

NHC 2015 Teacher and Artist in Residence Proposal Submission Form

**Submission Date** 2014-11-29 15:46:40

**Which are you submitting?** Course Proposal

**Applicant #1 Full Name** Marisa Harford

**E-mail**

**Preferred Phone Number**

**Skype or Google+ Name (specify the name and the service)**

**Address**

**How many times have you attended the NHC Summer Institute?**

**Please provide a brief (50-100 words) bio and description of your teaching style. If you have taught at the NHC or other retreats or events before, tell us what you most recently taught, where, and when, as well as what you took from the experience.**

Past courses taught at Institute:  
Midrashic Monopolies-- 2013  
Teaching As A Spiritual Practice-- 2012  
Tzniut-- 2010  
Secrets of the Matriachs-- 2007  
Chevruta-- 2005?

As a full-time educator with 13 years of experience, I believe that my role is to facilitate engagement between different participants, between participants and ideas, and between participants and texts. With an effective and interesting focus, thoughtful facilitation, relevant background information, and safe space, anyone can engage in deriving meaning from key Jewish texts, and I hope to accomplish this in my courses. I want the students in the class to learn about the text, their relationship to Judaism, and each other through discussion and creative exploration. In the class I taught most recently, I learned about how to balance providing frameworks and background for the participants so they can grapple with the text on its own terms and knowing when to open up the discussion beyond the framework provided so that participants can relate the text to their own understandings. In this course proposal, I have identified a theme and a frame or lens for each day that I hope will create a focus that will allow for productive and meaningful discussion that is accessible to all.

**Are you applying to present this course with another teacher?** No

**Address**

**Course Title** Women and Justice in the Book of Judges: Prophets,

Warriors, Tempresses, Innocents

## Course Description

The Biblical Book of Judges is populated by a broad range of fascinating female characters, both those that embody familiar archetypes and those that defy them. Judges also wrestles with a vision of justice as the Israelites enter the land of Canaan, and the women of the text are positioned at the nexus of these conflicts. Through chevruta (paired) study, discussion, and creative interpretive activities, we will explore the stories of three pairs of women, each playing on a different archetype-- the Prophetess, the Femme Fatale, and the Victim-- using various approaches as lenses to discuss how the female characters illuminate the meaning of justice in the text. All texts will be provided in both English and Hebrew.

## Course Categories (select up to 3)

Text Study for Everyone  
Suited for Teens

## Prerequisites

No Prerequisites Required

## Format

Regular course (Four 1.5 hour sessions)

## Scheduling Preference

No preference

## SESSION 1

Day 1: Introduction and Deborah as Warrior

- 1.) Welcome and framing: share names and then begin with a brief introduction to the themes of the course and 5 minutes of historical background on the book of Judges (general outline, theories about its composition, why justice is a crucial theme of the text). Develop group norms together.
- 2.) Activity: divide into 3 groups and each team brainstorms the qualities of their assigned archetype (Prophetess, Femme Fatale, Victim) and writes/draws/maps out that archetype and how it might relate to the idea of justice. During activity, groups also discuss a “get to know you” prompt about their favorite female character in the Bible to encourage participants to develop comfort with each other. Each group shares out its archetype and we post the ideas to refer to during the week.
- 3.) Framing text for the idea of justice: Brief discussion of Tanna d'vei Eliyahu parable about Israel in the days when the Judges ruled (found in Sefer HaAggadah)— how does this text present God’s role in establishing justice?
- 4.) Dive into the text, beginning with Deborah as the Warrior (our only unpaired look at a character). Review Judges 4:1-16 in chevruta, focusing on her role as a warrior and political leader (prophetic role is for tomorrow).

Key questions:

- What characteristics are ascribed to Deborah? To what is her success attributed?
- How would you describe the tone of the text? What is the text’s attitude toward Deborah?
- Is there anything about her portrayal that is problematic to you? Surprising?

## SESSION 2

Day 2: The Prophetess—Deborah and Samson’s Mother

- 1.) Brief introduction to frame/ lens for today: Richard Elliott Friedman—book of J, female authorship theory– J tradition of irony & humor. How does the author use irony to subvert archetypes?

2.) Deborah as Prophetess as the more straightforward example—read chapter 5 (Song of Deborah) together in chevruta and discuss. What vision of justice does Deborah's song put forward? How does the imagery of the song reinforce that vision? Does the image of Sisera's mother at the window complicate or clarify our ideas?

3.) Samson's mother as a more subtle example—act out a dramatized version of the story of the angel's annunciation to Samson's mother to emphasize the humor in this section and ask participants to brainstorm what each character (Samson's mother, Samson's father, the angel) are thinking during this section. Discuss how Deborah and Samson's mother offer complementary versions of female prophecy.

### SESSION 3

Day 3: The Victim—Yiftach's (Jephtha's) daughter and the Levite concubine

1.) Brief introduction to the frame/ lens for today—Phylis Tribble, Texts of Terror—stories of violence against women in the Bible. How are women portrayed as powerless victims? How does the treatment of women in these texts provide a litmus test for ideas of justice?

2.) Divide class into two groups. One focuses on deep chevruta study of the story of Jephtha's daughter and the other on the story of the Levite concubine, using the same focus questions:

- What do we learn about the female character?
- What or who is the source of the violence in this text? What is the woman a victim of?
- What is the role of the idea of sacrifice in this text?
- How does sexuality play into the idea of justice in this text?

Switch partners and each person then partners with someone who read the opposite text. Partners share out a summary of their focus story and their answers to the key questions. Whole-group discussion on the big ideas and questions that emerged.

3.) What is just? Discuss Genesis Rabbah 60:3 on Bechukotai – midrash on Pinchas as the high priest in the days of Jephtha. How is justice defined in these stories?

### SESSION 4

Day 4: The Femme Fatale—Delilah and Yael

1.) Brief introduction to the frame/ lens for today: Structuralist readings that play on the reader's expectations of archetypes, repetition, etc. Look at examples of portrayals of both Delilah and Yael in art to illuminate some of the characteristics of this archetype. Are there differences between how Delilah and Yael are portrayed?

2.) Together, read excerpts from the story of Samson and Delilah as the "classic" story of a temptress. What are the femme fatale's qualities? What marks her as a temptress? How does she manipulate gender roles to increase her own power? How does repetition work as an important element in the story? How does sexuality play a role?

3.) In chevruta, read the story of Yael and Sisera. In what ways does Yael fit the archetype? In what ways is she different? Is it just a matter of perspective?

4.) How do the stories of Yael and Delilah fit into our ideas of justice? Are they more like the prophetesses? Or the victims? Or somewhere in between?

**Will this course include some form of a presentation or performance to the Institute**

No

**community?**

**If the theme of your proposal is related to liturgy, would you be interested in being considered for the NHC Liturgist in Residence? (This involves similar contact hours but the format involves offering and participating in Institute workshops and programs open to the entire community, rather than teaching a four-session course.)**

Not a liturgy course