

If these die like the death of all men, and the destiny of all men is visited upon them. (16:29)

This was not the first time that someone usurped the authority of Moshe *Rabbeinu*. His reaction this time was atypical. He asked Hashem that this group be meted with a punishment which was both unusual and stark. It was important for all the people to know that Moshe was Hashem's chosen leader and that he made every decision under His direction. The heresy expounded by Korach must be put to rest in a manner such that it would be recorded in the hearts and minds of *Klal Yisrael* that Moshe's prophecy may not be denied.

Chazal (*Nedarim* 39b) derive from here that *bikur cholim*, visiting the sick, is alluded to in the Torah. "If these men die like all men, (whereby they become ill and are visited after the visit of all men) then Hashem has not sent me." Moshe indicated (according to *Chazal's* interpretation) that most people become ill, are visited during their illness prior to their succumbing to the illness. *Chazal* interpret the word *yipakeid*, is visited (upon them), that an ill person is visited during his illness. Apparently, the phrase *u'fekudas kol adam yipakekeid aleihem* is somehow related to visiting the ill. *Horav Chaim Toito, Shlita*, relates a story from which he gleans a deeper understanding of the relationship of *pekidah* (*yipakeid u'fekudas*) with visiting the ill.

Chacham Sulamon Mutzafi, zl, was one of the premier *kabbalists* in Yerushalayim during the early twentieth century. For the duration of an entire year, he would visit one of Yerushalayim's distinguished *rabbanim* who had become seriously ill and was confined to bed. Every Friday night, following *davening*, he would stop by the *Rav's* house to spend an hour discussing issues confronting the Jewish community and asking the *Rav* for his sage advice. All this was carried out prior to *Rav Sulamon's* going home. Considering the extra time it took to walk to the *Rav's* house and the duration of the time spent there, the *Sulamon* family (and his students) waited an hour and a half longer than other families. No one complained, but the students (who always valued the opportunity for learning) wanted to know why he spent so much time visiting the *Rav*.

The *Chacham* explained, "The *Rav* whom I visit every Friday night is a great scholar, who would ordinarily leave the *shul* on Friday night accompanied by a throng of followers, all thirsting for knowledge, who peppered him with questions on *halachah*, or to glean his sage advice. Now that he is ill and bedridden, in addition to the pain generated by his illness, he is also dispirited over being alone. Therefore, even though subjecting them to wait for me places a burden on my family, I am during this hour performing the *mitzvah* of *bikur cholim*, visiting the sick, in accordance with *halachah*."

This vignette underscores the meaning of visiting the sick. It is not about walking in, greeting, talking a few moments and leaving. The *mitzvah* of *bikur cholim* is about filling the bedridden person's needs. We must ask ourselves: "What is he/she missing most? What does he/she need?" Visiting the ill should not be about assuaging the visitor's guilt feelings, but about filling the

void in the life of the *choleh*.

This is why the Torah chose the word *pekidah*, which is synonymous with *chisaron*, deprivation, deficiency, something missing. *V'lo nifkad mimenu ish*; "And not a man of us is missing" (*Bamidbar* 31:49). We are enjoined to make the difference in the *choleh's* life by filling what is absent, lacking in his present condition.

Horav Aryeh Levin, zl, reverently known as the *Tzaddik* of Yerushalayim, devoted his life to the pursuit of all things *chesed* – especially in the areas from which others shied away. In prisons, leper colonies, mental health wards, he focused on the forgotten and ignored. He sought to fill the void that most of these lonely people needed most: friendship. They knew that in him they had someone who truly cared. For example: (this could go on for many pages, but I only selected one instance): *Rav Aryeh* would visit the mental wards where individuals who had suffered serious emotional challenges were treated until they were able to return to society. (These were the lucky ones who knew they had a problem and were willing to do something about it.)

One day, he saw a poor soul who was covered with black and blue welts and bruises. Needless to say, *Rav Aryeh* became interested in this man's welfare. He asked what had happened to him. The other patients explained, "We are all ill, strung out beyond our emotions ability to cope. We are here for treatment. There are difficult moments when we lose it and become wild. The orderlies must restrain us forcibly, and, at times, it gets out of hand. They even have to subject us to corporal beatings in order to control us. We all have family and relatives with whom the orderlies do not want to hassle. Therefore, the beatings are not injurious. That man, however, has no family. So the orderlies expend all their frustration on him. Whenever they have a difficult day, they release their frustrations on him."

When *Rav Aryeh* heard this, he walked over to the orderlies and informed them that the man/patient was his relative. He would check on him and see to his continued welfare. From then on, he visited the man every *Rosh Chodesh* and always brought along a little gift. He realized what the man had been lacking: a relative. *Rav Aryeh* filled the void and became his relative.