

Even any illness and any blow that is not written in this Book of the Torah, Hashem will bring upon you. (28:61)

Chazal say that the *choli* and the *makah*, illness and blow, are references to the tragic passing of *tzaddikim*, righteous persons. (Veritably, this *Midrash*, which is quoted by a number of commentators, has yet to be found.) The *Yaaros Devash* quotes it (*Chelek* 1, *Drush* 4). *Horav Yeshayah Pik, zl*, writes that he had searched for this *Midrash* and was unsuccessful in locating its source. Indeed, he observed anecdotedly that this is the meaning of a blow that is not written in the Torah. He is unable to locate this *Midrash*. Apparently, in *Shut Tiferes Tzvi Yoreh Deah* 38, the author cites the *Zohar HaKadosh* (*Chelek bais daf* 10b). *Horav B. Ransburg* explains that every one of the *Chamishah Chumshei Torah*, Five Books of the Torah, mentions the deaths of *tzaddikim*: *Bereishis*, the *Avos* and *Imahos*, Patriarchs and Matriarchs; *Shemos* commences with the passing of *Yosef* and the Tribes; *Vayikra* relates the tragic death of *Nadav* and *Avihu*; *Bamidbar* details the passing of *Aharon HaKohen* and *Miriam HaNeviah*; *Sefer Devarim* does not mention the death of any *tzaddik*. (Although *Moshe Rabbeinu's* death is mentioned after *Parashas Ki Savo*, when he admonished the nation with the rebuke, he was obviously still alive.)

Furthermore, the deaths and burials of every one of the preceding *tzaddikim* – were noted in the Torah. No one witnessed either *Moshe's* death or his burial. The atonement of a *tzaddik's* passing is derived through the medium of contemplation, ruminating over his life and achievements. This is best achieved when one can stand at the *tzaddik's* grave, and, with a relaxed mind, deliberate about his life. This is impossible with regard to *Moshe Rabbeinu's* life. Thus, *Sefer Devarim* is the place in which the blow of *missas tzaddikim* is not explicit. To recap: Veritably, all Five Books mention a *tzaddik's* passing. However, *Devarim* mentions it later after *Moshe's* Admonition. Thus, it really does not count.)

When the *Satmar Rav, zl*, visited *Yerushalayim* in 1932, he *davened* in one of the *shuls*. When the *shliach tzibbur, chazzan*, who was reading the service concluded *chazoras ha'shatz*, the repetition of *Shemoneh Esrai*, the *gabbai*, sexton, banged on the lectern. The *Rav* inquired for the reason behind this *makah*, banging. The *gabbai* explained that the *shul's* custom is not to recite *Tachanun*, supplication-confessional service, and instead recite *Kaddish* if that day coincides with the *yahrzeit*, anniversary of the passing, of a *tzaddik*. Thus, since that day they were commemorating the loss of a *tzaddik*, he banged as a form of announcement. The *Rav* mused that now he understood the meaning of the *pasuk*, "and a blow which is not written in the Torah," a reason *Tachanun* is not recited when a *bris* is being celebrated or if a newly-married *chassan*, during the first week following the wedding, attends the service. Such a *makah*, "blow/banging," is written in the Torah/*Shulchan Aruch*. The commemoration of a *tzaddik's* passing, however, is one that is not recorded in *Shulchan Aruch*. Therefore, *Tachanun* should be recited (unless a *Meseches* of *Talmud* is concluded and a *siyum* ceremony is celebrated).

In *Chut Ha'meshulash* by *Horav Shlomo Sofer, zl, Rav* of *Beregszasz, Czechoslovakia*, the author

distinguishes between *choli*, illness, and *makah*, blow. A *makah* is obvious, noticeable to the naked eye. One bangs himself in such a way that results in a wound that can hardly be concealed. *Choli*, illness, is different. It can be covered up, camouflaged, thus kept secret. One does not become immediately aware of an illness. It might take weeks and even months before the effects of the illness are noticed and revealed.

A similar phenomenon occurs with the passing of a *tzaddik*. When a *tzaddik* takes leave of his mortal surroundings, his passing leaves an immediate void, a vacuum that is painful. The *tzaddik* illuminates a community; he is their inspiration, their lodestar, their source of hope. With his passing, the *makah*, blow, is felt throughout. When time passes and life goes on, however, we become further aware and understand the depth of the loss of the *tzaddik*. When life continues and people begin to move on, we recognize and finally acknowledge the irreplaceable loss that we sustained. This is *choli* – illness, revealed, laid bare for all to see and truly sense the loss.

The *p'shat*, explanation, of *makah* and *choli* appropriately apply to the passing of a *tzaddik*. It is only after some time has elapsed that we truly begin to grasp the irreparable loss, the immeasurable toll of losing such a *tzaddik*. If this is the case, why does *choli*, illness, precede *makah*, blow? The blow is immediate, while the illness is only felt later on. The sequence in the *pasuk* should have been reversed. After ruminating over this question, I came to the realization that, indeed, the sequence is as it should be. The *pasuk* (I suggest) is addressing long-range effect. While long-term loss of the *tzaddik* might be mollified somewhat when a successor ascends to fill the void, no one can actually replace and serve as a substitute for the *tzaddik* who inspired so many. The natural course of life is that no one lives forever, and we hope that when we are summoned “home,” our life has served as a blessing for others. Generations pass, and *tzaddikim* move on to a better world, take their rightful place in *Olam Habba*, the World-to-Come. What we never get over is the shock of the blow, the suddenness of the loss, the overwhelming grief that we are unable to shake. The blow lives with us. It is something that we can never forget. Thus, *choli* precedes *makah*.