

PRACTICAL BIKKUR HOLIM
A GUIDE FOR VISITING THE SICK

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Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of Requirements for Ordination

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Los Angeles, California

March 24, 2014
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Introduction

Every Jew will encounter illness in some capacity in his or her lifetime. It is my hope that when they do get sick they will also encounter *bikkur holim*, the Jewish practice of visiting the sick. However, *bikkur holim* remains a topic foreign and intimidating to many people who are not formally trained to visit the sick in hospitals or in homes. There are incredible barriers in the practice of visiting the sick, yet every person will need this kind of visit at some point in his life. Many people feel that they do not know what to do or say in a hospital room or have had a personal experience that makes it difficult for them to enter a hospital or nursing home. Some people are not comfortable with prayer or do not feel that they know enough of Jewish prayer and tradition to use it in this setting.

I became interested in *bikkur holim* after receiving a *bikkur holim* visit when my father was in the hospital. I was living in Jerusalem during my first year of rabbinical school. When my father fell gravely ill, I came to the United States to visit my family during winter break. While sitting at his hospital bed where he was in an induced sedated state, a local rabbi came for a visit. I knew this particular rabbi well although he did not know before entering the room that the patient was my father and that I would be there; he was simply making his rounds of Jewish patients in the hospital at the time. He offered several prayers on behalf of my father and spent time talking with me. I do not remember exactly what we spoke about but I remember being comforted and uplifted at a time when I was lonely and afraid. It was from that experience that I began to learn the value of *bikkur holim* and knew that I wanted to pursue it in my rabbinate. It was in my third year of rabbinical school

that I asked for an internship placement at UCLA medical center. When the school year ended I knew this was an aspect of the rabbinate that would continue to be incredibly important to me.

Bikkur Holim is a central aspect of Judaism and is considered so important that it is said to have “no maximum measure,”¹ that one cannot perform it too many times. It is a *mitzvah* that equally incumbent on all Jews regardless of their sex, movement affiliation, or knowledge of Jewish law. It is such an important task that Maimonides states that if you neglect visiting the sick it is as if you had shed blood.²

For liberal Jews, the notion of commandment (*mitzvah*) and strictness of *halacha*, (Jewish law), do not necessarily make us feel bound to perform a certain deed. However, *bikkur holim* is such an important task that even though we are not necessarily bound to the commandments, we still try to emulate God in this powerful way.

In our morning prayer service we offer a blessing of gratitude to be created in the image of God. It is part of our Jewish tradition to live our lives in such a way that we try to live up to being the reflection of God in the world. One way of enacting our divine image is to act like God in so far as we are able through the holy task of *bikkur holim*. Suggestions of how to do this can be found in a Talmudic *midrash* on Genesis 18. After Abraham’s painful circumcision, God visits him for comfort and support, “Adonai appeared to him by the oaks of Mamre as he was sitting at the opening of the entrance to the tent at the hot time of the day.”³ The rabbis expand

¹ From *eilu devarim* prayer based on *peah* 1:1.

² Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah Hilchot Avel* 14.

³ Genesis 18:1

on this story as a profound statement on our responsibility to emulate God through caring for others, including the action of *bikkur holim*.

R. Hama said in the name of R. Hanina: What does it mean ‘ You shall walk after the Lord your God’? (Deuteronomy 13:5). Is it possible for a person to walk and follow God’s presence. Does not the Torah also say “For the Lord your God is a consuming fire?” (Deuteronomy 4:24). But it means to walk after the attributes of the Holy One, Blessed be He. Just as He clothed the naked, so you to clothe the naked, as it says, “And the Lord made the man and his wife leather coverings and clothed them” (Genesis 3:21). The Holy One, Blessed be He, visits the ill, as it says, “And God visited him [Abraham] in Elonei Mamreh” (Genesis 18:1); so you too shall visit the ill. The Holy One blessed be He, comforts the bereaved, as it says, “And it was after Abraham died and that God blessed his son Isaac...” (Genesis 25:11), so too shall you comfort the bereaved. The Holy One, blessed be He, buries the dead, as it says “And He buried him [Moses] in the valley” (Deuteronomy 34:6) so you to bury the dead.⁴

The midrash explains that while human beings cannot emulate God by being a “consuming fire,” we can emulate God in other ways. One of these ways is by visiting the sick just as God visited Abraham. By engaging in the holy task of *bikkur holim* we are reflecting God’s presence in our world.

In my experience working as a chaplain in hospitals and congregations, I met patients who spent days, weeks, or months in the hospital or sick at home without a visit from their fellow congregants and Jewish friends. While the hospital chaplains or congregational rabbi can provide a great deal of comfort and support, a visit from somebody who knows the patient in a more intimate way can provide more comprehensive spiritual care.

Even though most liberal Jews would agree that *bikkur holim* is an important task, it is not a main aspect of living a (liberal) Jewish life. Many synagogues may

⁴ Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Sotah 14a.

have a committee devoted to *bikkur holim* but in practice those committees do not receive the attention or devotion from both clergy and congregants that would make them successful. Organizations such as the Kalsman Institute and the National Center for Jewish Healing are working to incorporate *bikkur holim* into our daily Jewish experience by offering trainings and information to those who seek it. These organizations are important resources in the field, but this work can also be done on the congregational and individual level as well; and this is the goal of this guide.

This handbook for guiding lay people through *bikkur holim* visits will help break down the barriers to visiting sick people in hospitals and at home. By drawing from traditional and contemporary Jewish texts as well as from the experiences of contemporary rabbis and chaplains in the field I will dismantle the barriers that prevent lay people from the holy task of *bikkur holim*.

Relevant Literature

This guide incorporates Jewish texts from *Tanach* (Hebrew Bible) as well as Rabbinic literature including *Midrash* and the Talmud, *Maimonides' Mishneh Torah*, and the *Shulchan Aruch*. I gather Jewish liturgy from antiquity to the modern period, and incorporate Jewish philosophical sources such as Rabbi Nahman of Breslov. I also use contemporary anthological Jewish sources such as rabbinic counseling books, and other books on *bikkur holim* to supplement the texts.

There is a lot of secondary literature that has been written on *bikkur holim*, especially from the Orthodox Jewish perspective.⁵ These educational texts and practical guides provide *halachic* overviews of *bikkur holim* using the mandate of Jewish law and language that may be unfamiliar to liberal Jews. While they are informative, they are not easily accessible for the non-orthodox Jew who may not interact with Jewish law texts regularly.

There are also a plethora of works written on the topic of how to treat friends and family who are dealing with illness.⁶ These books provide firsthand accounts of illness and death, but do not incorporate Jewish text and tradition.⁷

This guide combines the different approaches of classical Jewish texts and contemporary experience to offer a broadened and accessible practical study of *bikkur holim*. By bringing together traditional sources, theologies, practical guidance on visiting, contemporary experiences, and an appendix of texts and prayers on healing, this guide provides a distinctive and useful resource for learning about and performing the holy task of *bikkur holim*.

⁵ Some titles include: *To Walk in God's Ways*, by Joseph S. Ozarowski, Yisrael N. Levitz and Abraham J. Twerski, eds., *A Practical Guide to Rabbinic Counseling* (New York: Feldheim, 2005). And Bat Tova Zwebner and Chana Shofnos, *The Healing Visit: Insights into the Mitzvah of Bikur Cholim* (New York: Feldheim, 1989).

⁶ Some titles include Joan Didion, *Blue Nights* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2011). And Henry J.M. Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer* (New York: Doubleday, 2010) and Sherwin B. Nuland, *How We Die* (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

⁷ One such book is: Letty Cottin Pogrebin, *How to be a Friend to a Friend in Need* (New York: Public Affairs, 2013).

Structure

This guide is split into three chapters: Traditions of Healing Prayers, Varied Responses to Suffering, and Practical *Bikkur Holim*. There is also an extensive appendix that includes the text of each piece studied throughout the guide for your reference in English, Transliteration and Hebrew/Aramaic where indicated.

The first chapter entitled “Traditions of Healing Prayers,” details the history and origins of the *Mi Shebeirach* prayer for healing. It also provides examples and analysis of various other prayers to use at the bedside both from the liturgy itself as well as from sources throughout the *Tanach* and *siddur*. There is a discussion of spontaneous and personalized prayer that includes instructions on how to create your own individualized prayer for each patient you encounter.

The second chapter entitled “Various Responses to Suffering” provides several texts that exemplify different Jewish responses to suffering. This chapter is meant to broaden a visitor’s understanding of Jewish responses to suffering as one may encounter a variety of views during your *bikkur holim* visits. This chapter will not tell you what to say or do in those situations, nor will it suggest a “correct” response to suffering. This chapter will provide opportunities for the visitor to explore what Judaism says about suffering from various perspectives so that she may better understand the perspective of the *choleh* as well as her own perspective on suffering in order to better support the *choleh*.

The final chapter entitled “Practical *Bikkur Holim*” is a guide for making *bikkur holim* visits from the moment you hear of the *choleh*, through the visit itself. Here

the reader will learn what several Jewish texts teach about when to make visits, what to do and say during a visit, and why this task is so important.

A Note on Terminology

Throughout the guide I will refer to the patient or sick person as *choleh*. This title is an acknowledgment that the *choleh* is in a temporary state of sickness and not permanently defined by it. By referring to the *choleh* instead of the “patient” my goal is to reinstate the humanity of the individual by moving away from technical jargon. Furthermore, many of the Hebrew texts will refer to the *choleh* and using this term consistently will connect the reader to the texts and tradition. I will refer to the act of visiting the sick using the Hebrew term *bikkur holim*. Additionally I will refer to the Bible as *Tanach*, meaning *Torah* (the first five books), *Nevi'im* (the prophets), and *Ketuvim* (the writings including Psalms). I will also refer to the prayer book using the Hebrew word *siddur*.

Appendix

Following the final chapter in the guide is an appendix of sources for the visitor’s reference. It contains the Hebrew text and translation of each text studied in the guide as well as the text of psalms and prayers for healing discussed in the guide. It is my hope that the reader will use this appendix as a resource for their visits, choosing appropriate texts and prayers for their own study as well as use at the bedside.

Chapter One

Traditions of Healing Liturgy

There is an expansive tradition of healing liturgies in Judaism, acknowledging that prayer at the bedside can be an essential part of the healing process. Whether one prays with a traditional and fixed liturgy or formulates one's own spontaneous prayer, the act of engaging with God and another human being can provide a sense of meaningful spiritual healing and connection between the visitor and the *choleh*.

Rabbi William Cutter writes, "The hope for intervention is a vertical approach, a directional description of the clunky word 'theurgy' (influencing God's actions).

Engagement with one's community is the horizontal piece; it's about shared, participatory, and ultimately, cultural bonding."⁸ Judaism recognizes that connections between human beings and between humans and God can provide meaningful connections in difficult times. Prayers for healing said on behalf of the *choleh* by a visitor is one way of linking the relationships among people and between human beings and God and can play a significant role in the spiritual healing of the individual and community.

How Prayer Can Help at the Bedside

When someone is sick at home or in the hospital, he feels vulnerable and isolated. Enhancing those feelings, he is often referred to as a "patient" or "sick person," removing his individual identity and he may feel that his existence is

⁸ William Cutter, "A Prayer for Healing", *Shema* June 2011, 4.

permanently connected with his illness. Through a *bikkur cholim* visit he is reminded that his illness does not define his existence and he can find comfort in the presence of a caring friend.

Rabbi Hara Person suggests that a visitor's prayers for healing can offer hope to the *choleh* by showing him that even though her body is out of balance, her soul can still be complete. When the visitor feels that he cannot do anything to help, that the visited is in such physical distress that it seems there is no way to pray for healing, this prayer offers hope and wholeness for the *choleh*.⁹ Often when the visitor finds herself in the state of helplessness, she may feel more useful by praying with the *choleh*. When she cannot perform surgeries or physical interventions, prayer offers both the visitor and the *choleh* a sense of hope and control. The visitor helps the visited by reminding him that he still has a God-given soul worthy of healing.

***Mi Shebeirach* Prayers for Healing**

No matter how rarely an individual attends *Shabbat* services or an adult education class in a synagogue, when sickness comes the first response is often prayer. Judaism provides a rich tradition of prayers for healing from the most well-known *mi shebeirach* prayer to some perhaps lesser known prayers, as well as rubrics for creating our own healing prayers.

⁹ Hara Person, "Introduction," in *The Mitzvah of Healing*, ed. Hara Person (New York: Women of Reform Judaism/UAHC Press, 2003), xvii.

When asked about healing prayers, most liberal Jews would refer to the prayer that begins “*Mi Shebeirach*.” Most liberal/Reform congregants know the version that Debbie Friedman set to music. While these prayers are meaningful and important ways for sick congregants to connect with God during difficult times of illness, they are not the only Jewish prayers for healing. In fact, the familiar form of the *mi shebeirach* prayer we know today has a long history of spontaneous and personalized prayer.

The History of *Mi Shebeirach* Prayers

Before the *mi shebeirach* became the standard healing prayer, it was a formula for prayers for a variety of personal and communal needs. It is first recorded in Mishnah Ta’anit (c. 200 CE) as a prayer for rain in a drought:

“מי שענה את אברהם בהר המוריה, הוא יענה אתכם,”

“May the one who answered Abraham on Mount Moriah, also answer you.”¹⁰ Each *tefilat mi shebeirach*, (*mi sheberach* prayer), follows a similar rubric. “There are *Mi shebeirach* prayers for every kind of illness, and almost every kind of relationship; there are *Mi shebeirach* prayers for people who refrain from gossip, for people who maintain responsible business ethics.”¹¹ There are examples of *mi shebeirach* prayers for public leaders such as Moses Montefiori and those for entire communities such as those people who disappeared from Budapest in 1943 praying for their safe return. The *mi shebeirach* prayer originated as a form of spontaneous

¹⁰ Mishnah Ta’anit 2:4, Hebrew from sefaria.org

¹¹ Cutter, “Prayer for Healing,” 5.

and personalized prayer and has since turned into a fixed piece of liturgy primarily used for healing.¹² The history of this prayer shows us that prayers for healing are constantly evolving and becoming fixed forms of liturgy. By adding to this tradition of reciting new prayers for healing and creating our own, liberal Jews are continuing this rich tradition.

One example of a *mi shebeirach* prayer for healing comes from Vienna in the late 16th century. This prayer draws upon biblical characters who dealt with illness to bring comfort to the *choleh*.

May the One who blessed our forefathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Moses and Aaron, David and Solomon and the early Pious (who is this referring to?) who sweetened the waters at Mara through Moses our teacher, and who cured Miriam the Prophetess from her leprosy and who healed the waters of Jericho through Elisha and healed Hezekiah the King of Judah from his illness and Benjamin the tzaddik from his, may He bless and heal xxx ben/bat yyy who is ill in that xxx has donated to Tzedaka on his/her behalf. Out of that recompense may God heal and strengthen him/her, give him/her be consistent or just say it in one gender life and health and strength; and make him stand firm and send him a foil of healing for his body, his flesh, and his limbs amidst all of the ill of Israel- now, speedily and soon and let us say, amen.

Another example comes from Worms, Ashkenaz and Konitz in the mid-18th century:

May the One who blessed our ancestors, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and who cured Hezekiah the King of Judah from his illness, and Miriam the Prophetess from her leprosy and Na'aman from his leprosy, and who sweetened the waters of

¹² Cutter, "Prayer for Healing," 5.

Marah through Moses our teacher and the waters of Jericho through Elisha, may he bless and cure ____the son of ____, on account of the Tzedaka that he pledged. On account of this, may the Makom guard him and save him and help him and cure him and sustain him on his bed of pain, and send him a complete healing, to all his body and his limbs, amidst all those in Israel who are ill, Amen.

Looking at several *mi shebeirach* prayers it is clear that while each prayer follows the same rubric, they call upon different biblical and historical figures and connect the tradition to the specific needs of each person in need. This practice of personalizing the prayer through connecting different figures to the individual has all but disappeared since the emergence of a fixed form of the *mi shebeirach* for healing. These *mi shebeirach* prayers were eventually codified and became a fixed form prayer for healing. These examples of *tefilot mi shebeirach* provide us with a paradigm for individualized spontaneous prayer. By connecting the individual to the tradition by invoking the patriarchs and biblical stories and characters, the visitor forms a personal connection with the individual and strengthens their bond with God and the tradition.

The tradition of creating *mi shebeirach* prayers for healing has become widely practiced in Judaism and several have become fixed pieces of liturgy used both in the congregation and at the bedside. A version of the traditional *mi shebeirach* prayer for healing from the National Center for Jewish Healing is as follows:

Mi shebeirach avoteinu avraham, yitzhak, v'yaakov, v'imoteinu sarah, rivka, rachel v'leah, hu yivarech virapei et ha holehholahben/bat.....

HaKadosh Baruch Hu yimalei rachamim alav/aleha, l'hahalimo/
l'hahalimah, ul'rapoto/ul'rapotah, l'hahaziko/l'hahazikah ul'hahayoto'ulhahayotah.
V'yishlach lo/la bim'hera r'fuah shleima r'fuat hanevesh ur'fuat haguf, b'toch sha'ar
holei yisrael hashta ba'agalah uvizman kariv. vnomar amen

May the One who blessed our ancestors- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, bless and heal the one who is ill:son/daughter of.....

May the Holy One, the fount of blessings, shower abundant mercies upon him/her, fulfilling his/her dreams of healing, strengthening him/her with the power of life.

Mericful one:

Restore him/her,

Heal him/her,

Strengthen him/her,

Enliven him/her.

Send him/her complete healing from the heavenly realms, a healing of body and a healing of soul, together with all who are ill, soon, speedily, without delay; and let us say: Amen!

This prayer offers a basic format for asking God for healing and can bring comfort to the *choleh* and his family during a time of illness.

Debbie Friedman's *Mi Shebeirach* Prayer for Healing

Debbie Friedman's *mi shebeirach* prayer is a beautiful contemporary interpretation of the *mi shebeirach* prayer rubric that has been used for thousands of years. The use of this prayer during the Torah service in most American liberal congregations is an example of how prayers for healing can be used outside of the sickroom to bring communities together.

Perhaps because of the prevalence of Friedman's arrangement of *mi shebeirach*, it is a commonly requested prayer in the hospital room and sickbed. When the *choleh* knows that the community is reciting this prayer on his behalf and

in his absence, he feels connected to them even without being physically present. However, this prayer also transcends the physical space of the synagogue and communal worship service. The music and words evoke a power of spiritual companionship between the *choleh* and the visitor and can be used as an effective tool for spiritual healing in the hospital room as well. During my time at UCLA Medical Center, most liberal Jewish patients specifically asked me to sing this prayer with them and their families, and it often evoked a strong sense of connection and hope. One of the first patients I saw in the hospital had just received a liver transplant and her body was rejecting the organ. She was very sick and members of her family spent many hours with her every day. On my first visit I asked if I could offer a prayer of healing and without flinching, her sister suggested I sing the *mi shebeirach* and she hummed the first few lines. They had heard this prayer sung for others and now they needed to hear its familiar message and tune.

Debbie Friedman's setting of Mi Shebeirach:¹³

Mi She'beirach avoteinu, m'kor ha'bracha l'imoteinu

May the source of strength, who blessed the ones before us

Help us find the courage, to make our lives a blessing,

And let us say, Amen.

Mi She'beirach imoteinu, m'kor ha'bracha l'avoteinu

Bless those in need of healing with *r'fuah shlemah*

The renewal of body, The renewal of spirit

And let us say, Amen.

¹³ The text and musical notation for this prayer can be found in the appendix.

Examples of Prayers for Healing

If reciting the traditional *mi shebeirach* prayer for healing or other formalized healing prayers is not desired, but spontaneous prayer seems cumbersome or too difficult, there are a variety of other prayers from tanach and Jewish tradition that can infuse a visit with meaning and divinity.

For example, there is a prayer for restoration of health from the 17th century:

Elohei oz tefilati

refa'einu ve'erafeh

ve'ten marpeh l'machlati

l'val amut v'esafeh

l'val amut v'esafeh

Lecha odeh v'odi chai

b'toch re'ai v'gam achai

v'arbeh mahalal sichai

b'kol arev v'niv yafeh

b'kol arev v'niv yafeh

Yeshu'at'cha tevo'ayni

v'al raglai teki'mayni

b'shuvi od elay chani

l'tovat'cha ani tsofeh

l'tovat'cha ani tsofeh¹⁴

God of Strength I pray

Heal me and I will be healed

And give me healing for my sickness

That I won't die or be destroyed

I will give thanks for more life

Amongst my neighbors and my brothers

And I will increase my praise in my conversations

In a pleasant voice and a beautiful utterance

Bring me salvation and

Stand me on my feet

When I turn to my maker

I look forward to Your goodness¹⁵

This beautiful poem speaks of the salvation that comes from being fully healed and standing before God's presence.

Many have found the biblical book of Psalms to be meaningful during an illness. Rabbi Nachman of Breslov (1772-1810) compiled a list of specific psalms

¹⁴ Abraham Lopes Cardozo, *Sephardic Songs of Praise*, (Berkley: Tara Publishing, 1987), 35.

¹⁵ The Hebrew text and musical notation for this prayer are in the appendix

that may bring healing: 16, 32, 41, 59, 77, 90, 105, 137, 150.¹⁶ Rabbi Nachman wrote of these psalms:

The way of the comprehensive remedy is to first work to uplift and enhance the mind and intellect so as to draw cleansing from there to rectify all of one's failures. This comprehensive remedy must be effected first and then all of the individual details will be remedied by themselves. It may be that the comprehensive remedy is higher and more exalted than the individual remedy for each detail. Nevertheless, the remedy for each one depends on bringing down cleansing from the soul and spirit. The mind can only be elevated through the comprehensive remedy. This is why it is first necessary to go to the higher level, the level of the comprehensive remedy, so as to rectify and elevate the mind. Then everything else will also be remedied as a matter of course.¹⁷

Rabbi Nachman suggests that suffering is partly related to "one's failures." This brings us to a difficult theological question - does suffering from illness have to do with one's deeds? While many generations of Jews have felt there is such a connection, it may not resonate with many of us. This question is addressed in chapter three.

¹⁶ The text of these Psalms is found in the appendix. While analysis of specific psalms for healing is not included in this guide, a good resource is Rabbi Simkha Weintraub's book Healing of Soul, Healing of Body.

¹⁷ Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, Likutey Moharan 1:29, 1-2. Quoted in Rabbi Kerry M. Olitsky, *Jewish Paths Toward Healing and Wholeness* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 2000), 62.

Spontaneous Prayers for Healing

While the traditional fixed prayer can bring meaning to someone who connects to traditional fixed prayers, using spontaneous and personalized prayer is an opportunity to connect between the visitor and the *choleh*.

Rabbi Julia Weisz offers some examples of prayerful moments that do not include the *mi shebeirach* prayer for healing. Rabbi Weisz uses meditations and rituals with patients who are reluctant to pray at first. Some prayers she uses are the *haskiveinu* prayer from the evening liturgy. This prayer asks God to spread over us a *sukkat shalom*, a shelter of peace, over us. The words of the *haskiveinu* prayer are as follows:

Hashkiveinu, Adonai Eloheinu,
L'shalom, v'haamideinu shomreinu l'chayim,
Ufros aleinu sukat sh'lomecha,
V'takneinu b'eitzah tovah milfanecha,
V'hoshi-einu l'maan sh'mecha.
V'hagein baadeinu,
V'haseir mei-aleinu oyeiv, dever,
V'cherev, v'raaav, v'yagon,
V'harcheik mimenu avon vafesha.
Uv'tzeil k'nafecha tastireinu,
Ki El shomreinu umatzlieinu atah,
Ki El chanun v'rachum atah.
Ushmor tzeiteinu uvo-einu

L'chayim ul'shalom,

Mei-atah v'ad olam.

Baruch atah Adonai,

Haporeis sukat shalom aleinu

V'al kol amo Yisrael v'al Yerushalayim

Grant, O God, that we lie down in peace,

and raise us up, our Guardian, to life renewed.

Spread over us the shelter of your peace.

Guide us with Your good counsel; for Your Name's sake, be our help.

Shield us and shelter us beneath the shadow of Your wings.

Defend us against enemies, illness, war, famine and sorrow.

Distance us from wrongdoing.

For You, God, watch over us and deliver us. For You, God, are gracious and merciful.

Guard our going and coming, to life and to peace, evermore.

Praised are You, Adonai, Guardian of Israel, whose shelter of peace is spread over us, over all Your people Israel, and over Jerusalem.¹⁸

Rabbi Weisz comments, "a lot is out of our control in the hospital and we are faced with how out of control we are, and that's why hospitals are so scary." By reciting a prayer for peace and shelter we can acknowledge that while we are out of

¹⁸ Translation from *Mishkan Tefilah*, 42.

control and scared, we can be comforted under God's shelter of peace, even for just the moment we recite the prayer.

Rabbi Weisz also uses Psalm 121 in situations where she thinks people will get comfort from visualizing God's peaceful shelter during a time of vulnerability.

The words of Psalm 121 speaks of turning to God for protection and help and can be a powerful image for someone who is seeking security and safety during a time of illness.

Psalm 121

A song for ascents.

I turn my eyes to the mountains; from where will my help come?

My help comes from Adonai, maker of heaven and earth.

God will not let your foot give way; your guardian will not slumber;

See, the guardian of Israel neither slumbers nor sleeps!

Adonai is your guardian, Adonai is your protection at your right hand.

by day the sun will not strike you, nor the moon by night.

Adonai will guard you from all harm;

God will guard your life.

Adonai will guard your going and coming now and forever.

Rabbi Julia Weisz suggests using Psalm 23 in a time of illness. She notes that the valley of the shadows is one of the greatest metaphors we have for loneliness. Everyone walks through valleys of different lengths in their lives and the psalmist reminds us that there's always somebody there with you; the memory of a

person, your partner, your counselor, your puppy, God. This psalm reminds you that you are never alone.

In addition to Psalms, there are many texts both from *Tanach*, and the liturgy that can be used in situations of illness. One such prayer is Moses's desperate cry for the healing of his sister Miriam found in the biblical verse (Numbers 12:13) "*Eil Nah Refah nah lah*" meaning "So Moses cried out to Adonai saying, 'O God, pray heal her!'" In this verse, Moses cries out to God to heal his sister Miriam. This is not a formal piece of liturgy but rather it is a wail from the heart of Moses straight to God.

This verse is set to music and is often used during Jewish healing services. It is an example of spontaneous prayer from Torah that has become a fixed prayer that we can use today when we cannot find our own spontaneous prayers.

Another prayer that resembles parts of the *mi shebeirach* prayer for healing was written by Rabbi Nachman of Breslov and can easily be recited word for word or built upon at the bedside:

God of wholeness,
 God of healing,
 envelope us
 with wholeness
 and well-being.
 Heal us in body and soul.
 Let all the elements of our bodies
 work together
 in perfect symmetry

and in peaceful harmony.

Remove every trace of illness,

every hint of infirmity;

send the healing which you alone can bring.¹⁹

Rabbi Bonita E. Taylor writes, “prayers are not restricted to words in a siddur written by sages long ago. Jewish tradition teaches that the heart’s cry to God is the highest form of all prayer.”²⁰ Though spontaneous prayer can be difficult for many visitors, personalized prayer can be meaningful and offer spiritual healing in a time of illness. By practicing and learning more about the practice of spontaneous and personalized prayer it is my hope that the visitor will become more comfortable utilizing this meaningful tool at the bedside.

When Prayer is Not Natural for the Visitor

Why pray for healing at all when we are not sure if our prayers will aid healing? It may be hard for many of us to pray because we may not have experienced God as One who hears prayers and answers, or because we feel that we led good lives and are still afflicted. Perhaps instead of rejecting the practice of prayer or belief in God altogether, someone in that situation may learn to reject a certain theology that he does not agree with and then look for a better way to suit his

¹⁹ Moshe Mykoff and S.C. Mizrahi, *The Gentle Weapon: Prayers for Everyday and Not-So-Everyday Moments* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 2012), 10.

²⁰Rabbi Bonita E. Taylor, “The Power of Custom-Made Prayers,” in *Jewish Pastoral Care*, ed. Rabbi Dayle A. Friedman (Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 2010), 151.

beliefs. In this way, tailoring a prayer to the needs of the individual can help that individual transcend both their theological barrier to prayer, but forget his suffering, if only for a moment. Rabbi Richard Hirsch suggests that healing liturgies provide us with a format for spiritual healing. He writes:

Jewish healing formats that allow this affirmation gently to surface help in the task of transcendence, for they remind us that even as we are more than our illness, we are also more than our bodies; we 'are' also souls, affirmed by Jewish tradition as eternal.²¹

Many liberal Jews may have difficulty believing that prayers to God will directly influence their lives, for example by healing illness. Often people find that engaging in the act of prayer alone or with another person can help in finding spiritual healing, *refuat hanefesh*, even when physical healing is out of one's hands. Sometimes even reciting the familiar words of a prayer can be a source of comfort and strength, even when it may not be the "correct" words or prayer for the occasion.

Rabbi Pearl BarLev tells a story of an adult child of a patient who marked her parent's passing with a truly heartfelt Hebrew prayer. She writes, "The patient had been making her meds palatable by mixing them with Maneshvitz wine. When the patient died, the adult child of the patient poured a glass of the wine, stood at the foot of the bed, raised the cup and said with great intent and depth: *Baruch ata adonai eloheinu melech haolam hamotzi lechem min haaretz*."²² Truly a great moment on the efficacy of ritual for emotional support, and the beauty of amassing

²¹ Rabbi Richard Hirsh, "Reflections on 'Healing' in Contemporary Liberal Judaism," in *The Mitzvah of Healing*, ed. Hara Person (New York: Women of Reform Judaism/UAHC Press, 2003), 30.

²² This is the blessing said over bread

one's Jewish blessings memory to sanctify this moment." From this story we learn that engaging in the act of prayer can offer spiritual support and comfort. Often someone may not know the right words to say or the correct prayer for the occasion, but the memory of reciting certain prayers can elicit a nostalgic response that is comforting during a time of vulnerability.

While shadowing chaplains and rabbis in hospital visits I observed a practice that seemed to connect the *choleh* to prayer most successfully. Often patients and families are reluctant to pray because they do not feel that their words will be eloquent or meaningful. On these occasions the chaplain asked the patient and the family what they would pray for. Then, as the chaplain offered a spontaneous prayer for healing, she wove those prayers of the patient and family. This action both offered meaningful and personalized prayers for healing, but also models for the family how to turn the words of their hearts into prayers for healing. In a time when you may not know the *choleh* well, asking him and his family to participate in the process of creating the prayer can enable you to provide them spiritual comfort and support through the action of spontaneous personalized prayer.

Reciting spontaneous prayers can be nerve-racking and difficult at first. Rabbi Dara Frimmer suggests that the visitor work on being present in the moment and not to worry about the words themselves. She emphasizes the importance of being patient with oneself and not focusing on what you do not know but letting your presence guide you. She also says it is important to be willing to "start off clumsy" and that it will get easier with time.

Using a rubric from the *Mi Shebeirach* Prayers for healing

Based on the traditions of *tefilot mi shebeirach* I present a rubric for creating one's own personalized prayers for healing. For those uncomfortable with spontaneous prayer it may be a good place to start using the traditional wording, but personalizing the prayer for each patient.

May the One who blessed:

Forefathers and Foremothers such as Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Rachel, Leah, Sarah, Rebecca and/or a reference to the *choleh's* ancestors.

AND/OR

Specific people healed in the Jewish tradition such as but not limited to:

Miriam healed from skin disease(from Numbers 12)

The Waters of Jericho for Elisha (from 2Kings 2:19)

Hezekiah healed from stomach sickness (Isaiah 38:1)

May God also bless (name) son/daughter of (name)

With healing of (Specific type of healing such as certain aspect of the illness or spiritual healing)

Options for physical healing may be: "Help her recover from this infection," or "Help her regain her strength and balance."

Options for spiritual healing may be: "Grant her comfort and support from friends and family," or "grant her a comforted soul."

And let us say, Amen.

Using this rubric, I wrote a prayer for a terminally ill man near the end of his life.

Mi shebeirach avoteinu....

Who gave hope to Job

Who strengthened Samson

Who sweetened the bitter waters for Moses and the Israelites,

Bring *this choleh's* loved ones near to him and may they all be comforted together, Just as Jacob and Esau came together for their father.

Enliven him, Strengthen him, help him stand before *hamakom* with a pure heart.

Send him love and strength

and we say, amen

Alternatives to Prayer

When the traditional prayers for healing or even the texts from Bible and the prayerbook do not feel appropriate, the visitor can use tools such as music, or even an engaged presence by showing signs of active listening, eye contact, supportive responses, and appropriate uses of touching. In this way, the visitor can offer support and spiritual healing to the patient. Various methods of “prayer” alternatives are discussed below; each visitor is encouraged to experiment in this area to find her own style in offering spiritual support to a patient.

Using Music

Many connect to God through music. This helps if someone is not familiar with the words of a prayer, or if the music, such as Debbie Friedman's tune for the *mi shebeirach*, is associated with healing. While Friedman used music in conjunction with prayer for healing, she was not the first to do so. In fact, there is an instance in the *Tanach* of music used for healing in 1 Samuel 16:14-23.

But the spirit of Adonai departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from Adonai

troubled him. And Saul's servants said to him, 'Behold now, an evil spirit from

God troubles you. Let our lord now command your servants, who are before you, to seek out a man who knows how to play on a lyre; and it shall come to pass, when the evil spirit from God is upon you, that he shall play with his hand, and you shall be well.'

And Saul said to his servants, 'Provide me now a man who can play well, and bring him to me.' Then answered one of the servants, and said, "behold, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who knows how to play, and a fine warrior man, and a man of war, and prudent in speech, and a handsome person, and Adonai is with him.' And Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said, 'Send me David your son, who is with the sheep.' And Jesse took an ass laden with bread, and a skin of wine, and a kid, and sent them with David his son to Saul.

And David came to Saul, and stood before him; and he loved him greatly; and he became his armor bearer. And Saul sent to Jesse, saying, 'Let David, I beseech you, stand before me; for he has found favor in my sight.' And it came to pass, when the evil spirit from God was upon Saul, that David took a lyre, and played with his hand; so Saul was refreshed, and was well, and the evil spirit departed from him.

In this story, King Saul is feeling depressed and in need of spiritual support. His servants suggest that a musician be brought to soothe. When the musician came,

the song indeed soothed Saul. It became a ritual for Saul when he was feeling depressed that he would employ music to refresh his soul. We use this practice often in contemporary times as well and music can be used in the hospital room and at the bedside to offer spiritual comfort.

In the early months of my chaplaincy internship at UCLA Medical Center, I was the only Jewish chaplain in the hospital when I received a page that a patient was dying and the family requested a rabbi. This was my first time receiving a page with this message and I had no idea what to do or say, so I looked to my bookshelf for help. I grabbed several books and manuals and headed upstairs to the ICU. As soon as I entered the room and saw the family huddled around their loved one whom a nurse was attending. I set the books aside and knew that there was no time to find the perfect set of prayers. My first instinct was to get to know the patient so I asked the family about him. They told me he was a Holocaust survivor came to the United States on a *Kindertransport* and spent the rest of his life educating people about the Holocaust and working to ensure that it could never happen again.

After several minutes, the patient's granddaughter said that every week Grandpa had led the family in Shabbat prayers and now that he is dying they do not know what to do. I had brought grape juice, challah and candles from my office and led the family in the prayers and songs welcoming Shabbat. The granddaughter told me that one of his favorite songs was *Oseh Shalom* gathered everyone close to one another and close to the patient and we sang these beautiful words for peace together. Several verses into the song, he opened his mouth and uttered one verse

as he drew his last breath. With tears in all of our eyes, we acknowledged the holiness of this moment and recognized that something incredible had happened. The music and the prayer reached beyond his senses and his participation at the end of his life brought together soul to soul, and soul to God. In this situation music offered comfort when spoken words could not. By singing the *choleh's* favorite song we connected to one another and to him for a moment of spiritual healing enabled by music.

I knew that none of the traditional prayers for healing would be appropriate for the family, but I knew that my presence would guide them to peace. Looking back on this story I find it telling that while I came to the room with books filled with liturgy, the prayer I found came from the patient. He provided the most moving and transformative prayers. From this experience I have learned that it is important to know the liturgy and know the myriad prayers for healing; but it is equally important to know when to use the liturgy and when to think creatively and offer song, presence, and peace.

Using Presence as a Form of Healing Prayer

Rabbi Glenn Ettman tells a story of a patient who was not very eager to pray for healing or talk about the end of his own life. Rabbi Ettman says, “He was a pain and didn’t want to talk. He was watching Dodger game and I asked to watch with him – after twenty minutes watching with family around, he kicked them out and said he was ready to have the “end of life talk.” It was an opportunity to guide him to hear the right questions and find his own personal answers.” This story is a great example

of a time when a visitor listened to the needs of the patient and did not immediately offer prayer or guidance. This story demonstrates how listening and connection are also forms of meaningful prayers for healing.

Conclusion

Prayers for healing play an important role in *bikkur holim*, even when prayer is not understood in the traditional manner. By learning more about various types of fixed liturgies for healing, spontaneous prayer, and alternatives to prayer, the visitor can develop his or her own style in order to offer spiritual comfort to the *choleh*. Using fixed liturgy such as the various forms of the *mi shebeirach* prayer for healing can provide a sense of comfort and hope to the *choleh* when the visitor feels it is desired and appropriate. In other situations, perhaps when the *choleh* is not familiar with those liturgies, spontaneous and individualized prayer may feel more comfortable. In this case the visitor can use the model set forth in those liturgies by utilizing the rubric for creating an individualized *mi shebeirach* prayer for healing. When the visitor feels that liturgy will not be comforting to the *choleh* he can use texts from *Tanach* or the *siddur*. Even still, when the visitor does not feel that those methods of prayer will work in a particular situation, alternatives to prayer can offer a sense of presence to the *choleh* that offers him spiritual healing. By learning various methods of prayer the visitor will better be able to enter a hospital room and assess the needs of the *choleh* and feel equipped to offer him spiritual support.

Chapter Two

Varied Responses to Suffering

The Central Question: Why Me?

I spent a year working in two hospitals as a rabbinic and chaplaincy intern. At UCLA medical center I visited every Jewish patient in the hospital, offering “shabbat bags,” (which included grape juice, challah, electric candles, and a prayer sheet) which were usually more of a nicety than a necessity. Most often, I simply offered my presence. At the beginning of my internship I left the hospital every day and cried for the entirety of my two-hour drive home. During my hours spent in the hospital I saw unimaginable suffering and simply could not absorb it or understand it all. I learned quickly that it was not my task to absorb it, nor was it really my task to understand it, but that it was my duty to be present for those who experienced it.

The most common questions I was asked by patients in the hospital during that year were:

“Why is this happening to me?”

“Why is God doing this to me?”

“I’ve been such a good person, why do I deserve this?”

How could I possibly answer these questions (questions that are only asked in the midst of suffering and feelings of brokenness) while staring into tear-filled eyes from a body and spirit in pain? At the same time, I felt compelled to listen to their questions, hear their concerns, and help them feel heard and supported. These questions are not new. The reason for human suffering has been a source of curiosity and searching in Jewish tradition since Rebecca asked why her pregnancy

put her through so much suffering,²³ and since Job asked for the reason for his suffering.²⁴

Jewish text and tradition provides responses to suffering. Some people may agree with one view and not with others, but through this exploration of the varied Jewish responses to suffering the reader will be exposed to several Biblical and Rabbinic texts as well as theologians and contemporary understandings of Judaism and suffering in order that she become better equipped to respond to the patient in her presence.

Suffering as Punishment from God

Deuteronomy 28 provides a model for an orderly theodicy²⁵ describing a society in which God punishes humans for their sins. Today, many people cannot accept a world in which God punishes us directly for our sins, especially with consequences found in this passage such as pestilence,²⁶ fever, consumption, and drought.²⁷ However, this theodicy provides us with a world in which one is never left wondering why he is suffering. The text indicates that acts of nature such as drought and famine are consequences for disobedience to God.

²³ Genesis 25:22

²⁴ Job 3:19

²⁵ Theodicy is being used here as a theology of suffering. That is, a theological attempt to answer the question of suffering, which may include evils such as genocide but also categorical suffering such as illness.

²⁶ Deuteronomy 28:21

²⁷ Deuteronomy 28:22

Another example of a Jewish response to suffering is found in the biblical book of Job. Job, a pious man, believes that God gives all things in life: good and bad. After hearing the news of his children's death he responds saying, "Naked I came out of my mother's womb and naked I will return. Adonai gave and Adonai has taken away. Blessed be the name of Adonai."²⁸ Job finds himself in a maelstrom of suffering and anger with God. Through his pain and rage Job struggles to find answers from a God whom he feels has betrayed him. Finally, (after thirty eight chapters) God responds to Job's questions with a challenge saying, if you think you're so smart and powerful, "where were you when I laid the earth's foundations."²⁹ God reminds Job that while his suffering is legitimate, he is a small part of the world and his suffering is not the only aspect of God's world and God's existence. God does not demand that Job retreat in silence and finally offers Job some solace in his search for answers. God comforts Job by reminding him that his suffering is legitimate and should not be ignored (by Job himself or by God). God appears to Job out of the whirlwind and demands that Job stand up for himself and acknowledge his pain saying, "Gird your loins like a man."³⁰

In the end Job does not die from his suffering. He takes whatever recompense he can and he lives again. The book of Job ends saying, "Job lived one hundred and forty years to see four generations of sons and grandsons. So Job died old and contented."³¹ In the midst of his pain he needed reassurance of God's

²⁸ Job 1:21.

²⁹ Job 38:4.

³⁰ Job 40:7.

³¹ Job 42:16-17.

existence, and in God's answer to Job he remembered that life is bigger than his suffering and that he can move on from it. He made it through his suffering not by rejecting God, but by struggling with his questions and facing his own pain.

During my internship at UCLA I had few patients to visit and since it was Chanukah my mentor suggested I visit the pediatric floor. I was always extremely uncomfortable at the pediatric floor and at her urging I choose a few children from the list, grabbed a bag of dreidels and gelt and headed upstairs. I met a young girl who was just admitted to the hospital earlier that week. She was in the room with her mother and father and the mood was tense and mournful. I noticed that the mother seemed agitated and wanted to talk more, but not in front of her daughter. I asked her to talk a walk with me and immediately after we left the room she began talking. She told me the story starting the week before when her daughter started feeling tired, collapsed at a soccer game, and was rushed to the hospital where they diagnosed her with cancer. She explained that for the past week she had supported her daughter that she had not slept or left the hospital since they arrived. She also mentioned that she had not had a chance to talk with anyone about how she was dealing with all of this, until I walked into the room.

We spoke of many things during the hour visit: her connection with the Jewish community, how she used to believe in God but she was not sure how she can given her daughter's illness, her worries and concerns for her family, how she was going to give her family a meaningful Chanukah. She could not understand why her daughter and their family were being punished like this. Why was God doing this to them when all they've done is tried to be good Jews?

I personally do not believe that God punishes us with illness, and I was fairly certain she did not believe that either, but she was definitely feeling punished. I told her that questioning God from places of pain has a long history in Judaism and that she was not alone in her pain and fear. I shared with her examples from the story of Job and helped her see that questioning why this is happening is healthy and natural. Mostly I reaffirmed her need to lament. She needed to talk, and I knew in that role I needed to listen and be present with her in her pain.

Suffering as Love from God

The Rabbis of the Talmud also struggled with the question of suffering. Berakhot 5a-b tells a story of *yisurim shel ahava*, sufferings of love. There is a theodicy found in this text. God is the cause of suffering, suffering is brought as an act of God's love and one should accept the suffering with the same love that God offered it in order to transcend suffering. There is an assumption in the Talmud that this should be a widely accepted theodicy and response to suffering. However, the Talmud tells a story that acts as a comprehensive rejection of the idea of *yisurim shel ahava*, sufferings of love. Berakhot 5a includes a discussion between the rabbis what constitutes suffering for its own sake or suffering of love (as in chastisement). Raba suggests:

If a man sees that painful sufferings visit him, let him examine his conduct.

For it is said: *Let us search and try our ways, and return unto the Lord*. If he examines and finds nothing [objectionable], let him attribute it to the neglect of

the study of the Torah. For it is said: *Happy is the man whom thou chastened, O Lord, and teachest out of Thy law.* If he did attribute it, and still did not find, let him be sure that these are chastenings of love. For it is said: *For whom the Lord loves, He corrects.*³²

The discussion that follows argues whether all suffering constitutes suffering of love or if some things are exempt from that, such as the death of children:

Raba (some say R. Hisda) says: If a man sees that painful sufferings visit him, let him examine his conduct. For it is said: *Let us search and try our ways, and return unto the Lord.* If he examines and finds nothing [objectionable], let him attribute it to the neglect of the study of the Torah. For it is said: *Happy is the man whom thou chastened, O Lord, and teachest out of Thy law.* If he did attribute it, and still did not find, let him be sure that these are chastenings of love. For it is said: *For whom the Lord loves, He corrects.*

In this text we can see that the rabbis are struggling to reconcile their theology of an all powerful God with what they see as unnecessary suffering (such as the death of children) for those people who do not deserve it (because they study Torah and perform acts of charity). The Talmud then offers a parable of illness and healing to suggest a solution. Rabbi Yochanan experienced the tragic death of 10 of his children. He carries the bone of one child with him and shows it to people to comfort them as if to say, this tragedy happened to me and I study Torah and

³² Babylonian Talmud Berachot 5a

perform acts of charity, so the fact that it is happening to you does not mean that you deserve to suffer.

The next section of text tells a parable of healing using the concept of *yisurim shel ahava*.

R. Hiyya b. Abba fell ill and R. Yochanan 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 up.

R. Yochanan 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 up.

Why could not R. Yochanan raise himself?

They replied: The prisoner cannot free himself from jail.

Rabbi Elazar became sick.

Rabbi Yochanan came to see him.

He saw that he was lying in a dark place. Rabbi Yochanan uncovered his arm and light fell from it.

He saw that Rabbi Elazar was crying.

He said to him: Why are you crying? If you are crying because you did not accomplish enough Torah, surely we have learned: it makes no difference whether you accomplish a great deal of Torah or a small amount, as long as your heart is directed toward heaven.

Or if it is because you had little money to sustain yourself- not every man earns two tables.

If it is because you didn't have a lot of children or any in fact, see, here is the

bone of my tenth son.

He said to him: Surely that is what you are crying for.

So the two of them cried.

Either way he said to him: Is your suffering pleasing to you?

He said to him: Neither it nor its reward.

He said to him: Give me your hand.

He gave him his hand, and he lifted him up.

Here the Talmud indicates that whatever the purpose of these afflictions, the sufferer wants to be healed from them, not to embrace the relationship with a God who supplied the suffering. The patient is screaming out; “No! I do not want this suffering and I do not want to understand them or deserve them!” This experience resonates well with those who suffer today. In the midst of one’s suffering, the response is often, “I am suffering and I don’t know why, and right now I don’t care, I just want it to end.” Rabbi Yochanan addresses this suffering by reaching out his hand and listening to the other person.

Rabbi Yochanan puts each patient through his own process of searching and questioning before they can be lifted up by him. This suggests that perhaps the searching process is a necessary part of the healing process but most important is the presence of another human being. The interaction with each patient forces the healer to confront his own suffering. The healing does not come from the explanation for suffering that he presents. Healing comes from the human relationship, expressed through touch and sitting with each other in the sadness.

This story teaches that presence and touch can uplift someone and offer them healing. Rabbi Richard Hirsh also teaches that “The simple gesture of holding

a hand becomes an endorsement of dignity. Healing of body is supported by the comfort of contact.”³³ Even when a person is dealing with a view of their suffering that may be difficult for the visitor to understand, presence and active listening to their story can offer them spiritual healing without offering answers or theological challenges.

God is Not Responsible for Suffering

Many people will be familiar with Harold Kushner’s When Bad Things Happen to Good People.³⁴ It offers a response to suffering that many people may find comforting in the midst of their pain. While many people may be asking “Why is God doing this to me?” what they may mean to articulate is “Why is this happening to me?” They may be blaming God for their suffering when it is not necessarily how they actually feel. Kushner offers a theology that might be helpful to people who ask those questions. He suggests that humans cannot understand the evil and randomness in the world, but that God is not intimately involved in what happens to humankind. The *choleh* may bring this theology to the conversation with the visitor and be comforted by it even though the visitor may not agree.

Kushner’s theology suggests that the sufferer did nothing to deserve the suffering and therefore God is not doing this to her. Rather than feeling punished by God, Kushner recommends that people feel supported and comforted by a good God who is the grounding of all good values. Furthermore, Kushner suggests that

³³ Person, Hara. The Mitzvah of Healing, 29.

³⁴ Harold S. Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Avon Books, 1981).

God is not intimately involved in the day-to-day events of the human world and therefore cannot cause suffering.

For someone in the midst of her suffering who has not explored theology in the past, this response to suffering could be very comforting. Kushner presents a theology with a very limited God who cannot be responsible for the bad things that happen to humans, but who also cannot be responsible for the good things that happen. This makes prayer in community very difficult since a lot of what Jews do in communal prayer is praise God for the everyday miracles God performs for humans, and ask God to intervene.

Conclusion: How to Respond to Different Theologies

Part of a visitor's work is finding alternative frameworks for *cholim* to view their situations. The visitor should not tell the *choleh* what to think, but rather help the visitor assess his or her situation realistically and find help from a professional chaplain or rabbi when a more in depth spiritual or theological conversation is warranted. Rabbi Richard Hirsch writes that "we need a model of healing in which the congregation and the congregant share expectations as to the path to healing and the challenging personal spiritual work that this requires- and which the community supports."³⁵ By creating a model of healing and a shared understanding of how to approach the situation, the visited person will feel heard by the visitor and will feel more equipped to move through their suffering with heartfelt accompaniment.

³⁵ Person, *Mitzvah of Healing*, 26.

Rabbi Pearl BarLev recalls a patient she once saw in the psychiatric unit. This patient was depressed and withdrawn when Rabbi BarLev first met her after a suicide attempt. She describes the patient as someone who used to believe so strongly in God but after several crises in her life simply cannot believe in God anymore and saw no point in living in a world where God can do such terrible things to people. Through their conversations in several visits, Rabbi BarLev helped the patient move from a theology that was trapping her in her suffering to a theology that allowed her to free herself from the vengeful God she had been experiencing.

The theology that worked for someone in the past may not still work for her after a time of crisis. In fact, our theologies change as we progress through our lives and various events and situations. As Kerry Orlitsky wrote, “Our beliefs about God and healing should be constructed along a progressive continuum that reflects the various stages of our suffering and our faith. We experience different facets of God as we move through our lives, and our belief in God changes as we progress through these experiences.”³⁶ And so, a visitor who is educated in various theologies will sensitize himself to his own assumptions, allowing room for the patient’s point of view and offering presence and support in the *choleh*’s confusing and vulnerable time.

³⁶ Rabbi Kerry M. Olitsky, *Jewish Paths Toward Healing and Wholeness* (Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 2000), 21.

An Exercise for Those Experiencing Suffering

There will be times when the visitor does not know how to respond to the *choleh's* pain and suffering. The *choleh* may be so angry with God, themselves or the world for their situation that they cannot hear a visitor's perspectives, no matter how well-meaning. An exercise from Rabbi Nachman of Breslov can help the visitor and the *choleh* face the suffering he is experiencing without offering a new theology. He suggests a silent screaming exercise when there is so much anger and pain inside that one needs to express.

“You can shout loudly in a “small still voice” (1 Kings 19:12).

With this soundless “small still voice,” you can scream without anyone else hearing you.

Anyone can do this. Just imagine the sound of such a scream in your mind. Depict the shout in your imagination exactly as it would sound. Keep doing this until you are literally screaming with the soundless “small still voice.”

When you depict this scream in your mind, the sound is actually ringing inside your brain. You can stand in a crowded room screaming in this manner, and no one will hear you.

Sometimes when you do this, some sound may escape your lips. The voice reverberating in your nerves may activate

your local organs. They might then produce some sound,
but it will be very faint.

It is much easier to shout this way without words. If you wish
to express words, it is much more difficult to hold the voice in
your mind, and not let any sound escape. Without words it is
much easier.”³⁷

This exercise offers both the *choleh* and the visitor an opportunity to face the
suffering without discussing their differing theologies.

When a visitor encounters a *choleh* with a different theology from his own, he
may experience a barrier to offering spiritual support to this *choleh*. However, by
learning about various theologies and Jewish responses to suffering, the visitor can
be better equipped to support *cholim* who bring many modes of thinking about their
suffering. Whether or not the visitor agrees with a particular theology, he can offer
the *choleh* spiritual support in a basic manner. When the visitor sees that he cannot
connect with the *choleh*'s theology, he can offer an engaged presence, listening to
the *choleh*'s story and offering responses that indicate he cares. The visitor may
also help the *choleh* work through his suffering through exercises such as Rabbi
Nachman of Breslov's silent scream, allowing the *choleh* to release his anger and
pain in a safe and comforting environment. The visitor should not try to argue or
teach the *choleh* about new theologies in this setting, but rather should offer a

³⁷ Rabbi Nachman of Breslov, *Sichot haRan*, 16. Cited in Facing Illness Finding God by Rabbi
Joseph B Meszler (Woodstock: Jewish Lights Publishing, 2010) 163-4.

comforting presence, aided by his knowledge and background in various Jewish responses to suffering.

Chapter Three

Practical *Bikkur Holim*

When asked why they do not make hospital visits often, many people may respond, “I wouldn’t know what to do or say.” Jewish tradition provides a framework for visiting a *choleh* from deciding when to visit, where to stand, and what to say.

Rabbi Glenn Ettman provides an example of his first time visiting a patient in the hospital without his mentor by his side. He was in his fourth year of rabbinical school in a pastoral care internship under the mentorship of Rabbi Rick Steinberg. Rabbi Ettman says that “Rick knew I hated pastoral work.” Rabbi Steinberg told Rabbi Ettman that he was going out of town and suggested several patients that needed visits. When Glenn showed up to the hospital that day, Rabbi Steinberg was there waiting for him. He told him they would go together to visit a patient who had a routine hip replacement. As they neared the room, Glenn knew this was no ordinary hip replacement patient but that rather, they were entering the neurology floor. As he walked up to the patient’s door, expecting his mentor to enter ahead of him, Rabbi Steinberg backed away and told Glenn he was doing this visit alone. As Glenn entered the room he learned that this patient was a man who had a stroke on the operating table while having brain surgery and was now fully conscious but non-communicative. Glenn recalls the story: “I made eye contact with the patient- I could see him smile with his eyes. I talked very briefly and uncomfortably with him.

“I’m just here to visit- not to make anything better.” I said a quick prayer for him and said I’ll come back in a little bit. I turned and walked away and looked at Rick who said ok let’s go to the next person.”

Rabbi Ettman thought he was not prepared for a visit like this and for a while he let it prevent him from making tough visits alone. It took a push from his mentor to show him that all he needed to do was walk in the door and that he would know what to do from that point on. He had learned the prayers and procedures he needed to learn, and all of his preparation made it possible for him to walk into a room without knowing what to expect, and offering spiritual support to a man in need. Rabbi Ettman reflected on this experience years later offering advice to people when they are hesitant to make a visit saying; “I honor their reticence- tell them how difficult it was for me to start doing that work. My mentor knew that I was petrified and literally pushed me into a room and walked away. Then I would tell them what I did that moment and even now: imagine you’re that person in the hospital bed. What do you want from a visitor? And give what you would want. As a congregant in a hospital room it’s not your job to wax poetic or be theological, that’s the rabbi/chaplain’s job. Just remember that what Jews do is we show up, we visit the sick. Sometimes there’s nothing to say. Just being there is enough.”

He tells another story of a time when he helped a woman with a crossword puzzle in her hospital room and she hasn’t forgotten it. He says, “There’s nothing rabbinic about that, yet there’s everything rabbinic about that.” Rabbi Ettman highlights an important point about making *bikkur holim* visits; there are many ways to offer comfort and support to someone who is sick besides prayer.

There are various Jewish texts that provide us with a framework for when we do not know the basics of how and when to visit a *choleh*. When lay people find themselves in this situation, they can draw both from the experiences of our peers as well as the wisdom from the Jewish text to fulfill this mitzvah of *bikkur holim*.

This guide will use analysis from two main Jewish texts on *bikkur holim*: *Shulchan Aruch Yore De'a 335* and *Maimonides' Mishneh Torah Hilchot Avel 14*. I will reference them throughout the guide and I provide Hebrew and English translations of each text in the appendix for the reader's further study.

The *Shulchan Aruch* is the most widely accepted Jewish Law Code. It was written in 1563 by Rabbi Yosef Caro and used today by halachically observant communities. While many liberal communities do not consider themselves bound by the laws set forth in the *Shulchan Aruch*, we can still draw insight from its wisdom. This text provides us with an explanation of the *mitzvah* of *bikkur holim* as seen through the lens of the sixteenth century.

First the text argues that *bikkur holim* is an essential aspect of being Jewish stating, "It is a mitzvah to visit the sick." The text also says, "Those who are close visit immediately and those who are not close after three days. And if his sickness came upon him quickly one may visit immediately: setting forth the ideal days and times for making the visit, based on the fact that at different times of day the visitor may perceive the *choleh's* condition differently.

The text then takes this further saying that the visit must include prayer, or it is as if one has not made the visit at all. This guide will take a different viewpoint on

prayer at the sickbed, noting that the concept of prayer and spiritual healing can take different forms aside from that of the recitation of formal prayers.

This text also suggests where to stand at the bed of the *choleh*; “The visitor to the sick should not sit on the bed and not on a chair and not on a sofa. Rather he should wrap himself (as if in a tallit) and sit before him (the sick person), the *shechinah* rests above his head.” Here the text notes that the visitor should experience the *shechinah*, the presence of God, at the head of the *choleh*’s bed.

Maimonides, also known as *Rambam*, was a medieval Jewish philosopher who wrote, among many other works, a law code called the *Mishneh Torah* (1170-1180). This text comes from the section of the *Mishneh Torah* that deals with the laws of death and dying, a subject that was of particular interest to Maimonides since he worked as a physician. This text, coming from a physician, offers us insight into the importance of *bikkur holim* and the difficulties we face in this task.

Maimonides begins by explaining the requirement for visiting the sick saying, “Visiting the sick is a mitzvah on everyone, even the greater visits the smaller and one visits many times a day.” This is an essential part the task of this guide, as each Jew is compelled by Jewish value (and law) to visit the sick, although many people do not know how to fulfill this commandment. Maimonides does not only say that it is required for Jews, but offers the benefits of visiting compared with the consequences of not visiting. Visiting the sick actually contributes to the healing (spiritually if not physically) of the individual.

On the other hand, he saw *bikkur holim* as such an important task that he goes on to say, “Whoever does not visit the sick is considered as if he shed blood.”

Maimonides offers several steps to guide the visitor through the visit. He acknowledges that sometimes sickness comes on quickly and that we do not have the luxury of time. Here Maimonides places such a high value on the visit itself, that the timing may be overruled based on the severity of the illness. He also offers the suggestion that we do not visit people with certain illnesses because our visit may actually cause physical harm (through potential exhaustion). I will apply the suggestions from both the Maimonides and *Shulchan Aruch* texts below in an applied step by step guide for *bikkur holim*.

STEP BY STEP GUIDE³⁸

1. Find out if sick person/family want visitors

Once you hear about a person who is sick, first find out from the patient herself or her family if she is ready for visitors. Do not be discouraged if they decline a visit, sometimes just the phone call shows that you care. It may be an opportunity to take on a different role by offering to do laundry or walk the patient's dog. While these do not fall into the typical role of a visitor to the sick, Jewish tradition says that the mitzvah includes attending to the *choleh's* physical needs as well as their spiritual needs.

³⁸ This section of the paper is deliberately written in the second person in order to make the guide accessible for the visitor

2. Choose the best day to visit

You may decide when to visit based on your schedule and availability. However, Jewish tradition teaches us that there is more to making this decision than convenience. We read in the both texts that depending on our relationship to the *choleh*, we may visit immediately or after three days. While at first reading this text may seem limiting, many interpreters have found in it guidance on how to better serve the patient. Freeman suggests that if the visitor already has a strong relationship with the *choleh*, “it makes sense to continue it during a difficult and trying period.”³⁹ Freeman also writes that a time of sickness is not a time to intentionally strengthen a relationship and therefore acquaintances should wait three days to make a visit.⁴⁰

3. Choose the best time to visit

Not only is the day of the visit addressed in these texts, but also the time of day. In the *Shulchan Aruch* we read that one must not visit the sick during the first or last hours of the day for fear that the visitor may not get an accurate impression of how sick someone is during certain hours of the day, and then may not know how to pray for the person. For example, if the visitor sees the patient when he is feeling at his absolute best, he may not pray for his recovery as fervently or provide him with the spiritual care that he needs. On the other hand, if the visitor sees him when he

³⁹ David L. Freeman and Rabbi Judith Z. Abrams, eds., *Illness and Health in the Jewish Tradition* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1999), 184.

⁴⁰ Freeman, 184.

is feeling his absolute worst, the visitor may assume that he is in dire straits and treat the situation with too much haste. Therefore, the *Shulchan Aruch* tries to allow for the most genuine relationship by providing a framework of time in which the visitor should make his visit.

However, while the text from *Shulchan Aruch* provides a valuable framework for timing visits, people's lives today vary greatly from those of the sixteenth century. Joseph Ozarowski writes, "visitors may come when they are able, even if the visit is during the Talmud's proscribed times; but visitors- professional or lay- should avoid times when medical treatment is given and not overtax the patient. In sum, visits should be timed to maximize the potential for spiritual connection and to minimize burden."⁴¹ This follows Rambam's interpretation of the law that the visitor should not make a visit during those hours because it is more likely that the *choleh* will be receiving medical attention.⁴²

It is my opinion that a hospital room or even a sickroom in a person's home is rarely a comfortable setting as it is since there are so many foreign components. The *choleh* is usually dressed in a hospital gown or pajamas, rarely has makeup on or brushed hair and may not have bathed in several days. These are not conditions in which most people in our communities would feel comfortable accepting regular visitors. There are machines making noises throughout the room, and there may be tubes and wires running from the person's body to those machines. This is not a typical setting for an intimate conversation, although it is often the time when people are feeling their most vulnerable and in need of support.

⁴¹ Ozarowski, 66.

⁴² Maimonides Mishneh Torah, Hilchot Avel chapter 14, halacha 5.

As human beings, our feelings change throughout the day, and no moment is more or less genuine than the next. I would address however the person is feeling in that moment and strive to create a genuine relationship in what might be a strange environment. Ozarowski suggests, “Today’s pastoral professionals may no longer be able to visit patients ‘many times in the day,’ in the praiseworthy manner of Maimonides’ suggestion, but they can still offer the infinite compassion of their hearts and souls, in the hope of offering spiritual healing to the ill and in imitation of the Holy One. They can take comfort in knowing they have made a difference, even though there is always more to do.”⁴³

4. Between Your House and the Hospital Room

There are some basic procedures to follow once you decide when to make your visit. Many first time visitors find increased stress in each barrier they face before they even enter the hospital room. By planning ahead and becoming knowledgeable about both one’s own role in the visit but also in the logistics of the visit itself, the visitor is better equipped to offer spiritual healing to the *choleh*.

One such barrier may be parking and finding the room itself. If the hospital is unfamiliar to the visitor, you may want to look at a map on the facility and find the parking structures before your visit. Once you have parked and walk into the building, you should check in at the information desk in order to register and receive a nametag. Most hospitals will not allow visitors without a name tag. The person

⁴³ Ozarowski 63.

sitting at the information desk can also tell you directions to the patient's room.

Remember that once you enter the hospital you are in a sacred space, although the patients in that hospital may feel that it is a cold and isolated environment. By bringing the attitude that each room in the hospital is a sacred space, you can help the patients feel that they are comforted and supported by human beings who care for them. Ozarowski writes, "If the *Shechina* is at the head of every sick person, a hospital or geriatric facility becomes a holy place. In the bottom line-oriented, contemporary health care system, Jewish tradition teaches us to reclaim the sacred as an integral part of the healing process."⁴⁴ This view helps us recognize the sacredness of the hospital room and sickbed. By viewing each room this way, we can begin to think of the sickbed not as a cold and isolating environment, but as a space where the presence of God rests and supports us in our time of vulnerability.

We can also draw upon the wisdom of contemporary author Letty Cottin Pogrebin author of How to be a Friend to a Friend Who's Sick. Reflecting upon her own experience with cancer treatments to help people face this holy task, she offers: "Twenty rules for good behavior while visiting the sick, suffering, injured, or disabled." The first five rules can be helpful in the first steps of visiting someone in the hospital:

1. Call ahead to ask about the patient's condition. Make sure they want visitors. Ask what time would be most convenient to come.

⁴⁴ Ozarowski, 60.

2. Check with a family member or nurse before entering the patient's room. Knock first; don't barge in...
3. Don't visit if you have a cold, cough, rash, or anything the patient might catch from you.
4. Respect the hospital's rules.
5. Don't expect your sick friends to look their best.
6. If they're asleep when you arrive, don't wake them....come back later.⁴⁵

These are good rules to follow for anyone making a visit. It is important to check in with a nurse before entering the room, especially to ensure that your visit will not conflict with a medical procedure. You also want to avoid embarrassing the patient by entering the room during a procedure or other sensitive time such as using the bedpan or showering. You also need to be aware of any precautions such as the need for a mask or robe before entering the room. Some patients are extra susceptible to infection while in the hospital and require all visitors to take necessary precautions. Do not be alarmed if you see such a sign, it is for the safety of the patient.

⁴⁵ Pogrebin, 91-94.

5. As you enter the room

Entering a patient's hospital or sickroom can be an anxiety-ridden experience, even for the most practiced *bikkur holim* visitors. Developing a ritual to perform before you enter the room can help calm your fears and anxieties, and bring divinity into your visit.

Rabbi Glenn Ettman provides the following advice for preparing to enter a hospital room:

My personal prep is to do know as much as I can about the person to whom I am visiting. What floor are they on? How long have they been there? How old are they? Then, when I walk in, I look around the room and get a sense of who is there and what the mood is. And I always ask “would you like a little visit?”

When I first started visiting patients at the hospital my mentor, Rabbi Pearl Barlev suggested developing a personal ritual before entering the room. These were her suggestions:

Sometimes (especially when I have a heads up that it is a traumatic or difficult situation) I just say a little personal prayer like:

· Please help me to be clear for them so I can give them the best I possibly can.

- Please help me with the right words and actions for these people/person.
- *Adonai sefatai tiftach ufee yagid tehilatecha* (with my kavannah being on help with the words that will fill the experience with a God directed guidance and fill the space with a God like essence.)
- Sing (to myself) the little ditty-esque song of:
God prepare me to be a sanctuary
Pure and holy, tried and true
With thanksgiving I want to be a living
Sanctuary for you.
 All the above are probably kind of the same: to clear my energy, to ask that I be a vehicle of healing, and bring the *kedusha* of god into my awareness.”

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov also offers words of prayer before undertaking a difficult task such as a hospital visit:

God of Wisdom, teach me to relate to others with words they need to hear, with words that will never misguide. Teach me, dear 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.⁴⁶

⁴⁶ Moshe Mykoff and S.C. Mizrahi, “The Gentle Weapon: Prayers for Everyday and Not-So-Everyday Moments Timeless Wisdom from the teachings of the Hasidic Master Rebbe Nachman of Breslov,” (Woodstock: Jewish Lights, 2012), 33.

You might find that drawing upon these practices of prayer or ritual will help focus and prepare your mind for the visit.

6. Once you are in the room: Where to Stand

The Babylonian Talmud in Nedarim 40a also provides guidance on where to stand once you are in the room. “It was also taught: One who enters to visit the sick should not sit on a bed, nor a bench, nor a chair but should enrobe himself and sit on the ground, for the Divine Presence rests above the bed of the patient, as it says, ‘The Eternal will support him upon his bed of illness’ (Psalm 41).” This text demonstrates how the visitor’s physical stance and location can alter the relationship between the visitor and the *choleh*. However, this text teaches us that there should not be a hierarchy between the two people. The visitor can display empathy for the *choleh* by approaching her at her physical level and can orient himself to create a genuine caring environment.

The stance of the visitor can affect the relationship to the *choleh*. A warm and engaging stance, for example, would be met with more comfort than a cold harsh stance. Imagine if you entered the room and stood next to the *choleh*’s bed with your arms crossed and did not make eye contact. This would likely not make the *choleh* feel at ease with your presence and the visit would not provide them the spiritual comfort and support they need. On the other hand, if you enter the room and immediately sit on their bed and hold their hand, you may be invading what little

personal space they have left in the hospital room. These texts show us that even before we say anything, the way we stand in relation to the *choleh* matters greatly. By paying special attention to that relationship, we can offer spiritual support.

Pogrebin offers an interesting analysis of the height difference between the visitor and the *choleh*. She writes, “Strength and weakness both are good, and each has its place...do not flaunt your own strength or health. Don’t stand above the bed. Sit at eye-level. Sick and well are not superior and inferior, just sick and well.”⁴⁷ By understanding your physical position as a hierarchy and adjusting the way you stand or sit, you can help the *choleh* feel at ease and encourage a healing relationship.

7. In The Hospital Room: Prayer

When many people begin making hospital visits, they are often uncomfortable with the idea of prayer, and especially spontaneous and unscripted prayer.⁴⁸

Babylonian Talmud *Nedarim* 40a provides several examples of reasons and ways to incorporate prayer into the visit to a *choleh*. In the Talmud we read that prayer is an essential part of the visit.⁴⁹ For the rabbis, prayer was a powerful resource that they believed had the potential to alter the *choleh*’s course of healing. Many liberal Jews hesitate to pray with the belief that their prayers will alter the course of an illness, but

⁴⁷ Pogrebin, 91.

⁴⁸ For more information on spontaneous prayer in the hospital room, see chapter on liturgies of healing.

⁴⁹ Babylonian Talmud Tractate *Nedarim* 40a.

that does not mean that prayer is not beneficial.⁵⁰ When a person is sick and removed from his or her community, whether at home or in a hospital, he may feel isolated and lonely. When the visitor and the *choleh* engage in prayer, they form a connection between one another and between God that can be a powerful tool in spiritual healing. It is not necessarily the words of the prayer itself, but the act of praying that connects the visitor to the *choleh* in a deeper and more meaningful way. Chaplain Judith Sommerstein related an occasion when,

[I was] visiting a Jewish patient who had stopped believing and being part of the Jewish community. When I asked permission to say the *Shema* with him, he agreed and as I was saying it, tears welled up in his eyes and he told me that memories of his childhood were triggered and the familiar sounds of the synagogue where he used to attend with his grandfather. From that visit on, we talked about Jewish prayers and stories as well as Torah study. It was very meaningful to me as well.

The visitor can make a meaningful connection with the *choleh* even through a simple and well-known prayer with a person who may have forgotten his connection with it.

8. In the Hospital Room: What to Say (and What to Avoid Saying)

It is important to note that in both Rabbi Glenn Ettman's and Chaplain Judith

⁵⁰ For a discussion on the importance of prayer at the sickbed, see the chapter on liturgies of healing.

Sommerstein's stories, they asked permission to pray with the *choleh*. This model is an important aspect of gaining trust in the hospital relationship. Ozarowsky suggests using the model of the *shiva* house in which the mourner is the first to speak. Comparing the role of the shiva visitor to a hospital visitor, Ozarowsky suggests that "the visitor lets the sick person guide the conversation, but this does not necessarily mean that one must wait for the sick person to begin the dialogue in a visit. Pastoral visitors can take the initiative by introducing themselves and starting the conversation; but from then on, they follow the lead of the sick person, and in this way, we show that he or she is their primary concern."⁵¹ Letty Cottin Pogrebin also speaks to this method. She writes:

- Don't infantilize your sick friend- it's within your power to protect those who already feel helpless and vulnerable- especially when clad in a hospital gown, the most undignified garment on the planet- from verbal humiliation.
- Think twice before giving advice
- Allow patients who are terminally ill to set the conversational agenda.⁵²

When the time comes to leave the hospital room, think about how you would like to close your conversation with the *choleh*. This may include offering a prayer or blessing, leaving your contact information if you feel comfortable, or scheduling another visit. Including a small ritual such as those suggested will offer closure to you as well as the *choleh* as you leave the holy space of their hospital room.

⁵¹ Ozarowsky, 68.

⁵² Pogrebin, 50.

From the moment that the visitor knows who is sick to the moment he steps out of the hospital room, he must make countless decisions and be mindful of the situation. Once he decides to make the visit he must take into consideration the best day and time to visit and can draw from the wisdom of Jewish tradition to make the most intentional decision. Once he is in the hospital room he will need to be knowledgeable of various theologies and Jewish responses to suffering so that he feels comfortable offering spiritual support to the *choleh*. He must also have a variety of tools for offering prayer and alternatives to prayer so that he can offer spiritual healing in the hospital and at the bedside. This guide aims to educate the visitor so that he will be more knowledgeable and therefore comfortable engaging in the holy *mitzvah* of *bikkur holim*.

Conclusion

From the moment the visitor hears that someone is sick to the moment he leave their hospital room, he has a lot of decisions to make. In order to help the visitor make these decisions he can draw upon the wisdom of Jewish texts such as the Babylonian Talmud and the Shulchan Aruch. These texts offer a framework within which one can view the act of *bikkur holim* and enable us to provide meaningful support and spiritual care. Once the visitor has made all of the decisions in preparation for the specifics of the visit, he can trust his instinct to offer presence and comfort to the person who is sick. Cantor Ida Rae Cahana offers wisdom from her experience in the hospital room:

At the end of one visit; I sang a Yiddish lullaby which I knew was special for the patient. I held her hand as I sang and had told her that she could close her eyes, if she liked. She did and as I sang, her body visibly softened (she was in some pain). I thought she had fallen asleep, in fact, and sat for a bit after the song was over; as I extracted my hand and got up quietly to let her rest, she said, "Thank you Cantor."

Throughout this guide I have underscored the importance of *bikkur hollim* in Judaism through personal stories and Jewish texts. Maimonides' suggestion that the act of visiting the sick is so important that to neglect it is akin to shedding blood teaches that one should place this *mitzvah* as a high priority in not only his Jewish

practice but within his responsibilities as human beings and members of a caring community. I hope that by studying these texts and reading these stories the visitor will have begun to see how *bikkur holim* is important in his life.

My interest in writing this guide came from my own experiences in *bikkur holim*, which showed me how meaningful it can be to receive a visit from a caring friend or clergy person during a time of fear and vulnerability. During my time working as a rabbinic chaplain intern at UCLA and St. John's hospital I learned that few patients in the hospital receive visits from their fellow congregants. The goal of this guide is to provide liberal Jews with the background and information about *bikkur holim* in order to remove the barriers one may feel preventing him or her from performing this important *mitzvah*.

Each chapter served the larger goal of the guide, removing the barriers to *bikkur holim*. In the first chapter I explored the history and usage of healing prayers in Jewish liturgy, with particular focus on the *mi shebeirach* prayer for healing. This chapter also explored the concept of spontaneous and individualized prayer and offered a rubric for creating one's own prayer at the bedside. It is my hope that by learning more about the prayers for healing and by exploring how to develop one's own personalized prayers, the visitor will feel better equipped to pray for healing at the bedside of the *choleh*.

In the second chapter I acknowledged that while visiting people in the midst of suffering you will encounter various theologies and responses to suffering. The visitor may agree with and understand some of them, but others may be difficult or foreign to him. This chapter offered several Jewish responses to suffering and

personal stories from clergy and chaplains who have encountered those conversations during their visits. While my goal in this chapter was not to suggest answers for the visitor to offer, it was to explore the various Jewish responses to suffering in order to prepare the visitor for when he encounters these theologies. By becoming more knowledgeable and experienced with the tradition, the visitor will be better able to support and comfort people who are dealing with painful situations.

The final chapter included a step-by-step guide for *bikkur holim* based on several texts which offer an in depth view of the task. By studying these texts Jews can gain a greater understanding of the Jewish tradition of *bikkur holim* and my goal in this chapter was to place the liberal non-clergy Jewish person into that context and as a continuation of the tradition. By reading and studying these texts through this chapter, my hope is that the barriers the visitor has felt to *bikkur holim* will go away and he will feel more comfortable to take part in this holy and important task.

Judaism is a religion of study but also of action and the *mitzvah* of *bikkur holim* is not an exception to this ideal. By reading this guide and studying these texts the visitor will have become more knowledgeable about the concept and tradition of *bikkur holim*. Just like for any important task, knowing the facts is not enough. Rather, performing the action is an essential part of the *mitzvah*. Just as the Genesis text teaches us that God visited Abraham during his sickness, so too should we act on this holy task by actually making *bikkur holim* visits. Jewish tradition teaches that study and action go together, each having its own importance and each being inextricably linked to one another. A selection from the Babylonian Talmud, *Kiddushin* 40a demonstrates this concept:

Rabbi Tarfon and some elders were reclining in an upper chamber in the house of Nitza in Lod when this question was asked before them: Which is greater, study or action? Rabbi Tarfon spoke up and said: Action is greater. Rabbi Akiva spoke up and said: Study is greater. The others then spoke up and said: Study is greater because it leads to action.

This text asks the question: Which is greater, study or action? It provides two opinions that resolve into one final elucidation. One may think that action would be greater because one could think about something or study something but the task would never be complete without the action. For example, if you only study about *bikkur holim* but never act on it, the *choleh* would never receive your visit. There is validity to this point of view because the action is necessary to carry out the task. On the other hand the study may be greater because without study, nobody would know how to perform the task and therefore action may be impossible. This text shows us that while study may be greater, it is only greater if it leads to action. Therefore, the study of *bikkur holim* is an essential part of the *mitzvah*, but only if the action follows.

Here are some ways to get involved in carrying out this important *mitzvah*. You can call your local rabbi or chaplain to talk about how you can be involved in your own community's *bikkur holim* programs. If a committee already exists within your synagogue, join it and begin making visits. If your congregation is looking to

set up a *bikkur holim* committee you can find resources on the National Center for Jewish Healing website.⁵³ You can also attend seminars and conferences on *bikkur holim* with organizations such as the National Center for Jewish Healing⁵⁴ and the Kalsman Institute.⁵⁵ If you do not have the time or ability to start a new group or attend a conference, you can carry out this holy task simply by getting in touch with a rabbi or chaplain at a local hospital or nursing home and talk about their volunteer programs. Once you have studied the texts and learned about the *mitzvah*, it is easy to start making *bikkur holim* visits in your community. I hope that by reading this guide and studying the texts and tradition of this holy task, that readers will feel more comfortable and more knowledgeable to perform the action.

⁵³ <http://www.jbfcs.org/programs-services/jewish-community-services-2/rabbi-isaac-trainin-bikur-cholim/organizing-group/#.UytTca1dWUA>

⁵⁴ <http://www.jbfcs.org/programs-services/jewish-community-services-2/rabbi-isaac-trainin-bikur-cholim/annual-conferences/#.UytSS61dWUA>

⁵⁵ <http://kalsman.huc.edu/VideoAudio/>

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1. Psalms from Rabbi Nachman of Breslov's List of Psalms for Healing

Psalm 16

1. These are among David's golden words:
Watch over me, God,
 For I seek refuge in You.
2. You said to the Lord:
 "You are my Master,
 but my good fortune is not Your concern.
3. "Rather, the holy ones on the earth
 _You care for them
 and for the great ones whom I should emulate.
4. "When their pain multiplies,
 they know to speedily turn to another.
 But I cannot even pour their libations because of guilt,
 I cannot even lift their names to my lips."
5. The Lord is the Portion, which is mine by right,
 my cup.
 You nurture my destiny.
6. Labor pains turn into pleasantness-
 so, too, I must see my inheritance of beauty.
7. I will bless the Lord who counsels me,
 though at night my conscience afflicts me.
8. I keep the Lord continually before me;
 because of God-Who-is-my-Right-Hand,
 I shall not break down.
9. So my mind is happy,
 my whole being joyful;
 even my body rests secure.
10. For You shall not abandon my soul
 to the world of the dead,
 nor let the one who loves You
 see his own grave.
11. Give me directions on life's road.
 With Your Presence,
 I am filled up with joys,
 With the delights that ever come
 From Your Strong Arm.

Psalm 32

1. A Song of David, of instruction:
Happy is one whose sins are forgiven,
Whose transgressions are wiped away.
2. Happy is one whose wrongdoing Adonai passes over,
whose Spirit is without deceit.
3. When I kept silent, my bones wore out;
I groaned all day in fear.
4. Day and night Your Hand weighed heavily upon me;
My marrow turned dry, parched as by the heat of Summer, *Selah*.
5. So now, I will acknowledge transgression,
I will no longer obscure wrongdoing;
Even as I begin to say, 'I admit my sins before Adonai,'
You forgave my errors and misdeeds, *Selah*.
6. Let one devoted to You offer this prayer
at those moments when You may be found:
*'When trials and troubles come,
may they not flood in a deluge of destruction!'*
7. You are my Shelter,
You protect me from distress, from enemies,
You surround me with the joy of deliverance,
Selah.
8. (You have said:)
'I will teach you Wisdom,
I will illumine the path you must take,
My eye will advise you and guide you.'
9. Do not be like a horse or a mule who cannot understand,
who, with a bit and a bridle,
must be restrained during grooming,
so that they do not come too close and attack.
10. Many are the troubles of the wicked,
but one who trusts in Adonai
will be enveloped by *Hessed*/Lovingkindness.
11. Rejoice in Adonai!
Exult, righteous ones!
Shout for joy, all who are upright in heart!

Psalm 41

1. To the Chief Musician: A Song of David
2. Happy is one who attends to the needy;
On an evil day, Adonai will rescue her.
3. Adonai will guard her, Adonai will give her life;
She will be considered fortunate on this earth,
Not subject to the whims of enemies.
4. Adonai will nurture her on her sickbed;
Even when her illness advances, and her rest is disturbed,
You will attend to her and turn things around.
5. As for me, I said,
'Adonai, have pity;
Heal my soul, for I have sinned against You.'
6. My enemies speak evil against me:
'When will she die and her name be obliterated?'
7. Even when my enemy comes to visit me,
her concern is empty and false;
her heart gathers malicious thoughts,
which she then goes out and spreads.
8. Together, they whisper against me, all my enemies,
they plot evil against me, they explain my suffering
away.
9. 'All her evil has returned to haunt her through this illness,'
they say,
'And now that she has succumbed,
she will never get up again.'
10. Even my intimate friend,
whom I trusted, who ate my bread,
has turned on me, has ambushed me!
11. But You, Adonai,
Take pity on me
Be gracious to me,
Lift me up and I shall repay them.
12. By Your Healing I will know that You accept me,
that my enemy does not shout triumphantly over me.
13. You will support me because of my integrity,
You will let me abide in Your presence forever.
14. Blessed is Adonai, God of Israel-
Amen and Amen!

Psalm 59

1. To the Chief Musician, a precious song of David:
‘Destroy not!’
Composed when Saul sent messengers to surround David's house and kill him.
2. Rescue me from enemies, my God;
from those who rise up against me-strengthen me!
3. Rescue me from those who act treacherously;
from bloodthirsty people- save me!
4. For they lie in ambush for my soul,
brazen ones gather against me;
yet I have not transgressed,
nor sinned against them, Adonai!
5. With no wrongdoing on my part,
they run and prepare themselves-
Awake, come towards me and see!
6. You, Adonai, God of Hosts,
God of Israel,
Rise up,
Hold all peoples accountable;
Show no favor to sinful traitors, *Selah*.
7. They return toward evening, howling like dogs,
going round about the city;
8. Mouths barking,
swords in their lips,
‘Who hears it? Who cares?’ they say.
9. But You, Adonai, You laugh at them,
You scorn the evil among the nations.
10. My Strength-
for Your Help I wait,
for God is my Haven.
11. God, my *Hessed*/Faithful One,
You will go before me;
God will let me gaze upon watchful foes.
12. Do not kill them, lest my people forget;
remove them from prosperity, with Your power,
and bring them down,
our Shield, my Master.
13. For the sin of their mouth is the word of their lips,
their very pride will trap them,
because of the curses and lies that they tell.
14. Consume them in wrath;
Consume them that they exist no more:
And then they will know
That God rules in Jacob
To the ends of the earth, *Selah*.

15. The wicked may return toward evening,
howling like dogs,
going round about the city;
16. wandering about, searching for food,
they do not sleep until they are satiated.
17. But as for me
I will sing of Your strength
I will sing out loud in the morning,
Rejoicing in Your *Hessed/Lovingkindness*;
For You have been my stronghold,
A refuge for me on my day of trouble.
18. My Strength-
To You I will sing praises,
For God is my Tower of Strength,
God of my *Hessed/Lovingkindness*.

Psalm 77

1. To the Chief Musician:
On the sufferings of evil decrees; A song of Asaph.
2. I lift my voice to God and cry out;
I lift my voice to God
And He turns His ears to hear.
3. On my day of suffering
I seek out my Master;
At night my hand reaches out,
Without ceasing;
My soul refuses to be comforted.
4. I remember God- and I moan;
When I talk,
My spirit faiths, *Selah*.
5. You gripped the lids of my eyes;
I throbbed in pain, and could not speak.
6. I recall former days-
ancient years, time long past;
7. I remember my song, well into the night
I delve into my heart,
My spirit searches and seeks.
8. Will my Master cast me off forever?
Will He not show favor to me once again?
9. Has his *Hessed/Lovingkindness* disappeared once and for all?
Has His word come to an end-
For all generations?
10. Has the Almighty forgotten how to be gracious?
Has His anger shut out His mercy, *Selah*?
11. I said, 'It is to terrify me, to inspire me with fear,

- that the Right Hand of the Most High has shifted.'
12. I remember the deeds of God,
I remember Your wonders from days long ago.
 13. I meditate on all Your work, Your actions,
I speak of Your deeds.
 14. God: Holiness is Your way-
What power is as great as God?
 15. You are the Almighty who does wonders,
You have let all nations know of Your strength.
 16. You redeemed Your people with an outstretched arm,
the children of Jacob and Joseph, *Selah*.
 17. The waters saw you, God,
the waters saw you and were terrified;
The depths trembled in turmoil!
 18. The clouds poured out water,
the skies emitted thunderclaps,
Your hailstone arrows flew about!
 19. The sound of Your thunder
whirled out like a wheel,
Bolts of lightning illumined the world,
The earth trembled and quaked.
 20. Your way was in the sea
Your path was in the great waters
Your footsteps were not visible.
 21. You led Your people as a flock,
by the hand of Moses and Aaron.

Psalm 90

1. A prayer of Moses, a man of God:
Adonai, You have been a refuge for us
In every generation.
2. Before the mountains were born,
before You brought forth the earth and the inhabited world,
from world to world-
You are the Almighty.
3. You bring people down
from arrogance to contrition;
You say,
'Return to Me, children of Adam and Eve!'
4. For a thousand years are in Your eyes
like yesterday, which has just passed,
like a watch in the night.
5. The stream of human life is like a dream;
in the morning, it is as grass, sprouting fresh;
6. In the morning, it blossoms and flourishes;

- but by evening, it is cut down and shrivels.
7. So are we consumed by Your anger;
we are terrified by Your rage.
 8. You have placed our sins before You;
Our hidden misdeeds
Are exposed by the light of Your countenance.
 9. All our days vanish
in the glare of Your wrath;
We have used up our years,
Which pass like a word unspoken.
 10. The days of our years may total seventy;
if we are exceptionally strong, perhaps eighty;
but all their pride and glory is toil and falsehood,
and, severed quickly, we fly away.
 11. Who can know the force of Your fury?
Your rage is as awful as our fear!
 12. To count every day- teach us,
so we will acquire a heart of wisdom.
 13. Return, Adonai- how long?
Take pity, have compassion on Your servants.
 14. Satisfy us in the morning
with your *Hessed*/Lovingkindness,
and we will sing and rejoice all our days!
 15. Give us joy
that will challenge the days of our affliction,
the years we have seen evil.
 16. Let Your work be revealed to Your servants,
let your splendor be on their children.
 17. May the pleasantness of my Master, our God, rest upon us,
and may the work of our hands be established;
Establish the work of our hands!

Psalm 105

1. Give Thanks to Adonai, call upon His name;
Let all nations know about His deeds!
2. Sing to Him, compose songs, play instruments for Him;
tell all about His wondrous acts!
3. Take pride in His Holy Name;
the heart of those who seek Him rejoices!
4. Search for Adonai and for His might,
Seek His presence always!
5. Remember the wonders He has performed,
His miracles, and the laws from His mouth.
6. Seed of Abraham His servant,
Children of Jacob, His chosen:

7. He is Adonai, our God;
The whole earth is governed by His laws.
8. He remembered His eternal covenant,
the word which He commanded to a thousand generations.
9. The covenant which He made with Abraham,
His oath to Isaac-
10. He established it as a statute for Jacob,
for Israel- an everlasting covenant.
11. Saying,
"To you I will give the land of Canaan,
the portion of your inheritance."
12. When they were only few in number,
and had scarcely dwelled in the land;
13. when they wandered from nation to nation,
from one kingdom to another people-
14. He permitted no one to oppress them;
He admonished kings of their behalf:
15. "Do not touch My anointed ones,
and to My prophets do no harm."
16. He called a famine in the land,
their staff of life, their bread, He broke off.
17. Before them He sent a man-
Joseph, sold as a slave.
18. They weighed his legs down in fetters,
an iron chain on his soul.
19. Until His word came to pass,
the word of Adonai purified him.
20. The king sent messengers and released him,
the ruler of many peoples set him free.
21. He appointed him master over his house,
ruler over all his possessions,
22. binding his ministers to his soul,
making his elders wise.
23. Israel then came down to Egypt,
Jacob sojourned in the land of Ham.
24. God made His people extremely fruitful,
He made them stronger than their adversaries,
25. whose hearts He turned to Hate His people,
to conspire against His servants.
26. He sent Moses, His servant,
and Aaron, whom He had chosen.
27. They performed among them
words of His signs,
wonders in the land of Ham.
28. He sent darkness- and it was dark;
they did not rebel against His word.

29. He turned their waters into blood,
causing their fish to die.
30. Their land swarmed with frogs,
reaching the very chambers of the kings.
31. He spoke, and wild beasts came,
lice throughout their borders.
32. He turned their rains into hail,
flaming fire in their land.
33. The hail struck their vines and fig trees,
shattered the trees within their borders.
34. God spoke and locusts came,
beetles beyond number.
35. They ate every herb in their land,
they devoured the fruit of their soil.
36. He struck all the firstborn in their land,
the prime of their strength.
37. He brought them out, carrying silver and gold,
and none among His tribes stumbled.
38. Egypt rejoiced when they departed,
for their terror had fallen upon them.
39. He spread out a cloud as a sheltering cover,
a fire to illumine the night.
40. Israel asked and He provided quail,
He satisfied them with bread from Heaven.
41. He broke open a rock and waters gushed out,
rushing through dry places like a river.
42. For He remembered His holy word,
His promise to Abraham, His servant.
43. He brought out his people with gladness,
His chosen ones with joyful singing.
44. He gave them the lands of nations,
they inherited that which nations acquire by labor.
45. So that they might keep His statutes,
and treasure His teachings,
Halleluyah!

Psalms 137

1. By the rivers of Babylon,
there we sat and we wept
as we remembered Zion.
2. Upon the willows on its banks
we hung up our harps.
3. For there our captors demanded of us
words of song;
Our tormentors asked of us (with) joy;

- ‘Sing to us from the songs of Zion!’
4. But how shall we sing the song of Adonai
on alien soil?
 5. If I ever forget you, Jerusalem,
may my right hand forget its cunning!
 6. May my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth,
if I remember you not;
if I do not set Jerusalem
above my highest joy!
 7. Remind the sons of Edom, Adonai, about the day of Jerusalem-
Remind those who said,
‘Raze it, raze it to its very foundation!’
 8. Daughter of Babylon,
it is you who are the annihilated one;
Happy is the one who will repay you
For all that you have done to us!
 9. Happy is the one who will grab *your* little ones,
dashing them against the rock!

Psalm 150

1. *Halleluyah*/Praise God!
Praise God in His Sanctuary;
Praise Him
In the vast expanse of Heaven!
2. Praise Him for mighty deeds;
Praise Him
According to His abundant greatness!
3. Praise Him
with the blowing of the *shofar*;
Praise Him
With the lyre and the harp!
4. Praise Him
with drum and dance;
praise Him
with string instruments and flute!
5. Praise Him
with resounding cymbals!
Praise Him
With clanging cymbals!
6. Let every breath of life praise God,
Halleluyah/Praise God!

2. Rabbinic Text

Mishneh Torah, Mourning 14:4:

בְּקוֹר חוֹלִים מְצוּהָ עַל הַכֹּל אֲפִילוֹ גְדוֹל מִבְּקָר אֶת הַקָּטָן וּמִבְּקָרִין הַרְבֵּה פַעֲמִים בַּיּוֹם וְכֹל הַמוֹסִיף
מְשׁוּבַח וּבִלְבָד שֶׁלֹא יִטְרִיחַ וְכֹל הַמִּבְּקָר אֶת הַחוּלָה כֵּאִילוֹ נִטַּל חֵלֶק מִחֲלִיו וְהִקְלָה מֵעֲלָיו וְכֹל שֶׁאִינוֹ
מִבְּקָר כֵּאִילוֹ שׁוֹפֵךְ
דְּמִים

אִין מִבְּקָרִין אֶת הַחוּלָה אֲלֵא מִיּוֹם שְׁלִישִׁי וְהִלָּאָה וְאִם קִפֹּץ עָלָיו הַחוּלִי וְהִכְבִּיד מִבְּקָרִין אוֹתוֹ מִיָּד וְאִין
מִבְּקָרִין אֶת הַחוּלָה לֹא בִשְׁלֹשׁ שָׁעוֹת רִאשׁוֹנוֹת בַּיּוֹם וְלֹא בִשְׁלֹשׁ אַחֲרוֹנוֹת מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהֵן מִתְעַסְקִין בְּצָרְכֵי
הַחוּלָה וְאִין מִבְּקָרִין לֹא חוּלִי מַעֲיִים וְלֹא חוּלִי הָעֵין וְלֹא מַחוּשֵׁי הָרֹאשׁ מִפְּנֵי שֶׁהַבְּקוֹר קָשָׁה לָהֶן. הַנִּכְנָס
לְבִקֵּר אֶת הַחוּלָה לֹא יֵשֶׁב לֹא עַל גְּבִי מִטָּה וְלֹא עַל גְּבִי כִסֵּא וְלֹא עַל גְּבִי סִפְסָל וְלֹא עַל גְּבִי מְקוֹם גְּבוּהָ
וְלֹא לְמַעַל מִמַּרְאֲשׁוֹתָיו אֲלֵא מִתְעַטֵּף וְיוֹשֵׁב לְמִטָּה מִמַּרְאֲשׁוֹתָיו וּמִבְּקָשׁ עָלָיו רַחֲמִים וְיוֹצֵא

Visiting the sick is a mitzvah on everyone, even the greater visits the smaller and one visits many times a day. Whoever increases the frequency of his visits, it is praiseworthy only if it is not painstaking for him. Whoever visits a sick person removes a portion of his sickness and relieves him. Whoever does not visit the sick is considered as if he shed blood.

One does not visit the sick except from the third day on. However, if a person's illness came upon him suddenly and his illness became severe, one should visit him immediately.

One does not visit the sick during the first three hours of the day, or in the last three hours because his attendants are busy tending to his needs. One does not visit patients with stomach illnesses, eye illnesses, or headaches because the illnesses are difficult for them.

When one comes to visit a sick person, he should not sit on a bed or on a chair or on a bench, or on a place higher or above the sick person's head. Instead, he should wrap himself in a tallit, sit below his head and request God for mercy on his behalf and leave.

Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 335:1-6

מְצוּהָ לְבִקֵּר חוֹלִים הַקְּרוֹבִים וְהַחֲבֵרִים נִכְנָסִים מִיָּד וְהַרְחוּקִים אַחֲרַיִם יָמִים וְאִם קִפֹּץ עָלָיו הַחוּלִי אֵלָיו
וְאֵלָיו . נִכְנָסִים מִיָּד : אֲפִלּוּ הַגְּדוֹל יֵלֶךְ לְבִקֵּר הַקָּטָן וְאֲפִלּוּ כְּמָה פַעֲמִים בַּיּוֹם וְאֲפִלּוּ בֶן גִּילּוֹ
וְכֹל הַמוֹסִיף הִ"ז מְשׁוּבַח וּבִלְבָד שֶׁלֹא יִטְרִיחַ לוֹ

It is a mitzvah to visit the sick. Those who are close visit immediately and those who are

not close after three days. And if his sickness came upon him quickly one may visit

immediately. Even the greater will visit the smaller and even many times a day and even the younger. Whoever increases his visits, it is praiseworthy only if it is not painstaking for him.

המבקר את החולה לא ישב ע"ג מטה ולא ע"ג כסא ולא ע"ג ספסל אלא מתעטף ויושב לפניו
:שהשכינה למעלה מראשותיו

The visitor to the sick should not sit on the bed and not on a chair and not on a sofa. rather he should wrap himself (as if in a tallit) and sit before him (the sick person), the shechinah rests above his head.

Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh De'ah 335:4-6:

אין מבקרין החולה בג' שעות ראשונות של יום מפני שכל חולה מיקל עליו חליו בבקר ולא יחוש לבקש עליו רחמים ולא בג' שעות אחרונות של יום שאז מכביד עליו חליו ויטיאש מלבקש עליו רחמים
One does not visit the sick in the first three hours of the day because every sick person maybe lenient on his illness (he may be feeling better) in the morning and one would not hurry to request mercy for him. And [one does not visit] in the last three hours of the day because then his illness is heaviest on him and the visitor may despair and request mercy on him

כשמבקש עליו רחמים אם מבקש לפניו יכול לבקש בכל לשון שירצה ואם מבקש שלא בפניו לא יבקש אלא בלשון הקדש: יכלול אותו בתוך חולי ישראל שיאמר המקום ירחם עליך בתוך חולי ישראל
:ובשבת אומר שבת היא מלזעוק ורפואה קרובה לבא

When he asks for mercy for him, if he is asking before him, he may ask in any language he desires, but if is not asking before him, he must only ask in the Holy Tongue [Hebrew].

include in it "batoch chulei yisrael" (amongst the sick of Israel), and he will say "hamakom yerachem elav batoch chulei yisrael", and on Shabbat say: "we cannot cry out on shabbat, but healing will come soon"

Berakhot 5b

Ravi Chiyya bar Abba became ill.

Rabbi Yochanan came to see him. He said to him: Is your suffering pleasing to you?

He said to him: Neither it nor its reward.

He said to him: Give me your hand.

He gave him his hand, and he lifted him up.

Rabbi Yochanan became ill.

Rabbi Chanina came to see him. He said to him: Is your suffering pleasing to

you?

He said to him: Neither it nor its reward.

He said to him: Give me your hand.

He gave him his hand and he lifted him up.

Why? So that Rabbi Yochanan should lift himself up?

It is said: "the prisoner cannot free himself from prison."

Rabbi Elazar became sick.

Rabbi Yochanan came to see him.

He saw that he was lying in a dark place. Rabbi Yochanan uncovered his arm and light fell from it.

He saw that Rabbi Elazar was crying.

He said to him: Why are you crying? If you are crying because you did not accomplish enough Torah, surely we have learned: it makes no difference whether you accomplish a great deal of Torah or a small amount, as long as your heart is directed toward heaven.

Or if it is because you had little money to sustain yourself- not every man earns two tables.

If it is because you didn't have a lot of children or any in fact, see, here is the bone of my tenth son.

He said to him: Surely that is what you are crying for.

So the two of them cried.

Either way he said to him: Is your suffering pleasing to you?

He said to him: Neither it nor its reward.

He said to him: Give me your hand.

He gave him his hand, and he lifted him up.

3. Prayers for Healing

Jewish Healing Center prayer for healing

mi shebeirach avoteinu avraham, yitzhak, v'yaakov, v'imoteinu sarah, rivka, rachel v'leah, hu yivarech virapei et ha holehholahben/bat.....

HaKadosh Baruch Hu yimalei rachamim alav/aleha, l'hahalimo/
l'hahalimah, ul'rapoto/ul'rapotah, l'hahaziko/l'hahazikah ul'hahayoto'ulhahayotah.
V'yishlach lo/la bim'hera r'fuah shleima r'fuat hanevesh ur'fuat haguf, b'toch sha'ar
holei yisrael hashta ba'agalah uvizman kariv. vnomar amen

May the One who blessed our ancestors- Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel and Leah, bless and heal the one who is ill:son/daughter of.....

May the Holy One, the fount of blessings, shower abundant mercies upon him/
her, fulfilling his/her dreams of healing, strengthening him/her with the power of life.

Meticful one:

restore him/her,

heal him/her,

strengthen him/her,

enliven him/her.

Send him/her complete healing from the heavenly realms, a healing of body
and a healing of soul, together with all who are ill, soon, speedily, without delay; and
let us say: Amen!

Debbie Friedman's setting of Mi Shebeirach

Mi She'beirach avoteinu, m'kor ha'bracha l'imoteinu

May the source of strength, who blessed the ones before us

Help us find the courage, to make our lives a blessing,

And let us say, Amen.

Mi She'beirach imoteinu, m'kor ha'bracha l'avoteinu

Bless those in need of healing with *r'fuah shlemah*

The renewal of body, The renewal of spirit

And let us say, Amen.

Elohe Oz

Elohei oz tefilati
 refa'einu ve'erafeh
 ve'ten marpeh l'machlati
 l'val amut v'esafeh
 l'val amut v'esafeh

Lecha odeh v'odi chai
 b'toch re'ai v'gam achai
 v'arbeh mahalal sichai
 b'kol arev v'niv yafeh
 b'kol arev v'niv yafeh

yeshu'at'cha tevo'ayni
 v'al raglai teki'mayni
 b'shuvi od elay chani
 l'tovat'cha ani tsofeh
 l'tovat'cha ani tsofeh

God of Strength I pray
 Heal me and I will be healed
 And give me healing for my sickness
 That I won't die or be destroyed

I will give thanks for more life
 Amongst my neighbors and my brothers
 And I will increase my praise in my conversations
 In a pleasant voice and a beautiful utterance

Bring me salvation and
 Stand me on my feet
 When I turn to my maker
 I look forward to Your goodness

Broadly

C

F

E - lo - hē ōz t' - hi - la - ti r' - fa - ě - ni v' - ě - ra -

C

G

C

fē v' - tēn mar - pē l' - mach - la - ti l' - bal a - mut v' - e - sa -

C

G7

C

fe l' - bal a - mut v' - e - sa - fe

Hashkiveinu prayer:

הַשְׁכִּיבֵנוּ יי אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְשָׁלוֹם וְהַעֲמִידֵנוּ מִלְּפָנֶיךָ לַחַיִּים. וּפְרוֹשׁ עָלֵינוּ סֶכֶת שְׁלוֹמְךָ וְתַקְּנֵנוּ בְּעֵצָה טוֹבָה
מִלְּפָנֶיךָ וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ לְמַעַן שְׁמֶךָ וְהַגֵּן בְּעַדֵּנוּ. וְהַסֵּר מֵעָלֵינוּ אוֹיֵב דָּבָר וְחָרֵב וְרָעַב וְיָגוֹן וְהַסֵּר שָׁטָן מִלְּפָנֵינוּ
וּמֵאַחֲרֵינוּ וּבְצֵל כְּנָפֶיךָ תַּסְתִּירֵנוּ כִּי אֵל שׁוֹמְרֵנוּ וְלְשָׁלוֹם מַעֲתָה וְעַד עוֹלָם. בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה יי הַפּוֹרֵשׁ סֶכֶת
שָׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל עַמּוֹ יִשְׂרָאֵל וְעַל יְרוּשָׁלַיִם.

*Hashkiveinu, Adonai Eloheinu,
L'shalom, v'haamideinu shomreinu l'chayim,
Ufros aleinu sukat sh'lomecha,
V'takneinu b'eitzah tovah milfanecha,
V'hoshi-einu l'maan sh'mecha.
V'hagein baadeinu,
V'haseir mei-aleinu oyeiv, dever,
V'cherev, v'raaav, v'yagon,
V'harcheik mimenu avon vafesha.
Uv'tzeil k'nafesha tastireinu,
Ki El shomreinu umatzlieinu atah,
Ki El chanun v'rachum atah.
Ushmor tzeiteinu uvo-einu
L'chayim ul'shalom,
Mei-atah v'ad olam.
Baruch atah Adonai,
Haporeis sukat shalom aleinu
V'al kol amo Yisrael v'al Yerushalayim*

Grant, O God, that we lie down in peace,
and raise us up, our Guardian, to life renewed.
Spread over us the shelter of your peace.
Guide us with Your good counsel; for Your Name's sake, be our help.
Shield us and shelter us beneath the shadow of Your wings.
Defend us against enemies, illness, war, famine and sorrow.

Distance us from wrongdoing.

For You, God, watch over us and deliver us. For You, God, are gracious and merciful.

Guard our going and coming, to life and to peace, evermore.

Praised are You, Adonai, Guardian of Israel, whose shelter of peace is spread over us, over all Your people Israel, and over Jerusalem.

Rabbi Nachman's prayer for healing

God of wholeness,

God of healing,

envelope us

with wholeness

and well-being.

Heal us in body and soul.

Let all the elements of our bodies

work together

in perfect symmetry

and in peaceful harmony.

Remove every trace of illness,

every hint of infirmity;

send the healing which you alone can bring.

Rabbi Nachman of Breslov

Eil Na Fefa Na La

God, please heal her!

Numbers 12:13

אל, נא רפא נא לה

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