



THE MITZVAH GRAM

The Monthly Publication of The Chicago Mitzvah Campaign

1-866-MY-RABBI

www.chicagomitzvahcampaign.com

Partially funded by the Chicago Department of Family and Social Services, Senior Division

CMC Chaplaincy and Senior Services Division

- Hospital visitations
- Weekly "Shabbos packages" delivered to hospital patients
- "Senior Friendship" (home outreach for isolated seniors)
- Monthly Jewish discussion at dozens of retirement and nursing facilities
- Subsidized emergency response systems
- Free kosher guest meals in hospitals
- Free medicar transportation for the elderly and infirm
- Delivering shabbos and holiday meals to patients
- Holiday awareness and celebrations at retirement and nursing homes
- Patient and family support
- Telephone reassurance program
- Promoting traditional Jewish funeral practices

New Medicar Van Acquired

The CMC is very pleased to announce the recent acquisition of an additional medicar van (pictured below), replacing the previous van that was no longer serviceable. Special thanks go to Jeff Cagan from Cagan Management Group, whose generous sponsorship made the acquisition possible.

Requests for the CMC's transportation service are continuing to grow. Some of the clients are senior citizens and disabled children who require transportation for medical appointments. The CMC also provides transportation for such clients to be able to be present at social events and family occasions, or to attend synagogue services.

Recently, the CMC was able to transport a number of senior citizens from nursing facilities and private homes to the grand Lag Baomer parade and festival that was held at Old Orchard mall. In a special note of gratitude, one elderly lady later wrote:

"I cannot tell you how much it meant for me to attend the Lag Baomer celebration and festival. I was able to meet old friends and acquaintances, observe the pure joy and wholesome pride of the kinderlach, and celebrate together with the community amidst the atmosphere of wholesome Jewish rejoicing. I will always be grateful to the CMC for giving me the opportunity to participate in this wonderful event."



Interfering in G-d's Domain?

From ancient times, thinking believers have wrestled with the question of how to reconcile the practice of medicine with the belief in Divine Providence. "After all", the question goes, "if G-d visits an illness on an individual, how can we human beings presume to remove the illness through medical treatment?"

Truth be told, this is a fundamental religious issue whose resolution has implications that go beyond the field of medical practice. For example, the same question of human interference in the Divine plan may also be applied to the idea of giving charity to the needy: if G-d has made an individual poor, how can we justify altering his condition of poverty? Taken a step further, the entire notion of prayer may be called into question, for by praying are we not presuming to tell G-d to "change His mind" and alter His design?

Some [non-Jewish] religious denominations take an approach to this question that runs contrary to the prevalent cultural in western society. Proponents of this theological approach do in fact abstain from accessing medical treatment and from giving charity. However, when it comes to withholding healthcare from children the American legal system has historically struggled to find a suitable balance between proscribing what many consider to be child neglect, or even abuse, with the principle of preserving religious freedom for all.

So how does Judaism fit in with any of this? Jews have always regarded the preservation of life and, by extension, of optimizing one's health, as a sacred priority of the highest order. This principle is communicated in countless Biblical verses and Rabbinic laws, and is perhaps also reflected by the almost unquestioning veneration that popular Jewish culture reserves for medical practitioners. But what is the theological explanation?

The key to answering this question is the concept that G-d created the world in a state of imperfection in order that human beings "partner" with Him in the creative process. Thus, Judaism teaches that it is not only permissible but actually obligatory for people to participate in perfecting the world, both actively (e.g. seeking/providing healthcare; giving charity) as well as passively (e.g. praying for Divine assistance).



(This concept is expressed many times in our Sages' teachings, as illustrated by the Talmudic vignette recorded at the bottom of this page.)

Indeed, in cases when the application of Jewish law requires medical expertise (e.g. when determining if a person is too sick to fast on Yom Kippur), Judaism teaches that it is the doctor, not the rabbi, to whom we must turn. Nevertheless, the Jewish perspective assigns two very important caveats to the authority of the healthcare professional.

One limitation is that a doctor is relied upon only to provide accurate medical information, based on his knowledge and experience. However, when it comes to making healthcare *decisions*, the doctor should take no more than an advisory role. For here it becomes the individual patient's task, with the help of a personal/spiritual mentor such as a rabbi, parent or friend, to crystallize his own priorities and value system in order to determine his decision.

The second limitation is that it is a healthcare professional's job to promote healing, not induce despair. While a doctor must be frank and realistic with his patients, he cannot know the future. He should therefore refrain from issuing a categorical negative prognosis, and certainly from setting a time limitation on life (e.g. "you have a maximum of six months to live"). Instead, he should focus on fostering a positive spiritual orientation and sense of hope and optimism in his patients. After all, a person's mental and emotional state can bear a direct and powerful influence on his physical health.

Cutting the Fruits of G-d's Vineyard

The Talmud (Bava Kamma 85:1) relates the following story: Rabbi Yishmael and Rabbi Akiva were once walking through the streets of Jerusalem accompanied by another person. They encountered a sick man.

He said to them, "Rabbis, tell me how I can be cured."

They replied to him, "Do such and such until you are cured."

He asked them, "Who afflicted me?"

They replied, "G-d."

The sick man responded, "You have interfered in an area that is not your domain. G-d afflicted me, and you advised me how to be cured. Are you not defying G-d's Will?"

The rabbis asked him, "What is your occupation?"

He replied, "I am a farmer; this is the scythe in my hand."

They asked him, "Who created the vineyard?"

He replied, "G-d."

They said to him, "You interfere in an area not under your domain. G-d created it and you are cutting its fruits!"

He responded, "Do you not see the scythe in my hand? If I did not plow, trim, fertilize and weed, nothing would grow."

The rabbis said to him, "Foolish man, have you never heard the verse (Psalms 103:15), 'As for man, his days are like grass'? Just as a tree without weeding, fertilizing, and plowing will not sprout, and after sprouting, without water and fertilizer, it will not live but will die, so too with the human body: the drugs and medication are like fertilizer and the doctor is like the farmer."

Mitzvah Observance in the Hospital

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As mentioned in the article on the previous page, a person's physical health is directly affected by the state of his mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. The implications of this fact are relevant to doctors and patients alike.

In one letter to a doctor, the Rebbe advised: "I am sure that you follow the practice of many G-d fearing doctors, in advising patients who seek your advice regarding a health problem that it is appropriate to also effect a healing of the soul..."

And in a letter to a patient, the Rebbe once wrote: "It is clear that a physical ailment needs to be treated by improving one's spiritual health as well. When one improves the vitality of the soul, this has the effect of improving the vitality of the body and aids in the effectiveness of the medical treatment..."

Obviously then, a hospital stay is no time for a person to become more lax in his Torah-observance! Nevertheless, it can certainly be challenging to maintain one's usual religious routine while convalescing in a hospital. Below are answers to some frequently asked questions concerning the challenge of this experience:

Q. Do I need a mezuzah in my hospital room?

A. No. Since patients do not own or pay rent to reside in a specific hospital room, a mezuzah is not called for.

Q. Can I really expect to don tefillin while in the hospital?

A. Medical condition permitting, absolutely! If you don't have tallis and tefillin with you, or you need help in donning them, contact the CMC.

When praying, it may be beneficial to have a simple sign taped to the door, stating that from such a time to such a time the patient is occupied and does not wish to be disturbed. Patients often have all kinds of reasons to place instructions such as this on the door, and as long as it is reasonable, the hospital staff usually makes the effort to comply.

Q. How do I go about observing Shabbat laws while in the hospital?

A. The answer will vary based on many factors concerning the patient's specific condition and circumstances. After discussing these factors with your rabbi, clarify with the relevant night and day shifts of the hospital staff what you can do on Shabbat, and what manner of work can be done by them on your behalf.

Q. On Friday night can I light some "tea lights" quietly in my hospital room?

A. No. Lighting any kind of fire is strictly prohibited by hospital rules. In order to light candles in observance of Shabbat, holiday, electric candles may be substituted and the traditional blessing may be recited. Call CMC for more details.

Q. What do I do about keeping kosher while in hospital?

A. Hospitals do provide kosher meals for patients, and many do so on a regular basis. Discuss with the hospital's medical and/or kitchen staff how your kashrut requirements can be accommodated. In addition, the CMC also has a kosher guest meal program that is in operation in many hospitals. See back page of this newsletter for details.

Q. Being so close to the holidays, I fear that if I am admitted into the hospital I will miss out on the holiday spirit and traditions. Can you advise?

A. The CMC goes to extraordinary lengths to ensure that Jewish patients are able to hear the shofar on Rosh Hashana, listen to the megillah on Purim, eat matzah on Pesach, and so on. If you are going to be spending a Jewish holiday in a hospital setting, call the CMC to see what is offered to hospital patients.

Prayer is Healing

Wishing a speedy recovery and good health to:

- Shoshana bas Sara
- Refoel ben Yehudis
- Rivka bas Leba
- Leah bas Chana
- Rivka bas Sara
- Faiga bas Tzila
- Gittel bas Kreindel
- Yehudit bas Sara
- Yehuda Dovid ben Rochel Sima
- Mordechai Pesach ben Devorah Mirel
- Chava Ronya bas Chadvera
- Refoel Yakov ben Gitel
- Yitzchok ben Sara
- Mordechai ben Rachel
- Baruch Berl ben Liba Leah
- Yael Chana bas Yehudit Miriam
- Yisrael Mazal ben Raizel Miriam
- David ban Sarah
- Shoshana Beth bas Bluma
- Devasha Golda bas Chanah



Kosher Meals in Hospitals

Weekdays

For Patients:

Hospitals are required to serve kosher meals upon request.

For Visitors:

Hospitals will serve kosher meals upon request, sponsored by CMC.

To order:

Contact the patient's nurse or the hospital's Dept of Food & Nutrition.

Shabbat and Chagim

For all patients and family members staying in the hospital for Shabbat or Chagim, the CMC will deliver delicious, full-course Shabbat or holiday meals.

To order:

Call the CMC office.



For all CMC services please call **1-866-MY-RABBI (1-866-697-2224)**

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This newsletter is dedicated in memory of Joan Topping, commemorating her first yobzeit.