



## Why don't we say a ברכה?

Virtually all מצות that we do whether they are דאורייתא or דרבנן, are preceded by a ברכת המצוה. Why then did חז"ל not establish a חיוב to say a ברכה before performing ביקור חולים (or any act of חסד for that matter). We find three basic approaches in the ראשונים. The (שו"ת ח"א סימן יח) explains that we don't say a ברכה on any מצוה that is dependant on an outside entity. In our case, we have to be הושש that the הולה will not be interested in our visit and we will have then made a לבטלה. Only when the מצוה is completely dependant on the one doing it can one state with confidence that he will certainly succeed in being מקיים it. The (הל' ברכות המוציא סימן קב) writes that we don't say ברכות on מצות whose חיוב is constant and does not have a pronounced beginning or end. The third approach is רבינו בחיי (במדבר טו:לה וע"ע בשו"ת בנימין זאב ח"א סימן (במדבר טו:לה וע"ע בשו"ת בנימין זאב ח"א סימן (במדבר טו:לה וע"ע בשו"ת בנימין זאב ח"א סימן (במדבר טו:לה וע"ע בשו"ת בנימין זאב ח"א סימן who states that we don't say ברכות on מצות שכליות - that one would logically conclude on his own. Since there is no inherent proof through one's actions that he is doing the מצוה in order to serve ה', and non-Jews perform the same actions for societal reasons, one should not say a ברכה.

## Must it be done in person?

The גמרא (נדרים לט.) discusses a situation in which someone has sworn not to receive הנאה from another person and now wishes to visit him. For technical reasons, the גמרא concludes, "הלה הוא מבקרר חלה בנו שואל בשוק" - if he is sick you may visit him, but if his son is sick you should inquire of his welfare in the marketplace. Thus we see that asking a third party as to the welfare of the individual constitutes a קיום of ביקור חולים. Therefore, many פוסקים write (אג"מ) that one partially fulfils the מצוה by calling the sick person on the telephone. However, this certainly doesn't constitute a proper קיום המצוה for a number of reasons.

1. The גמרא (נדרים שם) outlines what one is supposed to accomplish with his visit. It relates the story of רבי עקיבא who went to visit his sick student and took care of the student's needs, thus helping the student on his road to recovery. The פוסקים understand that inherent in the מצוה of visiting the sick individual is attending to his needs in a way that he himself is unable. Thus, one who 'visits' by merely calling on the phone is unable to accomplish this חלק of the מצוה. The (צ"ץ אליעזר שם) is of the opinion that if the הולה is in a hospital and is already being cared for by the doctors and nurses, one need not concern himself with this part of the מצוה, but the יהוה דעת disagrees. (One can certainly contend that

- even in the best of hospitals, those patients who receive visitors who are concerned with their well being are assured of better treatment, as the staff is aware that their actions on the patients behalf are being scrutinized.)
2. The (שם) גמרא tells us that one who visits a חולה removes one sixtieth of his illness. Obviously, this only applies to someone who visits in person. (Our text of the גמרא states that this only applies if the visitor is a בן גילו of the חולה. However, the רמב"ם's text (הל' אבל יד:ד) there is no mention of the requirement of בן גילו. The (חי' לנדרים לט:) סופר wonders why we don't really see the חולה get any healthier. He explains that when only a few people come to visit, it's possible that none of them are a בן גילו of the חולה. However, if many people come, it's likely that some of them are בני גילו. If they were all to enter at once we would see a vast improvement in the חולה's condition, but since people generally visit in intervals, the illness regains its original strength during the interim period. There is still a great benefit to the חולה, that the visitors help him keep his illness in check and the symptoms don't worsen.)
  3. Upon seeing his תלמיד's positive reaction to his visit, רבי עקיבא declared, "כל מי שאין מבקר חולים כאילו שופך דמים", anyone who neglects visiting the sick is considered as having committed murder. The גמרא explains that one who visits the sick will daven for the individual to recover, thus choosing not to visit robs the חולה of an opportunity for a רפואה שלמה. The פוסקים explain that even though one can certainly daven for an individual with whom he speaks with on the phone, the davening will be less effective of three reasons.

One who witnesses his friend in a weakened state of illness will certainly have more רחמנות than someone who hears about the situation but doesn't see it first-hand. It is for this reason that the (יו"ד שלה:ד) פסקנים that one should not visit during the first three hours or the last three hours of the day. In the beginning of the day, the חולה is just waking up from a good night's sleep and will appear healthier than he really is, and at the end of the day, he is exhausted and his condition will seem worse. Thus, the visitor who comes early will assume that his friend is on his way to recovery and not daven on his behalf, while a latecomer might decide that the situation is too far-gone and decide that there is nothing he can do.

The גמרא tells us that the שכינה rests above the head of the חולה. Thus, one who davens near the חולה is doing so in the presence of the שכינה, and certainly has a greater chance of his תפילה being effective.

The גמרא (ברכות לד.) states that one who davens in the presence of a sick individual need not mention the individual's name. This is learned from the תפילה of משה רבינו who davened for מרים when she had צרעת by saying "רפה נא לה". However, one who davens away from the חולה must do so by mentioning the individual's name. The זוהר הקדוש (פרשת וישלח קסט.) teaches us that it is better to daven for a חולה without mentioning the חולה's name. Therefore, even if one wishes to circumvent the aforementioned issue by gathering a מנין, thereby bringing forth the presence of the שכינה must still contend with this issue על פי קבלה.

In addition to the differences mentioned by the פוסקים, the מנחת אשר (בראשית) פוסקים, the רבנו writes that since the מצוה of ביקור חולים was established by the רבנו, it must be done within the parameters that ה"ל set forth. One who calls on the telephone might be fulfilling the מצוה of חסד in general, but is not performing an act of ביקור חולים as outlined by ה"ל and is not מקיים this particular מצוה.