

Bikor Cholim: End of Life Visits

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Reflections From Rabbi Karen Landy





Talmud, Bavli, Berachot 5b

R. Hiyya bar Abba fell ill. R. Johanan went to visit him. He said to him: Are your sufferings welcome 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.

R. Johanan once fell ill and R. Hanina went in to visit him. He said to him: Are your sufferings welcome 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.



Memorial in Boston – Baker Street Cemetery

- The memorial's inscription captures this moment in time: "...and the people mourned as one community."
- The memorial also includes two granite benches to provide a place for personal reflection. The first bench is dedicated to those who died without loved ones. The second bench is dedicated to the cemetery caretakers – "the last responders" – who unselfishly performed the ultimate act of loving kindness."
- The memorial ensures that the victims and their stories will never be forgotten. It honors the elderly woman who died without family and was laid to rest in the last available grave in the same cemetery where her parents were buried decades ago. It honors an only adult child with limited resources who lost both parents within 48 hours, veterans who defended our country and Holocaust survivors who lived through genocide and died during a global pandemic. The list is long.

National Memorial Service



- "To heal, we must remember. It's hard, sometimes, to remember. But that's how we heal. It's important to do that as a nation," Mr. Biden said in brief remarks, before taking a moment of silence before the array of lights set up alongside the pool.
- "Tonight, we grieve and begin healing together. Though we may be physically separated, we the American people are united in spirit," Harris said

Grief is described as a “process” with various theories of grief...however, personally, I would describe it as a complex web of thoughts, feelings and emotions that are often so intense and distressing... there are no words to truly describe or define it. **COVID-19 has compounded this complexity mainly because of the enforced separation from those we love and care for and who care for us.** This is particularly difficult in end of life care, whether the person is dying from COVID-19 or something else ... the reduced contact and indeed none for some.

Not being able to sit with someone you love when they are dying must be horrendous.

Imposing these restrictions is also so hard for staff, going against all our natural caring instincts at the very heart of nursing. Social distancing, sometimes referred to as “physical” distancing because during this traumatic time we need more social contact, not less, is having a radical impact on service delivery and communication.

The best resource of all is the human resource of personal contact...let's not pretend we are "okay" or "fine"... we may have wounds from this war but they will heal... my deepest fear is the scars they may leave behind if we do not tend to them with love and tender care.

Sandra Campbell

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Vidui for Coronavirus *By Rabbi Ora Nitkin-Kaner*

Below is a Viddui written for Jews who are losing a beloved to a plague, and who may not be able to be physically present or close to their loved one.

Take a cup of water in your left hand, pour it over your entire right hand, covering up to the wrist. Take the cup in your right hand, and pour it over your entire left hand, covering up to the wrist. Feel your feet connected to the floor. And breathe.

God Nowhere and Everywhere,
God of grounding and water and air,
God Who still hears the echoes of my ancestors and their prayers:

Hear mine now.

Hear my heartbreak as my words reach up to You, Angry and agonized and afraid.

See how my arms are empty when all I need is to hold
my loved one _____(name)
in the moments before their death.
I am not reconciled to their loss.
There is no part of me that rises up to bless You now.
And still, I know that You are with me:

You are the Source; You are the ground and the water and the air;
You are the filaments that link me to every other mourner in this moment.
You are the rope that binds me to my loved one, _____(name),
and reminds me that my life, my memories,
and my soul are bound up with theirs.
_____(name) has been my ground and my water and my air.
To be sharing none of these with them at this time, as they
leave this world,
is beyond what I should bear.

And still I bless and acknowledge the Source of All,
Who granted me the gift of growing with them, knowing them,
and loving them up to and through this moment.
Their lives were full. My heart is full. And my heart is breaking.
I know that their life and their death is in Your hands.
May they be blessed with life, O God.

And if they will die, when they die, shelter them in Your arms
and carry them gently into the wideness of All That Is To Come.

Hear me now, as I cry out to You:

Shma [Yisrael](#), Adonai Eloheinu, Adonai Echad.

Hear, O Israel, we who wrestle with God and with life and with loss:
God grounds us and carries us and reminds us that we all are One.
Amen.

Reflections from Rabbi Janet Madden

What's Behind the Picture?

Spiritual preparation for entering the room.



My Kavannot for Donning PPE:

- I am grateful for this physical protection.
- (Covering my hair): May I come in simplicity and humility to this task.
- (Putting on N95 and surgical mask): May I listen deeply and speak mindfully.
- (Putting on face shield) May I see clearly what is needed in this holy encounter.
- (Hand hygiene and putting on gloves): May my hands be blessed to be expressions of compassion.
- (Putting on the gown) May I bring gentleness and strength.
- (Tying the ties on the gown) May I be bound up in the spirit of loving service.
- (Putting on shoe coverings): May I walk in ways of holiness.
- (Preparing to enter patient room): Hineini. May I come to this I-Thou encounter in authenticity and awe.

Creating Your Personal Ritual for Bikkur Cholim Visits



Ritual Elements

- Candle (can be a battery-operated candle)
- Water for hand washing.
- Essential oil or flowers (if you are not scent-sensitive) or a plant that you designate for this purpose.
- A word or phrase to chant or say in preparation, such as “Hineini” (I am present)

Ritual for Bikkur Cholim Visits

- Wash/sanitize your hands as an indication of pure intention. Touch your lips as a reminder of the power of words and of your intention to listen more than you speak.
- Light your candle as a separation from the ordinary so that you can hold the potential of holiness in this encounter.
- Anoint your hands with a drop of essential oil. Make a scent tent with your hands and inhale for a few moments. And/or touch your vase of flowers or plant as a way of focusing your intention on living and growing in this encounter.
- Say or chant your word or intention/ preparation. Touch your earlobes for the intention of holy listening.
- Be still. Hold a few moments of silence. Silently express your intention to bring your authentic self in holiness to this encounter.

Break Out Sessions:

I've had family members say to me,
*Just please go in person and tell them in person that
I love them and promise me
that they won't die alone, that you'll be there at the bedside.*

**DISCUSSION: IF YOU WERE THE PERSON IN THE BED,
WHAT WOULD YOU WANT/NEED?**