

AMUD INSIGHTS 18B
RABBI YAAKOV BERKOWITZ
ETERNAL LIFE

The *gemara* we learned on this week's *amud* taught us a very strange thing. When the verse describes *Benayahu ben Yehoyada*, the warrior for King David, it calls him "*ben ish chai*," the "son of a live man". The *gemara* asks, "*are the rest of the world sons of dead men?*" The *gemara* explains that this is a reference to righteous people who are considered alive even in death. The *gemara* concludes that sinners are considered dead even when they are alive.

Rabbi Chanoch Zundel (d. 1867) explains this perplexing *gemara* in his commentary "*Anaf Yosef*" on *Ein Yaakov*. He writes that, as we know, we are in a passing world, and our job is to prepare ourselves for the coming world. What we earn in the coming world is entirely dependent upon, and reflective of, what we do in the "*olam ha'asiya*", the world of action - our world. As the Talmud tells us (Tractate *Avoda Zara* 3a) "*He who prepares for Shabbos on Erev Shabbos will eat on Shabbos*". Once one has left this world, he has forfeited his ability to further his reward. There is, however, one exception. A person who has spiritually influenced people positively, and has taught *Torah*, remains "alive" in the sense that he is still earning reward for that which he caused. For this reason, explains the *Anaf Yosef*, the verse continues according to the *gemara's* interpretation that Benayahu was a man who "*increased and garnered achievements in Torah*". This means to say that he had many Torah students. Therefore, the verse describes him as "*the son of a live man*" because he remains perpetually alive in the sense that his spiritual impact was still active and earning him reward.

In a similar vein, we find that when we study the *Torah* of someone who has already passed away, it is considered as if his "*lips are moving in the grave*". (Tractate *Sanhedrin* 90b) This follows the above concept, that even though a dead person cannot gain merits from his actions after he has died, he can be kept alive, in a sense, when Jews study his words of Torah. The same is true that one earns new reward when a person does a *mitzvah* as a result of the person who has passed away (for example, parents who educated their children in this manner).

May we all merit to be in the category of "eternally alive;" that the impact of our lives should be felt positively, in a spiritual sense, for long after our 120 years.