

NHC 2019 Course Proposal Submission Form

Submission Date 2019-01-06 20:59:22

Applicant #1 Full Name

E-mail

Preferred Phone Number

Address

How many times have you attended the NHC Summer Institute?

Please provide a brief bio and description of your teaching style (intended for the Course Committee). 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.

In three previous Institutes, I have taught courses related to puppets and masks. The first, in 2013, used found-object puppetry for midrash on the creation story. In 2016, we created sukkah shadow puppet pieces about wandering in the wilderness. This past year, beginning on Tisha b'Av and leading up to Shabbat Nahamu, we created masks as visual art objects for self-expression.

In this year's Institute, I would like to experiment with a form of masked improvisation from outside the Jewish tradition, but which has its own long, deep tradition, and use its practice as a way of elucidating patterns in the construction of our own tradition of midrash.

As a teacher, I value time when my students work individually or in groups while I circulate and give support. This allows them to explore independently and also get my individual attention. These times are balanced with bringing the whole group together, particularly at the beginning and end, so that the discussion can be broadened and cross-pollination can occur. In those times I serve as a facilitator, providing materials textual, conceptual and physical, and creating an environment of healthy back-and-forth and feedback, and also taking opportunities to teach particular skills and principles.

Please provide a brief bio (50-100 words) that will appear on the NHC website if your course is offered.

Yavni is a puppeteer, which means he doesn't have to choose between being a performing, visual, and literary artist. He has performed traditional Italian masked comedy in Bangkok, Czech revolutionary theater in New York, and street clowning in Israel. He has created rod puppetry accompaniments to contemporary classical song cycles, and built a shadow puppet tale using a sukkah as the shadow screen. He was the 2016 Timbrel Artist in Residence at NHC Summer Institute, where he was fortunate to work with the best company of wilderness shadow puppeteers.

Are you applying to present this course with another teacher?

No

Course Title

Commedia dell'Aggada: Midrash as Structured Improvisation

Course overview (intended for the course committee)

We will experiment with Commedia dell'Arte, an old style of masked improvisational comedy, while learning principals of midrash aggadah. Then we will use this theater form as a medium for improvised, invented midrash on Megillat Esther.

We will explore some rules that define how midrashei aggadah are constructed, how they relate to each other and to Tanakh. We will particularly look at patterns in midrash that parallel the rules and structure that guide the traditional European improvisational comedy of Commedia dell'Arte. To wit: Midrashim fill in plot gaps in the Text; Commedia dell'Arte performers improvise within the structure of a "scenario". Midrashim are consistent in the way personalities of characters are portrayed; Commedia dell'Arte employs stock characters. Midrashim have repeated tropes; Commedia dell'Arte performers have a library of "lazzi"---comic bits---that they bring in as they see fit over the course of a performance.

As a playground for exploring these ideas, we will get to know a subset of the Commedia stock characters, and use them to improvise around a Biblical narrative.

Course description (100-200 words, to appear on the NHC website if your course is selected)

What can a slapstick, masked improvised comedy form that originated in Renaissance Italy teach us about our own tradition of midrash aggada? Come find out by putting on masks and playing! We will learn and practice Commedia dell'Arte, while also studying midrashic texts to discover patterns they follow. Then we will combine the two by improvising, Commedia-style, on a Biblical narrative, thus creating our own performance-based midrash.

Course Categories

Arts, Music, Performance
History and Culture
Text Study for Everyone

Format

Extended Format preferred, but regular format acceptable

If you requested Extended Format, please explain why.

It will help to have enough time to really get comfortable performing in Commedia dell'Arte.

Scheduling Preference

No preference

Which type of classroom layout would you prefer?

A room with space to move around

Please list any other space requirements. We will do our best to accommodate all requests, but we appreciate your flexibility.

I would LOVE to be in the little brick theater space I discovered on campus last year. If that is not available, then a space with sufficient open floor space for physical comedy.

SESSION 1

Session 1: Masks

- Introducing ourselves and what we hope to get out of it. (10 min).
- Physical warmup to get ourselves comfortable in the room, in our bodies, with each other (10 min).
- Introduction to stock characters/masks, for experimentation: Arlecchino (Harlequin), Capitano, Dottore, Brighella, Pantalone, Pedrolino. Their characteristics, their distinctive walks, their driving forces. Improvising very short solo moments with each of them. (40 min).
- Processing: How was it? (10 min).
- Texts: Looking at a few midrashim with common characters. How do chaza"l treat personality and maintain it? (20 min).

SESSION 2

Session 2: Lazzi

- Check in (5 min).
- Introduction to lazzi (comic bits): Trying out/practicing a few pre-prepared ones with the characters we learned last session---getting "scripts", practicing in small groups and then showing the group. (50 min)
- Processing: How was it? (10 min)
- Texts: Looking at a few midrashim with common tropes, finding the repeated elements. What does it mean? (25 min)

SESSION 3

Session 3: Scenarii

- Check in (5 min)
- Texts: Looking at how a midrash interpolates the plot of a Biblical story (20 min)
- Introduction to scenarii: how a full commedia performance has a pre-established plotline, in which a company improvises the dialogue/action, sprinkling lazzi throughout. As a company, now (or in two groups) read through a very short scenario and then improvise the performance. (55 min)
- Processing: How was it? (10 min)

SESSION 4

Session 4: Bringing it together: Performing a Commedia drash

- Check in (5 minutes)
- As a company, treat a Biblical story as a Commedia dell'Arte scenario, assign Commedia stock characters to the Biblical figures, and improvise our own performative midrash. (35 min).
- Do it again with the same story, and get a different result. (35 min)
- Processing: How was it? (15 min).

Would you like this course to include some form of a presentation or performance to the Institute community?

Yes

If yes, please describe the presentation and performance, the space or venue you would like for it, and when it might take place.

It would have to take place after the last course meeting. Again, the theater space would be great, but it could be in other spaces with sufficient room for performers and audience. It is possible that the class will prefer not to perform in the end.

Please provide any other information that you think we should have when considering this proposal. (This may include links to blogs or web sites, videos, reviews, music, images) or other resources about you or that you feel would assist the committee in making its decision. You may also send additional documents or files to courses@havurah.org. Please reference this application in your message.

You can see images of some of my puppetry and mask work at <http://yavni.org>

I submitted this proposal last year; it was accepted. I was really excited to teach it, but in the end I couldn't make it to Institute. In the name of transparency, I want to let you know that I'm not yet 100% sure of my summer plans and there's a chance that I won't be able to come again this year. I really hope so, though, and would be super excited to teach this course!