

***Finding One's Self in Bikur Cholim:
Hessed and the Opportunity for Personal Growth***

Some Materials for Our Exploration

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Workshop at

***“I Will Awaken the Dawn:
The Transformative Power of Bikur Cholim”***

21st Annual Conference on Visiting the Sick

Co-sponsored by
Rabbi Isaac N. Trainin Bikur Cholim Coordinating Council
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"Give Me Your Hand"*
Three Stories from the Talmud
related to Bikkur Holim/Reaching Out to the Suffering

R. Hiyya b. Abba fell ill and R. Johanan went in to visit him. He (R. Johanan) said to him: 'Are your sufferings welcome/beloved to you?' He replied: 'Neither they nor their reward.' He said to him: 'Give me your hand.' He gave him his hand and he (R. Johanan) raised (healed) him.

R. Johanan once fell ill and R. Hanina went in to visit him. He (R. Hanina) said to him: 'Are your sufferings welcome/beloved 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. Why could not R. Johanan raise himself? They replied: 'The prisoner cannot free himself from jail.'

R. Eleazar fell ill and R. Johanan went in to visit him. He (R. Johanan) noticed that he was lying in a dark room, and he (R. Johanan) bared his arm and light radiated from it. Thereupon he noticed that R. Eleazar was weeping, and he said to him: 'Why do you weep? Is it because you did not study enough Torah? Surely we learnt: The one who sacrifices much and the one who sacrifices little have the same merit, provided that the heart is directed to heaven. Is it perhaps lack of sustenance? Not everybody has the privilege to enjoy two tables. Is it perhaps because of the lack of children? This is the bone of my tenth son!' -- He replied to him: 'I am weeping on account of this beauty that is going to rot in the earth.' He said to him: 'On that account you surely have a reason to weep,' and they both wept. In the meanwhile he said to him: 'Are your sufferings welcome/beloved to you?' -- He replied: "Neither they nor their reward.' He said to him: 'Give me your hand,' and he gave him his hand and he raised him.'...

Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 5b

**Please note that the Talmud itself does not give names to its narratives – “Give Me Your Hand” is simply what several of us in the Jewish healing movement call these three stories, by way of shorthand!*

Rabbi Simeon ben Yohai used to visit the sick. He once met a man who was swollen and afflicted with intestinal disease, uttering blasphemies against God. Said Rabbi Simeon: “Worthless one! Pray rather for mercy for yourself!” Said the patient: “May God remove these sufferings from me and place them upon you.”

Avot de Rabbi Natan 4:1

(Avot de Rabbi Natan is a Tannaitic amplification of the tractate Avot, ascribed to by Rabbi Natan, an older second century C.E contemporary of Rabbi Judah HaNassi, the editor of the Mishnah)

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Ma'avar Yabbok
S'fat Emet
Chapter 14*

I have chosen to present before the students of our sages the *kavvanah* (1) of Bikkur Holim, in addition to what is written in Section One on this, the *ta'am*/approach to death, *tzidduk haDin* (2), the eulogy, the funeral (3), and his burial, the *havra'ah* (4) and a number of other matters that are customary within Israel in the comforting of mourners, (deriving) from the words of our Sages which are fixed and well-established (5), as this is the work of Heaven, and this explication will (“not”) be without *hiddush*/innovation on the words of our Sages which teach wisdom to humankind.(6)

The *remez*/meaning (7) of “*Bikur Holim*” is that **the person who visits one who is ill reduces/mitigates/lightens the latter’s suffering**, as we see with the student of Rabbi Akiva (*Bab. Talmud, Nedarim 40a*). (8) If he is *ben gilo* (as Rashi explains) (and, according to the Ran there, *Nedarim 39b*), born of the same astrological sign, the pain that pains him is, to the one who is ill, as a *hatzalah purta*/partial relief, a deduction of one-sixtieth of his suffering, that he will at least pour out his complaint in his aching/ grieving for him, in his praying for him after visiting him. He took the language of *bikkur* and not the language of *r'iyah*/pilgrimage/seeing, or *halikhah*/walking/going, or receiving/*kabbalah*, to instruct a person (in) wisdom that **he must help the one who is sick to scrutinize (9) and search out (10) his deeds**, since with the departure of the cause, the effect will depart. And in this lies his ability to multiply the one-sixtieth, extending from *G'vurah* (11) down to *Malkhut* (12), so that an angel may serve as a *melitz*/advocate for him, and even one-thousandth from such an angel is often enough, all the more so one-sixtieth. Further, we might say that “sixty” is used habitually (not literally) by our Sages, as “sixty men may pursue him...” and “sixty pains” and so on (*Bab. Talmud, Bava Kama 92b*) and many other examples, yet in fact from the words of the G'mara it appears that there they do intend “sixty” specifically (literally), as it says (*BT, Nedarim, op cit.*) “If so, let sixty people visit him and restore him to health!” And we have already discussed this, above, in the first section, chapter 1. *Midat HaHessed* (13), the quality/attribute of lovingkindness, is not included in this accounting, for through it an enduring/ endless healing flows, which is there eternally for him, as a shield.

And after the *bikkur*/examination/visit, he returns to be a healer of the sick,(14) which is a *merkavah*/chariot/conveyer for *Tiferet* (15) from the aspect of the *Keter*/Crown (16) in which is healing/recovery. And **the *remez*/meaning (7) of Bikur Holim is a repair of that which is above**, for to that will be the *kavvanah*/intent/direction of the true servant/worshipper, as our Rabbis taught us (*Bab. Talmud, Pesachim 104a*) that with all the conclusions of blessings that they said, the opening must be similar in nature to the conclusion, and near the conclusion there should be a form of/the essence of the blessing. A very important principle is embedded in this teaching, for after we have set the order of the blessing, whether it is a blessing of praise and thanks, or a blessing for *mitzvot*, or asking for our needs, or *birkat nehenin* (17), all is to the end that **God’s Great Name may be blessed through the plenty/influence of the abundance of the blessing, as a woman who fills with milk through the infant who sucks from the breasts of the mother**. And this is, to my knowledge, the proper *kavvanah* with all conclusions and openings of blessings, with the exception of the *kavvanah* of the 12-letter Name of God on which one must focus in concluding, and this is all very *mukbal* as we wrote above (*Siftei Tzedek, Chapter 30*), on the *kavvanah* of the one who responds, “Blessed is He and Blessed is His Name,” q.v. In this manner should one who is visiting the sick direct his mind, that through this act of *g'milut hessed* he is mindful of and visits/examines the sick, and it is *Tiferet* (15) and *Malkhut* (12) which are ill, as it says (*Song of Songs 2:5*) “...for I am sick with love.” He strengthens them and remembers (invests in) them in visiting them, as it says, (*ibid.*) “Sustain me with raisin-cakes, comfort me with apples...” and in *G'dulah* (18) and *G'vurah* (11) there are two cakes, and *Netzah* (19) and *Hod* (20) are two apples, as explained in the *Tikkunim* (21.) Thus, a person, when occupied in the performance of this *mitzvah*, causes an outflow of strength and power, as he holds/strengthens/empowers the one who is ill through the visit and lifts off of him the evil/negative power of the sickness, as mentioned. And **the healing of the sick is, when a person is weighed down in his suffering, he acknowledges that in this illness an external force rules**

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over him, as it says in Job (2:6) “(And the Lord said to Satan,) ‘Behold, he is in your hand...’”, and all the suffering in the world is the spirit of *tum’ah* (22), clothed as *Din* (23) over humans, and in this way the *p’gam*/impairment/defect descends from On High, and the *Mishkan HaKodesh*/Holy Sanctuary (24) is sanctified from out of the darkness that darkened there at the place where his *n’shamah*/soul is most indwelling, and this is the *kavvanah*/intent/meaning of “But you have been Just in all that has come upon us...” (*Nehemiah* 9:33).

And as the disease/malady represents a waning of power given to him to become sick, that which is said (*Bab. Talmud, Avodah Zarah 55a*), “faithful to their oath” (25) as that **particular *din*/verdict is embedded in/driven into him until he receives what befits his culpability**, and indeed, this very *n’shamah* in its lofty place received its judgment and they strike it with fiery lashes (26). This causes, in turn, the fever in the body; similarly, the force of the *din*/verdict that freezes/solidifies harshly causes consumption in the body, and aches/pains will cause some impairment in whatever part of his *n’shamah* that hurts the particular limb, as they taught (*Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 11a*): “any ache, but not headache,” because in the head is the essential *mishkan* (27) of the *n’shamah*, teaching the greatness of his transgression, and similarly with the perilous pains in the heart, teaching that the impairment is in the inwardness of the *nefesh* that dwells inside it, and thus they said (*ibid*), “any pain, but not heart pain.”(28). But the essence of the exalted/lofty/Divine lashings is by fire, and therefore “...Feverishness, were it not a forerunner of the angel of death..” (29; *Babylonian Talmud, Nedarim 41a*), and indeed, the majority of those who die are felled by high fever. Thus they said in (the Zohar on) Parashat B’shallah page 65 (*amud bet*) that all paths of the *Shkhiv Meira*/ Terminally/Deathly Ill are (determined) by Divine Destiny, whether of the (evil) eye or not of the (evil) eye, **all deriving from the external power who governs him and his *n’shamah***.

And when a person comes to visit him, and **feels such great pain over him/his condition, and requests *Rahamim*/Divine Mercy (30) on him**, he draws over this *n’shamah shefa*/outflow/ influence from the aspect of *Keter* (16), and that is the *Rofeh Holim*/Healer of the Sick, as it heals the *n’shamah* and unites Tiferet (15) with *Binah*/Understanding (31), since there the reality/essence of *nefesh, ruah*, and *n’shamah* are clothed in *Din*/judgment (see note 11) and in illness; and when he visits him and keeps an eye after him for the Good, he causes the upper *sefirot* to be revealed on the ill individual, and that is the *Sh’khinah* which is above his head, and he requests Divine compassion on him among all the ill ones of the people of Israel, he unites/sets apart/assigns and lightens his suffering. *Bikkur Holim* (extends) from the aspect of *Hessed* (13) and if one occupies oneself in another’s healing it rises to the *Arikh Anpin* (32), out of which comes healing and cure, and thus the *tz’dakah* of maintaining those who are ill comes before all other forms of *tz’dakah*, as it extends from the *Keter* (12) of the *n’shamah* out through all the other *sefirot*.

The one who is ill ought **to try to fulfill those *mitzvot* that are within his strength and ability**, as all his transgressions are being weighed at this juncture. Rabbi Isaac of Akko (33) wrote about a *ma’aseh* that happened to Rabbi Joseph Gikatilla (34) who was seriously ill and close to death. Half asleep and half awake, he saw two men weighing his transgressions and merits on a scale, and they were exactly equal. He woke up, and, mustering his strength, asked for his *t’fillin* and put them on, and immediately he began to heal and emerge from death to life, as the side of merits outweighed the other side.

The one who is sick **should pay attention to his dreams**, particularly if he is a *talmid hakham* (accomplished student of Jewish learning), as often they appear to him to inform him what is decreed for him and how he might acquit his path, as expressed in the *Midrash on Shir HaShirim (Song of Songs; 2, 16)*: ‘...All the maladies which You bring upon me are to make me more beloved of You,’ (35) commenting on the verse “(Sustain me with raisins, comfort me with apples;) for I am sick with love.” (*Song of Songs* 2:5.) This matter is known and verified among a number of the lofty ones (36), as we say in *Midrash Kohelet (Ecclesiastes; 3, 3)*: (R. Helbo and R. Simeon b. Abba said in the name of) R. Joshua b. Levi: ‘All those who are ill are presumed to be in danger of death.’ And similarly we learned in the *G’mara*: “...when he takes to bed...” (37).

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Also there (*Midrash Kohelet Rabbah 3, 21*) page 74 *amud bet* is this tradition to be in your hand: “If one performs a *mitzvah* when near to his end, it is as though his quality of righteousness lacked only that *mitzvah* and is completed thereby; and if one commits an *averah*/ transgression when near to his end, it is as though his quality of wickedness lacked only that *averah*/transgression and is completed thereby. Both of them depart [from the world] fully consummated, one in the quality of righteousness and the other in the quality of wickedness (Heaven forbid.)” Thus, **a person really needs/requires *hizuk*/strengthening to purify his deeds and thoughts near to his death, and all Israel are *arevim*/interrelated one to his fellow**, to be a concrete/substantial aid/support to him, and thereby many will pray/entreat for him, and his *n’shamah* will be given to the (Heavenly) Treasury. And all who do not visit the sick, it is said in Midrash Tehillim in connection with Psalm 41, cause that an additional one-sixtieth is added to his suffering, and this applies, to my thinking, specifically to a *ben gilo*/peer. **When the ill individual is in great pain from his sickness, Rabbi Hanina taught that he should accustom himself to say *HaEl HaNe’eman* (“God the Faithful One”) as brought in Shir haShirim Rabbah 13b (2; 34 (45)) that the Holy Blessed One who is *rahim tav*/ lovingcompassionate, *tivuteih*/His goodkindness will not absent/deprive itself from him (for)ever.**

** Please note: This is a most preliminary, “non-academic” attempt to glean some meaning from a section discussing Bikur Holim in the wonderful early 17th century anthology, Ma’avar Yabbok, of Rabbi Aharon Berechiah of Modena, Italy. By no means is this rendering 100% correct or complete; it must not be regarded as an accurate, authoritative, rigorous translation. I welcome all comments, improvements, and insights.*

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All emphases are added.

Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, Iyyar 5763/May 2003

NOTES

(1) Intent, intention, focus, concentration, direction, attention, purpose, devotion, meaning, significance, premeditation....

(2) Acknowledging the righteousness of Divine judgment

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(3) *Halvayat hamet*, literally, escorting the dead

(4) The meal of comfort for the mourners, after the funeral

(5) *K'masmerot n'tu'im*, literally, "nailed down," unshifting, not to be changed

(6) *M'lamdei l'adam da'at* echoes the fourth blessing in the daily, central Amidah prayer:

"With grace, You endow human beings with *da'at*/intelligence,
teaching mortals *binah*/understanding.

Graciously grant us, from/of Yourself,

dei'ah/knowledge, *binah*/understanding, and *haskel*/discernment.

Praised are You, Adonai, gracious Grantor of *da'at*/intelligence."

On the Kabbalistic tree, *Da'at* is also the "non-sefirah sefirah" that represents the integration of *Binah*/Understanding and *Hokhmah*/Wisdom, centrally lined up below *Keter* and above *Tiferet*.

(7) *Remez*, of course, specifically refers to the metaphorical meaning in Torah interpretation or exploration – along with three other approaches: *P'shat* (literal), *D'rash* (allegorical), and *Sod* (secret/esoteric). This statement encapsulates Bikur Holim as "load-lightening."

(8) The well-known aggadah that is being referred to:

Rabbi Helbo once fell ill. Thereupon Rabbi Kahana went and proclaimed: "Rabbi Helbo is ill!" But none

visited him. He rebuked them [the scholars], saying,

"Did it not once happen that one of R. Akiba's disciples fell sick, and the Sages did not visit him? So R. Akiba himself entered [the disciple's house] to visit him, and because they swept and sprinkled the ground before him, he recovered. 'My master,' said the disciple, 'you have revived me!' Whereupon R. Akiba went forth and lectured: 'He who does not visit the sick is like a shedder of blood.'"

Babylonian Talmud, Nedarim 39b-40a

(9) *She-y'vashpesh*: Echoing Babylonian Talmud, Berakhot 5:

"If a man sees troubles coming upon him, let him search (*y'vashpesh*) his deeds."

(10) Suggesting the connection between different meanings of the Hebrew root *b-k-r*, to seek, to search out, to visit, etc.

(11) The 5th sefirah, *Gevurah* relates to Strength/Power/*Din*/Judgment, Rigor, Red, Left Arm – positioned opposite *Hessed* (see note 13 below). On the human level, it refers also to holding back, maintaining boundaries; laws, discipline, limitations, restraint, moderation – also acquiring, ambition, discovering, inventing.

(12) 10th sefirah – *Malkhut* is Majesty/Kingdom/Communion of Israel/Earth/Moon Queen/*Shekhinah*/Presence/Apple Orchard/Rainbow. This sefirah remains "cracked" from the big explosion, and it is our job to repair it.

(13) The 4th sefirah, *Hessed*/Love/Grace/White/Right Arm – in which the energy of formation, the process of giving shape, begins. On the human level, it is all about charity, healing, compassionate caring, nurturing, giving of ourselves, etc.... as well as also allowing others to give to/care for us.

(14) One hears an echo of the teaching concerning the first Biblically-recorded example of Divine Bikur Holim – when God visits the recovering (from his circumcision) Abraham in Genesis 18:1. Rashi and others stress that this visit truly was Bikur Holim – and not, say, a medical follow-up appointment, which suggests a different focus, goal, attitude, relationship.

(15) The 6th sefirah, *Tiferet* is Beauty/*Rahamim*/Compassion/Blessed Holy One/Heaven/Sun/Balance point of giving and receiving/Harmony/King/Green:

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“When Tiferet is balanced it is actually not perfectly balanced, but leans a little toward the side of Hessed, toward lovingkindness. Why is this? Because the universe began with an act of judgment, with the concentration of Din, and therefore there is slightly more Din in the world than there is Hessed. We need to balance the severity inherent in our world with a bit more mercy and compassion in order to achieve true balance. A world with a little more Hessed gives us leeway to have Din without it being destructive. We need a slight reserve of Hessed to balance the greater weight of Din in the world...”-- Kim Zetter, *Simple Kabbalah* (Berkeley, CA: Conari Press, 1999) p. 177.

(16) The 1st sefirah, *Keter* is Will/*Ayin*/Nothingness/Darkness, representing God’s act of *tzimtzum*, self-contraction; the Will before thought or idea. It is reflected in human selflessness, ego-obliteration, the Unity of All, humility.

(17) The “enjoyment benediction,” uttered over beverages, refreshments, etc.

(18) *G’dulah*/Greatness, which appears on some maps of the Sefirot, is close to, and perhaps in great measure identical with, *Hessed*; see (13) above

(19) *Netzah*, the 7th sefirah, is “Victory”/Triumph/Eternity/Prophecy/Right Leg, referring, on a human level, to the dominating nature, the self-confident leader, one with self-esteem who takes needed action. It also is reflected in the emotional nature of people, acting out of deep feelings.

(20) *Hod*, the 8th sefirah, is about Splendor/Grace/Prophecy/Left Leg, reflected in human vulnerability, complacency, acceptance, dependence and admiration of others. It is about requiring care, nurturing, and teaching from others, and also about thoughts putting reins on emotions.

(21) Apparently a reference to *Tikkunei Zohar* (“Amendments of Brilliance”), an ancient book ascribed to Rabbi Shimon bar Yohai, the 2nd century Tanna (scholar of the Mishnah), purported to be the author of many utterances in the *Zohar*, [The Book of] Splendor), the central work in the literature of the Kabbalah. Many scholars now date *Tikkunei Zohar* to the 14th century.

(22) Literally, “ritual unfitness” -- may be understood as a diminution or unproductive encounter with the Life Force

(23) Strict Judgment/Severity, related to *G’vurah* (11) above

(24) Apparently, referring to “The Temple of the Body”

(25) The idea is that the malady has an assigned mission. It is worth providing the paragraph that ends with this: [An Israelite named] Zunin said to R. Akiba: ‘We both know in our heart that there is no reality in an idol; nevertheless we see men enter [the shrine] crippled and come out cured. What is the reason?’ He replied, ‘I will give you a parable: To what is the matter like? To a trustworthy man in a city, and all his townsmen used to deposit [their money] in his charge without witnesses. One man, however, came and deposited [his money] in his charge with witnesses; but on one occasion he forgot and made his deposit without witnesses. The wife [of the trustworthy man] said to [her husband], “Come, let us deny it.” He answered her, “Because this fool acted in an unworthy manner, shall I destroy my reputation for trustworthiness!” It is similar with afflictions. At the time they are sent upon a man the oath is imposed upon them, “You shall not come upon him except on such and such a day, nor depart from him except on such and such a day, and at such an hour, and through the medium of so and so, and through such and such a remedy.” When the time arrives for them to depart, the man chanced to go to an idolatrous shrine. The afflictions plead, “It is right that we should not leave him and depart; but because this fool acts in an unworthy way shall we break our oath!”’ This is similar to what R. Johanan said: “What means that which is written, ‘And sore and faithful sicknesses?’ (Deuteronomy 28:59) — ‘Sore’ in their mission and ‘faithful’ to their oath.”

Babylonian Talmud, Avodah Zarah 55a

(26) In other words, there exists a relationship, even a correspondence, between pains in the body and pains in the “soul,” pains “above” and pains “below.”

(27) And the “head” means not just the brain, and not just the left brain, of course, but consider the eyes, the ears, the mouth...

(28) The full statement is:

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Raba b. Mehasia also said in the name of R. Hama b. Goria in Rab's name: Rather any complaint, but not a complaint of the bowels; any pain, but not heart pain; any ache, but not head ache; any evil, but not an evil wife.

Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 11a

(29) The full quote is:

Raba said: Feverishness, were it not a forerunner of the angel of death, would be as salutary once in thirty days as thorns which surround [and protect] a palm tree, and as theriak (a certain compound believed to be an antidote against poisonous bites) to the body (i.e., the fever has a purging and purifying effect on the body.)

Babylonian Talmud, Nedarim 41a-b

(30) *Rahamim*/Compassion, as a quality, is associated with the 6th sefirah, *Tiferet*/Beauty (15). Requesting Divine Mercy is a fundamental requirement in Bikkur Holim; see, for example, Maimonides, *Mishneh Torah: Hilkhot Aveilut*/The Laws of Mourning, Chapter 14, Section VI.

(31) The 3rd sefirah, *Binah* is Understanding/Palace/Womb, the “Mother of all the lower sefirot,” emerging/refracting one after the other, like Russian nesting dolls. On a human level, it is reflected in Integration – of masculine and feminine, and/or strength and vulnerability, and/or the intellectual and the physical – and in *T’shuvah*, Return/Repentance towards Wholeness.

(32) *Arikkh Anpin*, literally, the Longest Face -- the Highest Level – the Grandparent -- that is all Love and Mercy, “long” in the sense of exuding compassion and kindness. This “face” or “physiognomy” points to a personality of forbearing and indulgence; it is a phrase borrowed from the Zohar, where it appears as an Aramaic translation of the biblical “*erekh appayim*,” literally, “long-faced” signifying “long-suffering.”

(33) Isaac ben Samuel of Acre, a late 13th–mid-14th century kabbalist. In his youth Isaac studied in the yeshivah of Solomon Petit in Acre, leaving in 1291 for Italy, traveling from there to Spain, where he met numerous kabbalists. Four of Isaac's works have been preserved: (1) *Me'irat Einayim*, a major commentary on Nahmanides' mysticism; (2) *Otzar Hayyim*, a mystical diary of visions and revelations, many coming to him through trance-states or dreams. He notes three states in the ladder of ascent leading to the Holy Spirit – devotion, indifference, and solitude; (3) A commentary on the *Sefer Yezirah*; (4) A shortened free translation of the Arabic commentary of Judah b. Nissim ibn Malka on *Pirkei de-Rabbi Eliezer*.

(34) Joseph ben Abraham Gikatilla (also “Chiquatilla”), 1248-c. 1325, Spanish kabbalist whose works exerted a profound and permanent influence on kabbalism. His first extant work, *Ginnat Egoz* (1615), written in 1274, is an introduction to the mystic symbolism of the alphabet, vowel points, and the Divine Names. Gikatilla's most influential kabbalistic work, written before 1293, is his *Sha'arei Orah* (1559), a detailed explanation of kabbalistic symbolism and the designations of the ten *Sefirot*. Gikatilla made an original attempt to provide a detailed yet lucid and systematic exposition of kabbalism.

(35) Complete quote:

“FOR I AM LOVE-SICK. Said the Community of Israel before the Holy Blessed One: ‘Sovereign of the Universe, all the maladies which You bring upon me are to make me more beloved of You.’” In other words, translating: ‘For my sickness is for the purpose of love,’ (Suffering brings Israel near to God.)

Midrash Shir HaShirim 2, 16

(36) Those who have, through struggle, learning, exploration, and reaching, reached a high level of spiritual living/orientation, so that even with/despite increased, serious suffering, they are able to sense a drawing-closer to the Holy Blessed One.

(37) The full paragraph:

Our Rabbis taught: if one falls sick and his life is in danger (literally, ‘inclines to death’) he is told, Make confession, for all who are sentenced to death make confession. When a man goes out into the street, let him imagine that he is given in charge of an officer (to be brought to trial); when he has a headache, let him imagine that he is put in irons; **when he takes to bed**, let him imagine that he ascended the scaffold to be punished. For whoever ascends the scaffold to be punished, if he has great advocates he is saved, but if not, he is not saved. And these are man's advocates: repentance and good deeds. And even if nine hundred and ninety-nine argue for his guilt, while one argues in his favour, he is saved, for it is said, If there be with him an angel, an advocate, one among a thousand, “To shew unto man what is right for him; Then he is gracious unto him, and saith,

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Deliver him from going down to the pit,” etc. (Job 33:23ff). R. Eliezer the son of R. Jose the Galilean said: Even if nine hundred and ninety-nine parts of that angel are in his disfavour and one part is in his favour, he is saved, for it is said, ‘an advocate, one part in a thousand’.

Babylonian Talmud, Shabbat 32a

Commenting on the biblical phrase (Song of Songs 4:5) “Your breasts are like two fawns”:

These (the breasts) are Moses and Aaron. Just as the breasts are the beauty and the ornaments of a woman, so Moses and Aaron were the beauty and ornament of Israel. Just as the breasts are the charm of a woman, so Moses and Aaron were the charm of Israel. Just as the breasts are the glory and pride of a woman, so Moses and Aaron were the glory and pride of Israel. Just as the breasts are full of milk, so Moses and Aaron filled Israel with Torah. Just as whatever a woman eats help to feed the child at the breast, so all the Torah that Moses our master learned he taught to Aaron.

Shir Ha-Shirim Rabbah, trans. Maurice Simon, *Midrash Rabbah* (London and New York, 1983) p. 198.
(*Parsha 4, Siman 13*)

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Ten Possible Questions to Ask Oneself after a Bikur Cholim Visit

Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, LCSW © 2008

Please note: These are only suggestions for the self-debriefing that might follow a Bikur Cholim experience, and they are in no special order.

1. If you had certain expectations (of yourself, of the visitee) of this visit, what were they, and how do they compare to the ultimate experience?
2. What surprised you about this visit? What was unexpected?
3. What are you feeling at this moment?— some possibilities (underline all that apply):

Gratitude	Pain	Frustration	Special	Blessed	Angry
Relief	Despair	Successful	Empty	Uneasy	Regretful
Pride	Joy	Confusion	Light	Exhausted	Motivated
Humility	Helplessness	Curiosity	Heavy	Replenished	Shocked
Lonely	Hopeful	Repulsed	Appreciated	Sad	Repulsed
Connected	Failed	Ambivalent	Used	Touched	Rejected
4. What was *missing* from the visit – what would you have liked to have happened, that didn't?
5. If/When you were to pray for this individual, what would you express?
6. What name would you give to this visit, if it were a chapter of a book or a DVD? Or:
What lesson or teaching might you derive from this experience?
7. What losses are front-and-center for you? Which losses are you grieving, or perhaps, *not* attending to?
8. What are you grateful for – that you can feel now, at this moment?
9. Is there something specific, maybe 'concrete,' that you can/should do for this individual, his/her family, or healthcare professionals as a follow-up to this visit?
10. Is there anything about this visit that relates to the weekly *parashah* (Torah portion) or an approaching Jewish marker – holiday, fast day, etc.?

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