Honors Core, HNRC 201 Unit G Syllabus

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Unit G: How do we understand the sacred? What, therefore, should I do?

Course Description:

In this unit we will explore the ideas that language is itself "sacred" and that literature, especially mystical literature, is an important vehicle for representing, apprehending, and conveying experiences with sacred meanings. We will begin by studying Rabbi Nachman of Bratlsav's *Tales*, a collection of stories published in Europe at the same time as the Grimm Brothers published their famous *Household Tales*. Unlike the Grimm Brothers' tales of starvation, mutilation, and enchantments tinged with fear, Rabbi Nachman's Tales represent a world that is full to bursting with sacred meaning. The sources of sacred meaning are, however, unusual. They include laughter, jokes, riddles, and poems. The reader is invited to participate in rituals of reading that are not religious rituals, but which carry with them a form of engagement with the sacred. We will then read Chaim Bialk's collection of essays on the relationship between language and the sacred. These essays were written during the Hebrew revival at the turn of the twentieth century and consider the issues involved in resurrecting a sacred language for use in ordinary social, political, and economic contexts. Next, we will consider how James Joyce approaches similar concerns about language, the sacred, and nationalism during the period leading up to and after Irish independence. Finally, we will conclude with a collection of poems by the Soviet Jewish poet Peretz Markish, the "bad boy" of Yiddish poetry. These poems were composed during the Holocaust, and they consider how sacred meanings might be represented in times of unprecedented disaster.

Required Readings: You must purchase your own copy of each book, and you must have your own copy of each book BEFORE we begin our course readings.

Bialik, Chaim Nachman	***Revealment and Concealment in Language, and Other Essays***
Joyce, James	***Dubliners***
Peretz Markish	***Yerushe (Inheritance)***
Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav	***Tales***

Common Readings:

Blythe Clinchy, "On Critical Thinking and Connected Knowing" (handout if needed)
Robert Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," (handout)
James Boyd White, Introduction to *How Should we Talk about Religion*? (handout)
Daily reading of *The New York Times* (Monday through Friday)

Course Objectives: Upon completion of this course with a passing grade, students should be able to:

1. Think critically, demonstrating mastery application of concepts from across a number of disciplines using concepts drawn from *Asking the Right Questions (ARQ)*
2. Develop higher order reasoning skills by synthesizing ideas from several points of view and from multiple texts – higher order reasoning skills must be derived from the selection and organization of specific examples, specifically the development of patterns of thought that emerge from extensive and thoughtful quotations from course texts
3. Develop oral and written communication skills that cross the normal boundaries between disciplines with an understanding that any norm is a construction and a fiction
4. Function effectively as a working member of a learning community by applying conflict/resolution models and other models of negotiation and leadership besides those constructed by binary oppositions
5. Participate effectively in active learning by being fully prepared for each class – full preparation includes thoughtful and comprehensive reading of texts, marking passages in texts, coming to class with clear questions about texts, and demonstrating a sense of curiosity about texts that goes beyond conventional interpretations

Bring the texts to class every class. You may need more than one text per class, so have all four of the required texts handy.

Course Requirements and Grading:

Please note: Make sure that you have BACKUP COPIES – electronic and/or paper – of ALL your written work for this course. Computer problems are a nuisance that you can easily overcome. Save all of your work, including drafts, throughout the semester. Dr. Goeble will be needing them at the end of the semester for the Honors College assessment portfolio

1) A critical essay (45%) of your grade – 450 points. This essay should be 5-8 carefully and thoughtfully revised pages. Additional quotations from the texts supporting your thesis should be provided in an appendix to your essay. This paper will draw from course readings, course discussion (in class and on D2L), and from your journal entries. Discussions and journal entries can help you begin the process of thinking about your essay, but this essay must represent a refinement of your thoughts. Essays that merely reproduce discussion and journal material will not be passing essays. No additional research is required.

A polished draft of this essay is due on Friday, 10/5. A full draft of this essay is due for swapping with classmates for peer editing on Monday, 10/8. A revised draft is due on Friday, 10/12.

Failure to bring a full essay on this "swap day" OR to me when revisions are due will result in an F for the essay. When turning in your revisions, please include the draft with my comments and your responses to those comments.

2) Peer responses (10%) of your grade – 100 points. You will swap drafts of your critical essays with three classmates. Each of you will provide extensive feedback, following your instructor's comments, on each essay. Detailed, specific comments regarding content and organization are required and form the basis for your grade. You will also give your essay to a sophomore Honors College student for comments – that

student's comments will be graded by his or her professor. This assignment can make the difference between one letter grade and another.

3) Reading Journals and other writing assignments (30%) of your grade – 300 points. I will provide prompts for many of these assignments. **One short paper** (4-5+ pages), **weekly reading journals** (3+ pages each week), and **two *New York Times* responses** (1-2 pages) will be assigned. We will use these assignments to work on various aspects of writing, reading, and revision related to the course. These are not loose free writings; they are serious, thoughtful pieces of writing that demonstrate your engagement with the texts we have read. Some of these assignments will be posted on the course D2L page under "Discussions." I expect strong, specific, and textually engaged journal responses from you all, so keep up with the reading and make sure you have time to organize your thoughts when you write. You will work with a variety of texts (including *ARQ* and *The New York Times*) for these journal assignments.

4) Participation (15%) of your grade – 150 points. This includes your "Best of Unit G" handout and presentation. Excellent in-class participation and excellent participation on the D2L discussion board are expected from you. We will use online posts to get class discussion started, so please make sure you post by the deadlines I establish. I expect you to demonstrate online leadership as well as leadership in class. Shy people can lead in different ways from outgoing people!

I cannot stress the importance of participation in all facets of this course enough. We are a community of learners, and if people are unprepared, over garrulous, or simply sullen, the community fall apart. We all know the difference between comments that are substantive and lead to further discussion and comments that shut discussion down, so let's make sure to avoid the usual mistakes people make in the first year of college. Prepare, carefully and thoughtfully, on your own. Take time to read carefully and intently so that you enter into the world of the text fully. Group learning can too easily produce facile and reductive group thinking, so beware of formulaic responses and corner cutting "advice." It is usually cheap and counter productive.

We all (professors, administrators, and of course your student colleagues) expect you to work diligently and with intellectual integrity. With that in mind, consider the following components to your participation grade.

- Attendance – This is a requirement, needless to say! The Honors College attendance policy states that "more than one unexcused absence from class will result in an F grade for the course." This policy, viewed one way, puts a great deal of pressure on professors to "excuse" absences. Viewed another way, the policy encourages good, honest communication between the professor and students. The best way to avoid the consequences of this policy is to look after yourself and to attend every class. If you are ill, you should inform all of your professors that day. I will excuse one absence, regardless of the reasons you are absent. I will not promise to excuse any more absences than that. Make life simple. Do your work and come to class. Do not be late, since the Honors College counts two latenesses as one absence.
- Class participation – The Honors College is a community of learners, and the community of learners falls apart if you do not participate with integrity. Short

cuts to class preparation are damaging to us all, as are attempts to "get around" assignments and readings. I expect you to be able to synthesize feedback you receive from me and from others in class, to engage in discussions intently and purposefully, and to revise your initial ideas into more complex and nuanced ideas. In class.

- Small group work – Much of this work will be done through D2L, but we will also engage in revision workshops and quotation finding workshops using small groups in class.

Grading: A (1000-899 points), B (898-799 points), C (798-700 points), D (699-650 points), F (below 650 points).

Your shorter essays will receive comments and grades, since they are part of your preparation for your longer final essay. I will also grade and comment on your *New York Times* assignments and on the first few of your weekly journal assignments. After that, you should have internalized a standard to meet, so will not comment extensively on your journals (after the first few), although if I see things getting off track I will let you know, especially when it comes to applying and revising concepts from *ARQ*. We should be able to establish criteria for good journal writing together. You should expect to revise some of your work, since none of us are perfect!

It is important for you to establish a sense of what constitutes high quality work, and you should remember that you are learning how to do new things in this course. Strategies that have worked in the past may no longer work now that you are in a new environment. I will provide you with the basic building blocks for effective writing (strong thesis statements derived from a combination of strong topic sentences, transitional sentences, and signal sentences introducing quotations), and I expect you to use them. I also expect you to take the feedback I offer you seriously. If I say you need to work on transitional sentences, for example, I expect you to do so and to understand how that helps your writing. Good writing also emerges from good rereading, so I may ask you to revisit the texts we are reading to improve your writing. Developing your writing an d reading skills is time-consuming and often painstaking work. Be patient, diligent, and try to keep your frustration to a minimum – remember, you can always turn to the texts for help when you are in trouble, and you can develop your ideas by linking quotations from the text together.

Syllabus/Schedule of Work (Readings should be done FOR the dates they are assigned)

T 10/16 Introductory lecture in the Great Hall

TH 10/18 Nachman of Bratslav's *Tales.* How is Time Sacred?

F 10/19 Nachman of Bratslav's *Tales* and James Boyd White, Introduction to *How Should We Talk about Religion*? **Weekly Journal #1 due.**

T 10/23 Nachman of Bratslav's *Tales*

TH 10/25 Nachman of Bratslav's *Tales*

F	10/26	Bialik “Revealment and Concealment in Language” **Weekly Journal #2 due.**
T	10/30	Bialik “Revealment and Concealment in Language”
TH	11/1	Bialik and Joyce, *Dubliners*
F	11/2	Joyce, *Dubliners* **Weekly Journal #3 due.**
T	11/6	Joyce, *Dubliners*
TH	11/8	Joyce, *Dubliners* **Short Essay due (4-5+ pages)**
F	11/9	Joyce, *Dubliners* **Weekly Journal #4 due.**
T	1/13	Markish, *Yerushe (Inheritance)*
TH	11/15	Markish, *Yerushe (Inheritance)*
F	11/16	Markish, *Yerushe (Inheritance)* **Weekly Journal #5 due.**
11/19-11/23		**Thanksgiving Break – no classes**
T	11/27	**Paper Swap!!**
TH	11/29	Markish, *Yerushe (Inheritance)*. What, therefore, should I do? Rereading workshops. Using quotation clusters. **Weekly Journal #6 due.**
F	11/30	**Peer Editing. Bring 3 printed copies to class.**
M	12/3	**Unit G Papers due to Unit G Professor (me!) at Noon.**
T	12/4	**Conferences with Unit G Professor.**
TH	12/6	**Conferences with Unit G Professor.**
F	12/7	**Conferences with Unit G Professor.**
T	12/11	**“Best of Unit G” Handouts due at Noon**
TH	12/13	**“Best of Unit G” Presentations 10:15-12:15 in the Great Hall**