



## The Power of the Bedside Visit

In Jewish tradition, visiting the sick and helping to care for them is considered one of the greatest and most vital kindnesses we can bestow; many traditional communities have a “bikur cholim society” which ensures that no sick member is ever left alone or abandoned, whether at home or in hospital. This is no doubt inspired by the following story about the great R. Akiba:

*...one of Rabbi Akiba’s students fell sick, and the Sages did not visit him. So Rabbi Akiba himself, entered his house to visit him, and because the students swept and sprinkled the ground before him, he recovered. ‘My master,’ he said, ‘you have revived me!’ Rabbi Akiba immediately went out and taught: **He who does not visit the sick is like a murderer.** (Nedarim 39b-40a)*

Why didn’t R. Akiba’s students visit their sick friend? Can we assume that the dingy conditions (unswept and dusty) of his house, they didn’t want to come in? Or – did they fail to realize how important the *Mitzvah* of *Bikur Cholim* might be?

How did R. Akiba’s visit “revive” the student? Was it the fact that the great teacher came himself – or because, in honor of their teacher, his students tidied up the house?

What does R. Akiba mean by his equation? How can failing to visit someone who is sick be considered like murder? What does that tell us about our power - as friends and family – to affect the health of our loved ones and neighbors, especially when they are sick and possibly lonely?

1) Visiting the sick is included in R. Johanan’s famous list of deeds for which you “eat the fruit in this world and the capital remains for the world to come.” (BT Shabbat 127a)

2) Judaism teaches that any good deed we fulfill in this world earns us spiritual “capital” for the next world – but some deeds also carry rewards in this life – and one of them is *bikkur holim*. (BT Shabbat 127a)

What are the “fruits” of visiting the sick? Is it a good feeling we get from cheering someone up?

Do we “earn stock” so that if we are ever needy of help there will be people who we have helped who “owe us”?

Are there some important lessons we can learn about own limitations by going into a hospital?

*\*\*\*A lesson: my teacher taught that, contrary to common thinking, we do not perform Mitzvot of kindness **because** we love someone; rather, we learn to love someone as a result of acting kindly towards them. By practicing Divine habits, we develop Divine characteristics*

think about reflection

Jewish learning

service opportunities