How quickly a year flies by! Seems like I was just working on the fifth edition of Gleanings and here we are with issue number six! The urge to write, to express ourselves, agitates in every one of us. Some of us hope to it with wild enthusiasm, some of us have it dragged out of them, some of us ignore the rumblings of creativity or just sit on them as they shriek in rage. Some of the brave ones submit a piece of their heart (soul?) to this yearly magazine and hope that somebody reads it, resonates with it, loves it or hates it, but at least takes note of it. As Linda Loman said in Death of a Salesman, “Attention must be paid!” And so, here is Gleanings volume 6, but first a few words from some famous writers whose ideas are food for thought.

The most solid advice... for a writer is this, I think: Try to learn to breathe deeply, really to taste food when you eat, and when you sleep, really to sleep. Try as much as possible to be wholly alive, with all your might, and when you laugh, laugh like hell, and when you get angry, get good and angry. Try to be alive. You will be dead soon enough.

William Saroyan

The good thing about writing fiction is that you can get back at people. I’ve gotten back at lawyers, prosecutors, judges, law professors, and politicians. I just line ’em up and shoot ’em.

John Grisham

I lived in the midst of an affectionate, charming family, and I am sure that there is no greater obstacle to a person who is just beginning to write.

Katharine Butler Hathaway

A couple of months ago I had a dream, which I remember with the utmost clarity. . . . I dreamed I had died and gone to Heaven. I looked about and knew where I was—green fields, fleecy clouds, perfumed air, and the distant, ravishing sound of the heavenly choir. And there was the recording angel smiling broadly at me in greeting. I said in wonder, “Is this heaven?” The recording angel said, “It is.” I said (and on waking and remembering, I was proud of my integrity), “But there must be a mistake. I don’t belong here. I’m an atheist.” “No mistake,” said the recording angel. “But as an atheist how can I qualify?” The recording angel said sternly, “We decide who qualifies. Not you.” “I see,” I said. I looked about, pondered for a moment, then turned to the recording angel and asked, “Is there a typewriter here that I can use?” The significance of the dream was clear to me. I felt Heaven to be the act of writing, and I have been in heaven for over half a century, and I have always known this.

Isaac Asimov

Judy Cohen, editor
Worrier vs Warrior! by Judy Umlas

Last summer I participated in Rabbi Drill’s second Jewish Artist’s Way course, which was, like the first, fantastic and inspiring. One of the practices of the course, which was based on the book *The Artist’s Way* by Julia Cameron, was to write daily Morning Pages. These consisted of three (count them!) spiral bound notebook size pages written in a free association style of writing, rather than like conscious journal writing, every day. In other words, we were told to write whatever came into our heads, even such things as “I don’t know what to write about.” Punctuation and grammar didn’t count. It was seen as just a way of clearing our brains and letting our creativity emerge. And over time, I have found that it works!

Well, I became a true practitioner and kept up with the morning pages “religiously,” if you will. But very soon into the process, I began to see a pattern to much of what I wrote about: worries, of every shape, size and quality. You’re really not supposed to reread your morning pages, but when I felt this pattern clearly emerging, I went back to the pages and there they were. Line after line, page after page. But occasionally I would connect the worries with something more interesting or even helpful, and one day I found myself writing this: “I’m using my morning pages mainly for all kinds of worries. But what if I choose to go from being a WORRIER to a WARRIOR!?” I really liked the sound of those words, and I loved the action-oriented quality of the latter instead of the helplessness of the former that I normally felt regarding these worries.

But it was a little scary, because I had learned from a “master worrier”—my mother—that worrying actually prevents bad things from happening. It is also somewhere in our religious heritage, I believe, with the “keyna hora” and other superstitious practices we absorb. So if I stop worrying, I worried, will bad things then happen? It took courage to even think about it.

I’m going to try it, I wrote to myself in those pages. And when a worry came up that I described, I also wrote out a possible action I could take that would either dispel or confirm the worry. For example, my boss seemed short and grumpy toward me for a period of time, and I was sure I had done something that didn’t meet with her approval, offended her in some way, and I kept making up stories about it. I filled quite a few pages with these. So I finally worked up my courage, marched into her office, and puffing up my warrior chest, I asked directly, “Are you upset with me about something?” “No,” she said. “I’m just upset about...” and she went on to mention a list of things that had nothing to do with me. I was so relieved, and even was able to offer her a solution to one of the problems, even though it was outside my skill set. Normally I would have just continued to make up stories about what I could have done to upset her. It started to work...when I reminded myself to be that warrior.

So at one of the sessions of the Artist’s Way course, I did a short presentation on this exciting and liberating discovery that I had made through these writings. The people in the class had a lot of fun with it, got some good relief and most—even our esteemed rabbi—said they found it very useful. I have to remind myself on a pretty regular basis that I am a WARRIOR, and it can take some strategic thinking to come up with an appropriate action to dispel or relieve the worry, but it’s worth establishing the habit. Maybe you would like to try it.

So here’s a table to help you organize this practice if you want to try it out.

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So be a WARRIOR and not a WORRIER. You, and all of the people you worry about, will be much happier for this shift!

Ode to a Matzo Ball, by Eileen Rogers

Oh fair and fluffy matzo ball
You float as on an amber sea.
You bob and bounce atop your broth.
How come you sink in me?