



How to Do Bikkur Cholim

The mitzvah of בְּיָקָר חוֹלִים (*bikkur cholim*, visiting the sick) is, by many accounts, one of the core Jewish *mitzvot*. According to tradition, it is one of the *mitzvot* that grants even greater benefit in the world to come (Tractate Shabbat 127a, et al.). The mitzvah first appears in the Torah when God sends messengers to visit Abraham after his בְּרִית מִילָה (*berit milah*, circumcision) (Genesis 17:23 – 18:2). According to the rabbinic Sages, there is no limit to how much *bikkur cholim* one can do; and visiting a sick person will take away 1/60 of the person's suffering (Tractate *Nedarim* 39b).

There is a story told that is instructive about how one should approach the *mitzvah* of *bikkur cholim*. Reuven entered the room of his sick friend Shimon with a smile on his face. Shimon was happy to see his friend and asked Reuven why he was in such a good mood. Reuven replied, "I am happy that I get to perform the *mitzvah* of *bikkur cholim*." Shimon frowned and said, "I thought you were here to visit me."

Guidelines for *Bikkur Cholim**

- Be fully present for the sick person. Remember that you are there for them.
- If possible, make sure that the person is able to have visitors and would like to see other people.
- Do not touch the sick person. They might not want physical contact, and you do not want to put yourself in danger if they are contagious.
- If the sick person wants to speak about their illness, listen to what they say and be supportive. Remember to keep the focus on the person you're visiting.
- You may speak about everyday topics. For many people, having a visitor to speak with about everyday topics is a good way to feel part of the world or, sometimes, to forget about being sick for a while.
- Laughing and telling appropriate jokes is good medicine.
- Consider sharing a magazine or a book of puzzles that the sick person might enjoy. In this way, you can extend the good feeling of your visit.
- Be mindful of how long you visit. Don't overstay your welcome.
- While it is generally preferable to visit someone face to face, it is not always possible or medically advisable to do so. Calling someone on the phone, sending notes, and facilitating a video chat can also be good ways to help someone feel better.

*Note that these are only some basic suggestions. There are many other elements that can make for effective *bikkur cholim*. Just remember the basic rule to be a *mentsch*.