Jake Singer-Beilin
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On one Monday morning, my primary job was to pick up Shabbat candles that patients had used over the weekend. The rabbi gave me a list of patients, and pointed out one in particular – a patient who had been in the hospital for months, and was in a coma. He instructed, "While you're in there, why don't you visit with her for a bit? She won't respond, but it might be a nice thing to do." Wary, I donned my gloves and gown, and entered the room. I timidly walked up to the patient's bed and introduced myself. I looked down at the unresponsive face in front of me, and continued. I felt awkward speaking to the patient, but proceeded to wish him well and tell him there we people who cared about him. Then, there was silence, broken only by the sound of the breathing machine keeping this patient alive. I wanted to offer a blessing, but I struggled over which blessing to give. Do I say a Mi Sheberach when renewed health is not an option, and may not even be preferable? Do I offer a Vidui when I am not sure how much longer this patient has to live and he is unable to take part in it? Soon, the blessing I can offer him becomes clear. I decide to ask for God's face to shine upon this man and place the blessing of peace upon him. Yisa Adonai panav elecha vayasem l'cha shalom...ken y'hi ratzon. This is the blessing I now offer the patient whenever I enter his room, which I do each time with more confidence and with the feeling that even though he cannot respond to me, I am making a difference in his life as he is in mine.