

A Universe of Chesed

by Rabbi Jack Abramowitz

Want to perform acts of chesed (loving kindness) but not sure of all the details?



Here's a handy guide to help you get started with some of the more common deeds we can do. *Please note that this guide is not a substitute for a thorough study of these mitzvos.*



How To VISIT THE SICK

We visit the sick in emulation of God, Who visited Avraham when he was recuperating from his *bris* (Gen. 18:1). Some say that it is a Biblical obligation based on the commandment to walk in God's ways (Deut. 28:9); Rambam says that it's an aspect of loving one's neighbor (Lev. 19:18).



The mitzvah of *bikkur cholim* has no limits; visiting many times is considered meritorious so long as one doesn't become an imposition on the patient.

The reason to visit the sick is to raise their spirits, so the visitor should be cheerful and not gloomy. One should not give bad news to the patient.



According to the Shelah, the mitzvah of *bikkur cholim* has three components: the physical (visiting, bringing food or reading material, adjusting the bed or the lights, etc.), the spiritual (praying and reciting Tehillim for the patient, wishing them "refuah sheleimah") and the financial (assisting with expenses, thereby giving the patient some peace of mind).

It is preferable to visit the sick in a group, but wholly permissible to do so alone.



One should not sit at the head of the patient's bed.

One should pray for the patient in Hebrew but, when in his presence, one may do so in any language.



It is a mitzvah even to visit a baby who is ill. In this case the patient may be unaware, but the visit brings comfort to his parents.

If the patient is asleep when you visit, you still fulfill the mitzvah. The patient will be informed of your visit, which will please him.

While certain aspects of *bikkur cholim* can only be performed in person, one who is unable to visit should at least call, which fulfills other aspects of the mitzvah.

On weekdays, one should say, *HaMakom yeracheim alecha b'soch cholei Yisroel* (May the Omnipresent have mercy on you among the sick of Israel). On Shabbos one says, *Shabbos hi milizok u'refuah kerovah lavo* (We don't cry out on Shabbos and recovery will come soon).