

Turn to Me

A film about Bikur Cholim (visiting the sick)

Study Guide and Resources

“פנה אלי וחנוני כי יהיד ועוני אני”
תהלים כה: טז

“Turn to me and be gracious to me
for I am lonely and afflicted”

~Psalm 25:16



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Turn to Me is a documentary about the mitzvah of bikur cholim, our responsibility to visit the sick. The film tells the story of what bikur cholim means to people today: supportive, caring relationships, mutually rewarding exchanges and healing, even when there is no cure.

The narrative begins in the middle - the camera's lens is intimate and pans into the real lives of people committed to a bikur cholim relationship. Elie Wiesel, Nobel Laureate, Rabbi Tsvi Blanchard and members of our community share their insights into how the human condition is fundamentally improved through the small acts of kindness that unfold before us. Their commentary helps us understand the profound impact of the visits we are viewing while at the same time we might see ourselves in the roles of the visitor or visited.

Small acts of kindness benefit us as well as the person on whom our attention and concern are focused. Gestures of caring can take the form of a thoughtful card, telephone call, prayer, gift of flowers or even practical help like sweeping the floor, straightening up the house or shopping. The list goes on. In your life, you may write your own bikur cholim "script," reflecting who you are, the time you have and the opportunities you find around you.

We hope this film and guide will prompt awareness that will lead to action — and you, in turn, will bring comfort and connection to someone who is in need of a visit.

Using the Guide

Thank you for taking part in viewing this film.

Talk about it. This guide is intended to stimulate discussion. The questions throughout are meant to help you think about the meaning of bikur cholim and share your reactions to the film.

Give everyone a chance to listen and be heard. If you are viewing *Turn to Me* in a large group, you may want to break out into smaller groups. We have much to gain from one another's life wisdom; this is a key value of bikur cholim. "Who is wise? One who learns from all people." (Ethics of the Fathers 4:1)

Take it with you. Discuss, debate, reflect, educate and engage. Through the exchange of reactions and experiences, we learn and appreciate the importance of bikur cholim. The mitzvah of bikur cholim is a journey of discovery; this film is one step along the way.

The title *Turn to Me* is taken from Psalm 25:16, *Turn to me and be gracious to me for I am lonely and afflicted.*

Why do you think the title was chosen?



The visit must be for the benefit of the sick person.

“One should not sit upon the bed, nor even upon a bench, but he should wrap his mantle around him and sit on the ground, for the Divine Presence (*shechbina*) resides above the bed of a sick person.” (Talmud Nedarim 40a)

In what ways may one show respect to the ill person?

What sensitivities to the patient’s condition were reflected in “Turn to Me?”

In the sick person’s presence, the visitor may pray for the patient in any language since one is in the presence of the Divine presence. (Talmud Shabbos 12b; Shulchan Aruch YD 335:5)

Generally, it is best not to visit in the early or late part of the day nor should one visit when a patient may be receiving treatment. (Talmud Nedarim 41a)

What other factors contribute to a successful visit? What about length of a visit?

Bikur cholim has no boundaries or limits; i.e., one may visit as frequently as one likes provided one is not a burden to the ill person. (Talmud Nedarim 39a)

What does “no boundaries” mean to you?

How are limits and boundaries reflected in the film?

One who visits removes a sixtieth of the patient’s illness. (Talmud, Nedarim 39b)

One may not receive payment for bikur cholim. (Talmud, Nedarim Rosh 38b)

One should not inform a patient of the death of a relative; one should avoid distressing news; rather, gladden the sick person. (Shulchan Aruch 337, Aruch Ha’Shulchan)

Are there things one should not bring up on a visit? How can one know?

A visitor should not spend time with those who are suffering from intestinal disorders, speech problems, or mental disturbances, when the visit is likely to prove difficult or embarrassing to the patient. Better to just greet the person and inquire about their needs from a distance. (Talmud Nedarim 41a)

List ways you can show concern besides a face-to-face visit.

Some say one should not visit his enemy, but others permit it. The patient should never be allowed to feel that his enemy rejoices over his illness. Each case must be judged individually. (Shulchan Aruch YD 335). Others suggest that a message be sent to the patient asking the person if they would welcome a visit from his enemy (Aruch Ha’Shulchan)

When would it not be appropriate to visit?

The following is compiled from rabbinic literature.

These texts offer us guidance in the performance of bikur cholim.

What meaning do you derive from them?

Each text is followed by questions for you to consider.