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TRADITION & INNOVATION

Writing Memorable Characters: Lech Lecha - Go Forward (Take Yourself and Go)

Session Three: Meaning-Making. Perspective shift.

Opening Ritual: Welcome and Connections

Approx. 10 minutes

"I was on time. No, you were late. I remember it well. We dined alone! We dined with friends." (I Remember it Well, Gigi, Lerner and Loewe).

Time plays a role in what and how we remember. Think about an important event in your own journey. How has time impacted your recall of that event? (1 minute or less for each person).

Today's Focus

Approx. 1 minute

- Connect with others
- Explore *Lech Lecha* (Go forward, take yourself and go) with emphasis on making meaning of the journey
- Use perspective (Point in time) to deepen meaning

Jewish Wisdom: Guidance for our writing and our life's questions

Approx. 20 minutes

Lech lecha (go forward, take yourself and go) is the Jewish idea that life is a journey where we ask big questions, struggle with obstacles and ultimately make meaning and gain wisdom. This framework offers us a template for how to write about spiritual and personal journeying in a way that keeps readers engaged.

The timeless telling of our matriarch Sarah's journey illustrates that template. In Sarah's senior years, after a lifetime of infertility, she hears the challenging and disorienting call to be both the mother of a child, and of a great nation. Her journey begins as she pursues the question: "How can I possibly fulfill my purpose?" Repeatedly she encounters disappointment. The dramatic tension rises as Sarah struggles in truly relatable ways to keep faith and hope alive.

Eventually Sarah gives birth, but that is not the end of her journey. Generations of our people have reflected on Sarah's story, seeking to uncover wisdom and insight. Time provides a unique lens allowing each generation to reflect on Sarah's journey. With the passage of time, we know not only what happened, but also the guiding lessons drawn from those events.

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The following poem, written in 2026, by three women who work with the Jewish Writers' Circles, explores the question of how time might have impacted Sarah's perspective on events that occurred during her quest to become a mother of a child and of a people. It offers a contemporary answer to what meaning can be drawn from Sarah's journey.

The poem begins and ends with verses from, the *Amidah*, the standing prayer, which connects worshippers to God and to our ancestors, *Avot*, (including Sarah). Traditionally, worshippers bend their knee at the word *Baruch* to symbolize subservience to God. The prayer is considered a conversation, a silent dialogue, between the worshipper and God. The poem builds on this idea, by imagining a private conversation between Sarah and the generations.

A Conversation with Sarah

First, the generations call out:
"*Baruch Ata Adonai Elohenui Velohei avotenu v'imaotenu*
Blessed are You, Adonai our God and God of our fathers and mothers,"

Responding, I say, my children, after all these years,
When I hear you say my name, I answer.
Confidently, you stand on your own, yet
You also need me, so I come to you
It's what a mother does

I was certain I'd never be Sarah, ema, the matriarch
It's no secret, I laughed at the messengers
declaring old woman, you will be a mother,
to birth a son, and a people
Naturally, I didn't believe the impossible

Then *Adonai*, you, and the generations proved me wrong
teaching me to walk humbly into the unknown
Holding the triumphs and tribulations of our people
Insisting once again, joy does come in the morning*
So, I learned to replace hand wringing doubt
When the impossible appears before me
Now, naturally I am lingering longer in possibility

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A Conversation with Sarah, (continued)

Throughout time my children, naturally, I see
Some of you stand, bend your knee, call out to me,
Some walk away, bend your knee to another, don't even recall me
Some never call, choosing to fight viciously with one another

My hands no longer wring like when the messengers came
You are all my children,
I can't heal your pains,
Each generation suffering your own,
but what I can do, naturally
is remind you, as a mother does
When the impossible is before you
Linger longer in possibility, my children.
Call again.

We hear you, Sarah, ema, our matriarch,
reminded once again,
We will strive to hold on.
And will call again.

"*Barchu Atah Adonai, Oseh haShalom*
Blessed are you, Compassionate One, Maker of peace."

by Cyd B. Weissman, Gabrielle-Kaplan Mayer, Adva Chattler

("Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning" is found in Psalm 30:5)

Questions for Hevruta (study partner) or done in a large group:

1. The poem situates Sarah in the present day as she speaks to her children, the Jewish people. What wisdom, insight, or meaning has Sarah gained in her role as a mother? In her relationship to faith?
2. Contemporary Jewish writers often integrate original text into their work. In this case, the authors reference the Amidah and a Psalm. In what way does/doesn't original text enrich the meaning and context of the poem?
3. Reflect on your answer in the opening ritual about how time impacted what or how you remembered an event. What wisdom or insight did you gain from looking at an event from a different point of time?

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Writer to Writer: Wisdom of Seasoned Jewish Writers

Approx. 10 minutes

Review this quote about making meaning of events through time.. What stands out for you?

"I

As a writer, "I've been playing with my father's antique clock collection in my memoir and how time stopped after he died and 250 clocks stopped chiming and gonging and playing music until my house was eerily quiet. I felt like my father had died a second death. For me, time is a spiral and the past is here in the present that moves into the future in every breath, every word.

My father repaired broken time pieces, restored them to life, gathering broken parts to make them whole. I see now, after he died, that he was an artisan of time, and set each clock to chime at a different time, as he was not interested in time that imprisons us, but in time that liberates us. Even after his death, my father teaches me something about Time and its mysterious beats.

I love the Jewish sense of time as both Historical and Cyclical – and imagine a spiral of time as I write, a spiral unspooling which is neither early nor late. This is the sacred time of the Torah but also of literature. Here Time is fluid, bending, wiggly."

Lisa Grunberger, playwright and poet

Consider:

- Immersing yourself in the values and context of the narrator at the point in time of their reflection
- Identifying shifts in perspective that frame how an event is understood. For example, a doubt into faith, a failure into learning.
- Using the point in time as a waiting period to explore the uncovering and discovering of new insights.

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Writing Prompts

Approx. 20 minutes

Apply the prompt to a new piece of writing or something in progress. Be playful and open to whatever may appear on the page.

Accept the invitation of *Lech Lecha*—to go to yourself, to go inward for self-discovery; to go with yourself, carrying your values wherever you go; or to go by yourself, with the courage to stand alone.

For yourself or for a character, identify an endpoint: a significant moment that invites reflection on a journey. That moment may be shaped by achievement or failure, disappointment or success, certainty or loss.

Now, time travel. Have your narrator or character look back on that "endpoint" from a different point in time. What new insights have emerged with distance and reflection? What meaning can now be made of the experience? How has the passage of time shifted their understanding of what happened?

You may want to draw on a piece of Jewish text—perhaps about one of our ancestors—that has troubled, challenged, or spoken deeply to you. How might you give voice to the Biblical character in the way the poem read today gave voice to Sarah? Allow time to pass, allow that Biblical character to look back, reflect and make new meaning of events that occurred.

JWC Writer to Writer: learning from your colleagues

Approx. 20 minutes

Invite writers to share from their work and to listen. This could be with a partner or with a larger group. (5 minutes each writer)

- 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)

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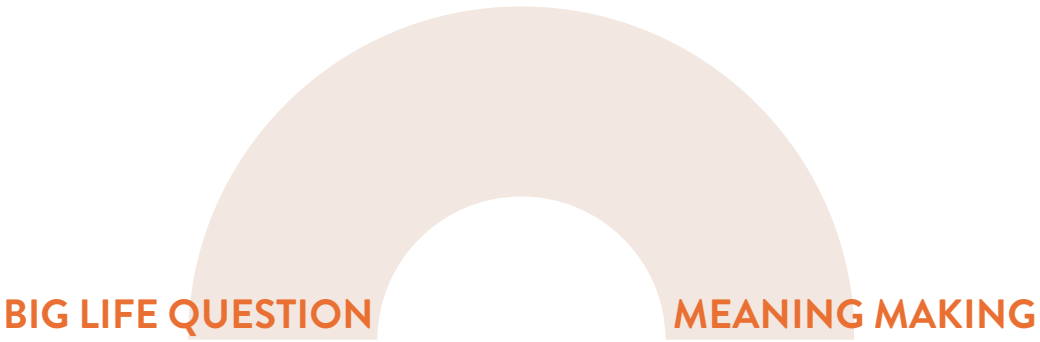
Next steps & Closing Ritual

Approx. 10 minutes

Today we explored *Lech Lecha* (Go Forward/Take Yourself and Go) with a focus on meaning making when writing about an engaging spiritual or personal journey. As a closing ritual, we invite you to share with your circle:

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

Three Steps for Writing an Engaging Arc:



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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

הַדְרָן עֲלָךְ

הֲדְרָן עֲלָךְ מַסֶּכֶת (יאמר שם המסכת) וְהַדְרָךְ עֲלָן. דַּעְתָּן עֲלָךְ מַסֶּכֶת (יאמר שם המסכת) וְדַעְתָּךְ עֲלָן. לָא נִתְנַשֵּׁי מִינָךְ מַסֶּכֶת (יאמר שם המסכת) וְלֹא תִתְנַשֵּׁי מִינָן, לָא בְּעָלְמָא הָדֵין וְלֹא בְּעָלְמָא דְּאָתֵי:

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