I. Description

In the biblical Book of Job, Job’s challenge to God—“Why do people suffer undeservedly?”—is oddly answered with God’s challenge to Job: “Why aren’t you as creative as I am?” Led by novelist and scholar Dara Horn, this advanced institute will address these twinned questions—the dilemma of divine justice and the related dilemma of human limits—through the lens of both ancient and modern Jewish literature.

Our literary inquiry is designed to complement the philosophic studies of theodicy and the problem of evil. Literature offers a new way of exploring these questions—not because of some magical quality of art, but because plot, character, style and other basic elements of narrative are created on a foundation of assumptions about how the world should or could be. The role of belief and commitment in literature is essential to its power.

“Divine Justice and Human Creativity in Jewish Literature” will introduce students to aspects of literary theory and history that illuminate the ways in which beliefs motivate artistic choices like genre, style, and plot structure, and then explore the effects of those choices on how writers in different eras addressed these enduring questions. With this foundation, we will study the biblical Book of Job and then a selection of modern works that also address these ultimate questions, including works by Sholem Aleichem, I.B. Singer, S.Y. Agnon, Saul Bellow and others.
II. Course Calendar

August 3rd: The Biblical Paradigm
9:30 AM – 12:30 PM
Readings:
- Book of Job: Read Chapters 1-13, 26, 31, and 38-42.

August 4th: Humor and Disaster
9:30 AM – 12:30 PM
Readings:
  - “Today’s Children”
  - “Hodl”
  - “Chava”

August 5th: Tisha B’av, No Session

August 6th: Fable in the Modern Era
9:30 AM – 12:30 PM
Readings:
  - “Tale of the Scribe” [Hebrew Included]

August 7th: The Pious Man Challenged
9:30 AM – 12:30 PM
Readings:

August 8th: Creative Endings
9:30 AM – 12:30 PM
Readings:
- Franz Kafka, “Before the Law”
• Etgar Keret, “Creative Writing;” *The New Yorker*, January 2, 2012
• Etgar Keret, “What, of this Goldfish, Would you Wish?” From *Suddenly, a Knock on the Door* (FSG Originals, April 2012)
III. Faculty Biographies:

Core Instructor

Dara Horn
Dara Horn was born in New Jersey in 1977 and received her Ph.D. in comparative literature from Harvard University in 2006, studying Hebrew and Yiddish. In 2007 she was chosen by Granta magazine as one of America’s “Best Young American Novelists.” Her first novel, *In the Image*, published by W.W. Norton when she was 25, received a 2003 National Jewish Book Award, the 2002 Edward Lewis Wallant Award, and the 2003 Reform Judaism Fiction Prize. Her second novel, *The World to Come*, published by W.W. Norton in 2006, received the 2006 National Jewish Book Award for Fiction, the 2007 Harold U. Ribalow Prize, was selected as an Editors’ Choice in *The New York Times Book Review* and as one of the Best Books of 2006 by *The San Francisco Chronicle*, and has been translated into eleven languages. Her third novel, *All Other Nights*, published in 2009 by W.W. Norton, was selected as an Editors’ Choice in *The New York Times Book Review* and was one of Booklist’s 25 Best Books of the Decade. In 2012, her nonfiction e-book *The Rescuer* was published by Tablet magazine and became a Kindle bestseller. Her newest novel, *A Guide for the Perplexed*, was published by W.W. Norton in September 2013. She has taught courses in Jewish literature and Israeli history at Harvard, Sarah Lawrence College, and City University of New York, and has lectured at over two hundred universities and cultural institutions throughout North America and in Israel. She lives in New Jersey with her husband and four children.

Dean

Alan Rubenstein
Alan Rubenstein was educated in Liberal Arts at St. John’s College in Annapolis, MD and also at Georgetown University. He was a senior consultant for the President’s Council on Bioethics and currently serves as Hanson Scholar of Ethics at Carleton College in Northfield, MN. At Carleton, he teaches ethical thought through close reading of great literature of the West – in particular, Plato, Hebrew Bible, and Shakespeare. He has served, for Tikvah, as Co-Director of the program *Jewish Thought and Enduring Human Questions* and as Co-Convener of a working group on the life and thought of philosopher Hans Jonas. He is married and father of three children.
IV. Our Mutual Commitment

Our pledge to you is that the program will be excellent and that the teachers are, in every case, among the best people in the world teaching the subjects they are teaching. Your pledge to us is that you will invest yourselves in the texts and the seminars, and do the work to the fullest extent of your talents. You have put your everyday work on hold to join us, so we know you come to us with great interest and commitment. We will insist that you continue that commitment—a commitment to attending each and every session, a commitment to coming to class on time, a commitment to doing all the readings—throughout the duration of the Institute. If anyone fails to honor his or her commitment, he or she will be dismissed from the seminar.