

VISITING THE SICK PART 2

by Rabbi Yehonasan Gefen

There are a number of reasons behind the mitzva (commandment) to visit the sick:

1. Providing the sick person with his needs.
2. Showing that you care about him.
3. Praying for him in his presence.

1. Providing him with his needs: The most fundamental reason for visiting a sick person is to ensure that he is being properly attended to. Traditionally, a sick person may not necessarily have been located in a hospital that provided quality health care and therefore it was very important to check that the sick person was being ably treated for his condition. Nowadays, most people with a serious sickness or who require an operation are in hospital where their needs are generally provided for. Nonetheless, it is possible that a patient not receive a great deal of attention since there are so many other patients, thus a visitor can still play an important role in clarifying the patient's needs and trying to make sure that the medical staff provide the patient with his needs and in this way the visitor can help make the patient's stay more pleasant.

2. Showing him that you care about him: Even if a person is not required to ensure that the patient is properly looked after, nonetheless he can fulfill the vital function of making the patient know that someone cares about him and is willing to devote some of his own time and energy to visit him in hospital. It seems that one's mere presence is more important than anything he may say to the patient. We learn this from the account of when Hashem visited Avraham Avinu after his circumcision. The Torah tells us that Hashem appeared to Avraham but makes no mention of what Hashem actually said. This teaches that the most significant factor about Hashem's visit to Avraham was the fact that He was there and that any words spoken were secondary. Moreover, it is important to note that when a sick person feels emotionally stronger it is more likely that his physical health will improve, thus visiting him and showing that you care is one way of helping him in his physical recovery.

3. Praying for him in his presence: The Rabbis write that an essential part of visiting the sick is praying for him in his presence. This is so important because we know that ultimately the real source of health is Hashem and not any doctor or medicine. Thus, praying is a genuine form of kindness. Praying for the patient is such an important part of visiting the sick that if one did not pray then he did not fulfill the mitzva.

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