



THE UNITED JEWISH CONGREGATION OF HONG KONG SHABBAT SHALOM

18 – 19 November, 2005

17 Cheshvan, 5766

Parashat Vayera
(Genesis 18:1–22:24)

Rabbi Michael Schwartz
Cantorial Soloist Julie Howard

D'var Torah by Rabbi Michael Schwartz

Shalom Chaverim,

This week's Torah portion, Vayera, begins with God appearing to Abraham. This visit by God occurs while Abraham is recovering from the minor surgery of his circumcision, and we understand that God is exemplifying the practice of the *mitzvah* known as *bikkur cholim*, visiting the sick (Sota 14a).

The following observation about the importance of this *mitzvah* is from Rabbi Rachel Cowan whose husband Paul suffered a long illness:

"I had always thought that visiting sick people was important and tried to do it as often as I could. But, like most Jews, I didn't see it as a *mitzvah* in the sense of "commandment". Instead I preferred to translate *mitzvah* as "good deed"—something nice a person does when he or she feels up to it. The year I spent with Paul during his illness—six months of that time in hospitals, sleeping in his room many nights, keeping him company and boosting his spirits—made me understand the importance of the *mitzvah*. If people do not have visitors, they find it much more difficult to mobilize their spirit and energy and to promote their healing, to engage in the drive to overcome their illness, or to live as fully as possible in the face of it. In that time, I also came to understand what our tradition has long taught: that Jews depend upon community, and that community is built through very specific, nitty-gritty, practical actions. Community cannot exist meaningfully when Jews hand over to the rabbis the task of caring for each other's rejoicing and praying and healing and mourning."
(*CLAL – Perspectives*, 5, no. 3, September 1990.)

A complete guide to the *mitzvah* of *bukkur cholim* is available for free on the internet at the following address: <http://netivotshalom.org/drashot/rkelman/Bikkur.pdf>

Shabbat shalom,
Rabbi Michael
15 Cheshvan 5766

17th November, 2005