

The Mitzvah of Visiting the Sick –
Some instructions from the “Kitzur Shulchan Orekh”
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CODE OF JEWISH LAW

CHAPTER 193

Visiting the Sick

1. When a person gets sick, it is the duty of every one to visit the sick individual, for we find that the Holy One, visits the sick. As our Rabbis, of blessed memory, explained (Talmud, Baba Mezia 86b) 'the verse (Genesis 18:1): "And the Lord appeared unto Abraham in the plains of *Mamre*," from this is inferred that God came to visit Abraham (after his circumcision) while he was healing.

When we observe the mitzvah of bikur holim we are engaging in Godly behavior

Relatives and friends who are accustomed to visit him often, should visit him as soon as they hear of his sickness. But strangers should not call immediately lest the ill individual think he is severely ill and lose hope. If, however, one becomes suddenly and severely ill, even strangers should visit him immediately.

When visiting the sick we want to buoy their spirits. The concern here is that if people rush to see someone, the patient may think it is to say goodbye. But in the case where a person may not recover, it is important for people to make it very clear how much they care and love the person.

Even a great man should visit a less important person, and even many times, during the day. It is meritorious to visit a sick person as frequently as possible, providing it does not weary them.

We don't stand on ceremony when visiting the ill. No one should consider the mitzvah beneath their dignity.

3. The essential reason for the precept of visiting the sick is to look into hers or his needs, to see what is necessary to be done for the person, and to pray for mercy on hers or his behalf. If one visited a sick person and did not pray for that person, he did not fulfill his duty.

There are two goals in visiting the sick: to help them with their needs – whether it be providing encouragement, food, or offering to help with chores while they are under the weather – and to pray for them. The prayer can be as simple as wishing that God should send a “refuah shlemah”, a complete and speedy healing.

10. We must not visit a person who is afflicted with intestinal pains so as not to embarrass him, nor one who is troubled with his eyes, or one who has a headache, or any person who is gravely ill and to whom conversation is difficult; but we should call at an outer room, inquire regarding their condition, and ascertain if they are in need of anything. We should take an interest in their condition and pray for mercy on their behalf.

The issue here is the dignity of the patient. Intestinal pains or according to traditional halacha, eye trouble may make the patient uncomfortable with visitors (maybe because they can't see the visitor?). Someone with a headache or who has trouble speaking may

find visitation difficult. In such cases where we think a visit may be a burden, it is better to send a note or get a message to them that we were concerned and care about them.

12. A non-Jew should be visited during his illness.

It is important that we note how our tradition insists that when it comes to illness, we are obligated to assist non-Jews as well as Jews in healing.