

**Vancouver School of Theology**  
**IPS/SP500 Spiritual Formation in Communities**

Fall 2022: Three weekend classes, Thursday 6:00 – 9:00 pm, Friday 9:00 am – 5:00 pm  
September 15-16, October 13-14, December 1-2

**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: Christian Spirituality: A Benedictine Approach with Archbishop (retired)  
Melissa M. Skelton, September 14-15

Weekend II: Buddhist Spirituality with Shinmon Michael Newton, October 13-14

Weekend III: Jewish Spirituality with Rabbi Susan Shamash, December 1-2

**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 October 9

Weekend II: Assignment due November 6

Weekend III: Assignment due December 16

## **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.

## **Weekend 1: IPS/SP501 - Christian Spirituality: A Benedictine Approach**

Fall Semester September 15-16, 2022

Meets in-person: Thursday, September 15 6:00-9:00 PM and Friday, September 16: 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM.

Instructor: Archbishop (retired) Melissa M. Skelton

[mskelton@ecww.org](mailto:mskelton@ecww.org)

206.693.8542

### **PURPOSE**

Christian spirituality as a broad term has been defined as the constellation of beliefs and values of the Christian person that leads to and animates a way of life. St. Benedict of Nursia (480-548 AD) in his founding and ordering of lay monastic communities has laid out in his Rule a spirituality that is deeply Biblical, communal and practical. This intensive will explore Benedict's approach and its implications for those who wish to embrace a way of life that is grounded in stability, obedience and conversion of life and is sustained by rhythm, balance and a persistent practice of hospitality towards others.

### **COMPETENCE OBJECTIVES**

Participants will

- Learn about the background, structure, and content of Benedict's Rule
- Explore the basic theological and practical approaches to Christian spirituality that Benedict sets forth, making connections between these approaches and our individual and communal lives
- Learn about and explore a specific practice inspired by Benedict's Rule that is important to the student's practice of the spiritual life.

### **REQUIRED READING AND TEXTS**

Esther de Waal, *Seeking God: The Way of St. Benedict* 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press), 1995.

Joan Chittister, *The Rule of St. Benedict: Insights for the Ages* (New York: Crossroad), 1996.

### **WRITTEN ASSIGNMENT**

**Due by e-mail to the instructor by October 15, 2022.** Prepare a 1500-word paper exploring your response to a spiritual approach or practice you have learned about in the course, referencing the assigned readings as well as the class experience. An excellent paper will demonstrate an understanding of the approach or practice and will offer personal experiences or insights related to the approach or practice.

**Weekend 2: IPS/SP505 - Buddhist Spirituality**  
**Instructor: Michael Newton, onshin@shaw.ca**  
**Dates: October 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 Populi - 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 November 14
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 III: Jewish Spirituality, December 1-2**

**Instructor:** Rabbi Susan Shamash

**Email:** polskyshamash@gmail.com

#### **Description:**

In this course we will explore, intellectually and experientially, three key practices in Jewish spiritual formation that have been key in forming Jewish values, communal identity, and theology: Shabbat (Sabbath) rituals, Torah (Bible) study, and prayerful blessing. 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.

#### **Competencies:**

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

1. Articulate an understanding of three core practices in Jewish spiritual formation: Shabbat, Torah and Blessing.
2. Recognize key characteristics of these three Jewish practices and how they influence Jewish spiritual formation.
3. Explain how these practices are expressed in contemporary Jewish spiritual life.
4. Compare and contrast these core Jewish practices with their own spiritual practices and vocabularies.

**Format:** Weekend intensive, Thursday December 1, 2020, 6:00-9:00 pm, Friday December 2, 2020, 8:00-4:00 pm

#### **Readings:**

*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.

Lawrence Kushner, *GOD Was In This PLACE & I, i Did Not Know: Finding Self, Spirituality and Ultimate Meaning* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing), 2016 (25th Anniversary Edition). Read the Prologue, Chapter 1 Rashi, at least two chapters on the other commentators, and the Epilogue.

*Please find posted on Populi:*

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.

### **Assignments:**

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

### **Written Assignment:**

**Due by e-mail to the instructor by DECEMBER 16, 2022.** 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, and offer a personal insight. Papers may also pose and/or explore deeper questions about the meaning of the idea or practice.

### **Suggested Bibliography for Further Reading:**

Ted Falcon & David Blatner, *Judaism for Dummies* (Hoboken, New Jersey: John Wiley and Sons), 2001

Neil Gillman, *Sacred Fragments: Recovering Theology for the Modern Jew* (New York: Jewish Publication Society), 1992

Arthur Green, *Judaism’s 10 Best Ideas: A Brief Guide for Seekers* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing), 2014

Abraham Joshua Heschel, *The Sabbath: It's Meaning for Modern Man* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux), 2005

Marcia Prager, *The Path of Blessing* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing), 2003

Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, *Jewish With Feeling* (Woodstock, Vermont: Jewish Lights Publishing), 2013

Adin Steinsaltz, *Biblical Images: Men and Women of the Book* (New York: Basic Books, Inc.) 1984