

Fascinating INSIGHTS

ג' אב תש"פ

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A Vital Visit

We know of the great Mitzva of Bikur Cholim, visiting the sick, which is one of the Mitzvos that one who fulfills enjoys their fruits in this world but the principle remains intact for him in the next world.¹ What are the reasons for Bikur Cholim?

The Tur² says one reason is in order to motivate the visitor to daven for their recovery. Then it is considered as if he renewed the sick person's life. In fact, the Rema³ brings that one who visits a sick person and doesn't daven for him hasn't fulfilled this Mitzva.

Another reason is to tend to any needs that are not being attended to. Indeed, ביקר means to check and to tend to as in אברך את צאני, I will tend to My sheep.⁴ בוקר is also related to בוקר, morning, since that is when things are clear and bright. This is what one must do for a sick person—brighten his day, encourage him, buy him a present and the like.⁵

Can one fulfill Bikur Cholim with a phone call? There is a lot that is lacking in this Mitzva if it is done with a phone call. When one personally visits a sick person, this arouses him more since he feels the pain more and it makes him daven better for the sick person. Additionally, being physically present at the bedside is usually a better way of determining what is needed. Furthermore, although a phone call can cheer up the sick person and make him feel important, a personal visit accomplishes this more effectively. Therefore, most aspects of

this Mitzva require a personal visit.⁶ However, in cases where circumstances don't allow him to visit, he should call.⁷

The Tzitz Eliezer⁸ says that if the sick person is in the hospital, all his needs are being tended to. Consequently, most of the Halachos of Bikur Cholim don't apply. The only Halachos that are relevant are to bring the sick person enjoyment and to daven for him. By asking those who are close to him, such as his relatives, about him they will relay the message to him which will bring him joy. Although the sick person may have more enjoyment if you visited in person, and even though you may daven better if you personally see his situation, since there is no set amount of how much pleasure you must give him, and no set amount of how much you have to daven for him, you have fulfilled the Mitzva of Bikur Cholim (through asking his relatives about him or with a phone call).

The Maharsha⁹ says that one can fulfill the Mitzva of visiting the sick by simply going there. The visit itself is pleasant to the sick person since from the pleasure he receives, the sickness becomes lighter.¹⁰

What about if one visits a sick person but he is sleeping? The Rosh¹¹ says that he fulfills the Mitzva just by being there—even if the person was sleeping or if he didn't say anything to the sick person. This is because it gives pleasure to the sick person when he is told that someone came to visit him.

Why Fast on Tisha B'Av?

The most stringent fasts are Tisha B'Av and Yom Kippur. We know Yom Kippur is mentioned in the Torah but where is Tisha B'Av mentioned?¹² Maybe we should observe Tisha B'Av with Ahavas Chinam. Who said we should fast?

We are taught the 365 sinews on one's body correspond to the 365 negative commandments and to the 365 days of the year.¹³ The Zohar tells us the Gid Hanashe corresponds to Tisha B'Av.¹⁴ The Zohar also informs us that the fight of Yaakov and the Malach of Esav occurred on Tisha B'Av.¹⁵ The Kisvei Arizal¹⁶ therefore says eating on Tisha B'Av is like

⁶ It has been pointed out that Hashem actually came to visit Avraham to be מבקר הויה, visit the sick (See Breishis 18:1, Sota 14a) and didn't ask about him from a distance.

⁷ Igros Moshe, Yoreh Deah 1:223. Also see the Shu"t Chelkas Yaakov 2:128, Minchas Yitzchak 2:84, Minchas Shlomo 2:82:9, Shulchan Shlomo 1 in Hilchos Refuah, p. 224, Pachad Yitzchak Igros U'kesavim 33, Chazon Ovadia, 1:8,9 and Yechaveh Daas 3:83:8,5, Remat Rachel, 8:6.

⁸ Baba Metzia 30b, s.v. הדרות.

⁹ Meiri to the 4th chapter of Nedarim, s.v. מצות עשה.

¹⁰ Pirush Ha'Rosh Al Hatorah, Breishis 18:1.

¹¹ See Tur, Orach Chaim, 554.

¹² See Makkos 23b.

¹³ Zohar, 1:170b.

¹⁴ The Malach of Esav made his mark on Yaakov, in the Gid Hanashe. This is symbolic that the trait of Yaakov—Torah—would be diminished on one day of the year, Tisha B'Av as this is the day we are limited on what we are allowed to learn (Shulchan Aruch, Orach Chaim, 554).

¹⁵ In 1534, the Arizal (1534-1572) was born in the Old City of Yerushalayim. His father died when he was a child. In 1541, unable to support the family, his mother traveled to Egypt with her children, where they lived with her brother, R' Mordechai Francis, a wealthy tax collector. The Radbaz—who was the chief rabbi of Egypt and the author of many commentaries and responsa—taught the Arizal both the revealed and the concealed aspects of the Torah. The Arizal also studied under R' Betzalel Ashkenazi, the author of Shita Mekubetzes. At the age of 15, the Arizal married his cousin (his uncle's daughter), and then spent the next six years in intensive study with R' Betzalel Ashkenazi. It was around this time that a copy of one volume of the Zohar came into his hands. He studied the Zohar in seclusion for another six years. He then isolated himself completely in a house near the Nile for another

¹ Shabbos 127a.

² Yoreh Deah, 335. Also, see the Beis Yosef, s.v. מצחה גזולה.

³ Yoreh Deah 335:4.

⁴ Yechzekel 34:12. See also Vayikra 19:20 and Menachos 49b.

⁵ The Kli Yakar (Bamidbar 16:29) suggests another reason for Bikur Cholim—to benefit the visitor. Seeing a person sick influences the visitor to think about the importance of doing Teshuva. This is similar to טב ללבת אל בית...החי יון אל לבו, better to go to the house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting for that is the end of all man, and the living should take it to heart (Koheles 7:2). This influence provides extra merit for the sick person since he caused someone else to do Teshuva.

eating from the Gid Hanashe as this is the area Yaakov was hit in.¹⁷

The Pasuk there states **על כן לא יאכלו בני ישראל את גיד הנשה**, the Jewish people are not to eat the Gid Hanashe to this day.¹⁸ This alludes to that we should fast on Tisha B'Av. Moreover, **תת** are the initials **תתשה אב**. The four fasts we observe because of the Churban—the 10th of Teves, Tzom Gedalya, the

two years. He remained alone, not speaking to any human being throughout the week. He would return home on the eve of Shabbos, just before dark. Even at home, he wouldn't utter a word and when it was absolutely necessary for him to say something, he would say it in the least possible number of words, and then only in the holy language—Lashon Hakodosh. The Arizal and his wife had a number of children, including a son named Moshe, who passed away at a young age, and a daughter, who married the son of R' Yosef Karo. On numerous occasions, Eliyahu Hanavi revealed himself and taught the Arizal the mysteries of the Torah. Every night his soul ascended into the heavenly realms. Crowds of Malachim would greet him to safeguard his way, bringing him to the heavenly academies. These Malachim would ask him which academy he chose to visit. Sometimes it would be that of R' Shimon bar Yochai while at other times he would visit the heavenly academies of R' Akiva or R' Eliezer Hagadol. On occasion, he would also visit the heavenly academies of the ancient prophets. In 1570, Eliyahu Hanavi told him it was time for him to move from Egypt to Tzefas. There he would meet R' Chaim Vital. When he first arrived in Tzefas, the Arizal joined the circle of students who studied Kabbala under R' Moshe Cordovero, known as the Remak. That was short-lived, since the Remak passed away soon afterwards. The Arizal then began teaching Kabbala. The Radbaz, who had also settled in Tzefas, warned him not to teach Kabbala in public. However, later the Radbaz retracted, after receiving a sign from heaven that he had erred in his ruling. Soon a group of the leading Kabbalists in Tzefas gathered around the Arizal, among them R' Chaim Vital, who became his chief student. The Arizal was recognized as a holy man with the power to perform miracles, read one's thoughts and predict the future. Except for a few notations, the Arizal left no writings since when he began to lecture on a topic there was such a flow of wisdom that it was impossible for him to commit it all to writing. R' Chaim Vital writes in the introduction to his *Shaar HaHakdamos* the following: "The Arizal overflowed with Torah. He was thoroughly an expert in Mikra, Mishna, Gemara, Pilpul, Midrash, Aggadah, Maaseh Breishis and Maaseh Merkavah. He was an expert in the language of trees, the language of birds and the speech of Malachim. He could read faces in the manner outlined in the Zohar (volume 2, p. 74b). He could discern all that any individual had done, and could see what they would do in the future. He could read people's thoughts, often before the thought even entered their mind. He knew future events, and was aware of everything happening here on earth, and what was decreed in heaven. He knew the mysteries of *gilgul* (reincarnation)—who had been born previously, and who was here for the first time. He could look at a person and tell him how he was connected to higher spiritual levels, and his original root in Adam. The Arizal could read wondrous things [about people] in the light of a candle or in the flame of a fire. With his eyes, he gazed and was able to see the souls of the righteous, both those who had died recently and those who had lived in ancient times. Together with, and from, these departed souls, he studied the true mysteries. From a person's scent, he was able to know all that he had done (See Zohar, volume 3, p. 188a). It was as if the answers to all these mysteries lay dormant within him, waiting to be activated whenever he desired. He didn't have to seclude himself to seek them out. All this we saw with our own eyes. These are not things that we heard from others. They were wondrous things that hadn't been seen on earth since the time of R' Shimon Bar Yochai. None of this was attained through magic. There is a strong prohibition against these arts. Instead, it came automatically, as a result of his saintliness and asceticism, after many years of study in both the ancient and the newer Kabbalistic texts. He then increased his piety, asceticism, purity and holiness until he reached a level where Eliyahu Hanavi would constantly reveal himself to him, speaking to him "mouth to mouth," teaching him these secrets."

¹⁷ It says **קְרֵב יְהִי עַקְבָּת**, Yaakov's hip socket was dislocated (Breishis 32:26). This alludes to the idea that evil will dominate on Tisha B'Av (Here are a few: Both **בַּתִּים מְקֻשְׁתִּים** were destroyed on this day. In 1492, during the Spanish Inquisition, the deadline for the Jews to leave the country or face death was on Tisha B'Av.), as the **תת** refers to the future generations of Yaakov, his descendants.

¹⁸ Breishis 32:33.

17th of Tamuz and Tisha B'Av are alluded to in the word **ג. גיד**. **ג** has a numerical value of 3 alluding to Tzom Gedalya, the 3rd day in the month of Tishrei.¹⁹ Also, **ג** is the first letter of **גָדְלִיה**. The **ת** alludes to the 10th of Teves as it has a Gematria of 10. Adding up the letters of **גִיד** we get to a sum of 17 referring to the 17th of Tamuz. The Gid Hanashe itself refers to Tisha B'Av.²⁰

The first Beis Hamikdash was destroyed because of sins **בֵין אדם למקום**, the three cardinal sins. The second was destroyed because of **בֵין אדם לחבירו**—Sinas Chinam.²¹ This is alluded to in **בֵין אדם ועם אנשיים ותוכלים**, you have striven with the Divine and with man and have overcome. **עם אלהים** refers to **בֵין אדם לחבירו** to **עם אנשיים** and **בֵין אדם למקום**. When we succeed in these areas then the third Beis Hamikdash will come.²³

Learning on Tisha B'Av?

On Tisha B'Av, the Halacha²⁴ states that it is forbidden to learn Torah aside from some exceptions such as Midrash Eicha, Iyov and the like.²⁵ The **שדי חמה** says that although a mourner is forbidden to learn Torah, it is permitted to learn **ספר ר'אה** as well as Siferei Mussar that awaken the heart of a person to do Teshuva.

The question arises though, is one exempt from the obligation to learn altogether on Tisha B'Av including that which is permitted on this day or is it an obligation to learn that which one is allowed to on Tisha B'Av?

R' Shlomo Zalman Aurbach brings from the Ritva two opinions on this matter.²⁷ The opinion of the Aruch L'ner is that one is obligated in the Mitzva of Talmud Torah and this can be fulfilled in that which is permitted to learn on Tisha B'Av. Likewise, the **שדי חמה** as well as **דרכי יציב**²⁸ and R' Elyashiv³⁰ say there is an obligation of learning on Tisha B'Av. The Kaf Hachaim³¹ however disagrees.

Rabbi Alt merited to learn under the tutelage of R' Mordechai Friedlander Ztz"l for close to five years. He received Semicha from R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg. Rabbi Alt has written on numerous topics for various websites and publications and is the author of the Sefer, *Fascinating Insights: Torah Perspectives On Unique Topics*. His writings inspire people across the spectrum of Jewish observance to live with the vibrancy and beauty of Torah. He lives with his wife and family in a suburb of Yerushalayim where he studies, writes and teaches. The author is passionate about teaching Jews of all levels of observance.

¹⁹ The Beis Yosef writes in the name of R' Yeruchem (Hilchos Tisha B'Av, end of 549) that Gedalya Ben Achikam was killed on Rosh Hashana and the fast is pushed off until the third of Tishrei, a weekday. The Kaf Hachaim (549:5, see there) and the Rambam say however that he was killed on the third of Tishrei.

²⁰ The Pasuk tells us Yaakov wrestled with the Malach of Esav—**וַיַּעֲקֹב נִכְנָס לְפָנָי** (Breishis 32:25). Why doesn't it say the more common term of **וַיַּלְמֹד**? Chazal (Kalla Rabasi 8) say the first destruction of Yerushalayim was because of Avoda Zara and the second was because of Sinas Chinam. The Shela points out it says the term **זא** in regards to Avoda Zara as in **כִּי־זָא דָבֵיקוּ בְּהָה**. Another place it says **זא** is concerning Lashon Hara as in **אֶבֶן לְשׁוֹן הָרָע** (Baba Basra 165a, See Hakdama to Shemiras Halshon that the destruction of the Beis Hamikdash was because of Lashon Hara). The Batei Mikdash were destroyed on the day of **זא**.

²¹ Yoma 9b.

²² Breishis 32:29.

²³ See Sefer Hachinuch, Mitzva 3.

²⁴ Orach Chaim 554.

²⁵ Regarding rinsing out one's mouth on Tisha B'Av, the Mishna Brura (567:11) writes that where one has a **צער גול**, great pain because of it, it is permitted to rinse with water. See the Minchas Yitzchok, 4:109 concerning one who has a **צער גול** from bad breath. As regards to an **איסטנץיא**, sensitive, delicate nature, the Mishna Brura (554:22) permits him to wash his face on Tisha B'Av with water.

²⁶ Siman 384. See the Meiri in Moed Katan 21a. The Biur Halacha (553 s.v. **וילך**) writes that if I wasn't scared of my colleagues, I would think that even on Tisha B'Av itself we can be lenient and learn...

²⁷ Halichos Shlomo, Bein Hamitzarim, 15:12. Ritva, Moed Katan 15a, s.v. **אבל**. See Pisikes Teshuvos 554:1.

²⁸ Asifas Dinim, Bein Hamitzarim 2:12.

²⁹ 2:240.

³⁰ Kara Alai Moed 8:4.

³¹ 554:10.