

Bikur Ch'olim

On that same day Abraham and his son Ishmael were circumcised. And all the men of his household--both slaves born in his house and those purchased with money from a foreigner--were circumcised with him. Then the LORD appeared to Abraham at the oaks of Mamre while he was sitting in the entrance of his tent during the heat of the day. – Genesis 17:26-18:1 HCSB

God came to 99-year-old Abraham and in essence told him, “Listen, I’m going to do right by you and take care of you. There’s this one thing I need you to do however...”

I can imagine Abraham’s discomfiture when he heard the requirement! “Now let me get this straight,” he might have said. “The Arabs will get oil and we get to do what?!”

But the Bible tells us that he and all the men in his household got circumcised that very day. I believe this attitude is what made Yahweh select Abraham out of all the people in the world. When God told him to get circumcised, he got right to it that very day. When God later told him to sacrifice his favored son, Abraham got up early in the morning to get right to it.¹ No wonder God considered Abraham no mere follower, but a friend!²

Like any good friend, God came visiting when Abraham was down for the count from his surgery. This mitzvah, this blessed commandment, is called *bikur ch'olim*. *Bikur ch'olim* (pronounced bee-CORE hoe-LEEM) is a Hebrew phrase that means visiting the sick and reflects the Lord’s command to “love your neighbor as yourself”³.

All humans need to feel connected. Those who are ill struggle with a feeling of isolation and, depending on their condition, a sense of embarrassment. In our “busy-ness”, time can pass quickly. For those who are bed or homebound, time crawls and the sense of being forgotten can quickly mount. Social contact and positive support can help them; if not to recover, at least to handle their problems with grace.

There are so many ways that we can reach out and demonstrate our Master’s compassion to our fellow man that you’d be hard pressed to list them all, but some things we can do include: offering comfort to the grieving; supporting the ill, the homebound or the untouchable; hospital, nursing home or rehab center visitation; caring for the physically, mentally or psychologically challenged; giving the care giver a chance for a break; bringing worship to the homebound; bringing food; offering transportation to medical appointments; helping with the children; praying or reading Scripture with them; filling their car with gas or mowing their lawns; paying for some gift certificates from local pizza delivery stores; picking up some extra groceries for them while at the store.

Just be there for them. Listen to them. Love them. Be God in flesh to them. Practice the mitzvah of *bikur ch'olim*.

¹ Genesis 22:3

² 2 Chronicles 20:7; Isaiah 41:8; James 2:23

³ Leviticus 19:18