



# A Vital Visit

We know of the great Mitzva of Bikur Cholim, visiting the sick, whose reward is that one who fulfills enjoys their fruits in this world but the principle remains intact for him in the next world (Shabbos 127a). What are the reasons for Bikur Cholim?

The Tur (Yoreh Deah, 335. Also, see the Beis Yosef, s.v. *u'mitzva*) says one reason is in order to motivate the visitor to daven for ill person's recovery. Then it is considered as if he renewed the ill person's life. In fact, the Rema (Yoreh Deah 335:4) 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, ביקור means to check and to tend to as in אבקר את צאני, I will tend to My sheep (Yechezkel 34:12. See also Vayikra 19:20 and Menachos 49b.). ביקור 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.

The Kli Yakar (Bamidbar 16:29) suggests another reason for Bikur Cholim—to benefit the visitor. Seeing a person ill influences the visitor to think about the importance of doing Teshuva. This is similar to טוב ללכת אל בית אבל...והחי, 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.

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 ill 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. However, in cases where circumstances don't allow him to visit, he should call (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.). It has been pointed out that Hashem actually came to visit Avraham to be מבקר חולה, visit the sick (See Breishis 18:1, Sota 14a) and didn't ask about him from a distance.

The Tzitz Eliezer (5, Remat Rachel, 8:6) says that if the sick person is in 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 enjoyment to the ill person 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 ill 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 Maharsha (Baba Metzia 30b, s.v. והודעת) 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 (Meiri to the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter of Nedarim, s.v. *mitzvas asei*).

What about if one visits a sick person but he is sleeping? The Rosh (Pirush Ha'Rosh Al Hatorah, Breishis 18:1) 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.

On this topic let us conclude with the following anecdote. In a letter dated Tuesday, the 22<sup>nd</sup> of Sivan, 5697 (1937), the Chazon Ish wrote to R' Isser Zalman Meltzer when R' Isser Zalman was ill that he really wanted to visit him but he overcame his desire in order not to disturb his rest, as he heard that doctors said that there is nothing better than silence (Igros Chazon Ish, 1:114).

## Rabbi Yehoshua Alt

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