

# Module One: Writing Deeply Felt Emotions: Simcha - Happiness

## Introduction

This introduction is designed for facilitators to understand the concept of *Simcha* and how it influences the writing of emotion. Also, the scope of the 3 session unit is highlighted here. When you have questions please reach out to the Ritualwell team.

A wedding is, on the surface, a joyous celebration. Yet anyone who has attended or been part of one knows that beneath the dancing, blessings, and laughter, a wide range of emotions may be present. Joy may be joined by longing, worry, gratitude or even sorrow—felt by different people in different moments—or even in the same person in the same moment. For a writer, this complexity offers a rich canvas. How might you capture the fullness of a wedding or any emotional experience that is sure to be layered with complexity.

To bring such moments alive on the page, writers must help readers feel the experience, not simply know that it happened. The following three sessions (90 minutes each) will support you in exploring essential tools for evoking deeply felt emotion(s) in writing:

1. Juxtaposition
2. Showing and Telling
3. Rhythm and Repetition

These writing practices are illustrated in three texts written by our ancestor-authors who wrote about *simcha*—happiness. The texts have survived through time, in part, because they enable readers to deeply feel the emotion of happiness. You'll see how Jewish wisdom, from ancient texts to contemporary voices, reveals a distinctive understanding of happiness—one that embraces its complexity and interweaving with other emotions.

Across these three sessions, you will explore *simcha*, a word familiar to many, almost viewed as part of the English language. “We are going to a *simcha*”—defined as a celebration. *Simcha* is also a deeply felt emotion that is hard to define in English. The closest word to approximate meaning that we will use throughout the sessions is happiness. Judaism, you'll discover, has a unique understanding of *simcha*. We invite you to look for how it may be similar or different than our English word happiness.

## Module One:

# Writing Deeply Felt Emotions: Simcha - Happiness

## Introduction

The setting of a wedding is a ritual that seems to be about joy alone but in fact holds a much wider range of human experience. By reflecting on how others have effectively written about *simcha* you will discover how to capture both the expected and the surprising dimensions of happiness—or any emotion—in your work.

The three sessions are designed to stand alone. You can select the one(s) that best meets the needs and interests of your JWC. However, we do see a richness emerge by doing all three. This chart below highlights the big ideas in each session: writing tool, a core concept of *simcha*/happiness, and the Jewish wisdom text (all associated with a wedding).

Writing Deeply Felt Emotions: Simcha	Writing Tool	Jewish Wisdom
Session One	<b>Juxtaposition:</b> Placing two opposing emotions side by side	The duality of happiness: Rebbe Nachman's parable
Session Two	<b>Showing and telling:</b> Immersing readers in experience and describing it well	Many dimensions of happiness: The seventh blessing from the <i>Sheva Brachot</i>
Session Three	<b>Rhythm and repetition:</b> Length of sentences, use of punctuation, and repeated words and phrases	<i>Simcha</i> , the Divine and Gratitude: Psalm 118:24 & <i>Hava Nagila</i>

# Writing Deeply Felt Emotions: Simcha - Happiness

## Session one

### Opening Ritual: Welcome and Connections

Approx. 10 minutes

Select something on your phone (such as a photo or note) or something from your bag that helps you to tell a story of happiness or joy (in one minute or less).

### Today's Focus

Approx. 1 minute

- Connect with others
- Explore *Simcha*: the duality of happiness
- Cultivate the craft of writing deeply felt emotions by placing opposing feelings side by side

### 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.

One example of a great teacher who embodied this approach to happiness is Rebbe Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810), who taught his followers to develop an intense, joyous relationship with God, defined by much singing, and dancing. He wrote:



Struggle with all your might to be only happy at all times, since it is natural to be drawn into depression and sadness



Rebbe Nachman's parables and stories encouraged his disciples to overcome obstacles in order to live with faith and joy. He himself suffered from grief, depression and tuberculosis, yet continually wrote about seeking *simcha*.

In the passage below, Rebbe Nachman offers a parable about the relationship between *simcha* and sadness. His writing illustrates how when juxtaposing two opposing emotions, the reader experiences a deeper understanding of each. Most often emotions are not experienced in a pure form—but rather in relationship to one another. Read and be prepared to put this story in your own words.

### Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, *Likutei Moharan Part II Torah 23:1*

בְּעֵינֵי הַשְּׂמֵחָה. עַל־פִּי מִשָּׁל, שְׁלִפְעָמִים כְּשֶׁבְנֵי־אָדָם שְׂמֵחִים וּמְרֻקְדִים, אֲזִי חוֹטְפִים אִישׁ אֶחָד מִבְּחוּץ, שֶׁהוּא בְּעֶצְבוֹת וּמְרָה שְׁחֵרָה, וּמְכַנִּיסִים אוֹתוֹ בְּעַל־כָּרְחוֹ לְתוֹךְ מְחוּל הַמְרֻקְדִים, וּמְכַרְיָחִים אוֹתוֹ בְּעַל־כָּרְחוֹ שְׂיֵהִיָּה שְׂמֵחַ עִמָּהֶם גַּם־כֵּן. כֵּן יֵשׁ בְּעֵינֵי הַשְּׂמֵחָה. כִּי כְּשֶׁאָדָם שְׂמֵחַ, אֲזִי הַמְרָה שְׁחֵרָה וְיִסוּרִים נִסְתַּלְקִים מִן הַצַּד. אֲבָל מַעֲלָה יִתְרָה – לְהִתְאַמֵּץ לְרַדֵּף אַחַר הַמְרָה שְׁחֵרָה דְּוִקָא, לְהַכְנִיס אוֹתָהּ גַּם־כֵּן בְּתוֹךְ הַשְּׂמֵחָה, בְּאִפְּן שֶׁהַמְרָה שְׁחֵרָה בְּעֶצְמָהּ תִּתְהַפֵּךְ לְשְׂמֵחָה. שְׂיֵהִיָּה הַמְרָה שְׁחֵרָה וְכָל הַיִּסוּרִין לְשְׂמֵחָה, כְּדֶרֶךְ הַבָּא לְתוֹךְ הַשְּׂמֵחָה, שְׂאִזּוֹ מִגְדֵּל הַשְּׂמֵחָה וְהַחֲדוּדָה מִהַפֵּךְ כָּל הַדְּאָגוֹת וְהַעֲצָבוֹת וְהַמְרָה שְׁחֵרָה שְׁלֹו לְשְׂמֵחָה. נִמְצָא שְׁחוּטְףָה הַמְרָה שְׁחֵרָה וּמְכַנִּיס אוֹתָהּ בְּעַל־כָּרְחוֹ לְתוֹךְ הַשְּׂמֵחָה, כְּמִשָּׁל הַנִּלְל.

On the topic of *simcha*. According to this parable: Sometimes, when people are happy and dance, they grab someone standing outside [the circle] who is depressed and gloomy. Against his will they bring him into the circle of dancers; against his will, they force him to be happy along with them. It is the same with happiness. When a person is happy, gloom and suffering stand aside. Yet greater still is to gather courage to actually pursue gloom, and to introduce it into the joy, such that the gloom itself turns into joy. A person should transform gloom and all suffering into joy. It is like a person who comes to a celebration. The abundant joy and happiness then, transforms all his worries, depression and gloom into joy. We find that he has grabbed the gloom and introduced it, against its will, into the joy, as in the aforementioned parable.

### Questions for Hevruta (study partner):

1. Explain the text (parable) in your own words.
2. This story honors the duality of our emotions. People often experience two or more opposing/contrasting feelings simultaneously. How would you describe the relationship between happiness and sadness according to Rebbe Nachman's story? What rings true? What is challenging?
3. How does this story deepen or shift your understanding of *simcha*? Of sadness?
4. Reflect back on the object you shared to tell a story of happiness for you. What other emotions might be intertwined with that story? How does viewing the object through the lens of two (or more) emotions impact the telling of the story?

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?



For me, it seems inevitable that various emotions come up when writing about a memory or reflecting on a recent experience. I like to use the metaphor of a prism you can hold in your hand that reflects different colors depending on how you hold it tilting towards a light source. Here's an example. I've been noticing how lately my voice really sounds like that of my mother, Connie, who died several years ago. I've always resembled her, but my voice has deepened. Especially when I laugh, a sense of her seems to move through my body and into surrounding spaces. I'm filled with surprise, joy, and deep longing- so many different emotions, like reflected prismatic colors. I'm starting to write some poetry about this.



**Cathleen Cohen, poet and painter, author of *Murmuration*, *Sparks and Disperses* and other books of poetry**

Judaism's understanding of *simcha* as an emotion that exists in relationship with sadness offers an opportunity for you to develop the skill of writing with depth that reflects the complexity of human experience (mixed, conflicting, and interactive emotions). By delving into this connection, you can help a reader deeply feel authentic emotions, enhancing the richness of your writing.

People rarely feel emotion in a pure form (pure happiness). To convey realistic experiences with emotional depth, place opposing emotions side-by-side. In doing so you will craft a sense of tension, complexity and interconnectedness that reflects the human experience and intensifies a reader's experience.

Consider:

- The tension between the emotions and the ways they impact one another
- How the presence of another emotion (within the same person/event, or with another person/event another) deepens the understanding of *simcha*, happiness
- What you want your reader to “feel”

## 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.

Rebbe Nachman used the setting of a wedding, which normally is viewed as a purely happy context, to reveal a Jewish understanding that joy and sadness exist in relationship with one another. Create a parable or a scene set in a context that is expected to be happy. Imagine a moment, a character or image from your lived experience that evokes both happiness and some other opposing feeling. Alternatively, imagine a scene that takes place where sadness is expected and yet happiness emerges as well.

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 placing opposing emotions in juxtaposition. 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?
- You may want to work on the draft you generated today, bringing it next month as we continue to explore *simcha* and writing deeply felt emotions.

» **Next:** Session two: Showing and Telling | The Many Dimensions of Happiness »

# Writing Deeply Felt Emotions: Simcha - Happiness

## Session Two

### Opening Ritual: Welcome and Connections

Approx. 10 minutes

Recall a happy moment you experienced – whether it feels small or significant. Now, describe that moment with only 7 words.

### Today's Focus

Approx. 1 minute

- Connect with Others
- Explore *Simcha*: the many dimensions of happiness
- Cultivate the craft of writing deeply felt emotions by both showing and telling

### 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.

A Jewish ritual practiced at weddings under the *chuppah* (wedding canopy) is the recitation of the Seven Blessings, the *Sheva Brachot*. The seventh of the blessings expresses hopes for the couple's future, wishing them a symphony of happiness. Rabbi Jonathan Sacks said:



Happiness is not a single thing, be it is a feeling, an emotion, a state of mind, or a judgment upon a life as a whole. It is many things, the sum of which is greater than the parts.



This blessing tells the story of the multiple dimensions of happiness that await the new couple. The Hebrew language offers 7 different words seeking to describe the full experience of happiness:

**Simcha** (שמחה): Happiness at celebrations like weddings or bar mitzvahs.

**Osher** (אֲשֶׁר): Refers to a more profound and lasting happiness or blessedness.

**Orah** (אוֹרָה): Can mean "light" or "happiness," suggesting a radiant or illuminating joy.

**Gila** (גִּילָה): Describes a joyful outburst or the happiness of discovery.

**Rina** (רִנָּה): Implies refreshing or uplifting happiness.

**Sasson** (שִׂשׂוֹן): Represents a sudden and unexpected happiness, often linked to a joyful surprise.

**Ditza** (דִּיצָה): A sublime or exquisite joy.

The text also portrays the story of the happy couple with vivid scenes that reflect their experience.

Read the text below. Notice the many different words that are used to describe happiness. Notice the vignettes created within the blessing. Be prepared to put this story in your own words.

בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם אֲשֶׁר בָּרָא שִׂשׂוֹן וְשִׂמְחָה חֲתָן וְכַלָּה. גִּילָה רִנָּה דִּיצָה וְחֻדוּה  
אֶהָבָה וְאַחֻוּה וְשָׁלוֹם וְרַעוּת. מְהֵרָה יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ יִשְׁמַע בְּעָרֵי יְהוּדָה וּבְחֻצוֹת יְרוּשָׁלַם, קוֹל שִׂשׂוֹן  
וְקוֹל שִׂמְחָה קוֹל חֲתָן וְקוֹל כַּלָּה קוֹל מִצְהָלוֹת חֲתָנִים מְחַפְּתָם וְנַעֲרִים מִמְשֶׁתָּה נְגִינָתָם. בָּרוּךְ  
אַתָּה יי מְשַׂמַּח חֲתָן עִם הַכַּלָּה:

*Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam, asher bara sason v'simcha chatan v'chala. Gila, rina, ditzah v'chedva, ahava v'achava v'shalom v'rei'ut. M'heira Adonai Eloheinu yishama b'arei yehuda u'vchutzot yerushalayim, kol sason v'kol simcha kol chatan v'kol kala, kol mitzhalot chatanim meichupatam u'n'arim mimishteit n'ginatam. Baruch ata Adonai m'sameiach chatan im ha'kala.*

Blessed are you, Adonai our God, Ruler of the Universe, who creates **happiness** and joy, groom and bride\*. **Exultation, delight, amusement, and pleasure, love and brotherhood, peace and friendship.** Soon, Adonai our God, may the sound of **happiness and the sound of joy** and the voice of the groom and the voice of the bride be heard in the cities of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem — the **rejoicing** of grooms from their huppahs and youths from their singing banquets. Blessed are you Adonai who makes the groom rejoice with the bride.

*\*Note: while the traditional version of the Sheva Brachot is distinctly heterosexual, there are now contemporary versions **adapted for same-sex couples.***

### Questions for *Hevruta* (study partner):

1. Explain the text in your own words.
2. What is the benefit/challenge of using so many nouns that are similar yet distinct in telling the story of the couple's emotional future?
3. The author creates vignettes –vivid scenes filled with sight and sound–to show dimensions of the couple's happiness. In what ways are those scenes effective/ineffective in helping the reader feel the emotion of the moment?
4. Think back to the story you shared in seven words. Which of the Hebrew words might you have used? Was your story more showing (with a vignette) or telling (describing a moment)?

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?



Effective creative writing evokes a vivid experience of concrete physical reality, most often through detailed description, using words that elicit sensory images (not necessarily visual) in the reader's mind. That's what is usually meant by "showing." But there are exceptions to every rule. If the "voice" of a piece suggests a specific person, it may seem to be "telling." But in fact, it is still creating a vivid experience.



Poet and publisher Judith Kerman

A writing technique that allows readers to deeply experience happiness is to challenge the adage, "show, don't tell" by incorporating both telling and showing. This approach is beautifully illustrated in the seventh blessing of the *sheva brachot*.

**Telling:** When describing a person or event it is helpful to be specific, be selective about the details you include. Engage all the senses and choose your nouns and adjectives with care.

Examples for telling:

- The joyous bride, happier than any ever before, stepped to the center of the circle, lifting the hem of her lace gown ready to dance.
- They said about Rabbi Yehuda bar Elai that he would take a myrtle branch and dance before the bride, and say: A fair and attractive bride. (Ketubot 17a:5-7)

**Showing:** Invite your reader to enter the story through action, sensory detail, and emotion—not through summary or explanation. Let them feel the experience of the emotion and interpret it through their own perspective. Instead of relying on adjectives or analysis, craft scenes that allow readers to draw their own conclusions.

Examples for showing:

- The bride twirling in the center of the circle, moved to the beat of the band lifting the hem of her lace gown, cheeks flushing, heart racing, faster and faster, her laughter penetrating the groom's desire as he grabbed on to her hand, attempting to mirror her motion.
- You have captured my heart With one glance of your eyes, With one coil of your necklace. (Song of Songs, 4:9)

Consider:

- Telling more by using selected, multiple, nuanced nouns or adjectives
- Showing vivid descriptions of physical sensations, actions, and surroundings to convey emotions. Incorporate details that allow the reader to infer the emotion based on the character's experience.
- Using images that appeal to the senses (sound, sight, touch, taste, smell)

## 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.

In the seventh blessing of the *Sheva Brachot*, the couple is celebrated in their joy—both in the present and for the future. Using that as inspiration, write about a moment of *simcha*, a time of deep happiness in your own experience or from your imagination. Let the reader feel joy through actions, sensations, and emotions. Focus on showing and telling. Carefully select which words to use in your description. 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 telling and showing. 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?
- You may want to work on the draft you generated today, bringing it next month as we continue to explore *simcha* and writing deeply felt emotions.

» **Next:** Session Three: Rhythm and Repetition | *Simcha*, the Divine and Gratitude »

# 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**

**תְּהִלִּים קי"ח:כ"ד**

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

זֶה הַיּוֹם עָשָׂה יְהוָה נְגִילָה וְנִשְׂמַחָה בּוֹ:

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

**Hava Nagila**

**הַבֵּה נְגִילָה**

*Hava nagila, Hava nagila*

Let’s rejoice, Let’s rejoice

הַבֵּה נְגִילָה, הַבֵּה נְגִילָה

*Hava nagila v'nismecha*

Let us rejoice and be glad

הַבֵּה נְגִילָה וְנִשְׂמַחָה

*Hava neranana, Hava neranana*

Let’s sing, let’s sing

הַבֵּה נְרַנְנָה, הַבֵּה נְרַנְנָה

*Hava neranana v'nismecha*

Let’s sing and be glad

הַבֵּה נְרַנְנָה וְנִשְׂמַחָה

*Uru uru achim*

Awake, awake brothers

עוֹרוּ עוֹרוּ אַחִים

*Uru achim b'lev sameach*

Awake brothers with a joyful heart.

עוֹרוּ אַחִים בְּלֵב שְׂמֵחַ

## 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 עָלָי. וְדַעְתָּן עֲלֶיךָ מִסְּכַת (יֹאמֵר שֵׁם הַמִּסְכָּת) וְדַעְתָּךְ עָלָי. לֹא נִתְנַשֵּׂי מִיְנֶךָ מִסְּכַת (יֹאמֵר שֵׁם הַמִּסְכָּת) וְלֹא תִתְנַשֵּׂי מִיָּנִי, לֹא בְעֵלְמָא הַדִּין וְלֹא בְעֵלְמָא דְאַתִּי:

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.