



ביקור חולים Bikkur Cholim



An essential element of *Gemilut Chasadim* (acts of loving kindness) is *Bikkur Cholim* - visiting the sick. When a person is sick and the illness is not contagious, it is considered an important mitzvah for friends and relatives to visit and provide care, relieving the patient of discomfort, distract them from their boredom, and help alleviate the fear of the unknown that goes along with many illnesses. The Talmud considers *Bikkur Cholim* a mitzvah to which no limit is prescribed (Shabbat 127a). As long as the person is sick, we have the opportunity for *Bikkur Cholim*.

Blessing for the Study of Torah:

ברוך אתה יי אלהינו מלך העולם אשר קדשנו במצותיו וצונו לעסוק בדברי תורה.

Baruch Atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam asher kidshanu b'mitzvotav, vitzivanu la'asok b'divrei Torah.

Blessed are You, our Eternal God, Ruler of the Universe, Who makes us holy through mitzvot, and commands us to engage in the study of Torah.

פרשנות Commentary

Jewish law demonstrates a great sensitivity to the psychology of illness and recovery and provides helpful guidelines to individuals who visit the sick- when to go, how long to stay, and what to do (or not do). Recent medical studies even confirm that prayer is a helpful form of therapy.

Relatives and friends who are accustomed to visiting the person often should visit as soon as they hear of his illness. But strangers should not call immediately, but should rather wait three days in order not to spoil his chances of recovery by attaching to him the designation of "patient." If, however, one suddenly becomes ill, even strangers should visit him immediately. Even a great person should visit a less important person, and he should even do so many times if possible. It is meritorious to visit a sick person as frequently as possible, providing such visits do not weary the sick person. One should not, however, visit a sick enemy, nor should one come to comfort him in his mourning, lest he may think that you rejoice at his calamity. The essential reason for the precept of visiting the sick is to look into his needs, to see what is necessary to be done for him, and to pray for mercy on his behalf. If one visited a sick person and neglected to pray for him, he did not fulfill his duty. Therefore, one should not visit a sick person during the first three hours of the day since it is at this time that the sickness assumes a milder form, and the visitor will consequently be insufficiently moved to pray for him. (Kitzur Shulhan Aruch, Chapter 193)

For more advice on how to perform the mitzvah of Bikkur Cholim, read Rabbi Bradley Shavit Artson's excellent article at:

www.myjewishlearning.com/daily_life/GemilutHasadim/TO_Visiting_the_Sick/Art_of_Visiting_the_Sick.htm

מקורות From our Sources

From the Torah

God pays a call to Abraham who is convalescing :
Thus Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised on that very same day, and all his household, his home-born slaves and those who had been purchased from others, were circumcised with him. And the Eternal appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre. (Genesis 17:26-18:1)

The Sages suggests we follow God's example (Talmud) : God visited the sick, as it is written, "And the Eternal appeared to him by the terebinths of Mamre." And so you too must visit the sick. (BT Sotah 14a)

Further teachings from the Talmud:

There is a story of one of Rabbi Akiva's students who became ill and none of the sages went to visit him except for Rabbi Akiva, and because Rabbi Akiva honored and lay down before him, he lived. The student said, "Rabbi, you've brought me life." Rabbi Akiva went out and taught, "Anyone who does not visit the sick it is as if he has spilled blood. When Rav Dimi came, he said, "Anyone who visits the sick causes him to live and anyone who does not visit the sick causes him to die." What does it mean by "causing him"? Should this be understood that when he visits, he prays for him to live and if he doesn't visit him he prays for him to die? Would you ever think that he would pray for him to die?!" Rather the person who doesn't go to visit the sick doesn't pray for mercy either for one to live or to die [and that is tantamount to causing his death.]. (BT Nedarim 40a)

שיחה For Discussion

Rabbi Nancy Flam, Co-founder of the Jewish Healing Centre, notes that, "Bikkur Cholim is particularly important in contemporary life, when isolation and lack of community are two of the greatest burdens people face. At a time of illness, Bikur Cholim offers the comfort of human connection and interdependence, and a sense of desperately needed community." Community is an important aspect of Bikkur Cholim and, as with many other mitzvot, Jewish communities throughout history did not leave the mitzvah only for individuals to perform. Every community had a Bikkur Cholim Society, which provided comfort and care to the sick. Today, major Jewish hospitals and synagogue caring committees are the legacies of Bikkur Cholim societies. But don't just leave visiting the sick to organizations. Nothing can bring strength to the ill like a visit from a loved one.

- 1) Can you recall a time when you were not well and a visit from family or friends made you feel much better?
- 2) How does Bikkur Cholim help Jews maintain their sense of community?
- 3) How does visiting the sick benefit the one making the visit?

