

Writing Deeply Felt Emotions: Simcha - Happiness

Session Three

Opening Ritual: Welcome and Connections

Approx. 10 minutes

Share a song or poem that lifts your spirits, that makes you feel “happy.” What makes it special to you? (1 minute or less)

Today’s Focus

Approx. 1 minute

- Connect with Others
- Explore *Simcha*: The Divine and Gratitude
- Cultivate the craft of writing deeply felt emotions by attending to repetition and rhythm

Jewish Wisdom: Jewish history, stories, and sources offering guidance for our writing and life challenges

Approx. 20 minutes

Judaism encourages us to meet life’s circumstances—even challenges—with openness and gratitude guiding us to a deeper experience known as *simcha*. *Simcha* is a word that although may be familiar to many, doesn’t have an exact English equivalent. We’ll use happiness as its translation, while exploring Judaism’s unique meaning for *simcha*. Our literary canon reveals that the Jewish people have been able to find happiness amid great suffering. This may well explain our embrace of the notion that sadness and happiness often exist in relationship with one another. And, when we do finally experience happiness, we are grateful, feeling it deeply.

The song *Hava Nagila*, commonly played at weddings and other celebrations is sure to bring everyone to the dance floor. While the melody evokes happiness it is helpful to know it was born out of a yearning for, not an experience of joy.

The wordless melody (*niggun*) of *Hava Nagila*, was created by Rabbi Yisroel Friedman, to lift the spirits of his Chasidic followers, living under the hardships of Czarist rule in the early 1800s (e.g. young Jewish boys were forced to serve in the Czar’s army for 25 years). Friedman was sentenced to two years in prison, falsely accused of murder and was able to eventually escape to Austria where he developed the community of Sadigora Chasidim.

In the early 1900s, some of Friedman’s followers moved to Jerusalem, bringing with them his joyous *niggun*. Cantor Abraham Zvi Idelsohn, (possibly with support from Moshe Nathanson) wrote lyrics based on a verse from Psalm 118 that expresses gratitude to God for protection, for creating each new day and for the opportunity to be happy. Gratitude, an essential element in Judaism’s understanding of happiness, focuses attention on what we have, not what we lack. Gratitude as expressed through our liturgy, acknowledges the Divine Power as the source of that happiness.

Read the two texts below: the original from Psalm 118 and the words of *Hava Nagila*. Notice content: how each text does or doesn’t evoke happiness and gratitude and a connection to God. Notice style: how each text does or doesn’t use the literary tool of rhythm and repetition. Be prepared to put the texts in your own words.

Psalm 118:24

*Ze ha’yom asah Adonai, **nagila v’nismecha** bo*

This is the day the Lord has made, **rejoice and be happy** in it

תְּהִלִּים קי"ח:כ"ד

זֶה הַיּוֹם עָשָׂה יְהוָה נְגִילָה וְנִשְׂמְחָה בּוֹ:

Hava Nagila

Hava nagila, Hava nagila

Hava nagila v’nismecha

Hava neranana, Hava neranana

Hava neranana v’nismecha

Uru uru achim

Uru achim b’lev sameach

Let’s rejoice, Let’s rejoice

Let us rejoice and be glad

Let’s sing, let’s sing

Let’s sing and be glad

Awake, awake brothers

Awake brothers with a joyful heart.

הָבָה נְגִילָה

הָבָה נְגִילָה, הָבָה נְגִילָה

הָבָה נְגִילָה וְנִשְׂמְחָה

הָבָה נְרַנְנָה, הָבָה נְרַנְנָה

הָבָה נְרַנְנָה וְנִשְׂמְחָה

עוּרוּ עוּרוּ אַחִים

עוּרוּ אַחִים בְּלֵב שִׂמְחָה

Questions for *Hevruta* (study partner):

1. Explain the text in your own words.
2. How does the absence or presence of God impact your understanding of *simcha*? The absence or presence of gratitude?
3. In what ways are the two texts similar and different in their content (God and gratitude) and literary style (repetition and rhythm)?
4. Reflect back to the song or poem you chose. How does repetition or rhythm impact your feelings when listening to the song?

If you have time, you may want to invite others to share their answers with the larger group.

Writer to Writer: Wisdom of Seasoned Jewish Writers

Approx. 10 minutes

Review this quote about writing deeply felt emotions. What stands out for you?

“Rhythm in writing is a powerful tool. It is often conflated with the use of meter in poetry, but meter is only one kind of rhythm. The rhythm in a piece of writing is its heartbeat and its pulse, and a skillful writer can, through the tools of rhythm, shape how quickly or slowly a piece is read and so create a powerful emotional context alongside the actual words of the piece. Rhythm is built into a sentence by the sounds within the words, the emotional feel of the words (hard/soft, active/passive, etc.), the length of phrases, and the length of sentences. Rhythm can be built by using several words with same initial sound (consonance), which gives a sentence an almost incantatory sound; fantasy writing often uses this tool when creating an atmosphere of magic.

Assonance, the repetition of vowel sounds, asserts that different parts of a sentence are connected, even if they seem not to be, and so has a powerful subconscious effect on readers. Sound patterns can even bring a reader to a stop -- in my sound translation of the Mourner's Kaddish I wanted readers to feel stopped, tripped up, forced to pause, so used the clashing sounds of "my heart beat speaks." Those two t's followed by an "sp" are awkward and force a close attention to how your mouth is working, adding tremendous emotional power to that moment, and creating a full stop after a long, rushing phrase.

Poet and translator Elliott batTzedek

Rhythm and repetition are writing tools that enable readers to viscerally experience an emotion. *Hava Nagila* with its short phrases, repeated use of words, and use of punctuation elicit the high energy of a joyous outburst (הִילָה, *gila*) and the kind of happiness felt at a wedding. (הַשִּׂמְחָה, *simcha*)

Rhythm: A mixture of long and short words and sentences creates a rhythm to the writing. Altering length creates a changing tempo and adds interest. Short sentences can convey immediacy or energy, while longer sentences reflect a quieter contemplative experience. Punctuation also plays its role in creating rhythm by marking stops and starts helping the writing move from smooth, to snappier. The rhythm you create should reflect the emotion you are capturing. When writing about sadness for example, short, impactful sentences can convey abrupt loss or shock, while longer, more descriptive sentences can evoke a sense of lingering melancholy.

Repetition: is a literary device in which a word or phrase is used multiple times to provide clarity, emphasis or highlight deeper meanings in the text. There are multiple types of repetition. Two examples:

1. Anadiplosis: repetition in successive clauses. Usually, the phrase appears at the end of one clause and the beginning of another. An example in Genesis 1:1-2:

Verse 1: "In the beginning God created the heaven **and** the earth."

Verse 2: "**And** the earth was without form, **and** void; **and** darkness was upon the face of the deep."

1. Epizeuxis: words repeated in quick succession, like: "Holy, holy, holy, is the God of hosts" (Isaia 6:3) The repetition of the word holy, *kadosh*, emphasizes the holiness of God in every way.

Consider:

- Adjusting the length of sentences and the use of punctuation to create a visceral experience that reflects the emotion you are conveying
- Playing with repetition to convey emotion or emphasis
- Including a sense of gratitude and expression of the Divine (Higher Power) as part of your writing

Writing Prompts

Approx. 20 minutes

Before writing, reflect on the insights gathered from the Writer to Writers, Jewish wisdom, and your *hevruta*. Infuse those insights into your prompt. This exercise could pertain to a new project, something you're currently developing, or an idea you may begin here and continue to refine.

Write about a moment of *simcha*—a happiness connected in some way to gratitude or to a sense of the Divine. Let your words carry the rhythm of the feeling you are describing. You might use repetition to build energy, emphasize a detail, or echo the pulse of joy itself. Show us how happiness and gratitude flow together in your experience or imagination. If you have brought a draft, you have been working on, apply these tools.

Situate your writing in the genre you prefer, with memoir or story, poetry, prayer or song. Be open to whatever may appear on the page—this writing time is designed to be playful and a rough beginning to spark ideas you might return to later.

JWC Writer to Writer: learning from your colleagues

Approx. 20 minutes

Invite each writer to read from their work to a partner, while the other writer listens with care. (5 minutes each) Share:

- Warm feedback (something you appreciate in the writing—an image, sound, word choice, etc.)
- Something that you're curious about (something that might help in a next edit)

Join back together as a large group. Participants can share their experience of the prompt or choose to read one minute or less from their draft. Warm feedback welcomed. (10 minutes)

Next steps & Closing Ritual

Approx. 10 minutes

Today we explored *simcha* (happiness) and how you can evoke deeply felt emotions by using repetition and rhythm. As a closing ritual, we invite you to pack up your computers, tablets or notebooks. *Share with your circle:*

- What are you taking home with you? (emotions, needs, questions, or writing ideas)
- What new perspectives on writing and emotions are you carrying forward?

Mazel Tov on completing the JWC module on *simcha*!

In the tradition of a *siyyum*, a celebration marking the completion of a unit of learning—most often a tractate of Talmud—learners say **Hadran Alach** (We will return to you). This phrase reminds us that completing a study is not the end of the journey, but just another step.

Following this tradition, you may want to mark this moment with a special celebration/*siyyum*. Consider using the phrase *Hadran Alach* (“We will return to you”) to reflect on a learning or writing practice that you would like to return to as your writer’s journey continues. Like the study of Torah, a writer’s journey is a lifelong process.

Hadran Alach

הַדְרֵן עֲלֶיךָ

הַדְרֵן עֲלֶיךָ מִסְּכַת (יֹאמֵר שֵׁם הַמִּסְכָּת) וְהִדְרָךְ עָלֵינוּ. וְדַעְתָּן עֲלֵיךְ מִסְּכַת (יֹאמֵר שֵׁם הַמִּסְכָּת)
וְדַעְתָּךְ עָלֵינוּ. לֹא נִתְנַשֵּׂי מִיְנֶךָ מִסְּכַת (יֹאמֵר שֵׁם הַמִּסְכָּת) וְלֹא תִתְנַשֵּׂי מִיְנֵנוּ, לֹא בְעֵלְמָא הַדִּין
וְלֹא בְעֵלְמָא דְאַתֵּי:

We will return to you, **Simcha Module**, and you will return to us; our mind is on you,
Simcha Module, and your mind is on us; we will not forget you, **Simcha Module**, and you
will not forget us – not in this world and not in the next world.