

Department of Religion
Gustavus Adolphus College

REL 223
Legends of the Jews
(HUM)

Spring 2022
Dr. Samuel J. Kessler
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T/TH
1:30-2:50PM
OM 04

Office Hours:
T/TH 5-6PM
(or by appointment)

In the beginning there were stories. Stories of heroes and monsters. Stories of men and women who spoke with God. Later, there were stories about prophets and kings, who went to see God in heaven, or who spoke with the dead to foretell the future. And even later, there were stories of great teachers, masters of wisdom, whose very force of being could change the course of nature.

Jews tell stories as a way of making sense of God and the world. In this course, we will examine three thousand years of Jewish storytelling, gaining insights into the historical and social context of the Jewish people and the political and theological elements of the Jewish religion.

In Judaism, the legend is not just a myth or fairytale. Instead, ancient and modern folklore is full of meaning and insight, told and retold so that each new generation can become part of the chain of memory that holds the Jewish people together. In this class, students will be introduced to texts from the Hebrew Bible and Second Temple periods, and from the classical rabbinic corpus through to the twentieth century. We will encounter great prophets and wise kings, as well as poor peasants and lonely brides, and even enchanted creatures summoned from the depths of mystical lore. We will have occasion to visit far-away places, mighty fortresses, and the Holy Land of Zion. Across the semester, students will gain a knowledge of and appreciation for the vast narrative folkloric literature of the Jewish people and the many profound and funny stories found within it.

This course has no prerequisites. The professor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus, including assignment due dates. These changes will be announced as early as possible.

You may not use a smart phone in class.
You may use a laptop, iPad, or other tablet device only for note-taking and PDFs.

General Guidelines & Policies

Course Readings & Communications

Readings for this course can be found either as a PDF on Moodle or under the list of Required Texts below. You can purchase all required books at The Book Mark or online.

You are responsible for checking your Gustavus email regularly for communications about the course.

Accommodations Resource Policy

Those who qualify under Gustavus policies and guidelines for reasonable accommodation (outside COVID-19 situations) should alert the professor privately at the start of the semester. Information concerning programs through College's Center for Academic Resources and Enhancement (CARE) can be found at https://gustavus.edu/general_catalog/current/.

Accommodations for COVID-19 Quarantine or Illness

This course will follow the guidelines published by the Provost's Office and arranged through personal COVID case managers for student quarantine and illness accommodation. Additional information can be found at <https://gustavus.edu/covid/phases/orange/academics.php>

Assignment Policies

All assignments are to be submitted on Moodle before class on the day they are due. You will be penalized 10% for each day a paper is late. Papers submitted over one week after the deadline will not be accepted. If you are ill or have a family emergency, please contact the professor as soon as possible.

All assignments must be written in 12-point font, Times New Roman or Garamond, with 1-inch margins.

The Gustavus Writing Center provides helpful overviews and links for improving your writing. They also have appointment services available to help edit papers or discuss the writing process with a tutor. You can find more information on these services at <https://gustavus.edu/writingcenter/>.

Note: You should not expect a response from the professor about papers or exams beginning 24-hours prior to their due date.

University Honor Code

The Undergraduate Honor Code states: "On my honor, I pledge that I have not given, received, or tolerated others' use of unauthorized aid in completing this work." For additional information about the Honor Code, visit https://gustavus.edu/general_catalog/current/.

Required Texts

- Composition Book (100-pages, wide-rule)
- S.Y. Agnon, *Two Scholars Who Were in our Town and other Novellas* (The Toby Press, 2014)
- S. Ansky and Tony Kushner, *The Dybbuk: or Between Two Worlds*, trans. Joachim Neugroschel (Broadway Play Publishing, 2017)
- Elie Wiesel, *Souls on Fire: Portraits and Legends of Hasidic Masters* (Simon & Schuster, 1982)

Course Assignments & Expectations

Class Attendance and Participation

Attendance will be taken during each class period. If you arrive late and attendance has already been taken you are responsible for alerting the professor to your presence. Arrivals more than ten minutes after class begins, or continuous tardiness, will be counted as absence. More than two unexcused absences will impact your final grade by 2% per absence. You cannot receive a course grade higher than a C if you have more than six unexcused absences. Please notify the professor as soon as possible for absences related to illness or family emergencies. For more information, the Gustavus Class Attendance Policy can be found at https://gustavus.edu/general_catalog/current/.

Class participation points are based on the following criteria: arriving in class on time; being awake and attentive during lecture; being responsive and active during discussions and small group activities; respectfully listening when others are speaking; and being engaged in the course without checking your mobile devices. Failure to meet these criteria will result in the loss of participation points throughout the semester.

Identifying Folkloric Themes (4-5 pages)

Twice during the semester, you will write a paper identifying and explaining one or two major common themes that run between the various narratives we'll be reading. Your paper should focus on a theme; explore and suggest reasons for its common appearance across different stories; and provide and analyze two to three key examples of this theme in texts we've read, making sure to supply appropriate contextual material to demonstrate how a single theme is reinterpreted across different geographies, timeframes, and cultures.

Due Thur., Mar. 10, before class

Due Thur., Apr. 21, before class

Class Presentation (2 pages & 10 mins)

Once during the semester, you will be expected to write about and present on one of the stories we read.

In your brief paper, you must: 1) summarize the story's narrative; 2) identify two or three of the story's major themes; 3) provide two or three examples of this theme from other stories we've read; 4) define two or three new vocabulary words; and 5) provide a 2-3 sentence explanation for the underlying religious message in the story.

Your presentation should be formal. (You must use PowerPoint or related software.) In it, you need to lead the class through the story, focusing on character development, standard

folkloric motifs, and then leading the class through an analysis of a major plot point or character's development.

Reading Journal

Over the course of the semester, you will need to keep a journal, recording key thematic elements, characters, vocabulary, geographies, and events for each of the texts we read. This journal is like taking notes on each reading, something you might do for other courses. But instead of preparing you for a test, the notes will help you see common elements across the stories and between cultures, as well as keep track of the various of the specifically Jewish content we're learning.

Due Thur., May 5, *in class*.

Collecting Folklore

As a semester-long project, you will be collecting an example of folklore from your own cultural context, annotating it, and writing a brief (3-4 page) essay reflecting on the religious or cultural elements it shares—and the specific details it does not share—with the texts we read this semester.

Your chosen folktale can be from a printed collection, or you can go and collect it yourself, recording and transcribing it from a human source. Your chosen folktale should be from a tradition to which you have some connection, be it regional, ethnic, religious, or otherwise.

This project will be completed in three steps.

Step 1: Find two or three possible texts or sources. In addition, you must write a summary of each text that includes its place of origin and how you're connected with it.

You must upload each complete tale, along with its summary, as a separate PDF on Moodle.

Due Thurs., Mar. 31, *before class*

Step 2: Choose one source and annotate it. These annotations can be handwritten on the printed story or typed inside a Word document. Your annotations should point out the thematic elements, define cultural, religious, or foreign terms and ideas, comment on particularly noteworthy actions or character developments, &c.

You must submit the marked-up tale as a PDF on Moodle.

Due Thur., May 12, *before class*

Step 3: Write the essay accompanying the annotated document.

Attach the essay to a new version of Part 2 and uploaded it as a single PDF on Moodle.

Due Sun., May 15 at 9pm

<i>Assignment</i>	<u>Grading</u>	<i>% of Course Total</i>
Class Attendance and Participation		5
Identifying Folkloric Themes (#1)		20
Identifying Folkloric Themes (#2)		20
Class Presentation		15
Reading Journal		20
Collecting Folklore		<u>20</u>
		100

ScheduleWeek 1: February 3

Introduction: Legends & Folktales as a Key to Religion

Reading (suggested)

- Schwartz, “On Jewish Fairy Tales”

Week 2: February 8-10

A Brief Introduction to Judaism

Readings

- Myers, “Names,” & “Cultures”
- Steinsaltz, “What is Talmud?”

Readings (suggested)

- Sacks, “Understanding Jewish Prayer”
- Ginzberg, “The Significance of the Halachah for Jewish History”

Week 3: February 15-17

Origins I: Tanakh: Heroes & Heroines

Readings

- Deborah & Yael in Battle (Judges 4-5)
- David & Goliath (1 Samuel 17)
- Daniel in the Lion’s Den (Daniel 6)

Week 4: February 22-24

Origins II: Midrash: Interpretation & Commentary

Readings

- Peters, “Introduction”
- God Consults the Angels in the Creation of Man
- God Consults Man in the Naming of the World
- “Midrash on the Ten Commandments”

Week 5: March 1-3

Elijah: Man of God

Readings

- Tales of Elijah the Tishbite (1 Kings 17-19, 21; 2 Kings 1-2)
- Elijah, Rabbi Yehoshua ben Levi, and the Messiah (b. *Sanbedrin* 98a)

Week 6: March 8-10

Elijah: The Prophet Who Comes to the Door

Readings

- “The Tenth for the Minyan”
- “Elijah and the Three Wishes”
- “The Scholar, the Rich Man, and the God-Fearing Man”
- “Elijah’s Violin”

***Identifying Folkloric Themes (#1): Due Thur., Mar. 10, before class**

*Brides, Bridegrooms, and Kings*Week 7: March 15-17

If on a Wedding Night A Traveler

Readings

- “The Wedding Attended by the Patriarchs”
- “The Wine of Paradise”
- “Asher in the Harem”

***Spring Break: March 21-25**Week 8: March 29-31

The Inhabitants of the Castle

Readings

- “The Story of a Woman-Loving King”
- “The King and the Forty Crows”
- “The Prince Who Went Off on His Own”
- “The Princess Who Refused to Talk” & “The Prince and the Gazelle”
- “The King Who Had No Children”

Collecting Folklore (Step 1): Due Thur. Mar. 31, before classMagic & Mystery*Week 9: April 5-7

A Creature to Protect Us

Reading

- Rosenberg, *The Golem and the Wonderous Deeds of the Maharal of Prague*

Reading (suggested)

- Wiesel, *The Golem*

Week 10: April 12-14

A Spirit Overtaketh Thee

Reading

- Ansky & Kushner, *The Dybbuk: or Between Two Worlds*

Reading (suggested)

- “The Dybbuk Stories”

Note: Online Class (via Zoom), Thur. Apr. 14Wisdom is in the Journey*Week 11: April 19-21

A Longing for Zion

Reading

- S.Y. Agnon, *Two Scholars Who Were in our Town and other Novellas*, pp. 65-162 (“In the Heart of the Seas”)

Note: Both classes will be online (via Zoom) this week**Identifying Folkloric Themes (#2): Due Thur., Apr. 21, before class**

Week 12: April 26-28The *Tzaddik*, Master of Learning and Prayer*Reading*

- Wiesel, *Souls on Fire*, pp. 40-130, 203-229

*A New World*Week 13: May 3-5

Making One's Way

Watch

- "Fiddler on the Roof"
- "Yentl"

Reading Journal: Due Thur., May 5, *in classWeek 14: May 10-12

Conclusion: Foolishness & Wisdom

Reading

- "The Wise Men of Chelm"

Collecting Folklore (Step 2): Due Thur. May 12, *before class

**Collecting Folklore (Complete Project)
due
Sun., May 15 at 9PM**

On Rosh Hashanah, Levi-Yitzhak of Berdichev told this story: A woman arrives at the synagogue out of breath; she is late. She notices that services have not yet started. And so she addresses God: "I wish to thank You for telling Your children to wait awhile. What could I possibly wish You? I wish You to be proud of them, as I am proud of them."

Elie Wiesel, *Souls on Fire*

Appropriate Email Etiquette

This sheet is intended to help you compose formal and appropriate emails to your professors and/or anyone employed by the College.

You should follow these guidelines *every time* you compose an email message, *unless specifically instructed otherwise*.

How to Compose an Appropriate Email

- Include a clear, direct subject line
- Begin your email with a professional, formal salutation
 - Begin with “Dear” or “Hello,” *always avoid* “Hi” or “Hey”
 - Address the person with his/her highest formal title (e.g., Dr., Prof., Ms., Mr., &c.)
- Space your message appropriately
 - Never send a long, run-on paragraph
- Provide background on your question or comment
 - Assume the recipient does not know the context of your note
- Never send a single line response (even if the message is part of a chain)
- Use normal font styles and sizes
- End your note formally and with your typed name
 - Above your name, write “Sincerely” or “All the best” or “Regards”
 - Never end *only* with an automatic signature

When Applicable

- Never assume the answer to a question, especially if it involves asking someone for their time
- Be explicit about specific needs or requests
 - Bold or italicize times, dates, and deadlines
- Give your recipient at least *one business day* (i.e. not Saturday or Sunday) to answer, *even* if it feels like an emergency to you
- Use your professional (college) email address

What to Avoid

- Never *begin* an email without a formal salutation
- Never address your professors by their first name *unless specifically instructed otherwise*
- Never *end* an email simply with an automatic signature—always type your name, first and/or last
- Never send an email you haven’t read at least twice

*Remember:

Nothing you write in an email is permanently confidential. *Absolutely nothing*. Go to the email recipient *in person* with anything that might be best not written down.