

Torah Fund General Campaign Theme 2024-2025

Am Yisrael Chai - The People of Israel Live

The Torah Fund 2024-2025 theme may have originated when a chaplain shouted it out during a service at the liberation of Bergen-Belsen. The words themselves do not appear in Jewish scriptural sources, but for most Jews, the words are an affirmation of Jewish endurance in the face of oppression.

Some believe that the phrase *Am Yisrael Chai* dates back centuries, but the song was written and first performed in the mid-1960s. In the spring of 1965 Jacob Birnbaum (founder of the grassroots Student Struggle for Soviet Jewry) looked for a song to inspire activists at a major April 1965 rally in New York opposite the Soviet mission to the United Nations. He reached out to Shlomo Carlebach (1925-1994), a popular Hasidic "singing rabbi" who was developing an international reputation as a composer and recording artist. Carlebach wrote the song and performed it for the first time on a trip to Prague.

After the New York demonstration, the song became an anthem, and the words themselves a rallying cry. We hear *Am Yisrael Chai* chanted at almost every major Jewish political gathering from the 1960s to present day.

News reports record it being shouted during the 1967 Arab-Israeli Six Day War and at the 1975 rallies which protested the United Nations (UN) vote to equate Zionism with racism and to allow the Palestinian Liberation Organization to participate in a UN debate. We heard it again in 1973 when Golda Meir, then the prime minister of Israel, received an honorary degree from Yeshiva University, and in 1989 when Israeli and Soviet basketball teams faced off in Moscow in a record-breaking détente event. Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu wrote it in the visitors' book during his 2009 visit to the Wannsee Villa in Berlin where the leaders of the Third Reich planned The Final Solution, and we hear it chanted now in the Gaza conflict.

Am Yisrael Chai has become an expression of Jewish solidarity for both Israel and the continuity of the Jewish people. Through Torah Fund, we back these important efforts and demonstrate our support as we help ensure the future of worldwide Jewish communities. *Am Yisrael Chai* represents our strength and endurance as a people. Wear your pin with pride!

Join us in our efforts to remind the world that *Am Yisrael Chai* (The People of Israel Live) by continuing to donate to Torah Fund to support our five Conservative/Masorti institutions of higher education. Your generous contribution to Torah Fund helps The Jewish Theological Seminary in New York, Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies in Los Angeles, Seminario Rabinico Latinoamericano in Buenos Aires, Schechter Institutes of Jewish Studies in Jerusalem and the new Abraham Joshua Heschel Seminary in Potsdam, Germany.

We honor Israel and remember our hostages in the aftermath of October 7.

Am Yisrael Chai

References:

[Am Yisrael Chai | Jeffrey Levine | The Blogs](https://forward.com/culture/568200/am-yisrael-chai-jewish-anthem/) • <https://forward.com/culture/568200/am-yisrael-chai-jewish-anthem/>