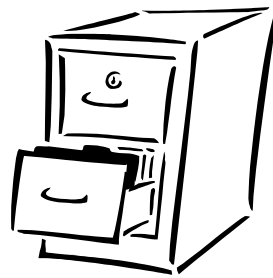




# BIKUR CHOLIM RESOURCES

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The Rabbi Isaac N. Trainin Bikur Cholim Coordinating Council,  
a program of The Jewish Board of Family & Children's Services

120 West 57<sup>th</sup> Street, 6<sup>th</sup> Floor  
New York, NY 10019

Vicki Rosenstreich, LCSW – 212.399.2685 ext. 229

Robin Schoenfeld, LMSW – 212.399.2685 ext. 212

[BikurCholimCC@jbfcs.org](mailto:BikurCholimCC@jbfcs.org)

[www.bikurcholimcc.org](http://www.bikurcholimcc.org)

## ***WHAT IS BIKUR CHOLIM?***

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Bikur Cholim literally means “visiting the sick” – but it is much more.

Bikur Cholim is considered one of the important deeds included in “Gemilut Chassadim” – the performance of deeds of loving kindness – which was viewed by the sages (Pirke Avot, Ethics of the Fathers, 1:2) as one of “the three pillars of Judaism upon which the continued existence of the world depends” along with Torah and Avodah (prayer).

Some Rabbinical authorities maintain that Bikur Cholim is one of the 613 commandments of the Torah, while some hold that it is derived from the precept, “Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself” (Leviticus 19:18).

The tradition of Bikur Cholim was part and parcel of Jewish life for thousands of years wherever Jews lived. It found expression in the formation of Bikur Cholim societies in villages, towns and cities in all parts of the Jewish world. Bikur Cholim was an accepted practice for neighbors, friends and people in the community to visit those who were sick, disabled, elderly and lonely and to minister to their needs – to provide care for the sick, to bring them food, to maintain their households, and to care for members of their families.

Jews view the mitzvah of Bikur Cholim to be an essential social obligation reflective of “man’s relationship to man”.

***DOING GOOD IS NOT ABOUT BEING NICE***

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Doing good is not about being nice.

You can do nice things all day long for many people, but it could all just be more service of your own self, food for your own ego.

The world was designed so people would need each other, not so that you could be nice, but to give you the opportunity to escape the confines of your own self.

When you help those who show gratitude, when you lend a hand to those who are on your side, you are still within the realm of your own ego and self.

Help someone you don't want to help - only because this is the right thing to do.

At first it may not feel so rewarding. But you have sprung free.

-“Bringing Heaven Down to Earth”- Meditations and Everyday Wisdom of the Rebbe,  
Menachem Schneerson- compiled by Tzvi Freeman  
Adams Media Corporation.

## HELPFUL HINTS FOR VOLUNTEER VISITORS

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Bikur Cholim is not always as simple as walking into a friend's hospital room or obtaining a list of Jewish patients from the admissions department if you have no one in particular to visit and offering a "*Shalom Aleichem.*"

Most hospitals have security procedures that screen visitors, limit the number allowed in a patient's room and steer visitors through established channels. Bikur Cholim experts advise prospective visitors to register with a hospital chaplain, Office of Volunteer Services, or a Bikur Cholim society to ease one's way into regular visiting rounds.

Volunteers in the seminars offered by the Coordinating Council on Bikur Cholim receive instruction in listening skills and sensitivity training. Among the suggestions offered:

- Knock on a patient's door before entering; do not enter suddenly.
- Before visiting someone who is very ill, check with the family and the nurse. Ask if there are any specific suggestions or restrictions.
- Introduce yourself to the patient as a Bikur Cholim volunteer and give the name of your group.
- Do not shake hands – this is for the patient's sake.
- Do not enter the patient's room if it is crowded with other visitors, if the patient is getting a test, or if the patient appears embarrassed by your presence. Do not stay if the patient appears sleepy or excessively irritable.
- If a person has a scare or disfigurement, do not stare. If a piece of clothing comes off a patient, put it back on, with permission.
- Do not visit the sick immediately after they have fallen ill, patients might feel they have serious illnesses.
- If possible, do not visit during the first three hours and the last three hours of the day. Early-morning visits often interfere with staff activities; the patient is probably tired at night.
- If you bring books, make certain they are not too heavy in weight or content; a patient's attention span may be shorter than normal. Avoid very funny books unless you want to keep the patient in stitches.
- Wish the patient a quick and complete recovery and ask if there is anything you can do for him or her, or the family. Or offer some specific help.
- Do not bring sad news, or bring up subjects likely to upset the patient.

Rabbi Isaac N. Trainin Bikur Cholim Coordinating Council, JBFCS

[BikurCholimCC@jbfcs.org](mailto:BikurCholimCC@jbfcs.org)

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- Do not awaken a sleeping patient. Return, if possible, before leaving the hospital. Leave a note from the group by the bedside, if possible.
- Do not ask why the patient is in the hospital and do not offer medical advice.
- If a patient asks for help moving or getting out of bed, check first with the hospital staff. Also, do not offer the patient anything to eat or drink unless it is checked with a doctor or nurse.
- Come in with a cheery disposition. Talk to all patients in the same room, make sure you do not slight patients who are not Jewish.
- Importance of confidentiality – both in and out of the hospital.
- Never offer an opinion regarding the competency of a particular doctor.
- Know that a “red-bag” indicates infectious waste.
- Developing sensitivity to the religious level of the patients when there are clear differences between their orientation and the volunteers.
- Funneling additional patient needs (homemaker, visiting nurse, etc.) to the chaplain or social services department.
- Do not give patients food or drinks. Do not call the nurse to move a patient. Give the patient the “call” button and let him/her summon the nurse.
- Do not enter a room if there is a doctor making rounds.
- Recognizing that patients can be cranky and even abusive. Not to take this as a personal attack.
- Reliability, consistency and continuity. Important to be available as planned. Don't make promises you can't keep. Don't make promises for other people.

## ***LISTENING***

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### ***The Most Important of Communication Skills***

We live in a world of sounds, but we seldom listen.

1. Take time to listen; it may help to clarify the issues.
2. Be sensitive; try to put yourself in the other's person's place.
3. React verbally and non-verbally; use eloquent and encouraging grunts, head movement, facial and hand gestures as appropriate.
4. Don't probe for additional facts; deal with feelings being expressed.
5. Refrain from making judgments of what's being said; don't give direct advice, even if asked. Reflect the question back.
6. Remember they are really talking things out with themselves; given the chance, they will work things out. Let them make the decisions.
7. Listen between the lines; be aware of feelings, body language, and areas of avoidance.
8. Restate to find out if you are hearing what the speaker means to be saying.

## ***SEVEN WAYS OF ASKING***

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When we reach out to help someone who is ill, we often forget that there may be a loved one in the role of caregiver, who is equally in need of support and/or concrete help. But simply asking "How are you?" may not convey authentic, personal interest and may not open up an honest, expressive response. Some people who are suffering have criticized this common question because it doesn't seem to acknowledge the very different course their life has taken, and seems to come "attached" to automatic, expected answers such as "I'm OK" or "Fine, thanks," which may not be a sincere reply, or may not be the whole story. So here are seven alternative ways of asking.

1. How are you doing with all of this?
2. How are your spirits?
3. How are you hanging in?
4. What do you need the most, right now?
5. What's helping you get through this?
6. What's been on your mind as you try to cope with all of this?
7. What are some of the obstacles to your managing/coping?

Rabbi Isaac N. Trainin Bikur Cholim Coordinating Council, JBFCS

[BikurCholimCC@jbfc.org](mailto:BikurCholimCC@jbfc.org)

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## **COMMUNICATION**

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Communication is the giving and sharing of time, ideas, experience, interests and companionships. It is concentrated listening which says "I care about you".

When you effectively communicate with the elderly you help: a) relieve loneliness b) stimulate thinking c) restore self-worth d) exchange ideas and experiences e) foster friendships f) establish mutual respect. Remember, an open invitation to talk is a gift. To be successful volunteer, you need to know how to do the following to communicate effectively.

### **\* BE A GOOD LISTENER**

Many older people have a real need to talk. Some have rich backgrounds to share. Let this information come voluntarily to avoid probing into a painful past. Others have problems and complaints and although the volunteer does not interfere or give advice, it is helpful for the resident to express his feelings. Encourage the resident to talk. Don't monopolize the visiting time by talking about yourself.

### **\* EXPLAIN YOUR ROLE**

Give simplified explanation of why you are there and your interest in the resident and home. Introducing yourself; state why you are there and how long you are staying.

### **\* OBSERVE AS YOU LISTEN**

Note the residents' reasoning powers, possible deafness poor vision, memory losses, the people and things that mean something to him, current interests and strengths that can be built on.

-Observe the residents ability to understand, reason, see, hear and remember. Adapt accordingly.

-Never look bored; concentrate with full attention.

-Speak slowly, clearly and simply in a normal voice never shout

-Use humor and laughter whenever possible. It has therapeutic properties

-Encourage the other person to talk – do not monopolize the conversation.

### **\* REMEMBER NAMES**

It is easy to lose your individuality when living in a nursing home with others. ---- to be remembered by name means a great deal. Ask resident how he/she likes to be addressed. Mr./Mrs./Miss or by first name.

Remember names, even if yours is forgotten.

**\* *CREATE A COMFORTABLE ENVIRONMENT***

60% of communication is body language - - - be informal

- Use positive feedback.
- Maintain eye contact - - an open, friendly relaxed position and SMILE.
- Draw up a chair close enough for good vision and hearing - - - but not too close.

**\* *BE PATIENT***

Older people may be slow to respond and may not show immediate enthusiasm for new activities. They may repeat themselves. They may be very frank about likes and dislikes.

**\* *ENCOURAGE***

Encourage residents to do as much as they can for themselves. Allow them to proceed at their own pace. It is wise to examine carefully the basis for their refusal to participate. They may be afraid of being embarrassed in a situation in which they feel they are unable to cope. Make light of any mistakes made.

**\* *CONSIDER ALL MEMBERS OF THE GROUP***

When working in a group setting, remember the shy and retiring may need extra support while the aggressive may need to be directed from dictating to others. You will find someone easier to relate

## *THE MISHEBERACH*

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This is often considered the most traditional prayer for one who is ill. It is usually recited during the Torah service at synagogue. Offering to say it at someone's bedside is also very comforting and healing. The individual's Hebrew name is often included in this blessing. The name is inserted in the blanks provided and it usually includes the person's mother's Hebrew name, as well.

May the One who blessed our fore fathers Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, Moses and Aaron, David and Solomon, bless and heal (insert patient's Hebrew name) \_\_\_\_\_ the son/daughter of (mother's Hebrew name) \_\_\_\_\_. May the Holy One, blessed be God, be merciful and strengthen and heal him/her. Grant him/her a complete and speedy recovery- healing of body and healing of soul. And let us say: Amen.

## *PRAYER FOR HEALING*

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--Rebbe Nachman of Breslov

God of wholeness,  
God of healing,  
Hear our words,  
Accept our prayers; Send a special blessing  
Of healing  
To (name) son/daughter of  
(mother's name),  
among all those of Your children  
who are in need of  
Your healing blessing.

## *A HEALER'S PRAYER*

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Most High G-d, before I begin my holy work,  
healing those whom you have created,  
I send my prayer before before your Throne of Glory,  
that you may give me courage and energy to do my work in good faith, and that the  
aspiration for public acknowledgement should not blind my eyes from seeing the truth.  
Make me worthy to look upon every sufferer who comes to ask for my advice, as a  
person, without making a distinction between the rich or poor, friend or foe, good or  
wicked – that I only see the person in pain.

If greater healers than I try to teach me understanding,  
give me the desire to learn from them, for there is no end to the knowledge of healing.  
Let not foolish persons try to affect my knowledge. I love this work.  
Please strengthen my resolve, so that I don't consider the age or honor of those who are  
trying to mislead me.  
Let only the truth guide me, for overlooking anything can lead to a great tragedy or  
illness to one of your creations.

I beseech you, O Lord, the Merciful One, to make me strong and energetic in body and  
soul, and to plant in me a perfect spirit.

Moses ben Maimon (Maimonides)  
12<sup>th</sup> century