

**Vancouver School of Theology**  
**IPS/SP500 Spiritual Formation in Communities**  
Jewish Spirituality Weekend, Fall 2024 (1 unit)  
November 28 and 29, 2024

Instructor: Rabbi Susan Shamash  
Email address: 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 November 28, 2024, 6:00-9:00 pm, Friday November 29, 2024, 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.

*Please find posted on Populi:*

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

*Please read on-line:*

*Parshat Toldot*, the weekly parsha or Torah Portion in the Jewish lectionary, Genesis 25:19-28:9. Please use the translation and commentary found at this link. It takes you to Sefaria, a free, living library of Jewish texts, in Hebrew and in translation:

<https://www.sefaria.org/Genesis.25.19-28.9?ven=Tanakh: The Holy Scriptures, published by JPS&lang=bi&aliyot=1>

Please follow this process:

1. Read the portion through, focusing on just the Torah text.
2. Read some commentary on VERSES 27:28-29, 27:39-40 and 28:3-4. Here's how to access the commentary. When you click on a verse in Sefaria, a Resources tab will open up on the right. One of the options you will see is entitled Commentary. If you see EN beside the commentator's name, their commentary has been translated into English.

Please read 2 or 3 commentators on each of the verses listed above in the Parsha/ Torah Portion, always including Rashi. Do some simple research on who the commentator is, when they lived/their historical context, and what their particular orientation was.

3. Read eight Torah essays (Divrei Torah) offering different perspectives. Choose four of the websites listed at the bottom of the page found at the link below (excluding Wikipedia which is simply an in-depth summary of the Torah portion and Learn Tefillah which is in Spanish). From each site, choose two essays.  
<https://www.hebcal.com/sedrot/toldot-20241130>.

Here is a guide to the perspectives by denomination, to help you choose your four different sites: Rabbi Sacks, OU Torah and [torah.org](http://torah.org) are Traditional Orthodox. Chabad is an Orthodox Chasidic sect influenced by Jewish mysticism. The Jewish Theological Seminary, the American Jewish University and Exploring Judaism are Conservative (a centrist Jewish denomination). Reform Judaism is Reform. The Academy for Jewish Religion is pluralist.

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 13, 2024.** 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:**

Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic Books), 2011

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

Joseph Telushkin, *Jewish Literacy: the most important things to know about the Jewish religion, its people and its history* (New York: HarperCollins), 2008