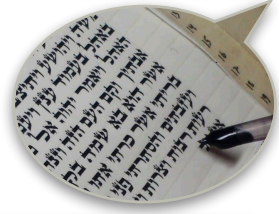




# The Collective Conversation

Weekly Torah Essays from the  
Young Israel of Scarsdale Community



Sefer Bereshit

Parshat Vayetzei

Kislev 5784 / November 2023

## Am Yisrael is Very Chai

By Josh Trump

In one of the more memorable social media posts of the last week, I saw a picture of the 300,000 people standing side by side on the National Mall under a stunning blue sky in one of the largest gatherings in that historic location. The caption above read: “Am Yisrael is very Chai,” a heblish version of our rallying cry that the Nation of Israel is alive. Indeed, Am Yisrael was alive in Washington DC, as the masses of people answered the call from all corners of the US (including hundreds from our community) to drop everything and gather together in love and support for our brothers and sisters in Israel. But the rally in Washington was not the only evidence of Am Yisrael’s “Chai-ness.” In fact, anecdotally, I have found over the last few weeks the tears I have shed daily have gone from 100% tears of sadness to a slightly more hopeful 70/30 depressing/inspiring tear ratio because of the hopeful posts and videos I have seen online. The recorded acts of achdus are countless as Israelis from all sides of the political and religious spectrums are doing everything they can to let others know that Am Yisrael is chai.

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we witness Yaakov’s  
transformation from isolated  
boy to man of faith to family man, we  
see Yaakov’s attitude go from vayetzeh to  
vayisa to vayakam.  
It is in this spirit that Am Yisrael lives.  
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stronger than before, is how Am  
Yisrael has survived since the  
time of Yaakov Avinu.

So how is it that Am Yisrael is able to come together like this during such difficult times? I would posit that there are certain character traits that Yaakov (the original Yisrael) had, which we look to during times of struggle.

In *Parshat Vayetzei*, we get a feel for what’s in the DNA of Bnei Yisrael that makes them *Am Yisrael*.

Examining Yaakov’s journey from son of Yitzchak and Rivka to activist forefather, one could divide up *Parshat Vayetzei* into three sections: Section 1: Yaakov leaves his parent’s house, Section 2: Yaakov lives under the thumb of Lavan, and Section 3: Yaakov escapes from Lavan.

In section 1, we meet Yaakov on the run: *Vayetzeh Yaakov miBe’er Shava, and Yaakov leaves Be’er Shava*. Yaakov is on the move, but he is focused on leaving his childhood home. After tricking his father and enraging his brother Esav, Yaakov is afraid for his life; his mother recommends he go to Haran to find a wife, but the real priority is to leave. Yaakov is alone, and he is uncertain about where he is going and what the future holds. It is a dark time. However, that night, Yaakov has a fateful dream in which God encounters him and says “I will not leave you until I have done what I have promised for you.”

Following this blessing from God, section 2 begins with a very different tone: *Vayisa Yaakov raglav, and Yaakov resumed his journey*. Rashi explains Yaakov's "heart lifted up his feet, and he walked swiftly." Things are looking up for Yaakov. His first encounter in his new town is a great success as he sees Rachel and is smitten by her and wins her favor. However, things then take a more difficult turn as Yaakov is tricked into marrying Leah and subjected to years of abuse and chicanery by Rachel's father, Lavan. During this section of the parsha, Yaakov is also blessed with the birth of 11 sons and 1 daughter and amasses personal wealth, but there are tensions within the family, and financial success does not come easily. It seems to be one frustration after another. One can feel the sadness of Yaakov until the end of section 2 when God appears to Yaakov for the second time and tells him to return to his birthplace and reiterates, "I will be with you." It is then that Yaakov decides to flee Lavan's house.

Following this, section 3 of the parsha brings us a new energy: *Vayakam Yaakov vayisa et banav v'et nashav al hagmalim, Yaakov got up and lifted his children and wives onto camels*. Here, we not only see Yaakov get moving, but we see him get his family moving as well. While Yaakov is again on the run, this time, we get the feeling that Yaakov is excited about where he is going. He is excited about whom he is traveling with. In fact, this is the first time we see Yaakov interact with his children and wives as one family unit. While Yaakov was coming off years of challenges, at this moment, he found strength from his faith in God and his family around him. Section 3 concludes with a dramatic encounter in which Yaakov unleashes decades of frustration on Lavan and tells him to leave them alone, which he eventually does. As we witness Yaakov's transformation from isolated boy to man of faith to family man, we see Yaakov's attitude go from *vayetzeh* to *vayisa* to *vayakam*.

It is in this spirit that Am Yisrael lives. Having in us the DNA that endures struggles and setbacks, only to come out stronger than before, is how Am Yisrael has survived since the time of Yaakov Avinu. Our faith in God and the love of our (very extended) family is what sparks a hopeful attitude and brings us together. With this inspiration, may we all find ways to "get up" and show support for our brothers and sisters who are being held hostage, fighting on the front line, or are just trying to manage their lives through a time of war. **Am Yisrael is very Chai!**

**Josh** and Lizzy are both Westchester natives who moved back to the area 14 years ago from Manhattan. Their four kids, Natalie, William, Simon, and Alex are all products of the incomparable Westchester Day School with some wonderful enhancement from Ramaz, Frisch, and NYU, making them regulars on the institutional dinner circuit. They love everything about living in the Scarsdale community and feel incredibly blessed to live among such a warm and inviting group of people.

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