intellectually and experientially, three key practices in Jewish spiritual formation: Shabbat rituals, Torah (Bible) study, and prayerful blessing. These have been key in forming Jewish values, communal identity, and theology. For example, Shabbat rituals ground spiritual formation in the family; Torah study teaches critical thinking; prayerful blessing teaches theology through a daily practice of gratitude. In class, we will utilize lecture, large and small group discussion, personal writing, singing and experiential introduction to simple rituals. Active participation in ritual will be optional.

Reading list:

Please borrow or buy from amazon.ca or chapters.ca:

Ted Falcon & David Blatner, *Judaism for Dummies* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons), 2001. Read Part I “What Jews Generally Believe,” Chapters 1-5; Part IV Chapter 17 “Shabbat”; Appendix B, “Sampler of Jewish Prayers.”

Marcia Prager, *The Path of Blessing* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing), 2003. Read the first 100 pages.

Please find posted on moodle:

Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, “A Life in Time,” from *Jewish With Feeling* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing), 2013.

BRING WITH YOU: A copy of the Bible that includes the Hebrew Bible, any translation.

Written Assignment, POSTED ON CANVAS IN WORD FORMAT by November 1, 2018. Please prepare a 1500-word paper exploring your response to a spiritual idea or practice introduced in the course, referencing the assigned readings as well as class experience. An excellent paper will accurately describe the practice or idea, document the relevant experiences that help the student understand it, offer a personal insight. Papers may also pose and/or explore deeper questions about the meaning of the practice.

Weekend III: Islamic Spirituality Weekend

Thursday November 15 (6:00-9:00 pm) and Friday November 16 (9:00 am – 4:00 pm)

Instructor: Seemi Ghazi, seemi.ghazi@ubc.ca

Description: In this course, we will explore the rich and diverse traditions that have nourished Muslim spiritual formation over 1400 years, from the Middle East to Africa and Asia, and now across the globe. We will learn together in intellectual, aesthetic and experiential modalities. In keeping with the Sufi tradition of Sohbet, contemplative companionship and conversation, we will be guided by the questions students bring from their own intellectual and spiritual journeys. In Sohbet we will explore themes of birth/ creation, revelation, and death/re-creation, through Qur'an (Scripture), Tafsir (scriptural interpretation), Sirah (the biography of Muhammad), Shi'r (poetry) and Adab (literature, especially memoir). We will discuss these themes in light of our foundational readings on Islamic belief, practice and spirituality, touching also on the teachings of the mystics, Jalaluddin Rumi and Ibn Arabi. On Saturday morning we will share in the embodied practice of Dhikr, remembrance of the Divine, through chant, music, song and the turning meditation of the Mevlevi Dervishes, followed by a communal dervish meal.

Assignment: Prepare a 5-7 page essay engaging intellectually and personally with an idea, text, conversation, practice or experience in the course. You may integrate knowledge and experience from the Jewish and Indigenous spirituality weekends. I am open to alternative modalities such as journaling, poetry, and art. Paper is due November 30.

Readings:

Cornell, Vincent J., *Fruit of the Tree of Knowledge: The Relationship Between Faith and Practice in Islam*, The Oxford History of Islam, 1999.

Douglass, Susan L., *The Fabric of Muslim Daily Life* in Voices of Islam, Volume 3, Cornell, Vincent J. Henry-Blakemore, Virginia Gray, Praeger Publishers, Connecticut, 2007.

Henry-Blakemore, Virginia Gray, *Even at Night the Sun is There...* in Voices of Islam Volume 3, Cornell, Vincent J., Praeger Publishers, Connecticut, 2007.

Kahf, Mohja, *E-mails from Scheherazad*, University of Central Florida Contemporary Poetry Series 2003.

Karamustafa, Ahmet T. *What is Sufism?* in Voices of Islam, Volume 1, Cornell, Vincent J., Praeger Publishers 2007.

Moore, Daniel Abdal-Hayy, *Beginning the Prayer* in Voices of Islam, Volume I, Cornell, Vincent J., Praeger Publishers 2007.

Moore, Daniel, *The Ramadan Sonnets*, A Jussor Book, Kitab/City Lights 1996.

Moore, Daniel Abdal-Hayy, *The Miracle of Pain*, Voices of Islam 3, Praeger Publishers, 2007

Rahman, Jamal, *The Five Pillars of Islam* in Fragrance of Faith: The Enlightened Heart of Islam.

Sells, Michael, *Preface, Introduction and Excerpts, Approaching the Qur'an: The Early Revelations*, White Cloud Press Second Edition, Ashland Oregon, 1999