



11Reb Shloime on *Bikur Cholim*

[Aryae C "Bikkur cholim" AK 1974]

*gevald*

***But then he says, this is so deep, he says, when you visit a person and he's very very sick at a time that's it very hard on him, he thinks maybe you'll give up on me and you won't pray for me. This person came to visit me, but they see how sick I am, maybe they don't believe I'll get well. Then you are missing the whole point of the visit. You have to .visit at a time that they believe that you are praying for them .person all the sick people of the worl***

***This is very deep friends. We were learning a little yesterday, in a very strange way, pain brings people together. Sometimes I think, there is so much pain in the world, in a very crazy way, one sick person mamash knows how another sick person feels. He knows. They are mamash connected, like a union of sick people. So when you come to a sick person and you pray and you want this union to be mentioned. He wants you to pray for him and also say, I wish all the sick people of the world.***

***This is very, very deep. People are very sick G-d forbid, they are afraid of dying, G-d forbid, when they owe people money it hurts them so much, they think, maybe G-d forbid I will die and this person will always remember me that I stole his money.never pray like ".you***

***Something else very important, a sick person while they are sick, the conflict of life is very deep. We are just living through it, but they mamash know what it's all about. A sick person sometimes has very deep thoughts about life. They might be a simple person in***

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***ordinary life, but now they are sick, they really have something special to say. Maybe nobody ever asked them. They want so much to say but they think it's something everybody knows. When you give them a little courage you don't know what you are doing on their insides. It's very important, we should ask him, please tell me what life is ?all about. What is life to you? What does it mean to you***

*You know my sweetest friends, there are so many passages in the Psalms and every word is so special and so deep, every word in the Psalms, my sweetest friends, I want you to know, the medrash says, can you imagine all the people of the world from the first man to the last man ever, they would get together, and all of them would be praying, can you imagine what a sound, !imagine what a prayer*

*And every word of King David contains a prayer of the whole world, can you imagine? Therefore, to the end of all generations, anybody who opens the book of Psalms has his own prayer written in this holy book. There is one passage which is very special to us and it says:*

*“even I walk in the Valley of Death, I fear no evil, I see no evil, You are with me,”*

*what a passage! You know how many people since King David wrote those words, how many !!people literally live those words, how many people draw strength from those words*

*Singing Gam kee aylech*



## וילכו שניהם יחדו

Walking arm in arm  
father and son  
in silence  
the cool Jerusalem spring air  
Dad comments repeatedly on the quiet  
the absent traffic  
on this Shabbat morning.

“Magic” he described the feeling walking with me, later  
“not like father and son”

Our task from his home to the hospital  
was to visit his beloved partner  
forlorn without her  
at times disoriented  
focused only on her visitation  
worried about her pneumonia  
as was I  
we slowly make our way to the Bokur Cholim  
internal medicine floor.

I her ward are 4 other women.  
The one behind her, disallowing the curtain to be drawn for um’s privacy  
screaming if we in any way tamper with it  
born in Kovno , Lithuania  
and sings early zionist songs during the night  
keeping all awake.  
She has no visitors despite many children  
have they given up on her?

Opposite mum is an Arab woman  
covered from head to toe at all times  
with many many visitors streaming in and out during the day  
seven daughters her husband boasts to me  
the youngest in Bethlehem University studying business.  
each daughter prettier than the next but the youngest unmarried scholar  
is stunningly beautiful.  
I kibbitz with him about dressing more like the patriarch he is what with 37 grandchildren  
at 57 years!.  
All this banter takes place in the cultural divide that separates citizens of this so called secular  
society but hovers like a pall over all interactions.

Lastly the “Schvester”  
a single spinster in her 90’s  
no family survived the Holocaust but her  
frail and fragile  
in long gown  
and *tiechel*

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she has a steady flow of visitors all planned by the neighborhood  
so only one at a time,  
they *daven* with her  
and speak little.  
She came to Jerusalem after the Shoah  
from Germany  
sole survivor  
now the mascot for her local Geulah neighborhood  
all the young and not so young women are happy to visit "Shvester"  
no men come by.

And the fourth is my mother  
unwilling to be here  
out of place in such company  
ignoring the others as much as possible  
despite my holy sister's constant visitations to their needs too.  
This pneumonia this petty cough  
the shadow on the X ray that convinced the ER physician of the need for the admission  
the antibiotic infusions, the periodic inhalants that irritate  
her reluctant walks up and down the ancient corridors  
of this building once a hospice  
in the old city.

*Bikur Cholim first opened in a residential building in the Old City in 1826. In 1843, the hospital had only three rooms for patients. In 1854, a building was purchased which soon grew overcrowded. In 1864, another complex of buildings was acquired incorporating treatment rooms, a pharmacy, a hospice for the terminally ill and administrative offices. The Ashkenazi Perushim Hospital, as it was known, became the favorite charity of the British Jewish philanthropist Moses Montefiore, who described the facility in his diary in 1875. The general ward consisted of two rooms, each with eight beds. One room was reserved for men, and the other for women. In 1893, the hospital cared for 781 patients and treated 12,347 people in its out-patient clinics.*

*By 1907, hospitalizations exceeded 1,000 per annum. A decision was reached to build a new hospital outside the walls of the Old City. The cornerstone of the new building was laid in 1912, but construction work was delayed by the outbreak of World War I. The building on Chancellor Avenue (now Strauss Street), just off Jaffa Road, was completed in 1925 and opened its doors to all residents of Jerusalem, Jews and non-Jews. The hospital in the Old City continued to treat the chronically ill until 1947.*

*Many of the wounded from the 1929 Palestine riots and 1936–39 Arab revolt in Palestine were brought to Bikur Holim. Jewish underground fighters were hospitalized under fictitious names to keep the British mandatory police from finding them. During the War of Independence in 1948, the hospital came under artillery fire from Jordanian guns. Hadassah Hospital on Mount Scopus was evacuated, and many patients were transferred to Bikur Holim.*

*In 2007, the Russian-Israeli tycoon Arkadi Gaydamak saved the hospital from bankruptcy, taking it over from receivership. In 2010, Gaydamak stopped funding the hospital and returned to Russia. The current building was designed by architect Zvi Joseph Barsky in the neo-classical*

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*style with modernist elements. Zeev Raban of Bezalel designed the bronze doors. When Arcady Gaydamak bought the hospital for \$35 million in 2007, he commissioned plans, designed by the Architect Moti Bodek to build two hospitalization towers alongside the existing historical structure.*

I hold my father's arm as we ascend the worn stone steps to the second floor  
I wonder how many decades it takes to wear down the central third of the step  
how many people trod these steps on their way to beloved relatives  
how many walked these stones in the hope of recovery.  
The stones steps can tell stories we long forgot  
bearing the weight of humanity  
they groan and slowly wear down  
under the sheer mass of suffering.

We don't know  
we never know  
we can only endure  
these moments of uncertainty  
but during these times  
the arms interlocked  
father and son  
in silent movement  
there is no-thing to say  
the obvious lies before us  
illness decay and mortus,  
so the moment is treasured like no other  
in the anxiety of what may be  
we tread the steps humbly  
following the countless before us.

All differences fall away before the tremendum  
all opinions and treasured beliefs seem trivial here  
I ask my father about a recent spat,  
based on what I believe is the very conflict surrounding the soul of the family  
"does one ignore religious differences in the children for the sake of the unity  
of the family?"  
he thinks for a few minutes  
relying: "it's not worth making a stand"  
and for a minute all my resentment falls away  
and his judgement makes so much sense  
when seen from his perspective.

Father and mother take on different meaning  
this late in life  
they are the gift that endures  
and each month I visit  
I am given another gift  
another lease

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albeit tenuously  
albeit seeing the slow decline  
so I treasure this  
and even more so when this gift is threatened by possible mortal illness.

I am truly gifted  
the very privilege of walking with my father  
this Shabbat  
in the quiet streets of Jerusalem  
in the cool spring air  
the blue sky meeting the yellow stoned buildings  
all is right  
even here and now  
in the anxiety of the moment.