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Writing an Engaging Arc Around the Big Questions: Lech Lecha - Go Forward (Take Yourself and Go)

Introduction for Facilitators

Across genres, writers invite readers on a journey along with their characters, carrying both from here to there—and when successful leaving both changed. The challenge authors face is how to craft that experience in a way that readers' interests are peaked with the tension, drama, and discovery they crave. Authors ask, "How do I keep my reader reading?" In this unit, we'll explore how to structure a dramatic arc that sustains engagement when writing about personal and spiritual journeying initiated by big life questions.

You may be familiar with the 12-step writer's template, the "hero's journey" that moves the protagonist (the hero) from a known world, to an unknown world filled with challenges, eventually returning the hero back to their world, transformed (e.g. The Odyssey, Harry Potter). A need for personal glory, knowledge or treasure, magical support and tangible reward characterize the hero's journey. The hero's journey provides a template to write an engaging story about, as Madonna might say, the material world.

When our writing is focused in a decidedly different direction, on life's big questions (e.g. Who am I? Why am I? Where do I belong?), we as Jews understand there are no easy or dogmatic answers. To find the answers, our tradition directs us to go forth, *Lech Lecha*, לֶךְ־לְךָ. *Lech Lecha* can mean going out on a physical journey in the world. It can also mean a personal or spiritual journey, to **go to yourself**, to go inward for self-discovery; to **go with yourself**, to take your values wherever you go; and to **go by yourself** having the courage to stand alone, to be your unique self.

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Lech Lecha invites us to pursue challenging life questions, to wrestle with faith and hope when obstacles arise, and ultimately to make meaning of our quest.

To write an engaging tale of uncovering the answers to life's big questions, we as Jewish writers are invited to use a template extrapolated from the timeless telling of our matriarch Sarah's journey, as she pursues the universal big question, "How can I fulfill my purpose?"

From Sarah's story, we have extrapolated a three-step template for crafting an engaging dramatic arc when writing about personal and spiritual transformation.

1. Ask big life question stemming from a crucible moment
2. Personalize faith/hope wrestling when meeting obstacles
3. Make Meaning of events—not just what happened—but what mattered

To explore how to write an engaging arc when writing about personal journeying, you'll find these three sessions are designed to stand alone. Each session explores a different aspect of *Lech Lecha* and a different writing practice for creating an engaging arc. Participants who can attend all three sessions will experience the added benefit of building and deepening the arc over time.

Adjust your schedule as needed to respond to the interests of your circle. The chart below highlights the big ideas in each session: a core concept, a writing tool, and a Jewish wisdom text.

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Writing an Engaging Arc Core Concept	Writing Tool	Jewish Wisdom
Session One: Ask a big life question arising from a crucible moment	"In Medias Res" Drop the reader into the middle of the action, immediately highlighting the stakes	*Lechi Lach*, Debbie Friedman The big question arising from a crucible moment— to go forth to oneself, journey for the answers
Session Two: Explore small moments of faith and hope wrestling when meeting obstacles	Relatable anecdotes	Itzik Manger's *Abraham and Sarah*
Session Three: Make meaning of events	Perspective shift and point in time (PIT).	*Conversation with Sarah,* *The meaning made of Sarah's journey*

Three Steps for Writing an Engaging Arc:

