

the Mi Shebeirach in Hebrew – takes place during services after the Torah reading.

In this prayer, one mentions the sick person's name and their mother's name (preferably their Hebrew names if known) and pledges to give charity in the merit of the sick person.

The Torah is read on Mondays, Thursdays, Shabbat and Jewish holidays. Just tell the rabbi or the person running the services that you wish to make this prayer and they should be glad to help you.

### NEED A VISITOR? NEED SOMEONE TO VISIT?

You don't need to know the sick person you are visiting and, conversely, if you are sick you don't need to know the person visiting you.

Remember, visiting the sick is such an important and holy act, we

shouldn't just limit it to friends and family.

For that very reason, most cities around the world, wherever there is a Jewish community, will have a special "Bikur Cholim" society established just for the purpose of arranging visits for the sick. The words bikur cholim literally mean "visiting the sick" in Hebrew.

If you want to visit a sick person, or if you are sick and would like a visit, these groups are dedicated to helping people perform this great mitzvah.

## VISITING THE SICK

BY RABBI SHAIS TAUB

Have you ever visited a sick friend or relative?

Did you ever wonder if it was really helping?

In Jewish tradition, visiting the sick is not just a nice thing to do, it is one of the most fundamental acts of goodness that a human being can perform.

At a glance, here are just a few points that Judaism makes when talking about the greatness of this "mitzvah."

The Torah says (Deut. 28:9): "And you shall walk in His ways," which means that we are enjoined to emulate the kindness of our Creator. The Talmud explains: "How does one imitate G-d? Just as G-d visits the sick, so shall you."

The great rabbi and doctor, Maimonides, used to teach that visiting the sick is also an indispensable aspect of the commandment (Levit. 19:18) "Love your fellow as yourself."

Another special thing about visiting the sick is that it is one of the few good deeds for which we are promised a reward both in this lifetime and in the next.

"AND YOU SHALL WALK IN HIS WAYS."

THE TORAH (DEUT. 28:9)

"HOW DOES ONE WALK IN G-D'S WAYS? JUST AS HE VISITS THE SICK, SO SHALL YOU."

THE TALMUD



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## IS IT EFFECTIVE?

Okay, so visiting the sick is a big mitzvah. That's good for me. But does it really help the person I'm visiting? Sometimes it feels like we're visiting a sick person just to fool ourselves into thinking we're doing something.

Judaism says that this is not so. Visiting a sick person actually helps them. Of course, today's studies will corroborate the positive, healing effects that loving visitors bring, but Jewish tradition has been saying this for thousands of years. The Midrash actually says that when we call upon a sick person, each visit removes one sixtieth of their suffering.

Also, there is no limit to the amount of times that one can perform this good deed. As long as the sick person isn't put out by the visit, then it is a mitzvah each and every time we visit the sick person.

## HOW TO BEHAVE AT THE VISIT

Our tradition teaches that the Divine Presence rests upon the sickbed. As such, the sick person's room is actually a sacred place and should be treated with appropriate reverence.

That does not mean that one should be somber. Not at all! What it means is that it is a fitting place to offer prayers and to feel close to G-d. Accordingly, our attitude ought to really be joyful. Even though it may be difficult for us emotionally when we see someone who is not

**“ONE WHO VISITS A SICK PERSON TAKES AWAY ONE SIXTIETH OF THEIR SUFFERING.”**

🕒 MIDRASH



well, we should remember that in paying a visit, we are performing a holy task and as King David taught (Psalms 100:2) it is best to “serve G-d with joy.” We're not there to “have a good time.” But we are there to do something G-dly, and in that, there is cause to be happy.

Besides, being glum will not help anyone. Our visit will actually be most beneficial to the sick person if we come with a cheerful mood. Even if the situation is very serious, it is important to remain upbeat. Negative emotions can have an adverse effect on the patient. One should certainly never bring bad news to a sick person.

It is appropriate to say a short prayer, even one as simple as saying to the sick person, “May G-d grant you a full and speedy recovery.” On the Sabbath when we rest not only from work but from making supplications we say “On Shabbat we do not plead. Healing is soon to come.” It is also appropriate to say words of Psalms. Chapter 20 is an especially appropriate chapter.

## THREE ASPECTS OF VISITING THE SICK

There is an old tradition that breaks down the mitzvah of visiting the sick into three main components – body, soul and possessions.

**BODY** – Show up. Bring your physical presence. Also, bring tangible things like food or reading material. While you're there, offer to adjust the sick person's

**“VISITING THE SICK IS A GOOD DEED FOR WHICH ONE IS REWARDED BOTH IN THIS WORLD AND THE WORLD TO COME.”**

🕒 THE MISHNAH

bed or pillows. Offer to open or close the shades.

**SOUL** – Pray for the sick person. Say words of Psalms. Wish the sick person a speedy and complete recovery.

**POSSESSIONS** – This means money. Are you able to help the sick person with medical or other expenses? This can do a great deal to put the patient's mind at ease and help them heal. Do not overlook the opportunity to be helpful in this way if it is possible for you. Certainly it is a good thing to give charity on behalf of the sick person or to help the sick person to give charity – even by placing a few coins in a charity box.

## SYNAGOGUE PRAYERS

In addition to visiting the sick, there is a traditional prayer for the sick that is made in synagogues. The prayer – called

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