

**IPS/SP5/710 Liturgy, Ritual, and the Sacred, Fall 2023**  
**COURSE OUTLINE** (more detailed syllabus available soon)

**Instructor:** Rabbi Dr. Laura Duhan-Kaplan ([LDKaplan@vst.edu](mailto:LDKaplan@vst.edu))

**Purpose:** An introduction to the theory and practice of ritual, focused on elements shared by multiple traditions. Humans use ceremony to approach the divine, build community, mark important life events, and more. Together, we will explore theological, psychological, sociological, anthropological, and philosophical theories of ceremonial activity. We will apply those theories as we study effective ritual facilitation to increase our own skills. The course is an MDiv/PPL spirituality elective and MAIS requirement.

**Competencies:** Students will be expected to learn and demonstrate the ability to:

- Explain selected psychological, sociological, philosophical, and anthropological theories of the role of sacred ceremony in human communities
- Articulate a personal theory of the role of ritual in the sacred
- Describe the formational role of two key sacred ceremonies from two faith traditions
- Describe elements of effective ritual facilitation
- Plan a public ritual or ceremony with attention to context, participants, symbols, language and rites

**Format:** Five Wednesday afternoons 2-5 pm (Sept 27, Oct 4, Oct 18, Nov 15, Nov 29) plus one VST worship observation online or in person (Oct 5) plus intensive weekend Thursday-Saturday November 2-4 (Th 6-9 pm; Fri 10am-4pm; Sat 10am-4pm). **The intensive weekend is in-person only.** The intensive weekend will include guest presenters and site visits.

**Identification of the levels at which the course can be taken:** Certificate, Basic (Diploma/MA/M.Div) or Advanced (Th.M).

**Required texts:**

*Available from the library and on amazon.ca:*

Bell, Catherine. *Ritual Theory, Ritual Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 2009.

Hoffman, Lawrence A. *The Art of Public Prayer*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (Woodstock, VT: Skylight Paths), 1999.

*Available on Populi (no later than Sept 11):*

Behar, Ruth. "Death and Memory from Santa Maria del Monte to Miami Beach" in *The Vulnerable Observer: Anthropology that Breaks your Heart* (Boston: Beacon Press), 1996.

Brown, Joseph Epes. "Hunkapi: The Making of Relatives" in *The Sacred Pipe: Black Elk's Account of the Rites of the Oglala Sioux* (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press), 2012.

De Botton, Alain, "Wisdom Without Doctrine" in *Religion for Atheists: A Non-Believer's Guide to the Uses of Religion* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart), 2012.

Corbett, Lionel. "The Numinosum: Direct Experience of the Sacred" in *Psyche and the Sacred* (New Orleans: Spring Journal Books), 2012.

Eliade, Mircea. "Sacred Time and Myths" in *The Sacred and the Profane* (New York: Harper and Row), 1957.

Snow, Chief John. "The Indian Religious Movement" in *These Mountains are our Sacred Places: The Story of the Stoney People* (Toronto: Samuel Stevens), 1977.

**Research Bibliography:** Available in a separate document

**Assignments:**

For all students, including auditors:

- Attendance in accordance with VST policies
- Completion of assigned readings
- Thoughtful engagements with all course activities

Additional for all students in certificate or degree programs:

- Individual Leadership of a 5 minute in class ritual
- Worship Analysis Paper (750-1000 words) analyzing the October 5 VST Community Worship service (attended in person or via Zoom)], using concepts from the course. Specific concepts to be reviewed in class. Due Friday October 13 2023.
- In-class group presentation (30 minutes) exploring a chapter from Bell. Specific chapters to be assigned in class.

Additional for Basic-level degree (Diploma, MA and MDiv) students:

- Course paper (3,000 words) or presentation (30 minutes + 30 minutes Q&A/discussion) on a theme relevant to the course, demonstrating at least two of the course competencies, involving research with at least 10 sources beyond the course reading. Details of possible topics to be discussed in class. Due December 15, 2023.

Additional for advanced credit (Th.M.) students:

- Course paper (4,000 words) or presentation (40 minutes + 30 minutes Q&A/discussion) on a theme relevant to the course, demonstrating at least two of the course competencies, involving research with at least 15 sources beyond the course reading. Details of possible topics to be discussed in class. Due January 15. 2023.

### Assignment details:

- Short in-class individual ritual leadership **(5 minutes)**.
  - Each student will sign up to lead one **5-minute** ritual, ceremony, prayer, meditation, moment of silence, etc., either at the beginning of class or as we return from break. (Timer will sound at the 5 minute mark!)
  - Please prepare. AND before you lead, quietly check in with yourself and with your own assessment of the mood of the class. Make any necessary changes in the moment.
  - As part of your leadership please give only minimal explanation as necessary.
  - After you lead, we may ask you about your process in choosing, designing, or adapting what you chose. We will allot 5-10 minutes max for discussion.
  - We will lead and participate with curiosity, sensitivity to diversity, and respect for personal decisions about the boundaries of our participation.
  - A sign-up sheet will be distributed on the first evening.
  
- In-class group presentation **(30 minutes)** introducing the class to a chapter from Bell. Selected chapters and sign up procedure TBA.
  - The presentation is not a summary; rather, share your learning with the class.
  - Core question: What do you experience and understand differently in light of the chapter?
  - Part of your answer includes speaking about this, using both language from the book and language that makes sense to you.
  - Part of your answer includes an activity for the class that helps us gain insight into the message of the chapter
  - Sign up will take place on the first weekend of the course.
  - A timer will sound at the 20 minute mark. At the end, we will allot 10 minutes for class questions and discussion.

**Tentative Schedule of Course Readings and Activities Will Be Available by Orientation Week, when a course syllabus will replace this outline.**