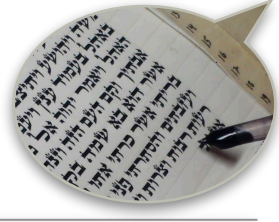




# The Collective Conversation

Weekly Torah Essays from the  
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community



Sefer Bereshit

Parshat Vayechi

Tevet 5784 / December 2023

## עוד אֲבִינוּ חַי • Our Father Still Lives!

By Nancy Leff

Having recently returned from the amazing YIS Mission to Israel, playing over and over in my mind are the words of our Kibbutz Be'eri host, Or Yellin: "We, Am Yisrael, believe in life, unlike Hamas, who believe in death.

And, so begins *Parsha Vayechi*, וַיְחִי, *And he lived.*" It does not say "he died" — though when we meet Yaakov, at the outset of the parasha, he is on his deathbed, summoning Yosef to his side. First, he asks Yosef to bury him in Israel with his forefathers, even though the final seventeen years of his life in Egypt were good ones. Then, all of his sons gather around his bedside. Yosef's sons, Ephraim and Menashe, Yaakov's grandsons, are there as well. The scene is one of filial devotion and family unity, a fitting ending to *Sefer Bereshit*.

We believe in life, and so Yaakov's life lives on. On his deathbed, he blesses each of his children and grandchildren individually, each according to personality and qualities. He blesses his grandchildren first, perhaps with the pride of seeing the future generations emanating from them and from him. Most of Yaakov's life had been one of struggle, but that seemingly was not the case for Yosef's sons. Ephraim and Menashe were the first brothers in *Sefer Bereshit* who did not see each other as rivals. They also maintained their identity as Israelites even though they lived in a society of temptation. The bracha that Yaakov gave to them is the one that Jewish fathers throughout the world say on Friday nights to bless their sons: יְשֻׁמָּה אֱלֹהִים בְּאַפְרַיִם וּבְמְנַשֶּׁה, May Hashem make you as Ephraim and Menashe. (*Bereshit* 48:20)

הַמַּלְאָךְ הַגָּאֹל אֹתִי מִכָּל-רָע יְבָרֶךְ אֶת-הַנְּעָרִים

*May the Angel who has delivered me from all harm bless these  
boys. (48:16)*

We pray that our children show that same loyalty to their parents and to our God as Yosef's sons did. The brachot that he gave to his own sons differentiate them as the 12 tribes.

הָאֶסְפוּ וְאֶגִּידָה לָכֶם אֵת אֲשֶׁר-יִקְרָא אֲתֶכֶם בְּאַחֲרִית הַיָּמִים

*Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall  
befall you in the end of days. (49:1)*

The distinctive blessings to each son have become an inspiration and model nowadays for ethical wills.

Yaakov/Yisrael lives on. He says to Yosef:

הִנֵּה אֲנִי מֵת וְהָיָה אֱלֹהִים עִמָּכֶם וְהָשִׁיב אֶתְכֶם אֶל-אֶרֶץ אֲבֹתֵיכֶם

*Behold, I die, but HaShem be with you and bring you back to the  
land of your fathers. (48:21)*

Yaakov's wish for Am Yisrael is that we return to our homeland. He was adamant that even if we find that we live well in galut, we shouldn't get too comfortable.

אֲנִי נֶאֱסָף אֶל-עַמִּי קְבְּרוּ אֹתִי אֶל-אֲבֹתָי... בְּמַעְרֶה אֲשֶׁר בְּשֵׂדֶה הַמַּכְפֵּלָה

*I am to be gathered unto my people; bury me with my fathers....  
in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah. (49:29)*

Yaakov's body was buried. His sons carried his physical body into the land of Canaan into the cave of Machpelah, which Avraham had bought. After the burial, Yosef's brothers thought that Yosef would now take revenge on them for the evil that had been done to him. Yosef said that even though they had behaved with evil intent, Hashem meant it for good. Their deed enabled Yosef to be in the high position he had in Egypt and save people from the famine and, of course, reunite with his father and family.

So, the final parasha of *Sefer Bereshit, Vayechi*, ties up and resolves issues that are ever present in the first book. Sibling rivalry and struggle lead to peaceful coexistence. Filial devotion and respect thrive. A comfortable life in galut leads to a yearning for a return to our homeland. Revenge against misdeeds is not an option, since Hashem intervenes for the good. Recognizing individuality and distinctiveness in our children is addressed here too. All of these themes signify a continuation of life, not death. They look to a bright future. "Am Yisrael chai! Od Avinu chai!"

עַם יִשְׂרָאֵל חַי עוֹד אָבִינוּ חַי

*The people of Israel live; our father still lives!*

**Nancy** and her husband, Jerry (z"l), moved to the YIS community with their 3 children in the summer of 1972. Nancy loves our community and is delighted to experience its growth.

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**The Collective Conversation** is a project of the  
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