

Dvar Torah for Parshat VaYechi

Based on *Likutey Moharan II, Lesson #9* *Likutey Halakhot, Hashkamat HaBoker 4:14*

"...and Yisrael bowed at the head of the bed...[someone] said to Yosef, 'Your father is sick.' He took his two sons, Menasheh and Ephraim, with him" (*Genesis* 47:31, 48:1).

The Shekhinah is at the head of the bed of an ill person (*Shabbat* 12b; *Tanchuma, VaYechi* 3 [end]).

A student of Rebbe Akiva became ill. None of the other students went to visit him. Rebbe Akiva came to visit. Rebbe Akiva came in and took a look around to see what needed to be done. He opened the windows, dusted, swept and washed the floor. The student began to feel better. He said, "My master, you have given me life." After he left, Rebbe Akiva said, "One who doesn't visit a sick person is like a murderer" (*Nedarim* 40a; see *Shulchan Arukh, Yoreh Deah* 335:8).

Who is as sick as we are? Our hands are sick from what they have wrongly taken, our tongues ill from the slander they have spoken and our eyes dimmed from the all the perversion they have seen. We are so weak that we often cannot brush away the *yetzer hara* (evil inclination) who is compared to a fly (*Berakhot* 61a). It may be amnesia or Alzheimer's, but we often forget that we are Jewish, or what it means to be a Jew.

Those who are still "students" don't come to visit. They are busy pursuing their own growth. It is hard to visit the ill. It is difficult to interrupt the flow of one's daily routine; one feels awkward, not knowing what to say. It is uncomfortable to be confronted by a stark reminder of our frailty, of how strong and permanent we are not.

Who is as sick as we are? Yet, because we are the walking ill, the Shekhinah is with us. With the Shekhinah present there is no need to despair. We can pray for ourselves—and others—and know that there is hope. The Shekhinah is at "the head" of the bed. She offers us the light of the tzaddik's teachings which can enter the mind, feeble as it may be.

The tzaddik is concerned enough to leave his home and cheer up the sick. With his teachings and advice he comes, not only to shed light on our weary souls, but to ease our physical discomfort as well. By listening to him we could avoid so much trouble. (After all, he is much smarter than we are, and much more connected to the Divine pulse, as well.)

The tzaddik visits, sweeps out the dust, opens the window and lets in the light. He drives away our melancholy. He not only breathes fresh air into us; the tzaddik *is* fresh, clean invigorating air (*Numbers* 27:18). He knows us and our condition better than we do. He knows what we need to allow our minds and hearts to heal.

Visiting the sick. Hashem does it (*Genesis* 18:1). The tzaddikim do it. So should we (*Sotah* 14a).*

zei gezondt! Be well!
agutn Shabbos!
Shabbat Shalom!

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***Please see *Yoreh Deah*, Section 335 and/or *Kitzur Shulchan Arukh* Section 193 for relevant information on how to fulfill this mitzvah.**

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