

Mi Shebeirakh
Refuat Hanefesh u'Refuat Haguf
“complete healing of soul and body”
Text & discussion materials to accompany
Rabbi Greyber and Peltz's teshuvah

Psak #1. Individuals recovering from illness can consider themselves healthy and therefore no longer in need of prayers for healing. Nevertheless, we should include whoever asks us to in our public prayers and, individually, we may pray for whoever we think needs healing.

Psak #2. A person must give consent to be included in communal lists for mi shebeirakh prayers. That consent must include whether that person's name should be said in Hebrew or English and their relationship to a member of the congregation. If the sick person is unable to give consent, then it can be granted by a loved one or trusted friend. Otherwise, the privacy of the person must be respected, and the name not rectified aloud.

Psak #3. It is appropriate to include those with chronic or mental illness with communal mi shebeirakh prayers. Mi shebeirakh prayers that have been composed for these or other specific illnesses may also be used if the individual or / community chooses, and ought to be considered for inclusion in future RA publications.

Psak #4. One may recite a mi shebierakh for one who is terminally ill, but it may be advisable, based on the situation, to instead pray for that person's and their family's needs.

Psak #5. A community should determine a fixed time to reset their communal list.

What guidance can traditional Jewish sources offer about when one should and should not pray for someone who is ill?

“This section is juxtaposed to teach you that whoever prays for mercy on behalf on another when that person him/herself is also in need of that very thing for which s/he prays on the other’s behalf, will him/herself first receive favorable response from God, for it is said (at the end of Genesis 20), “And Abraham prayed for Abimelech and his wife and they bore children” and immediately afterwards it states, “And God remembered Sarah,” i.e. God had already remembered her before God healed Adimelech.”

Rashi on Genesis 21:1 (Source 5)

Rashi’s commentary on Genesis 21:2 is just one of many examples from our tradition about the importance of praying for those who are ill. Rabbis Greyber and Peltz write in their teshuvah that *“we can understand this teaching more broadly as telling us that prayers for others are praiseworthy and of inherent value.”*

- What does this source teach you about the importance of praying for someone who is ill?
- One might read this source as “promising” that one will be healed if one prays for others. But if our prayers do not control God, what else might this text be teaching us? What type of Jewish individual are we trying to cultivate through the mitzvah of prayer and bikkur holim?

Take away - the Jewish community aspires to cultivate a religious person who thinks of the needs of others, rather than solely about oneself.

One who visits the sick and does not pray for him / her has not fulfilled the mitzvah of bikkur holim.

Rabbi Moses Isserless in the Shulhan Arukh

When making a bikkur holim visit or phone call, there are different ways to ask if someone would like to be added to a mi shebeirakh list. Two suggestions:

Could I mention your name publicly or add your name to a mi shebeirakh list?

I don't want to do anything to make you uncomfortable. Would it be OK if we said a prayer together?

When making a bikkur holim visit, you can let the person know that you will be keeping them in your prayers. Though as long as the prayers are your private prayers (and not shared communally), you can pray on behalf of this person without their permission. You are offering prayers as an act of kindness and support. A bikkur holim visit is not the time to work through prayer theology.

Be empathetic. Be supportive. Be considerate.

Who should we be praying for?

Source text from Rabbi Greyber and Peltz's teshuvah

Healing is not only physical, but also emotional and spiritual.

Jewish tradition places great value on our praying for healing on behalf of those who are sick.

Not every scrape or cold requires a prayer for healing....With that said, we should pray for whomever asks us to, or whomever we think needs healing.

If a patient defines themselves as not ill and we pray for them anyways, we can assume that our 'extra' individual prayers undertaken by people in the community do no harm. If I care about a person and am worried about their health, even if they do not see themselves as sick, my individual prayers on their behalf - even without their knowledge or consent - can hardly be seen to be harmful.

...saying a mi shebeirakh for the person with the terminal illness is not a tefillat shav / vain prayer as there is a need for spiritual healing.

[From Rabbis Greyber and Peltz's teshuvah](#)

- How do you relate to the concept that "healing is not only physical, but also emotional and spiritual"? How are these three aspects of healing connected?
- How can we reconcile the concept of a "tefillat shav" with the desire to pray for someone with a terminal illness? What is the role of spiritual healing both in this context and to you personally?

How do we pray for someone who is ill? This teshuvah explores questions about praying in a communal prayer setting for those who are ill. This is done in two ways - communal prayer and individual prayer. As written in the teshuvah, communal prayer refers primarily to the *mi shebeirakh* for those who are ill as part of the Torah reading.

When should someone come off the mi shebeirakh list? “When a person passes away or when they say so.”

When should we stop including someone’s name in prayers for healing because they have crossed the threshold from illness to health? When one’s body returns to regular function. Rabbis Greyber and Pletz offer different language for a mi shebeirakh prayer for those suffering from chronic illness.

When should we stop praying for someone’s healing because it cannot be reasonably expected? You can pray for a person’s spiritual healing for as long as you would like to do so.

Chronic illness - Jewish Prayer for Persisting by Rabbi Julie Pelc

Mental illness - Mi Shebeirakh for Mental Health from The Blue Dove Foundation

Terminal illness - Prayers for Terminally Ill by Robert Scheinberg

- How does each mi shebeirakh prayer reflect the Jewish value of healing?

A person should only be the object of communal prayers with their consent.

Bava Metzia 58

- What implications does this text have for the management of a mi shebeirakh list?

How is a mi shebeirakh list compiled and when is it recited?

The standard practice is that the rabbis or gabbai recites the liturgy and then reads a list of names kept by the community - often the synagogue administrative staff - after which people in the congregational can offer additional names either by approaching the bimah and whispering them to the gabbai who repeats them aloud, or by remaining in place and saying names aloud as the gabbai signals to people in the congregation that it is their turn, after which the gabbai concludes the prayer.

In an effort to balance the challenges of keeping up with those whose names are on the list and communal prayer realities, many congregations reset their mi shebeirakh lists regularly. By reset, we mean they clearly communicate to the congregation that everyone will be removed from the list unless instructed otherwise. Though there is no set amount of time for someone to remain on the list, there are different customs that have developed to reset the list. Some have the custom of doing it every month, on Rosh Hodesh, while others do it twice a year, on Passover and Rosh Hashanah. Whatever the reset time frame is, it is advisable to determine a reset routine that can make sure that the list is as up to date as possible, while also not becoming too long.

Going around the room to ask for the names of those people are praying for is more engaging and personal than reading a list from the bimah.

[From Rabbis Greyber and Peltz's teshuvah](#)

For Discussion

- Why do you think Rabbis Greyber and Peltz recommend that we find alternative ways to share the names of those in need of healing and that we avoid reading a long list of names?
- What is the theology of prayer we are trying to create in our prayer spaces?

Takeaway - encourage those attending services to share the names of those in need of healing. Find an alternative way to share the long list of names. For example, share a public list in the synagogue lobby. Avoid reading a long list of names. We are hoping to cultivate participation in prayer and not cultivate a “magic-based” conception of prayer.

Our communal prayer for those who are sick serves an important communal purpose of notifying the community of who is sick and therefore who in the community should be the object of bikkur holim efforts. Additionally, it calls attention to who in the community is praying for someone who is ill and therefore should be the object of our attention and care.

[From Rabbis Greyber and Peltz's teshuvah](#)

- What does the teshuvah teach us about the purpose of communal prayer?
- How do you think communal prayer for those who are sick helps to create a sense of community?

Putting together a mi shebeirakh list. Whether this information is asked about during a visit, phone call or compiled when completing a form, items to consider:

- A person may only be added to a communal mi shebeirakh list with their consent.
- If a member of someone's family or friend adds them to the mi shebeirakh list, it is an opportunity to then reach out directly to the person who is sick.
 - A form could also ask if you would like a visit or a member of the clergy to reach out. When in doubt, reach out.
- Let people know how long names will remain on the communal mi shebeirakh list or when the list resets, so they know to reach back out if the prayers for healing are still needed.

Relationship building opportunities - Creating caring communities. Including someone on a mi shebeirakh list is an opportunity to build relationships and create a caring community. While there is a logistical outcome of adding or removing someone from a mi shebeirakh list, the focus should remain on the relational aspects and not become all about maintaining a list.

- How can communities use their mi shebeirakh lists to create community?

Guidance on preparing for the mitzvah of bikkur holim.

During a bikkur holim visit or call it is appropriate to inquire as to whether the patient's name should remain on the list. It should be emphasized that such calls should not become rote. Staff and volunteers should receive training so that the calls are made with the utmost care and sensitivity.

[From Rabbis Greyber and Peltz's teshuvah](#)

Upon finding out that someone is sick*

- ☐ Send a card or note.
- ☐ Notify the sick person's rabbi.
- ☐ Plan to visit the sick. Don't plan a long visit. When the patient tires, leave courteously with a plan to return another time.
- ☐ Offer to pray with the patient. Some rabbis teach that visiting a sick person and not praying does not constitute bikkur holim.
- ☐ Offer to add this person's name to a mi shebeirakh list

*Resource from My Jewish Learning:

<https://www.myjewishlearning.com/article/how-to-visit-the-sick-in-judaism/>