

“And God appeared to Abraham ...”

Jewish principles, practices
(including *bikur cholim* - ‘visiting the sick’)
and prayers for supporting those who are ill

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Bikur Cholim

The Jewish practice
of visiting the sick

HOW TO USE THIS CHAPTER ON *BIKUR CHOLIM*¹

Modern Jewish thought and practice draw upon a long tradition of debate and written commentary, rooted deeply in the Bible as core text. Different strands of modern Judaism vary in their interpretation and emphasis, but all begin with the texts of centuries of what is known as 'rabbinic Judaism'. This article summarises the main teachings within Judaism about the practices and principles of visiting the sick. The key sources are:

- the *Torah* (the first five books of the Bible, 'the five books of Moses'),
- the *Tanach* (the whole Jewish Bible, ie without the Christian New Testament),
- the *Talmud* (a vast compendium of Rabbinic discourse from the 2nd to 6th century containing debates, stories and legal rulings),
- later commentaries by notable figures such as Rashi (*Tanach* commentary, 11th century), Maimonides (*Mishneh Torah*, 12th century), Nachmanides (*Torah* commentary, 13th century), and Karo (*Shulchan Aruch*, Code of Law, 16th century),
- as well as a few modern writers.

Traditionally, Jews always name the sources of their own learning, as a way of honouring their teachers. In this spirit, the footnotes name the sources for the ideas, and also quote the original texts. This makes for a larger document, but the reader can capture the essence of the teachings by reading just the main text, and browsing the footnotes at a later date.

THE CONCEPT OF *BIKUR CHOLIM*

The bonds of community and mutual care are given very high value within Judaism. The importance of a Jew extending themselves on behalf of another includes offering the same practical, emotional and spiritual concern for those beyond the Jewish community. One of the key ways that this can be expressed is through *bikur cholim*, visiting the sick. It is regarded as a *mitzvah* – literally a commandment, but it also means that it is a practical task, and, above all an honour and a joy to carry out.

- **Origin of the term *bikur cholim* ('visiting the sick')**: *Cholim* means 'sick people'. *Bikur* (comprising the Hebrew letters *beit-kof-reish*, or B-K-R) literally means to seek out, investigate, or find out the facts, essence or truth of something. Of the eight instances of its use in the Bible, three of them happen close together in Ezekiel. The extended metaphor is one of God visiting to heal Israel, and gives clear indications of what the visit should achieve. In this passage, there are five concepts: i) Show up, be present, and engage personally (the *hineini* principle) ii) 'be a friend' to the patient iii) The visit (even without speaking) is a powerful expression of caring and relationship. iv) There is a sense of kinship, a covenantal

¹ All the Hebrew words have been transliterated for the convenience of non-Hebrew readers. 'ch' is pronounced as the ending of the German composer's name 'Bach'.

bond with the sick, which brings both empathy and sense of responsibility – caring is not left to someone else. Without these, *bikkur cholim* would not occur. v) The visit leads to enquiry, which leads to action.^{2 3}

- The fact that **God Himself was the first to visit** a sick person indicates the importance of *bikur cholim*.⁴
- Anybody who might bring benefit can and should visit the patient, without social barriers. **Nobody is too grand to be a visitor** to the sick. Everyone shares the same obligation to partner with God, and help those in need.⁵

² **Ezek. 34** [2] “Woe to you shepherds [ie leaders] of Israel, who have been tending yourselves ... [*reish-ayin-heh*: feed, tend, be a friend to]” 3 “ ... but you do not tend the flock.” [4] “You have not sustained the weak, healed the sick, or bandaged the injured; you have not brought back the strayed, or looked for the lost;...” [11] “For thus said the Lord God: [*Hineini*] Here I am! I am going to take thought for [the Hebrew word root *Dalet-Reish-Shin*: ‘consult, enquire of’] My flock and I will seek them out. [*Beit-Kof-Reish*]” [Rashi: “in the sense of visiting the sick”] [12] “As a shepherd seeks out [B-K-R] his flock when some [animals] in his flock have got separated, so I will seek out [B-K-R] My flock, I will rescue them from all the places to which they were scattered on a day of cloud and gloom.” [16] “I will look for the lost, and I will bring back the strayed; I will bandage the injured, and I will sustain that which was sick ...” See also: **Sheer, Charles (2009)** ‘Bikkur Holim: the Origins of Jewish Pastoral Care’ – (Director, Department of Studies in Jewish Pastoral Care College of Pastoral Care, HealthCare Chaplaincy) - [http://healthcarechaplaincy.org/userimages/Bikkur Holim final 7-14-09.pdf](http://healthcarechaplaincy.org/userimages/Bikkur%20Holim%20final%207-14-09.pdf) – A similar version of this paper was published in the Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy, Vol. XV, Issue #2, 2009, pages 99-113

³ **Goldberg, Rabbi Zvi** (*Kashrut Administrator*) ‘The Visitor’s *Halachic* Guide to Hospitals’ - <http://www.star-k.org/kashrus/kk-HalachicGuidetoHospitals.htm> “A visitor should try to determine if there are any patient needs to which he can attend such as arranging for proper nutrition, comfort and cleanliness or even family needs including child care or coordinating meals. Even with all the care available nowadays, there are often things that the patient is still missing.”

⁴ **Midrash Tanhuma Vayera 2**: “When God was revealed [to Abraham], the Holy Blessed One stood and Abraham sat, as it says, “ ... and he was sitting in the doorway ...” It is the custom of the world that when a student is sick and the teacher goes to visit, [other] students go first and say, “[There is] a delegation of the teacher to the house of the patient,” meaning that the teacher wishes to visit the student. Not so the Holy Blessed One. When Abraham was circumcised and was in pain from the circumcision, God told the messengers to go and visit. But before they arrived, God came in first as the Torah says (v.1), “And God appeared to him,” and after that (v.2), “And he lifted his eyes and saw three ...” Is there no greater Humble One than this?”

⁵ **Talmud, Nedarim 39b** “It was taught: There is no measure for visiting the sick. What is meant by, ‘there is no measure for visiting the sick?’ R. Joseph thought to explain it: its reward is unlimited. Said Abaye to him: Is there a definite measure of reward for any *mitzvah* [performance of a commandment]? But we learnt: Be as heedful of a light *mitzvah* as of a serious one, for do you not know the grant of reward for them? But Abaye explained it: Even a great person must visit a humble one. Raba said: [One must visit] even a hundred times a day. R. Abba son of R. Hanina said: He who visits an invalid takes away a sixtieth of his pain/sickness.” Also see Note 6. Also: **Shulchan Aruch 335:2** “Even a prominent person must visit a humble one.” *Talmud, Pirkei Avot* 4:12 “Be of humble spirit before every person.”

- Judaism puts high value on the difference that actions make. Part of visiting is about finding out what **physical help is needed**, and making sure that this is put in place.⁶
- There are **three main purposes to visiting** the sick: help physically; help emotionally, with companionship; help spiritually – with prayer.⁷
- *Bikur cholim* is seen as part of the wider Jewish responsibility to contribute to **repairing a troubled and broken world** - *tikkun olam*.⁸
- **Visitor's are not paid** - It is the moral and spiritual obligation to visit and care that leads to the prohibition from receiving payment for *bikur cholim*.⁹

IN THE IMAGE OF GOD

- Being created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27), we must do as God does, which means **we must be gracious and compassionate**.¹⁰
- **God visited Abraham** when he was not well, so we emulate God by visiting the sick.¹¹

⁶ *Talmud, Nedarim 40a* [39b: "R. Helbo fell ill. Thereupon R. Kahana went and proclaimed:] 40a: R. Helbo is sick. But none visited him. He rebuked them [sc. the scholars], saying, 'Did it not once happen that one of R. Akiba's disciples fell sick, and the Sages did not visit him? So R. Akiba himself entered [his house] to visit him, and because they swept [*kibdo* – also means 'honoured'] and sprinkled the ground before him, he recovered. 'My master,' said he, 'you have revived me!' [Straightway] R. Akiba went forth and lectured: He who does not visit the sick is like a shedder of blood [As in Lev. 19:16]."

⁷ **Nachmanides, *Torah Ha-Adam***, modern edition in *Kitvei Ha-Ramban*, Vol. II, Charles Chavel, Mossad Harav Kook, publishers (Jerusalem, 1963), p.17 - "We understand from this [i.e., the various talmudic passages previously cited, largely from *Talmud Nedarim*] that [the practice or commandment of] *Bikur Cholim* is in order that they should sweep and sprinkle [down the dirt floor] before him and so that they may attend to all his needs that he required relative to his sickness. [On account of their actions] he [i.e., the patient] will derive much gratification *nahat ruach* [literally, "pleasure of the spirit/soul"] from his friends. Additionally, [the commandment is so that] he [i.e., the visitor] will be moved to compassion and he will petition [in prayer] on his behalf..."

⁷ **Psalm 89:31** "A world of *chesed* [loving-kindness] will be built". **'Illness & Healing'**, Jewish Interactive Studies: Online Adult Jewish learning - <http://jewishstudies.org/info/ethics2/samplelecture.htm> "Nachmanides identifies three general objectives that visiting the sick should achieve: 1) Physical assistance: a visitor should try to help in attending to the sick persons physical needs. 2) Spiritual assistance: a visitor should pray to G-d on behalf of the sick person. 3) Emotional assistance: a visitor should be friendly to a sick person, providing him with a feeling of camaraderie."

⁸ **Psalm 89:31** "A world of *chesed* [loving-kindness] will be built".

⁹ *Talmud, Nedarim 39b*. Also see Note 5. (For payment of medical professionals, see note 25.)

¹⁰ *Talmud, Shabbat 133b* "Abba Saul interpreted (Ex 15:2 *zeh eili v'anveihu* – this is my God, and I will glorify him), as 'and I will be like him': [reading *vav-aleph-nun-vav-heh-vav* as the word combination *ani v'hu*] I and He (have to act alike)] be like God: for just as God is gracious and compassionate, so you too be gracious and compassionate."

¹¹ *Talmud, Sotah 14a* "What means the text: 'Ye shall walk after the Lord your God?' [Deut 13:5] ... [The meaning is] to walk after the attributes of the Holy One, blessed be He. ... The Holy One, blessed be He, visited the sick, for it is written: 'And the Lord

- Combining the two principles mentioned here leads to the idea that **the act of *bikur cholim* invites God's presence** to the bedside of the person who is ill.

THE IMPACT OF CARING AND VISITING

- **We are responsible for one another.** And there is social advantage in building bonds of community through mutual acts of kindness and support.¹²
- The community has many roles that it has to fulfill, of which *bikur cholim* is only one. Not everyone can visit, but a visit from one member of the community can be representative of the community. The patient can take comfort in the knowledge that the community is mindful of their situation.¹³
- Visiting the sick extends to conveying to them that **the patient is not alone**, even when, for safety, the visitor must keep some distance.¹⁴
- It is painful and damaging for the patient not to feel the care from others.¹⁵
- We cannot always discern the patient's state of illness or impending recovery. Visit anyway, help anyway, pray anyway. **Visit whenever it is best for helping restore the patient**.¹⁶
- **One's visit might prompt others to help.** A visitor's presence can prompt staff on a ward to remember the patient, and pay closer attention.¹⁷

appeared unto him by the oaks of Mamre', [Gen 18:1, when Abraham was recovering from circumcision] so do [p. 73] thou also visit the sick." Also: *Shulchan Aruch, Yoreh Deah* 335:1 - "It is a *mitzvah* to visit the sick." Note that the Rabbis have been very creative here, in that they claim God visited Abraham because of his invalidity, but the story shows Abraham under a tree at the hottest time of the day, then rushing to entertain the strangers that visit – not the actions of an ill man!

¹² **Maimonides (*Mishneh Torah, Laws of Mourning, 14:1-2*)**. Also: "You shall not stand idly by the blood of your neighbour." (Lev. 19:16) "You shall love your neighbour as yourself" (Lev. 19:18) Genesis 4:9 "Am I my brother's keeper?" The implied response is, 'yes'.

¹³ **Talmud, Bava Metzia 96a** "R. Jonathan said: We find in the whole Torah that a man's agent is [legally] as himself."

¹⁴ **Shulchan Aruch 335:2. Shulchan Aruch 335:8** (and Nachmanides) "When someone is too sick for a face-to-face visit, we should stand outside the door to hear the sounds of suffering" [in order to understand their predicament more closely, and initiate appropriate actions to help.]

¹⁵ See Note 6.

¹⁶ **Talmud, Nedarim 40a** "R. Shisha son of R. Idi said: One should not visit the sick during the first three or the last three hours [of the day], lest he thereby omit to pray [Lit., 'dismiss' his mind from mercies] for him. During the first three hours of the day his [the invalid's] illness is alleviated; in the last three hours his sickness is most virulent." A visitor in the first three hours may think him on the road to recovery, and consider prayer unnecessary; in the last three hours, on the other hand, he may feel that prayer is hopeless.

¹⁷ See Note 6. The Rabbis taught that R. Akiva's visit prompted others present to clean around the patient.

- **Visit as often as is beneficial.**¹⁸
- **Physical touch, or a simple gesture or word of concern or kindness** can make a difference. Connection with others is integral to our healing; we do not heal alone, but in community, with the support of others. And even though we can help others, at times, we ourselves need to reach out for and allow ourselves to be helped.¹⁹
- **Offering Jewish blessings** can connect them reassuringly to Jewish tradition, community and identity: wish them *shalom*; pray for them ‘with the people of Israel’. Wishing for them that God ‘remembers’ them brings consciousness of potential healing; wishing that God ‘visit’ them invites the lived experience of God at their bedside in some form (which may be through care from others).²⁰
- We may not be in a position to heal the patient, or to fix all or even some of the problems that arise, but **even though we may feel inadequate, that does not absolve us of contributing in some way.**²¹
- We cannot always know how much a visit benefits the patient, but **we must trust that visiting makes a positive difference.**²²
- Make a reasonable effort towards the patient’s welfare. God will do the rest.²³

¹⁸ **Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah, Laws of Mourning 14:5*** “One can visit many times in the day. Whoever adds [to this] is praiseworthy, providing one does not trouble [the patient].”

¹⁹ ***Talmud, Berachot 5b*** “R. Johanan once fell ill and R. Hanina went in to visit him. He said to him: Are your sufferings welcome to you? He replied: Neither they nor their reward. He said to him: Give me your hand. He gave him his hand and he raised him. Why could not R. Johanan raise himself [ie cure himself]?— They replied: The prisoner cannot free himself from jail.” *Shir Hashirim Rabba* 11:16 Rabbi Yochanan visited when Rabbi Chanina was ill, and suggested that R. Chanina spoke to himself the same encouraging words he offered when R. Yochanan was ill. R. Chanina explained: “When I was free of sufferings, I could help others; but now that I am myself a sufferer, I must ask others to help me.” ***Talmud, Pirkei Avot 2:5*** “In a place where there is no humanity, strive to be human.” **Maimonides, Letter to Hasdai HaLevi** “The heart’s intention is the measure of all things.” **Rabbi Simkha Weintraub in Sh’ma, March 2003** “Our generation, as those before and after us, will be judged by how we listen to those who are sick and vulnerable and to those who care for them. In the end, there is no them. There is only us.” **Proverbs 16:24** “Pleasant words are like a honeycomb, sweet to the palate and a cure for the body.” **Israeli, *Manhig HaRofeim, ca. 930*** “Comfort the sufferer by the promise of healing, even when you are not confident, for thus you may assist his natural powers.” ***Zohar Gimmel, 299b*** (13th century core text for the Jewish mystical tradition of *Kabbalah*) “a wise physician must do his best first to provide him a healing for his body, and if he cannot do this he must try to find a healing for his soul.”

²⁰ ***Talmud, Shabbat 12b*** “Rabbah b. Bar Hanah said: When we followed R. Eleazar to inquire after a sick person, sometimes he would say to him, [in Hebrew], ‘The Omnipresent visit thee in peace [*shalom*];’ at others, he said, [in Aramaic], ‘The Omnipresent remember thee in peace.’”

²¹ ***Talmud, Pirkei Avot 2:21*** “It is not up to you to complete the work, yet you are not free to abstain from it.”

²² See Notes 5 & 6.

²³ **Weinberg, Noah (2000) ‘Appropriate Effort Even Without Direct Results’** - <http://www.aish.com/sp/f/48970541.html> - “My uncle, Rabbi Avraham Weinberg of blessed memory (who later became the Slonimer Rebbe) lived in Israel during World

PERMISSION TO HEAL, AND TO BE PAID FOR HEALING SERVICES

Although this topic falls outside the subject of *bikur cholim*, it is worth noting that, even in the strictest Jewish observance, healing interventions are regarded as both permissible²⁴ and obligatory. There is no notion that healing should remain the exclusive province of God. And while it is taught that visitors should not be paid (see note 9), doctors and medical professionals are permitted to be paid for their work.²⁵ Certain Jewish professionals are also allowed to be paid for their work on Shabbat.²⁶

SENSITIVITY TO THE PATIENT

- **Visitors must be psychologically aware** of the potential impact of their behaviour. The patient loses some autonomy and control of their personal space. For example, sit at eye level with the patient, and not above them.²⁷

War One. At that time, the situation in Israel was so bad that some Jews actually died of starvation. My uncle was living in Tiberias, where it was nearly impossible to earn a living. So he said to a friend, "We have to make a reasonable effort. Let's go walk from one end of the marketplace to the other, and then back again." They went down to the market, and walked from end to end. On the way back, someone came over to my uncle's friend and offered to sell him some merchandise wholesale. Nobody approached my uncle, so he headed back home to learn Torah. When he arrived home, there was an Arab waiting with three sacks of wheat. The Arab said he had to leave town and needed someone with whom to trust his wheat. He gave the wheat to my uncle and said, "Sell it for me and you'll get a percentage." Instant income! When relating this story, my uncle said: "People might think that going to the market helped my friend, but didn't help me. But that's incorrect. You don't have to tell the Almighty when and where to respond to your effort. You just make an effort -- and the Almighty brings results."

²⁴ **Talmud, Berachot 60a** "On going in to be cupped [a common medical intervention of the period] one should say: 'May it be Thy will, O Lord, my God, that this operation may be a cure for me, and mayest Thou heal me, for Thou art a faithful healing God, and Thy healing is sure, since men have no power to heal, but this is a habit with them [to be cupped]'. Abaye said: A man should not speak thus, since it was taught in the school of R. Ishmael: [It is written], 'He shall cause him to be thoroughly healed.' (Ex. 22:19) From this we learn that permission has been given to the physician to heal."

²⁵ See note 58, Maimonides. Also, **Rosner and Widroff (1997)** "Physician's fees in Jewish law," *Jewish Law Annual*, 1997, vol .12, pp 115-126

²⁶ **Rosner, Fred (2000)** 'Payment For Healing On The Sabbath', *Journal of Halacha & Contemporary Society* XL; Fall 2000, Sukkot 5761 - <http://www.daat.ac.il/daat/english/journal/rosner-1.htm> "Payment for Sabbath work is ordinarily forbidden because of a rabbinic prohibition against conducting business on the Sabbath. But public functionaries, such as pulpit rabbis, cantors, Torah interpreters and their like, are permitted to receive payment for the services they provide on the Sabbath and Holy Days because they perform a mitzvah. It is preferable that they be paid by the week, month, or year so that their Sabbath pay is absorbed or included in services also provided on weekdays."

²⁷ **Talmud, Nedarim 40a** "Rabin said in Rab's name: Whence do we know that the Almighty sustains the sick? From the verse, 'The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing' (Ps 16:4). Rabin also said in Rab's name: Whence do we know that the

- **Silence can be the kinder** and better response, presence more important than conversation.²⁸
- **Deep listening** is a healing gift. Listen with your heart, and listen to the whole person of the patient.²⁹
- **Illness is not 'deserved'**. Don't suggest that a person's illness is because of their sinfulness or that they have brought it upon themselves. This is an important lesson from the story of Job.³⁰ (NB Also see **WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE**, p.11.)
- **The dignity of the patient must be taken very seriously.**³¹ 1) People may not be as clear thinking as usual, when they are ill or distressed.

Divine Presence rests above an invalid's bed? From the verse, 'The Lord sets Himself upon the bed of languishing'. [This is another rendering of the same verse. Rashi suggests another interpretation; for *yisa'denu*, meaning 'he will strengthen him', read (ie alternate perspective on the Hebrew letters) *yesharenu*, 'he will abide with him'.] It was taught likewise: He who visits the sick must not sit upon the bed, or on a stool or a chair, but must [reverently] robe himself and sit upon the ground, because the Divine Presence rests above an invalid's bed, as it is written, 'The Lord sets Himself upon the bed of languishing.' Also **Talmud, Shabbat 12b**: "The *Shechinah* (Divine Presence) rests above the bed of one who is ill." (Gen 47:31 "and Israel bowed on the head of the bed" Rashi: "He [Jacob on his deathbed] turned around to the side of the *Shechinah*. From here [the Sages] deduced that the *Shechinah* is at the head of a sick person")

²⁸ **Job 2:13** "They sat with him . . . no one spoke a word to him, for they saw that his suffering was very great." **Talmud, Pirkei Avot 1:17** "Shimon his son said: All my days have I grown up among the wise and I have not found anything better for a man than silence." Also, see Note 4 – there is no mention of God speaking to Abraham, only of appearing. And the Rabbis taught that the *Shechinah*, the indwelling Divine, was present at Jacob's deathbed (Gen 47:31), but did not speak.

²⁹ **Ps 41:2** "Happy is the one who considers the poor [a person who is weak, sick] ..." **Abraham Ibn Ezra (1089–1167) commentary**: "Some say 'considers' (Heb. *maskil*) means sees; the more correct [interpretation for *maskil*] is to understand with one's heart regarding the patient; and some say *maskil* is an active verb referring to [actual] visiting, speaking to the heart [of the sick person] and understanding him or her." **1 Samuel 3:10** "Speak, for your servant is listening."

³⁰ **Talmud, Bava Metzia 58b** "If he is visited by suffering, afflicted with disease, ... one must not speak to him as his companions spoke to Job, '... who ever perished, being innocent [Job 4:6ff - also, 'where were the upright destroyed?']?"

³¹ **Jane Handler, Kim Hetherington with Rabbi Stuart Kelman (1997) Give me your hand: traditional and practical guidance on visiting the sick**, Second Edition, 2nd edition published by Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkely, California, <https://stanfordhealthcare.org/content/dam/SHC/patientsandvisitors/spiritual-care/docs/bikkur.pdf> - originally published by Adas Israel Congregation, Washington DC 1988, p.4 "Rabbi Harold Schulweiss once suggested that the underlying ethos of *bikur cholim* is the dignity of the human being, the respect for his or her suffering, and the power of community to restore dignity to the patient." **Talmud, Nedarim 41a** "it has been taught by R. Jose b. Parta in R. Eliezer's name, viz., One must not visit those suffering with bowel [trouble], or with eye disease, or from headaches. Now the first is well, the reason being through embarrassment; [He has his bowels frequently moved.] but what is the reason of the other two? — On account of Rab Judah's dictum, viz., Speech is injurious to the eyes and to [people suffering from] headaches." **Nachmanides in Torat Ha-Adam** – restrict visiting anyone who has trouble speaking.

Reminding someone of their well self can help restore their dignity.³² Illness, adversity or dementia can make a person forgetful, or lose sight of their accumulated wisdom and knowledge. We must hold that in awareness on their behalf.³³

- In the event of a visitor staying away so as not to embarrass the patient, **the visitor can still be of help at a distance**, by 'listening to the patient's distress', discerning the patient's needs and help them get met; a visitor can still make contact via phone (or other electronic means, such as text, video call etc).³⁴
- Visit as long as it doesn't inconvenience the patient.³⁵
- **Informing the community** - Don't overreact to illness in the first instance. Consider the possible negative impact of telling people someone is ill. Later on, tell people. Well-disposed people will wish the patient well, pray for them, and mobilize visits and help.³⁶ Making a patient's illness more generally known can help arouse the concern of the community. The patient is reassured to know that they are not isolated, either from the community, or from God, as expressed through community.³⁷

³² **Talmud, Nedarim 41a** "Thou hast turned his bed in his sickness.' (Ps 41:4) R. Joseph said: This means that he forgets his learning. R. Joseph fell ill and forgot his learning; but Abaye restored it to him. Hence it is frequently stated that R. Joseph said, 'I have not heard this law,' and Abaye reminded him, 'You yourself did teach it to us and did deduce it from this particular teaching.'" **Talmud, Pirkei Avot 2:15** "Let your fellow person's honor be as beloved in your eyes as your own."

³³ **Talmud, Menachot 99a** "Which you broke, and you shall put them in the ark. R. Joseph learnt: This teaches us that both the tablets and the fragments of the tablets were deposited in the ark. Hence [we learn that] a scholar who has forgotten his learning through no fault of his [lit., 'by reason of his misfortune'] must not be treated with disrespect." **Talmud, Berachot 8b** "R. Judah says: ... be careful [to respect] an old man who has forgotten his knowledge through no fault of his own, [as a result of illness or struggle for a livelihood.] for it was said: Both the whole tablets and the fragments of the tablets were placed in the Ark." **Job 12:12** "There is wisdom in the aged and understanding in the long-lived."

³⁴ **Shulchan Aruch 335:2. Shulchan Aruch 335:8** (and Nachmanides) When someone is too sick for a face-to-face visit, we should stand outside the door to hear the sounds of suffering [in order to understand their predicament more closely, and initiate appropriate actions to help.] **1 Samuel 3:10** "Speak, for your servant is listening"

³⁵ **Eliezer ben Isaac, Orhot Hayyim, c.1050** "Visit the sick, for sympathy lightens pain ... Fatigue him not by staying too long ... Enter cheerfully, for his heart and eyes are on those who come in." **Ibn Gabirol, Mibhar HaPeninim, c. 1050** "Visiting is like rain: prayed for when withheld, loathsome when overdone." **Maimonides (Mishneh Torah, Laws of Mourning, XV: 5)**

³⁶ **Talmud, Nedarim 40a** "Whenever Raba fell sick, on the first day he would ask that his sickness should not be made known to any one lest his fortune be impaired. [Rashi: "If his illness became known, people might talk about it and thus affect his fate."] But after that, he said to them [his servants], 'Go, proclaim my illness in the market place, so that whoever is my enemy may rejoice, and it is written, 'If your enemy falls, do not rejoice ... Lest the Lord see it, and be displeased, and he turn away his wrath from him [Prov. 24:17-18]', whilst he who loves me will pray for me."

³⁷ **Talmud, Moed Katan 5a** "And he shall cry 'Unclean! Unclean!'; [this teaches that] one must needs make his distress known to many, that many pray for mercy on his behalf."

- **Difficult relationships** - Be sensitive to visiting if you have had a falling out with the patient. Do not enter without the patient's permission. On the other hand, visiting someone with whom you have been in conflict can be an opportunity for reconciliation and healing.³⁸
- **Bereaved patients** - The patient's recovery is more important than responsibilities as a mourner. The visitor is not obligated to inform the patient of the death, as receiving the news could be detrimental to the patient's health.³⁹
- **Crying and laughing with the patient** - Crying with the patient can be healing.⁴⁰ Bring joy whenever possible – humour and jokes can lift the patient's spirits.⁴¹

WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD PEOPLE

Some people believe that personal hardship and illness are a result of spiritual or religious failure on the part of the individual. However, there are many who reject such thinking. However, it is possible that some people, especially when ill, unhappy or vulnerable may slip into self-recrimination, as well as a crisis of faith. It is therefore perhaps worth spending some time exploring one rabbi's response to this.⁴² Harold Kushner, who wrestled with the concept of evil when his son died aged 14, outlines the various ways that people try to salvage their view of God as supposedly reasonable and benevolent, and the world as orderly. He lists the usual rationalisations for misfortune as:

- Someone made a mistake, or failed in the observance of some religious duty.
- God has a hidden purpose, or is making use of knowledge we don't have.
- Suffering itself will turn out to be good for us.
- God's purpose is in the grand design of the Universe (which is good and

³⁸ **Bikur Cholim Coordinating Council**, 'A Digest of Laws of *Bikur Cholim*: A guide for leaders and visitors' - <http://www.bikurcholimcc.org/visiting1.html> "Some say one should not visit his enemy, but others permit it. The patient should never be allowed to feel that his enemy rejoices over his illness. Each case must be judged individually."

³⁹ **Talmud, Moed Katan 26a** "Our Rabbis taught: If one who is ill sustains bereavement, they should not inform him thereof, lest he thereby become distracted in mind; nor do they direct to have any garments rent in his presence and they direct the women to keep silent [from lamenting] in his presence." **Talmud, Nedarim 40a** "It is advised that a sick person not be informed of the death of a relative or friend lest it cause more pain."

⁴⁰ **Talmud, Berachot 5b** "R. Eleazar ben Pedat fell ill, and R. Yohanan came to visit him. ... Then he noticed that R. Eleazar was weeping. So he asked, 'Why are you weeping?' ... R. Eleazar replied, 'I am weeping on account of this beauty of yours, which will in the end waste away in the earth.' R. Yohanan: 'On that account, you surely have good reason to weep.' And they both wept."

⁴¹ **Maimonides, The Preservation of Youth** "In order to strengthen the vital powers, one should employ musical instruments and tell patients gay stories which will make the heart swell and narratives that will distract the mind and cause them and their friends to laugh ..." **Reb Nachman of Bratslav, Likutey Moharan 2:34** "It is even good to do silly things in order to cheer oneself up."

⁴² Harold S. Kushner (1978) When Bad Things Happen to Good People, Random House

- beautiful), not in the life of the individual.
- Suffering teaches something, either to us or to those who see us suffer.
 - Suffering is a test.
 - Death leads us and our loved ones to a better place.

But Kushner steps beyond all this. He sees the events in the world as impartial and random, the laws of the universe as already set, and that God has wound up the mechanism, and stepped back to let it run its course without further Divine intervention. For Kushner, the deciding factor is ourselves. Kushner writes:

"Laws of nature do not make exceptions for nice people. A bullet has no conscience; neither does a malignant tumor or an automobile gone out of control. That is why good people get sick and get hurt as much as anyone. No matter what stories we were taught about Daniel or Jonah in Sunday School, God does not reach down to interrupt the workings of laws of nature to protect the righteous from harm."⁴³

"Pain is the price we pay for being alive. ... When we understand that, our question will change from, 'why do we have to be in pain?' to 'what do we do with our pain so that it becomes meaningful and is not just pointless empty suffering? How can we turn all the painful experiences of our lives into birth pangs or into growing pains?' We may not ever understand why we suffer or be able to control the forces that cause our suffering, but we can have a lot to say about what the suffering does to us, and what sort of people we become because of it. Pain makes some people bitter and envious. It makes others sensitive and compassionate. It is the result, not the cause, of pain that makes some experiences of pain meaningful and others empty and destructive."⁴⁴

This is, of course, Kushner's personal theology and response. His outlook has received criticism from within and outside Judaism. However, he has made an important contribution. And, crucially, his book is not called 'Why bad things happen to good people', but 'When bad things happen to good people. In the context of *bikur cholim*, both the patient and the visitor can learn something from Kushner's central theme, elegantly and concisely expressed:

"All we can do is try to rise beyond the question 'why did it happen?' and begin to ask the question 'what do I do now that it has happened?'"⁴⁵

SPIRITUALITY AND PRAYER

- For a long section on the purposes and effect of prayer, as well as a selection of Jewish prayers, see **PRAYER** (p.18 of this booklet).
- **Treat the patient's space as a sacred place.** The Hebrew word *kadosh*, usually translated as 'holy' literally means 'separate'. The patient's space

⁴³ *ibid.* p.58

⁴⁴ *ibid.* p.64

⁴⁵ *ibid.* p.71

can be considered *kadosh*, a place where we welcome, and are conscious of, the Divine Presence.⁴⁶

- **A visit does not have to include prayer, or even conversation.** Even the most menial tasks can be a way of honouring and encouraging the patient; helping physically has, in Judaism, a spiritual value.⁴⁷
- **Some Rabbis saw prayer as integral to a visit,** and supporting a patient. The advice was to pray even when you think it is not necessary, either because the patient does not seem seriously ill, or because it seems too late to help.⁴⁸
- Remembering the root meaning for *bikur*, to ‘investigate’, a visit can happen with the express purpose of finding out how best to approach God on behalf of the patient. *Bakashat rachamim*, a ‘petition for mercy’, is believed by some to help the ill person survive.⁴⁹
- Visiting the sick can nourish the visitor spiritually.⁵⁰

SHABBAT

- On Shabbat⁵¹ (Friday evening to Saturday evening) Jews often refrain from many weekday activities, but it’s ok for Jews to visit the sick on Shabbat. In fact, it could be especially nourishing for a patient to receive a visit on Shabbat.
- A Jewish patient may feel it is inappropriate for a non-Jewish visitor to greet them with the traditional words of *Shabbat shalom*, or *gut shabbos*. However, a Jewish patient may appreciate it if the non-Jewish visitor acknowledges that for the patient it is Shabbat, and the visitor may sense that it is ok to wish the patient a ‘good Shabbat’ – the visitor could even ask the patient if it is ok to do this.
- Shabbat is a time when Jews are commanded to **be joyful**, so when visiting a patient, in the spirit of Shabbat, aim to focus on positives, and

⁴⁶ See Note 27 (God’s presence above Jacob’s deathbed).

⁴⁷ In Gen. 18:1, God did not speak visiting Abraham; in Gen. 47:31 God did not speak at Jacob’s bedside; in Ezek. 34, God did not speak when healing Israel. Rabbi Akiva, visiting his student (*Talmud, Nedarim 40a*, see Note 6) did not pray or converse; purely physical tasks were identified and attended to.

⁴⁸ See Note 16.

⁴⁹ **Sheer, Charles (2009** – (see reading list), commenting on *Talmud, Nedarim 40a* “When R. Dimi came, he said: He who visits the sick causes him to live, whilst he who does not causes him to die. How does he cause [this]? Shall we say that he who visits the sick prays [Lit., ‘begs mercy for him’] that he may live, whilst he who does not prays that he should die, — ‘that he should die!’ can you really think so? But [say thus:] He who does not visit the sick prays neither that he may live nor die.” Through the lack of his prayers, which might have been accepted, he is said to cause the patient’s death. See also *Talmud, Ketubot 104a*, Note 60

⁵⁰ *Talmud, Nedarim 40a* “Rab said: He who visits the sick will be delivered from the punishments of Gehenna, for it is written, ‘Blessed is he who considers the poor: the Lord will deliver him in the day of evil’ (Ps 16:2).”

⁵¹ Emphasis on the final syllable.

keep your own spirits buoyant.⁵² Focusing on Sabbath celebration and joy (which are traditionally commanded) can bring its own comfort. The due observance of the Sabbath will bring recovery in its wake.⁵³

- It is permissible to disregard many Shabbat rules if it benefits the patient to do so.^{54 55} (See also **LIFE & DEATH, AND MOURNING**)
- Some who are particularly traditionalist may also wish to observe *kosher* guidelines for food, and certain aspects of strict Sabbath observance. For some Jews, observance of *halachah* (the precise rulings about conduct in everyday life and ritual) is central to their expression and experience of spirituality.⁵⁶ If in doubt, it is good for the patient, visitor or medical

⁵² **Talmud, Shabbat 12b** "R. Judah said, 'May the Omnipresent have compassion upon you and upon the sick of Israel.' R. Jose said, 'May the Omnipresent have compassion upon you in the midst of the sick of Israel.' Shebna, a citizen of Jerusalem, on entering would say 'Peace'; and on leaving, 'It is the Sabbath, when one must not cry out and healing will soon come, His compassion is abundant and enjoy the Sabbath rest in peace.' With whom does this dictum of R. Hanina agree: One who has an invalid in his house should combine him with other Jewish sick? [i e., pray for him as one of many.] With whom? — With R. Jose. R. Hanina also said: It was [only] with difficulty that comforting mourners and visiting the sick was permitted on the Sabbath. [Because both induce grief, which is contrary to the spirit of the Sabbath, which is 'a day of delight.']"

⁵³ **Talmud, Shabbat 12a** "Our Rabbis taught: If one enters [a house] to visit a sick person [on the Sabbath], he should say, 'It is the Sabbath, when one must not cry out, and recovery will soon come.' R. Meir said, [One should say] 'It [the Sabbath] may have compassion.'"

⁵⁴ **Shulchan Aruch, Orah Chayim 328:2** "It is a *mitzvah* [commandment] to desecrate the Sabbath for any person afflicted with an illness that may prove dangerous; he who is zealous is praiseworthy while he who asks questions sheds blood." Some who are particularly traditionalist might observe the prohibition, for example, of grinding (e.g. herbs) on Shabbat. However, the Talmud is lenient in the case of grinding or making other preparations for medicine: **Talmud, Shabbat 134a** "R. Simeon b. Eleazar said in R. Meir's name: One may indeed beat up wine and oil. R. Simeon b. Eleazar related, R. Meir was once suffering internally, [Lit., 'in his bowels'] and we wished to beat up wine and oil for him, but he would not permit us. Said we to him, 'Your words shall be made void in your own lifetime!' 'Though I rule thus', he replied, 'yet my colleagues rule otherwise, [and] have never [Lit., 'throughout my days'] presumed to disregard the words of my colleagues'."

⁵⁵ **Talmud, Yoma 85b** "R. Eleazar answered and said: If circumcision, which attaches to one only of the two hundred and forty-eight members of the human body, suspends the Sabbath, how much more shall [the saving of] the whole body suspend the Sabbath!"

⁵⁶ **Goldberg, Rabbi Zvi (Kashrus Administrator)** "The Visitor's *Halachic Guide to Hospitals*' - <http://www.star-k.org/kashrus/kk-HalachicGuidetoHospitals.htm> . Food: "It is permitted to have non-Jews heat up food on *Shabbos* for patients who are ill [Shulchan Aruch O.C. 328:17], however, this leniency does not apply to visitors. If a hot meal is brought for a visitor, he may not eat it until the food has cooled down to room temperature [This assumes the meal was only heated, but not actually cooked on *Shabbat*]. Even if a hot meal was brought for the patient, a visitor may not partake of it until it cools down [Shulchan Aruch 318:2]. There is a *mitzvah* [commandment] to use two whole *challahs* [loaves] for *lechem mishneh* [blessing over the bread]. Bagels or buns may be used instead of *challahs*. If they are sliced, they are acceptable with the following conditions: 1. The two halves are still attached, even if only slightly; and 2. When picking up the smaller piece, the larger piece remains attached and does not break

practitioner to seek the advice of a rabbi who is conversant with the practices and teachings of the patient's Jewish denomination.

- **Healing on the Sabbath is permitted** – Jewish medical practitioners are likely to know this. However, Jewish patients might not, and might think (mistakenly) that their medical needs are forcing a Jewish medical practitioner to break Shabbat rules. The teaching is that it is better to break the rules on one Sabbath in order that a person may survive to have many more Sabbaths. Also, we are taught observance of Jewish principles is intended to preserve life, not to place it in jeopardy.⁵⁷

LIFE & DEATH, AND MOURNING

- **Healing interventions**, including medical ones, are considered compatible with also trusting God. Medical professionals are allowed to intervene, and do whatever they can to save life and help people heal.⁵⁸
- The principle of *pikuach nefesh*, 'saving a life', leads to the idea that we are allowed not to visit if visiting could put our own health or life in danger.⁵⁹
- **Praying when death is near** - One should continue to hope and pray for someone's recovery even when they are near death. However, if it is clear that death is imminent and unavoidable, then one could compassionately pray for someone to die, so they are relieved from suffering. Moreover, when death is inevitable, do not prevent or delay it.⁶⁰

off. Candles: *Hadlakas Neiros Shabbos* [commandment to light Sabbath candles] is an obligation that applies even to someone who is hospital bound. Since hospital regulations forbid the actual lighting of candles in the room, one should light an electric incandescent lamp or flashlight in the hospital room and recite a *brocho* [blessing]."

⁵⁷ **Talmud, Yoma 85b** "R. Simeon b. Menassia said: 'And the children of Israel shall keep the Sabbath.' (Ex. 31:16) The Torah said: Profane for his sake one Sabbath, so that he may keep many Sabbaths. Rab Judah said in the name of Samuel: If I had been there, I should have told them something better than what they said: He shall live by them (Lev. 18:5), but he shall not die because of them."

⁵⁸ **Maimonides** (a doctor) taught that if a healing art, or knowledge from a book were used, that was evidence of God working through that medium. The proof text used for this is Ex 21:18-19 "And if men contend, and one smite the other with a stone, or with his fist, and he die not, but keep his bed; if he rise again, and walk abroad upon his staff, then shall he that smote him be quit; only he shall pay for the loss of his time, and shall cause him to be thoroughly healed." (See also note 25)

⁵⁹ **Lev. 19:16** "Neither shall you stand by the blood of your neighbour." In the case that one must make the choice of saving their own life or that of a companion, Rabbi Akiva states that it is permissible to save your life and not the other. This verdict was rationalized by the biblical verse, "Let him live by your side as your kinsman." Rabbi Akiva determined that the verse implies that "your life takes precedence over his life." "You shall therefore keep my statutes and my rules; if a person does them, he shall live by them: I am the LORD." Lev. 18:5 The rabbis add: "That he shall live by them, *and not that he shall die by them.*" (**Talmud, Yoma 85b**)

⁶⁰ **Talmud, Berachot 10a** "Even if a sharp sword rests on a man's neck, he should not desist from prayer (II Sam. 24: 17), as it says, Though He slay me, yet will I trust in Him (Job 13:15)." **Talmud, Ketubot 104a** "Rabbi's handmaid [a famous character, known for her sagacity and learning] ascended the roof and prayed: "The angels desire Rabbi [to

- **Final prayers to supporting the dying patient:** One can help a patient make peace with people and God, for example through the *Vidui* (a traditional prayer of confession said at *Yom Kippur*). The Bedtime Forgiveness Prayer can also help comfort a dying person. Traditionally, a person's last words might be the first six words of the *Shema*.
- **When someone dies** – The key piece of information here is to know that Jewish people are normally buried within 24 hours of dying. All Jewish communities have very efficient and compassionate procedures in place to make this possible, organized by a group within the synagogue or community called the *chevra kadisha*.
- **Jewish customs around death and mourning** – these have profound psychological wisdom. For more information, see <http://alexandermassey.com/jewish-customs-around-death>.

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- **Friedman, Dayle A. (2005)** Jewish Pastoral Care: A Practical Handbook from Traditional and Contemporary Sources, 2nd Edition Revised and Expanded, Jewish Lights, Woodstock, VT
- **Kohn, Douglas J. (ed) (2012)** Broken Fragments: Jewish Experiences of Alzheimer's Disease through Diagnosis, Adaptation, and Moving On, URJ Press, New York
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join them] and the mortals desire Rabbi [to remain with them]; may it be the will [of God] that the mortals may overpower the angels. When, however, she saw how often he resorted to the privy [he was suffering from acute and painful diarrhoea], painfully taking off his *tefillin* [ritual items which must not be worn when the body is not in a state of perfect cleanliness] and putting them on again, she prayed: 'May it be the will [of the Almighty] that the angels may overpower the mortals'. As the Rabbis incessantly continued their prayers for [heavenly] mercy she took up a jar and threw it down from the roof to the ground. [For a moment] they ceased praying and the soul of Rabbi departed to its eternal rest." **Nissim Gerondi 1340-1380 commentary** on *Talmud, Ketubot* 104a "There are times when one must pray for the mercy of the patients' death, as when he is in great pain and cannot go on living". Also, **Sefer Chasidim par. 723** - One must not prevent a speedy death e.g. the sound of chopping wood being chopped outside the house must be removed, as it prevents the soul departing.

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- **Bikkur Cholim Coordinating Council**, 'A Digest of Laws of Bikur Cholim: A guide for leaders and visitors', compiled from the Shulhan Arukh (16th Century text) & Rabbinic Literature - <http://www.bikurcholimcc.org/visiting1.html>
- **Bikkur Cholim Coordinating Council**, 'What is Bikkur Cholim?' - <http://www.bikurcholimcc.org/whatisbc.html>
- **Goldberg, Rabbi Zvi** (*Kashrus* Administrator) 'The Visitor's *Halachic* Guide to Hospitals' - <http://www.star-k.org/kashrus/kk-HalachicGuidetoHospitals.htm>
- **Handler, Jane; Hetherington, Kim; with Kelman, Stuart (1997)** Give me your hand: traditional and practical guidance on visiting the sick, Second Edition, 2nd edition published by Congregation Netivot Shalom, Berkley, California, originally published by Adas Israel Congregation, Washington DC 1988 - <https://stanfordhealthcare.org/content/dam/SHC/patientsandvisitors/spiritual-care/docs/bikkur.pdf>
- **Jewish Virtual Library** 'Visiting and Healing' - www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Judaism/sick.html
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- **Katz, Nina Dubler**, Yad L'Yad: A Training Manual for Bikur Cholim Volunteers, The Rabbi Isaac N. Trainin Bikur Cholim Coordinating Council, Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services, New York - <http://www.jbfcs.org/programs-services/jewish-community-services-2/rabbi-isaac-trainin-bikur-cholim/video-print/> - .VK-7yCjde10
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- **Massey, Alexander (2014)** 'Jewish customs around death and mourning' - <http://alexandermassey.com/jewish-customs-around-death>
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- **Sheer, Charles (2009)** 'Bikkur Holim: the Origins of Jewish Pastoral Care' – (Director, Department of Studies in Jewish Pastoral Care College of Pastoral Care, HealthCare Chaplaincy) - [http://healthcarechaplaincy.org/userimages/Bikkur Holim final 7-14-09.pdf](http://healthcarechaplaincy.org/userimages/Bikkur%20Holim%20final%207-14-09.pdf) – A similar version of this paper was published in the *Journal of Health Care Chaplaincy*, Vol. XV, Issue #2, 2009, pages 99-113
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Prayer

JEWISH THOUGHTS ON PRAYER

Talking to God

“Even if a sharp sword rests upon a man's neck he should not desist from prayer.”
(*Talmud, Berachot* 10a)

“... intercessory prayers have a long and honored place within Judaism, reaching back to biblical days. Moses prays for Miriam's health, Elijah and Elisha seek the health of people before them. At the close of the book, Job prays for his friends (Job 42:10). Prayer is no more the purview and privilege of rabbis and cantors than are *bikur holim* visits. Anyone can pray. Think of prayer as simply being in conversation with God.” (Taylor and Zucker, 2012)

“Take words with you, and (re)turn to God ...” (Hosea 14:3)

Finding strength

“Prayer is one of the ways a person avails himself of the great spiritual resources of religion. What is prayer? Prayer is the magic wand that opens the gates of Heaven to mortal beings. Prayer is the golden chain that unites a person with his spiritual past in an everlasting bond. Prayer is a song whose silent melody has inspired man to conquer the world and reach for the stars. Prayer can endow man with these potent powers because prayer implies that there is someone to pray to, someone to turn to. Prayer means that man has not been left all alone in a distant and cold universe. Sickness often makes a person feel unwanted and alone. When sickness clutches at an individual and squeezes the joy of living out of him, prayer can give him the strength and the will to fight back.” (Hollander, 'Nursing World')

Expressing our deepest concerns

Prayer “can bring about an emotional release and the regrouping of energies needed to face a crisis: it puts the entire situation in a broader perspective, enabling one to relate a personal nightmare to the human condition, shared by so many others. Prayer not only asks for healing but prepares one for the possibility that the request may not be granted. When the patient knows that prayers are being offered on his or her behalf, the very knowledge that other people care affords strength ... prayer is a life-uplifting plea and a powerful statement of one's deepest values and concerns. We do not expect that prayer will act as an autonomous force guaranteeing recovery.” (Waldman, 1993)

God listens

“That we are heard is the central conviction of prayer. Prayer does not rise or fall upon granting of a wish. That is the prayer of a child who views heaven as a celestial dispensary of gifts. As often as not our requests are denied. ... The Psalmist loves to know that God listens to his prayer, not grants his prayer. But we are granted the object of prayer itself, and that is to be heard ... True prayer is liberation. It releases the imaginings and yearnings of a soul, and relieves -- even if only for a moment -- the fear of being alone, of never being understood.” (Wolpe, 1990)

“All mankind comes to You, You who hears prayer.” (Psalms 65:3)

How prayer ‘works’

Prayer may ‘work’ by evoking God-consciousness, by becoming a centering tool, by transcending the pain and distress, by entering the pain more deeply in order to transcend it, by connecting us to community (including Jewish community and tradition), by connecting us to our inner place of wholeness, by connecting us to blessings and gratitude. (Adapted from Flam, Offel, and Eilberg)

“To pray ... means to bring God back into the world.” (Abraham Joshua Heschel, *Man’s Quest for God*)

Creating personal prayers (National Centre for Jewish Healing, 2002)

- “1) Begin by addressing your prayer. Call that address a name which is comfortable to you. Here are some examples: Source of Life, Creator, Merciful One, Holy One, *Shekhinah*, etc.
- 2) State what is going on at this moment. Be honest. State what you feel about the situation right now. Note any changes or transitions you may be facing. Do not be afraid to express anger and other negative feelings.
- 3) Call out for what you want and or need or hope. You can use words like: help me; guide me; let me; may I; etc.
- 4) If you feel you can, try to include in your prayer an expression of gratitude — naming the good that is present in your life.”

GENERAL PRAYERS

Morning

Modeh [f. modah] ani (traditionally said upon waking, before getting out of bed)

Modeh [f. modah] ani l'fanecha, melech [ruach] chai v'kayam, she-hechezarta bi nishmati b'chemlah, rabah emunatecha.

I offer thanks to You, ever-living King/Ruler [Spirit], that You have returned my soul to me in mercy: how great is Your trust!

Elohai n'shamah

Elohai n'shamah shenatata bi, tehorah hi.

My God, the soul you have given me is pure.

[NB. A fundamental Jewish principle is that, essentially, at their core, every person is pure and good, and has the potential to express this in their lives.]

This day and each additional day ...

"This day and each additional day granted to me, is a gift which I must treasure. It is not for my merits that I am endowed with the favour of life, but so that I may accomplish the purpose for which I was created. Waking up to another day is a sign of God's trust in me.

Modeh ani l'fanecha, melech chai v'kayam, shehechezarta bi nishmati b'chemlah – rabah emunatecha.

I gratefully thank You, living and enduring King, for restoring my soul to me with compassion – abundant is Your faithfulness.

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, hama'avir shenah me- einai ut'numah meiafapai.

Blessed be You, Adonai our God, King of the Universe, who removes sleep from my eyes and slumber from my eyelids.

May I make this new day a special day. May I overcome my weaknesses and radiate around me the light of love, care and joy. May my desire for success and attainment not blind me to the needs and wants of others, especially those I love and those who depend on me. May I be able to make during this day, some real time for myself and my family, and some meaningful space for You. Help me to remember throughout the day, that my time is like a scroll; I need only write on it what I want to remember, lest I run out of parchment." Rabbi Ady Assabi (1947-2003)

Any time

Sh'ma

Sh'ma Yisrael, Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad

Hear, Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One.

Baruch shem k'vod malchuto l'olam va'ed.

Blessed be the Name of His glorious kingdom for ever and ever.

V'ahavta et Adonai Elohecha, b'chol l'vavcha uv'chol nafsh'cha uv'chol m'odecha.

V'hayu had'varim ha-eileh asher anochi m'tzav'cha hayom al l'vavecha. V'shinantam l'vanecha v'dibarta bam b'shivt'cha b'veitecha uv'lecht'cha vaderech uv'shochb'cha

uv'kumecha. Uk'shartam l'ot al yadecha v'hayu l'totafot bein einecha. Uch'tavtam al m'zuzot beitecha uvish'arecha.

You shall love Adonai your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might. Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day. Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up. Bind them as a sign on your hand and let them serve as a symbol on your forehead; inscribe them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates.

[NB The first six words of the *Shema* are perhaps the most important in Jewish consciousness, for religious and secular Jews alike. With them, we identify with tradition, our people, and our personal history. They are said at morning and evening prayer, and traditionally may well be the last words one says before dying.]

Y'varech'cha Adonai

Y'varech'cha adonai v'yishmarecha; ya'eir adonai panav eilecha vichuneka; yisa adonai panav eilecha v'yaseim l'cha shalom.

May the Lord bless you and keep you; May the Lord make His face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; May the Lord lift up His face to you and give you peace.

[Sometimes called the Aharonic or Priestly blessing, this is also said by parents to their children on Friday night, and can also be a general blessing to wish goodness on someone. The word *shalom*, meaning peace, is linked closely to the idea of wholeness and completeness.]

Shehechyanu

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha'olam, shehechyanu v'kiyemanu v'higianu laz'man hazeh.

We praise You, Lord our God, Ruler of the universe, who has given us life, sustained us, and brought us to this joyous time.

[A *Shehechyanu* can be used at any time, as an expression of gratitude for something good happening, especially when it is the first time. For example, it could be said with the patient when s/he comes back onto the ward after surgery, when s/he is able to eat again after being 'nil by mouth', etc.]

Evening

Bedtime Forgiveness Prayer

You, my Eternal Friend, witness now that I forgive anyone who hurt or upset me or who offended me - damaging my body, my property, my reputation or people that I love; whether by accident or purposely; with words, deeds, thoughts or attitudes. I forgive every person who has hurt or upset me. May no one be punished because of me. May no one suffer from consequences for hurting or upsetting me.

Help me, Eternal Friend, to keep from offending You and others. Help me to be thoughtful and not commit outrage by doing what is evil in Your eyes. Whatever sins I have committed, blot out, please, in Your abundant kindness, and spare me suffering or harmful illnesses. Help me become aware of the ways I may have unintentionally or intentionally hurt others, and please give me guidance and strength to rectify those hurts and to develop the sensitivity to not continue acting in a hurtful way. Let me forgive others, let me forgive myself, but also let me change in ways that make it easy for me to avoid paths of hurtfulness to others.

I seek peace, let me BE peace. I seek justice, let me be just. I seek a world of kindness, let me be kind. I seek a world of generosity, let me be generous with all that I have. I seek a world of sharing, let me share all that I have. I seek a world of giving, let me be giving to all around me. I seek a world of love, let me be loving beyond all reason, beyond all normal expectation, beyond all societal frameworks that tell me how much love is "normal," beyond all fear that giving too much love will leave me with too little. And let me be open and sensitive to all the love that is already coming to me, the love of people I know, the love that is part of the human condition, the accumulated love of past generations that flows through and is embodied in the language, music, recipes, technology, literature, religions, agriculture, and family heritages that have been passed on to me and to us. Let me pass that love on to the next generations in an even fuller and more explicit way.

Source of goodness and love in the universe, let me be alive to all the goodness that surrounds me. And let that awareness of the goodness and love of the universe be my shield and protector. Hear the words of my mouth and may the meditations of my heart find acceptance before You, Eternal Friend, who protects and frees me. Amen. (Rabbi Zalman Shachter-Shalomi, 1924-2014)

[Some Jews take the opportunity at the end of the day to do a *cheshbon hanefesh*, an 'accounting of the soul', making peace with the people around them, with themselves, and with God. This text is a modern re-working by my rabbi of a much older prayer.]

Hashkiveinu [excerpt from a longer evening prayer]

Hashkiveinu adonai eloheinu l'shalom, v'ha'amideinu malkeinu l'chayim; ufros aleinu sukat sh'lomecha.

Make us lie down, Lord our God, in peace; and may we rise up, our Ruler, to life; spread over us the shelter of your peace.

PRAYERS WHEN WE ARE ILL

The Angel Song

B'shem Adonai Elohei Yisrael, Mi'mini Michaeil, U'mi-smoli Gavrieil, Mi-l'fanai Urieil, U'mei-achorai R'phaeil, V'al roshi Sh'chinat Eil.

In the name of Adonai, the God of Israel; on my right is Michael; on my left is Gabriel; in front of me is Uriel; behind is Raphael; and above my head is the Divine Presence of God.

[The ending of the *Shema* at bedtime, this prayer can also be used any other time we feel moved to say it. *Michaeil* means 'Who is like God', representing our faith; *Gavrieil* means 'God is my strength', and our support systems; *Urieil* means 'God is my light', ie what gives me hope, meaning, purpose; *Raphaeil* means 'God heals' - through the presence of the previous three.]

Psalms

- Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav (18th century) suggested there were 10 'healing psalms' (16, 32, 41, 42, 59, 77, 90, 105, 137, 150). Rabbi Zalman Shachter-Shalomi liked to substitute Ps 139 for Ps 137.
- There is also a tradition of taking the letters of a patient's Hebrew name, and reciting all the verses from Ps 119 that begin with those letters.
- "Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud: Have mercy on me, answer me." (Ps 27:7)
- "Do not cast me off in old age; When my strength fails, do not forsake me." (Ps 71:9)
- "I say to God, my rock "Why have You forgotten me, why must I walk in gloom oppressed by my enemy?" (Ps 42:10)
- "Out of my distress [lit. 'narrow place'] I called upon the Lord; He answered me with freedom [lit. 'a large place']. (Ps 118:5)

Heal me

R'fa'eini adonai v'eirafei, hoshieini v'ivasheiah; ki t'hilati, atah.

Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved: for You are my praise. (Jeremiah 17:14)

- We can wish for ourselves, or for someone else, three kinds of healing: *r'fuat haguf*, healing of the body; *r'fuat hanefesh*, healing of the soul; and *r'fuah sh'leimah* whole recovery.
- Some give money to charity [*tzedakah*] in connection with seeking healing, as a way to show personal commitment towards healing in the physical world. Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav taught that the best remedy for depression is to give to charity.

Ana b'koach

Ana b'koach gedulat y'mincha tatir tzururah

We beg You, Source of Mercy, with Your strength, untie our tangles.

Kabel rinat amcha sagveinu tahareinu nora.

Accept our prayer-song, raise up Your People, strengthen us, purify us, Great One.

Na gibor dorshe yichudcha k'vavat shamreim.

Please, Strength Itself, for those who seek Your Oneness, guard us as the apple of Your eye.

Barchem taharem rachamem tzidkatcha tamid gamlem.

Bless us, cleanse us, with Your mercy and righteousness may You infuse us.

Chasin kadosh b'rov tuvecha naheil adatecha.

Powerful One, Holy One, with the abundance of Your goodness, guide Your people.

Yachid geyeh l'amecha p'nei zochrei kedushatecha.

Unique and Sublime One, face us with kindness, as we hold in our hearts and minds Your holiness.

Shavateinu kabel ushma tza'akateinu yodea ta'alumot.

Receive our prayer, hear our cry, You who know all that is secret or hidden.

Baruch shem k'vod malchuto l'olam va'ed.

Through time and space, your glory shines, Majestic One.

[In his book All Breathing Life adores Your name: a the interface between poetry and prayer (2011) Rabbi Zalman Shachter-Shalomi writes that "[This prayer] is considered by many to be a very potent passkey that takes our prayers directly to God, even when other avenues are blocked.".]

PRAYERS FOR SOMEONE NEEDING HEALING & PROTECTION

Eil, na r'fa na lah

Eil, na r'fa na lah.

God, please heal her now.

[Moses prays these words as a petition for healing his sister Miriam (Num 12:13). An extra word is often added at the beginning, meaning 'please' – thus, *Ana, eil, na r'fa na lah*. Although the words refer to a female, keeping to ancient ways has meant that this prayer, even in gender-neutral settings, or praying for a male, has been kept to its original wording in modern Jewish communities.]

God of wholeness

God of wholeness, God of healing, hear our words, accept our prayers; send a special blessing of healing to [name] son/daughter of [name of mother, father, or both parents], among all those of Your children who are in need of Your healing blessing. (Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav)

Please bring healing

"Please bring healing to body and soul – God who blessed in times of old, make us whole." (Alexander Massey)

R'fa'einu Adonai ['Heal us and we shall be healed' – from the *Amidah* daily prayer]

R'fa'einu Adonai v'neirafei, hoshieinu ki t'hilateinu atah. V'ha'aleih r'fuah sh'leimah l'chol makoteinu. [Y'hi ratzon milfanecha Adonai Eloheinu velohei avoteinu, shetishlach m'heirah r'fuah shelimah min hashamayim, r'fuat hanefesh v'r;fuat haguf, l'[name] ben [son of] bat [daughter of] [parents' name] b'toch sh'ar cholei yisrael.] melech rofei ne'eman v'rachaman atah. Baruch atah Adonai rofei cholei amo yisrael.

Heal us, Adonai, and we shall be healed. Help us and save us, for You are our glory. Grant perfect healing for all our afflictions. [May it be Your will, Adonai our God and God of our ancestors, to send complete healing of body and soul, to (name) along with others who are stricken.] For You are the faithful and merciful God of healing. Praised are You, Adonai, Healer of the people of Israel.

Mi Sheberach ['May the One who blessed our ancestors ...']

Mi Sheberach Avoteinu: Avraham, Yitzhak, v'Yaakov, v'Imoteinu: Sarah, Rivka, Rachel v'Leah, Hu y'vareich virapei et hacholeh/hacholah _____ ben/bat _____ . HaKadosh Baruch Hu yimalei rachamim alav/aleha, l'hachalimo/l'hachlimah, u-l'rap'oto/u-l'rap'otah, l'hachaziko/l'hazikah, u-l'hay-oto/u-l'hay-otah. V'yishlah lo/lah bim-hera r'fuah shleimah, r'fu-at hanefesh u-r'fu-at hagoof, b'toch sh'ar cholei Yisrael v'cholei yoshvei teivel, hashta ba'agalah u-vizman kariv, v'no-mar, Amein!
May the One who blessed our ancestors -- Patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Matriarchs Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah -- bless and heal the one who is ill: _____ son/daughter of _____. May the Holy Blessed One overflow with compassion upon him/her, to restore him/her, to heal him/her, to strengthen him/her, to enliven him/her. The One will send him/her, speedily, a complete healing -- healing of the soul and healing of the body -- along with all the ill, among the people of Israel and all humankind, soon, speedily, without delay, and let us all say: Amen!

[This is often considered the most traditional prayer for one who is ill. It is usually recited during the Torah service at synagogue. Offering to say it at someone's

bedside is also very comforting and healing. The individual's Hebrew name is often included in this blessing. The name is inserted in the blanks provided.]

There are moments ...

“There are moments when wellness escapes us, moments when pain and suffering are not dim possibilities, but all too agonising realities. At such moments we must open ourselves to healing. Much we can do for ourselves; and what we can do we must do – healing, no less than illness, is participatory. But even when we do all we can there is, often, still much left to be done. And so we turn to Life, to the vast Power of being that animates the universe as the ocean animates the wave, seeking to let go of that which blocks our healing. May those whose lives are gripped in the palm of suffering open, even now, to the Wonder of Life. May they let go of the hurt and meet the True Self beyond pain, the Uncarved Block that is our joyous Unity with Holiness. May they discover through pain and torment the strength to live with grace and humour. May they discover through doubt and anguish the strength to live with dignity and holiness. May they discover through suffering and fear the strength to move toward healing.” (Shapiro, Rami M., 1997, in Prayers for Healing, Maggie Oman, ed., Conari Press, Berkeley)

PRAYING FOR PEOPLE AROUND THE ILL PERSON

“God changed the fortune of Job ...”

“And God changed the fortune of Job, when he prayed for his friends.” (Job 42:10)

[It can be healing for a patient to have positive thoughts, and to feel s/he can still make a contribution. Praying for health care professionals, visitors, family, friends, and all those affected by the patient’s illness, can change the patient’s perspective and improve her/his spirits. Visitors can also pray for those around the patient.]

PRAYERS FOR VISITORS

Blessing for *Bikkur Cholim* Volunteers

Eloheinu V'Elohei Avoteinu V'Imoteinu,

God of our ancestors, ...

We thank You for giving us the *mitzvah* – the commandment, opportunity and privilege - of *bikkur cholim* – visiting those who are unwell,

For giving us hands for reaching and hearts for listening.

We thank You for giving us eyes that gaze into others’ souls,

And we thank You for Your *Shechinah* - Your Divine Presence -

That hovers in the many places we visit.

Elohei HaShamayim, Most High God,

Shine forth Your blessing to the community

Of caregivers gathered here today.

Give us courage and renewed energy

To do our holy work of caring in good faith.

Make us worthy to look upon every sufferer

With clear eyes and open hearts.

May we be

Agents of compassion, representatives of hope,

Messengers of laughter and light.

May our own lives be blessed with wellness and security

So that we may continue to bring to others the gift of ourselves.

And let us say: *Amen*.

[Adapted from an original prayer composed for the closing the 14th Annual Bikur Cholim Conference, NYC, by Rabbi Sara O'Donnell Adler, MetroWest Jewish Health and Healing Center. November 18, 2001]

Prayer for the right words

“God of wisdom, teach me the right words. Teach me the very words that will touch the hearts and souls of others. When a friend needs my understanding ear, teach me the words to say that will strengthen, that will encourage, that will express only my love and concern.” (Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav)

Prayer for silence

“Teach me, ear God, that often the most effective words are no words at all. Teach me how and when to communicate with that most potent gift of silence.” (Rabbi Nachman of Bratslav)

PRAYERS ON RECOVERY

Gratitude for the return of consciousness or a clearer mind

The morning prayer *Modeh ani*, thanking God for life itself (and return of the *n'shamah* 'soul') on waking up has been reframed by Brand (2012). She has suggested we might give thanks for when someone regains lucidity – or more grounded sense of self - after a mental 'absence' (e.g. due to Alzheimer's). We could extend Brand's idea to include the return of consciousness after general anaesthetic or coma. Brand offers the following wordings:

Modeh ani l'fanecha, melech [ruach] chai v'kayam, she-hechezarta bo nishmato baz'man hazeh, b'chemla, rabah emunatecha.

I offer thanks to You, ever-living Ruler [Spirit], that You have restored his *n'shamah* to him, at this moment, in mercy: how great is Your trust.

Modeh ani l'fanecha, melech [ruach] chai v'kayam, she-hechezarta ba nishmata baz'man hazeh, b'chemla, rabah emunatecha.

I offer thanks to You, ever-living Ruler [Spirit], that You have restored her *n'shamah* to her, at this moment, in mercy: how great is Your trust.

[Medwin, Michelle Brand (2012) 'Alzheimer's and the Soul: a new perspective', in Douglas J. Kohn (ed) Broken Fragments: Jewish Experiences of Alzheimer's Disease through Diagnosis, Adaptation, and Moving On, URJ Press, New York, pp.114-122]

Min hameitzar (Ps 118:5)

Min hameitzar karati Yah; anani b'merchav Yah.

"Out of my distress [lit. 'narrow place'] I called upon the Lord; He answered me with freedom [lit. 'a large place'].

Birkat hagomel [Blessing on recovery]

Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu melech haolam, hagomel l'chayavim tovot, shegemalani kol tov.

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, ruler of the universe, graciously showing kindness to those in Your debt, even as You have bestowed favour on me.

[Response by others] *Mi shegemalcha (f. shegemalech) kol tov, hu yigmalcha (f. yigmalech) kol tov selah.*

May God who has been gracious to you continue to favour you with all that is good.