

# Writing Memorable Characters: Elu v'Elu - These and Those

## Introduction for facilitators

Memorable characters are relatable, heroic, emotive, and engaging. More adjectives could apply. Yet at their core, across genres—from stories, plays, and film to narrative poetry, memoir, and songs—memorable characters share one common trait: complexity. Just as we explore how writing deeply felt emotions requires us, as Jewish writers, to convey emotions like joy (*simcha*) in a complex way, the same intention holds true when writing indelible characters.

Guiding our writing of memorable characters will be the Talmudic lens known as *Elu v'Elu* (“these and those”). Most often, the idea of *Elu v'Elu*—valuing “these and those”—pertains to an approach to arguments that honors all voices. Jewish tradition teaches that we are to hear one another, even contrasting voices, because there is insight in each perspective. We believe that a third way—a better way—can emerge from conflict when we listen to contrasting points of view offered in search of a good outcome.

As Jewish writers, we are invited to apply a “these and those” approach to creating characters. When we do, we avoid writing what are known as “flat characters”—those with a single defining trait, such as fully good or fully evil, and unable to grow and change. Rather, we seek to create characters who embody contrasting worthy desires: to do good, to be moral, and to reach for power, pleasure, and self-preservation.

We’ll explore the inevitable outcome of characters with contrasting motivations and traits: conflict. We’ll give voice to our characters’ internal conflicts (e.g., moral or psychological) and to the external expression of the insight that emerges from that internal struggle—a third, generative way. Their efforts to resolve conflict become the engine that releases insight, enabling characters to grow and change while providing forward momentum and drama.

*Elu v'Elu* provides us with a uniquely Jewish blueprint for creating memorable, complex characters, framing their personal alchemy of decision-making in a way that reflects how we understand human nature and how we craft engaging literature. In the following three sessions (90 minutes each), you will use the tools of:

## Introduction continued

1. Backstory, which explains why a character is motivated by contrasting worthy desires—to do good and to act morally (these) and for power, pleasure and personal gain (those).
2. Internal monologue, which reveals dueling motivations within your characters as well as their search for insight, the source of growth and change.
3. Dialogue, which brings to the fore a character’s emerging growth and change, putting them in relation with another.

The three sessions are designed to stand alone. Each session explores a different aspect of *Elu v’Elu* and a different writing practice for creating memorable characters. Participants who are able to attend all three sessions can experience the added benefit of building and deepening the same character over time.

Adjust your schedule as needed. Some JWCs may wish to spend more than one session on each source sheet. The chart below highlights the big ideas in each session: a core concept, a writing tool, and a Jewish wisdom text.

## Introduction continued

Writing Memorable Characters	Writing Tool	Jewish Wisdom
Session One: Contrasting Traits and Desires	<b>The backstory:</b> The rationale for a character's unique needs, desires, or traits; a tool enabling the writer to fully know their character.	<i>Bereshit Rabbah:</i> All desires are valued: <i>yetzer hara</i> (desire to do evil) and <i>yetzer hatov</i> (desire to do good)
Session Two: Conflict	<b>Internal monologue:</b> Reveals the character's unique voice as they struggle to resolve their conflicting desires and traits.	Avivah Gottlieb Zorenberg's commentary on the value of solitude to resolve conflict and the need for integration, not sublimation of desires
Session Three: The Third Way	<b>Dialogue:</b> Demonstrates, in relationship to another, a character's growth and change, revealing the impact of feedback (negative or positive).	New Day Will Rise, an Israeli song, illustrating an expression of a third way that grows stronger with the help of encouraging voices

# Writing Memorable Characters: Elu v'Elu - These and Those

## Session One: Contrasting Traits and Desires—Writing a Backstory

### Opening Ritual: Welcome and Connections

Approx. 10 minutes

Think of someone whom you consider to be “complex”. Complex, in this case, isn’t a bad thing; it just means someone who demonstrates notably contrasting characteristics or traits (e.g., teaches love and peace yet is ill-tempered with family). Share two of their contrasting qualities or traits. (1 minute or less per participant).

### Today’s Focus

Approx. 1 minute

- Connect with others
- Explore *Elu v'Elu* (these and those) with emphasis on *yetzer hara* and *yetzer hatov* (the evil and good inclinations)
- Use the tool of backstory to create a memorable character with contrasting traits/desires

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

Approx. 20 minutes

Guiding our writing of memorable characters is the Talmudic lens known as *Elu v'Elu*—“these and those”. Most often, the idea of *Elu v'Elu*—valuing “these and those”—pertains to a method of argument that honors all voices. Jewish tradition teaches that we are to hear one another, even contrasting voices, because there is insight in each perspective. We believe that a third—better—way can emerge from conflict when we listen to contrasting points of view offered in search of a good outcome.

As Jewish writers, we are invited to apply a “these and those” approach to creating characters. When we do, we avoid writing what are known as “flat characters”—ones with a single defining trait, such as all good or all evil. Rather, our characters embody contrasting worthy desires: to do good and to be moral (*yetzer hatov*), and to reach for power, pleasure, and self-preservation (*yetzer hara*).

People are—well—complicated. Our writing needs to reflect that truth, so we’ll begin our three-session journey of writing memorable characters with the Jewish idea that within each person exist multiple, contrasting desires and traits.

Our tradition names these desires as the *yetzer hatov* and the *yetzer hara*. The *yetzer hatov* is the desire to do good, to act morally. The *yetzer hara* literally means the desire to do evil, but is better understood as the drive for self-preservation, pleasure, and power. *Yetzer* can be understood as the pull between two powerful inclinations that shape a person’s moral growth and change. According to Jewish tradition, all desires are necessary and valued, as they motivate us and move us forward.

In the following excerpt from *Bereshit Rabbah*, a midrashic commentary on the book of Genesis dating from approximately 200–500 CE, the rabbis celebrate the full range of human desire, emphasizing that humans contain “these and those.” Pay attention to how both *hatov* (good) and *hara* (bad) motivations are acknowledged as integral parts of the human experience—necessary and driving us forward. Prepare to put the text in your own words.

### Bereshit Rabbah

רַבִּי נַחֲמָן בַּר שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר נַחֲמָן בִּשְׁם רַב שְׁמוּאֵל בַּר נַחֲמָן אָמַר, הִנֵּה טוֹב מְאֹד, זֶה יִצְרָ טוֹב. וְהִנֵּה טוֹב מְאֹד, זֶה יִצְרָ רָע. וְכִי יִצְרָ הָרַע טוֹב מְאֹד, אֶתְמָהָא. אֵלָּא שְׂאֵלֻלֵי יִצְרָ הָרַע לֹא בָּנָה אָדָם בַּיִת, וְלֹא נָשָׂא אִשָּׁה, וְלֹא הוֹלִיד, וְלֹא נָשָׂא וְנָתַן.

Rabbi Nahman bar Shmuel bar Nahman said in the name of Rav Shmuel bar Nahman: “Behold it was very good” – this is the good inclination; “and behold it was very good” – this is the evil inclination. Is the evil inclination, then, very good? This is a rhetorical question. Rather, were it not for the evil inclination, a man would never build a house, would never marry a wife, would never beget children, and would never engage in commerce.

## Questions for Hevruta (study partner):

1. Explain the text in your own words.
2. What insight does this text provide about the *Yetzer Hara*? *Yetzer Hatov*?
3. How does the text affirm or conflict with your own understanding of human desires?
4. Think back to the person or character you shared in our opening exercise who exhibited contrasting traits. You probably don't know their backstory, but what might you imagine contributing to their dramatically different traits (e.g., family of origin, formative experiences)?

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

Today, we'll draft a backstory for a character you create, or a person you write about (in memoir, poem, song, etc.). First, review this advice from a contemporary Jewish author about writing a backstory. What stands out for you?



You can have a sympathetic protagonist or an antagonistic or unlikeable protagonist, but the person still has to have a backstory, that is some personal history or some psychological disposition, behind his or her yearning or drive. You can slide this in as a memory passage or a full flashback passage after the action gets underway, which is what I prefer, or you can start with a time-past introduction to the story, add white space, then jump to present time.

Feel free to create an off-beat or skewed character.



Lynn Levin, poet and writer, author of the short story collection *House Parties*

Backstory, simply put, is whatever comes before the main story or characterization. A backstory—most often not used fully in the creative piece—enables a writer to understand the character they create: who they are and why they are complex individuals.

Using an *Elu v'Elu* lens, we write a backstory to explain why a character is motivated by contrasting worthy desires—to do good and act morally (these), and to strive for power, pleasure, and personal gain (those). Backstory answers questions such as: “What brought the character to this moment?” and “Why do they have contrasting traits or desires?” In memoir writing, backstory clarifies answers to these questions about real individuals.

Consider:

- Identifying two sharply contrasting or “dueling” desires or traits in a character
- Writing about why your character is driven by these contrasting traits—for example, a desire to do good (morality, acting on behalf of others) and, at the same time, a desire for self-preservation, power, or pleasure.
- Exploring what has given your character a unique voice, shaped their values, and shed light on their motivations.

## 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.

To craft a memorable character, begin by identifying their contrasting traits, desires, or motivations (“these and those”). The backstory you write today will explain the source of their complexity. Alternatively, you may start with a character’s backstory—contrasting traits or desires will naturally emerge.

If you’re not working on an existing character or a person from your life, create a new character by combining two or more contrasting traits or desires that you heard in our connection question.

Here are two idea starters for writing a backstory:

- Map your character’s life journey through relationships. Identify one or two defining relationships (e.g., a friend, parent, sibling, spouse). What happened in your character’s childhood, young adulthood, or current relationships that help explain their current contradictions? (Especially helpful when writing memoir or short fiction.)
- Identify one or two “triumph or tribulation” moments in the life of your character. Imagine your character’s defining events of success or failure. What deeply felt emotions did they experience that could clearly explain why they embody contrasting desires or traits? Consider that their present contradictions are a direct consequence of these pivotal moments. (Especially helpful when writing poetry or songs.)

Over the next two sessions, consider making this character the focal point of your creative work, whether it’s a song, a narrative poem, a story, or a play. If you’re writing a memoir, you might draw inspiration from your own life or the past of someone you’re writing about.

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 *Elu v'Elu* (“these and those”) with a focus on *yetzer hara* and *yetzer hatov*. By creating characters with contrasting desires and traits, you are sure to create complex, memorable characters. As a closing ritual, we invite you to pack up your computers, tablets, or notebooks and share with your circle:

- What are you taking home with you? (emotions, needs, questions, or writing ideas)
- What new perspectives on writing memorable characters are you carrying forward?
- You may wish to continue working on the draft you generated today and bring it next time as we continue to explore *Elu v'Elu* and the craft of writing complex characters. In the coming weeks, we will explore how contrasting traits and desires fuel conflict, with a focus on writing internal monologue and dialogue that emerge from those conflicts.



**Next:** Session Two: Conflict | Developing an Internal Monologue



## Writing Memorable Characters: Elu v'Elu - These and Those

### Session Two: Conflict—Developing an Internal Monologue

#### Opening Ritual: Welcome and Connections

Approx. 10 minutes

When you face a difficult decision driven by two competing desires, what is your practice to help you resolve the conflict? (1 minute or less per participant)

#### Today's Focus

Approx. 1 minute

- Connect with Others
- Explore *Elu v'Elu* (these and those) with emphasis on integration of contrasting desires or traits
- Cultivate the craft of writing memorable characters using the tool of internal monologue to resolve conflict

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

Approx. 20 minutes

We continue to guide our writing of memorable characters using the Talmudic lens known as *Elu v'Elu* (“these and those”). Most often, the idea of *Elu v'Elu*—valuing “these and those”—pertains to a method of argument that honors all voices. Jewish tradition teaches that we are to hear one another, even contrasting voices, because there is insight in each perspective. We believe that a third—better—way can emerge from conflict when we listen to contrasting points of view offered in search of a good outcome.

As Jewish writers, we are invited to apply a “these and those” approach to creating characters. Today, we’ll explore writing about the inevitable outcome of characters with contrasting motivations and traits (*yetzer hara* and *yetzer hatov*): conflict. We’ll focus on giving voice to our characters’ internal conflicts (e.g., moral or psychological). Their struggle to resolve conflict becomes a powerful engine that releases insight, enabling your character to grow and change, while providing forward momentum and drama.

In the phrase *Elu v'Elu*, we bring attention to the “v,” which in Hebrew means “and.” Certainly, if the rabbis had intended a different approach to resolving conflict, they would have used the phrase *Elu o Elu*—meaning “these or those.” The challenge the rabbis set for us is not to choose one desire over another, but rather to do the work of integrating our contrasting, or dueling, desires, as all are worthy and each holds value. When attending to our dueling desires, guided by high purpose—to act in a goodly or Godly way—we can, as the rabbis note, act “for the sake of heaven” (*Pirke Avot* 5:17).

The following quote from contemporary biblical scholar and author Avivah Gottlieb Zornberg provides a window into how tradition suggests we resolve—not dissolve—contrasting desires in service of a higher purpose. Get ready to put this text into your own words.

“I think that redemption (being saved from doing wrong\*) happens in listening to oneself... A deep destructiveness works within human beings, which is self-destructiveness as much as anything else. Human aggression turned against the good should at least be recognized as such. Destructive impulses cannot be totally disposed of but may be integrated to allow love to flourish.” Love flourishes, according to Zornberg: “when you enact, embrace and integrate all your heart(s) *b'chol levacha*” — that is the meaning of the rabbinic teaching, she notes, “With both your hearts, the good inclination and the evil one.”

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

1. Explain the text in your own words.
2. Zornberg prescribes self-talk as a way to find resolution to one’s contrasting desires. But do you really only talk to yourself? In what ways might self-talk include the voices of the past? How do past relationships and experiences enter a conversation you have with yourself?
3. Zornberg notes that conflicting desires cannot be blotted out; rather, they are the source of a third, a better way through integration (add insight from these and some from those, then something better emerges). Share an example of what the integration of contrasting desires might sound like.

4. Zornberg’s version of higher purpose—“for the sake of heaven”—is to act so that love flourishes and overcomes destructive impulses. Reflecting on your answer to the connection question, what factors in your own life (your backstory) help you reach for a higher purpose (love, goodness, Godliness) when making decisions?

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*

Today, we’ll write the internal monologue of a character struggling to resolve their conflicting traits or desires. First, review this advice from a contemporary Jewish author. What stands out for you?



William Faulkner wrote, ‘the only thing worth writing about is the human heart in conflict with itself.’ Our characters are not marionettes for our preconceived ideas; rather, writers must listen to characters, letting them express their internal contradictions. As an exercise, imagine a character sitting across from you as you observe closely, slowing down to witness their body language and tune in to their words. You may want to interview them, asking questions related to your story. If you do this exercise with patience, your character may surprise you, offering you a glimpse of their vulnerabilities and deepest conflicts.



**Amy Gottlieb, author of *The Beautiful Possible***

Giving voice to a character struggling with competing desires allows the reader to know them intimately and honestly in a way that dialogue and action alone cannot.

To pull back the curtain on your character’s personal alchemy for decision-making, let your reader hear the competing forces at work within. What voices are speaking in your character’s head (e.g., a parent, a spouse)? What past experiences are shouting in your character’s mind (e.g., a betrayal, a death), influencing their internal struggle and eventual growth or change?

Consider:

- Writing in the unique voice of how your character speaks; dwell in your imagination with your character listening to them speak to you.
- Letting the character's body language and behavior reveal their internal struggle.
- Drawing on their backstory, exploring how pivotal events and significant past relationships shape their decision making.

## 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.

Consider returning to the character and backstory that you developed previously or begin by creating a new character defined by two contrasting traits or desires.

Place them before a high-stakes decision where there is no easy answer—after all, they are driven by dueling motivations or traits. Write their internal monologue as they struggle toward integration. What and who are they hearing as they strive to decide?

Allow insight to emerge, revealing the new way that moves your character forward. Pay attention to what enables your character to ultimately reach for higher purposes.

Consider making this character the focal point of your creative work, whether it's a song, a narrative poem, a story, or a play. If you're writing a memoir, you might draw inspiration from your own life or from the past of someone you're writing about.

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 *Elu v'Elu* (“these and those”) with a focus on the integration of desire as an engine for insight. By creating characters who face difficult decisions, driven by contrasting or dueling desires, you are sure to create complex, memorable characters. As a closing ritual, we invite you to pack up your computers, tablets, or notebooks and share with your circle:

- What are you taking home with you? (emotions, needs, questions, or writing ideas)
- What new perspectives on writing memorable characters are you carrying forward?
- You may want to work on the draft you generated today, bringing it next time as we continue to explore *Elu v'Elu* (these and those) and the craft of writing complex characters. When we meet again, we will focus on the tool of dialogue as a way to express your character’s insight and growth outwardly.

»» **Next: Session Three: The Third Way | Crafting Dialogue** »»

## Writing Memorable Characters: *Elu v'Elu* - These and Those

### Session Three: The Third Way—Crafting Dialogue

#### Opening Ritual: Welcome and Connections

Approx. 10 minutes

The rabbis say, “To change a habit is as difficult as the parting of the Red Sea” (*Talmud, Sanhedrin* 108b). Share a time when someone’s words either encouraged or discouraged your growth or change. (1 minute or less per participant)

#### Today’s Focus

Approx. 1 minute

- Connect with others
- Explore *Elu v'Elu* (these and those) with emphasis on insight that emerges from integration of contrasting desires or traits
- Use dialogue to illustrate the “third way” demonstrating growth and the impact others can have on it

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

Approx. 20 minutes

Guiding our writing of memorable characters is the Talmudic lens known as *Elu v'Elu* (“these and those”). Most often, the idea of *Elu v'Elu*—valuing “these and those”—pertains to a method of argument that honors all voices. Jewish tradition teaches that we are to hear one another, even contrasting voices, because there is insight in each perspective. We believe that a third—better—way can emerge from conflict when we listen to contrasting points of view offered in search of a good outcome.

Today, we focus on giving voice to the “third way” that emerges through dialogue with others. When contrasting desires are integrated, a new and better insight takes shape. As humans, we often share these emerging insights with those close to us, testing the waters. Dialogue offers an opportunity to receive feedback—both positive and negative—that can strengthen, refine, or challenge our motivation to move forward. *Elu v'Elu* offers a unique framework for understanding a person’s personal alchemy in decision-making. We recognize that we don’t necessarily extinguish our contrasting traits and desires; rather, we move forward in a new way, even as some conflicts remain within us.

The following excerpt from the Israeli song “New Day Will Rise” is intended to deepen our practice of exploring a characters’ personal alchemy for decision-making. It emphasizes Jewish tradition’s ancient and contemporary understanding that we must move forward, even while holding within us contrasting traits or desires—our “these and those.”

“New Day Will Rise” is the debut single by Israeli singer Yuval Raphael, who hid from Hamas for eight hours under dead bodies in a shelter at the Nova Music Festival. Of the 50 people in that shelter, she was one of the 11 who survived. The song, written after October 7 by contemporary Israeli musical artist Keren Peles, came in second place at the 2025 Eurovision competition.

This song can be understood as a conversation. Listen for 3 distinct voices. The narrator begins by speaking to the young people murdered at the Nova Music Festival. Next, you’ll hear those who perished responding with the chorus, and then a quote from the *Song of Songs* brings forth the voice of our ancient ancestors. A “third way” emerges as pain and loss coexist with love and hope, signaling a path forward. Get ready to put the song in your own words.

### New Day Will Rise

And even if you say goodbye  
You’ll never go away  
You are the rainbow in my sky  
My colors in the grey  
My only wish upon a star  
Sunshine in the day  
The only song that my piano ever plays

And even if you say goodbye  
You’ll always be around  
To lift me up and take me high  
Keep my feet close to the ground  
Are you proud of me tonight  
Dreams are coming true  
I choose the light  
Nothing to lose if I lose you

chorus:

New day will rise  
Life will go on  
Everyone cries  
Don’t cry alone  
Darkness will fade  
All the pain will go by  
But we will stay  
Even if you say goodbye

*Mayim rabim*  
*Lo yechabbu*  
*Et ha’ahava*  
*V’neharot lo yishtefu.*

scan to listen



מַיִם רַבִּים לֹא יִכְלֹוּ לְכַבֵּת אֶת־הָאֲהָבָה וְנְהָרוֹת לֹא יִשְׁטְפוּהָ  
“Vast floods cannot quench love, nor rivers drown it.” *Song of Songs*, 8:7

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

1. Explain the text in your own words.
2. The song expresses the contrasting feelings and desires—the “these and those”—of the narrator. Describe the narrator’s struggle. What happens to the pain?
3. As the narrator shares her emerging, fragile insight, what role do the other voices play in her ability to grow and change?
4. Think back to a time when someone’s words either encouraged or discouraged your growth or change. What enabled—or hindered—you from hearing an outside perspective?

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*

Today, we’ll write a dialogue to express a character’s growth or change. First, review this advice from a contemporary Jewish author. What stands out for you?



In the heightened reality of fiction, dialogue must sound authentic, but it should never just convey information. Strong dialogue reveals character and relationships. It can prickle with dramatic tension. You can craft that through the content of the conversation, e.g. bickering, flirtation, evasiveness, self-revelation. (Philip Roth is a master of this.)

You can also play with one of the writer’s most powerful tools, subtext. Use beats—bits of internal monologue or action—to reveal the emotional narrative going on beneath the surface: unresolved issues characters are bringing into the scene, unequal power relationships, gaps between what a character says and what they really feel.



**Janice Steinberg, author of *The Tin Horse* and the *Margo Simon* mystery series**

Dialogue enables you to show your character in action, in relationship with another, and to create emotional connections between characters. Accompanied by carefully selected body language, conversation can illuminate the impact that encouraging or discouraging feedback has on a character’s fragile new growth.

When your character speaks to another, you'll need to decide whether they are testing, telling, or demonstrating their new insight. Consider how their voice, language, or body changes as a result of realizing a new, better way. Think about what your character is willing or able to reveal and conceal. Attend to how their revelation is received and how your character reacts to feedback.

Consider:

- Weaving into the dialogue beats of actions or internal thoughts (e.g. slammed the door/ while saying “I’m brave”, thinking I’m afraid).
- Writing in the character’s authentic voice, vocabulary, and rhythm.
- Using dialogue to deepen relationships between characters, creating an emotional moment demonstrating the third way.

## 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.

Consider returning to the character and backstory you developed previously (if this is your first session, begin by imagining a character with conflicting desires or traits). Place them before a high-stakes decision where there is no easy answer—after all, they are driven by dueling motivations.

Write a dialogue between your character and a meaningful person in their life, someone who either encourages or discourages their “third way,” or emerging insight. Pay attention to what your character chooses to reveal or conceal during the dialogue. In this intense moment, portray how the feedback they receive encourages or discourages their growth and change, while moving the narrative forward. Express in the dialogue how open/closed your character is to the feedback.

If you are writing a memoir, you may draw from a lived experience—either as the protagonist or as the person offering feedback—or recall a scene where you witnessed this kind of exchange. For writing a song or poem, use the format of *New Day Will Rise* to inspire a dialogue through multiple voices.

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 *Elu v'Elu* (“these and those”) with a focus on creating complex, memorable characters. By developing characters with contrasting desires and traits who demonstrate their growth through dialogue, you are sure to craft characters that feel real, engaging, and memorable.

As a closing ritual, we invite you to pack up your computers, tablets, or notebooks and share with your circle:

- What are you taking home with you? (emotions, needs, questions, or writing ideas)
- What new perspectives on writing memorable characters 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*

### הִדְרָן עֲלֶיךָ

הִדְרָן עֲלֶיךָ מִסְכָּת (יֹאמֵר שֵׁם הַמִּסְכָּת) וְהִדְרָךְ עָלֶיךָ. וְדַעְתֵּן עֲלֶיךָ מִסְכָּת (יֹאמֵר שֵׁם הַמִּסְכָּת) וְדַעְתֵּךְ עָלֶיךָ. לֹא נִתְנָשִׁי מִיָּנֶה מִסְכָּת (יֹאמֵר שֵׁם הַמִּסְכָּת) וְלֹא תִתְנָשִׁי מִיָּנֶיךָ, לֹא בְעֹלָמָא הַדִּין וְלֹא בְעֹלָמָא דְאַתֵּי:

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