



Bikkur Cholim Lesson- Part 2

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This guided lesson is a way for you to learn to about the value of *Bikkur Cholim* - visiting the sick.

Before we start, here are a couple of important things to understand:

- Judaism as a whole provides us with opportunities for working on being better people.
- Jewish texts can help to give personal meaning and insight into the community service that we do.

Directions:

Part I: Start out asking yourself the following questions:

Have you ever had to stay overnight in a hospital?

What was that like? If not, what do you think it would be like?

Have you ever visited someone who is ill in the hospital?

If visiting a sick person in the hospital makes us feel uncomfortable (and it does for most of us), why do we do it? Why should we do it?

“It happened that one of Rabbi Akiva’s students became sick, but none of the sagesⁱ went to visit him. Rabbi Akivaⁱⁱ, however, went to visit him. Because he swept and cleaned the floor for him, the student recovered. The student said to him, ‘Rabbi, you have given me life!’”
- Babylonian Talmud, Nedarim 40a

Part II: Answer the following questions:

According to the text, why did the student recover?

Rabbi Akiva was renowned as one of the greatest rabbis of his time. Is sweeping and cleaning the floor something you would expect from someone of his status? Why or why not?

How could Rabbi Akiva’s sweeping and cleaning a floor help the student to recover?



think about reflection

Jewish learning

service opportunities

Ultimately, who determined the value of Rabbi Akiva's actions?

In any visit to a sick person, who determines the impact?

Conclusion:

This text seems to be saying that visiting the sick will help the sick person to feel better. By spending time with someone who is bedridden, we can show the person that they are not forgotten and that the outside world cares for their health and well being.

In our text we saw that beyond the visit, treating a patient with deference and respect can have a great impact.

Even though it may be awkward or difficult, *Bikkur Cholim* - visiting the sick - is an important Jewish value - even for such an esteemed sage as Rabbi Akiva.

How will you apply this teaching? For suggestions on places to visit the sick, visit sulamcenter.org and find the Health Care/*Bikkur Cholim* option in the first drop-down menu.

Did you find this helpful? For suggestions or feedback, write to Imetz@bjela.org.

ⁱ "The sages" here refer to other learned rabbis, contemporaries of Akiva, who served along with him in the Sanhedrin, an assembly of 71 scholars which acted as a supreme court and legislature for the Jewish people in Palestine after the destruction of the 2nd Temple in 72 CE.

ⁱⁱ Rabbi Akiva was a Palestinian scholar, patriot and martyr. Little is known of his early life; according to tradition he was of humble origin and remained uneducated until the age of 40. With the help of his wife, Rachel, he devoted himself to study and became a highly distinguished rabbi. Akiva developed a method of biblical exegesis, systematized the oral law, and established an academy at Bene Brak. He was imprisoned by the Romans for teaching Torah and was tortured to death. He lived approximately from 50-135CE.