

“And Avraham will surely become a great and mighty nation... For I have loved him, because he commands his children and his household after him.” (18:18,19)

The *pasuk* seems to imply that Avraham *Avinu's* *z'chus* was primarily due to the impact he would make on future generations – his adherence to the *Mesorah*, transmission of our heritage, throughout the generations. This is enigmatic. Is Avraham not worthy on his own account? After all, he was the first one to recognize Hashem; the individual who was willing to die in a fiery furnace for his convictions; the one who stood up against an entire pagan society to preach monotheism. Certainly, this is quite a résumé to consider! Is Avraham's only merit the fact that he would pass it all onto the next generation? *Horav Yosef Chaim, zl, m'Bagdad*, the *Baal Od Yosef Chai*, explains this by first citing *Chazal* who compare *tzaddikim*, righteous people, to trees, quoting David *Ha'melech* in *Sefer Tehillim*: “A righteous man will flourish like a date palm, like a cedar in the Lebanon he will grow tall” (92:13). In contrast, *reshaim*, wicked people, are likened to grass – “When the wicked bloom like grass” (Ibid. 92:8).

The difference between trees and grass is that a tree has deep roots. What appears above the ground is only part of the entire tree. Concerning grass, however, what you see is what you get. It does not have such penetrating roots. A *rasha* is very much like grass. The way he appears to be is all that exists. In other words, the *rasha* lives, then dies, and is forgotten about. He does not have “roots” – there is nothing enduring about him. Nothing remains but a wasted life of evil.

On the other hand, the *tzaddik* is compared to a tree, because his life does not end with the grave. There is much more to a *tzaddik's* life than what we see before us. It has deep roots that penetrate far beneath the soil in every direction. His children carry on his legacy, reflecting his lofty character traits and teachings long after he is gone. Likewise, his students and their students are all a positive reflection of their mentor's impact. Yes, the *tzaddik* is very much alive, even after his soul has gone on to the World of Truth.

Chazal (Bava Basra 116a) distinguish between David *Ha'melech's* passing, which is described in the *Navi* as *sh'chivah*, resting, while Yoav *ben Tzruyah's* passing, is referred to as *missah*, death (*Melachim I* 11:21). David left a successor for his position, a son who would follow in his noble ways. Therefore, David's passing is only considered “resting,” because his legacy lives on. Yoav did not leave progeny to carry on after him. Thus, the *Navi* considers him dead in the full sense of the word.

We now understand why Avraham's ability to transmit his teachings to the next generation is what merited him to be the progenitor of a large nation. The Torah is not addressing the present. Clearly, Avraham was a great individual whose character and conviction were without equal. The Torah is addressing the future generations: *V'Avraham ha'yo yi'he'yeh l'goi gadol*, “And Avraham **will** surely become a great and mighty nation.” The double wording *ha'yo yi'he'yeh* underscores

two *ha'vayos*, presences, of Avraham: **now**, during his lifetime; and **later**, in the future when he will be gone. There is a **revealed** aspect to Avraham, which, like a tree, is seen by everyone who comes in contact with him. There are also the roots, the **concealed** impact he has on his progeny and myriad students, something which is seen even after the Patriarch takes leave of this world. In fact, this is the way to truly describe a *tzaddik*: by his enduring impact on future generations.