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## Praying For The Sick

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The **שפתי חכמים** provides what prompted Rashi to draw his conclusion:

**שפתי חכמים בראשית פרשת וירא פרק כא פסוק יז' אות ע' – צריכים להבין הא גם היא בכתה בדכתיב ותשא קולה ותבך, ולמה לא שמע לקולה, והא דאמרינן בפרק קמא דברכות (ה' ב) ולוקים ר' יוחנן לנפשיה, ומשני אין חבוש מתיר עצמו מבית האסורין, צריך לומר משום דלא מצא מכוין, אבל אי מצי מכוון מפי עדיף (רא"ם):**

*Translation: We need to understand that Hagar also cried out to G-d as it is written: and she lifted up her voice, and wept. Why did G-d not respond to Hagar's prayer. You might try to challenge this explanation based on the following Gemara (Brachos 5b) R. Johanan once fell ill and R. Hanina went in to visit him. He said to him: Are your sufferings welcome to you? He replied: Neither they nor their reward. He said to him: Give me your hand. He gave him his hand and he raised him. Why could not R. Johanan raise himself? (If he could cure R. Hiyya b. Abba, why could not he cure himself?) They replied: The prisoner cannot free himself from jail (And the patient cannot cure himself). How should we explain that Gemara? Being captive in jail and being ill are not comparable. Under most circumstances, a person who finds himself captive in jail needs someone to rescue him but if the means to escape suddenly materializes, he should help himself to that means of escape. (Sefer Ha'Mizrachi-Rabbi Eliyahu Mizrachi Grand Rabbi of the Ottoman Empire 1455-1526).*

Rashi's ruling based on his interpretation of the above **פסוקים** would seem to give total support to the Sephardic tradition. So how would Ashkenazim respond? The same Rabbi Mizrachi who is quoted by the **שפתי חכמים** is also quoted as limiting Rashi's position:

**ובר"א מזרחי (בראשית כא', יז', על דברי רש"י) חילק, שתפילת החולה עדיפה כאשר הוא יכול לכוין כראוי, אבל במקום שמחמת היסורים לא יכול לכוין כראוי, תפילת אחרים עדיפה.**

*Translation: Rabbi Mizrachi commenting on the words of Rashi (Bereishis 21, 17) agrees that the prayers of the sick person is more effective when he can concentrate upon his prayer but in a situation when a person's illness interferes with his ability to pray properly, the prayers of others are more effective.*

Rabbi Mizrachi is introducing a simple fact about many illnesses. They render the person incapable of properly praying for himself. In those cases, others have to pray for him. Perhaps Ashkenazic Siddurim are providing inserts to pray for the health of those who cannot pray for themselves due to their illnesses. Since many serious illnesses will render the person incapable of praying for himself, the default position should be that others pray for him.

If a person is in fact so seriously ill that he cannot pray for himself, is there any way available by which someone can act as his agent and his prayers cannot rise with as much potency as his own prayers? The following **תשובה** may provide a way:

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חשוקי חמד' מנחות דף צג' עמוד ב' – אשתו דכגופיה דמיא – חולה הרוצה לשלוח שיתפללו עליו בכותל המערבי, האם ישלח חבר או את אשתו. שאלה חולה הרוצה שיתפללו עליו בכותל המערבי, ונסתפק את מי עדיף לשלוח סתם חבר, או את אשתו? תשובה נאמר במסכת מנחות דף צג' ע"ב, למה צריך פסוק מיוחד למעט את השולח קרבנו ביד שליח מ"סמיכה", ועוד פסוק מיוחד למעט את אשתו מ"סמיכה", משיבה הגמרא דאי אשמעינן רק שליח, היינו אומרים דאמנם שלוחו של אדם כמותו, אבל לאו כגופיה דמיא, אבל אשתו דכגופיה דמיא אימא תיסמך צריכא. מדברי חז"ל אלו רואים, שכוחה של אשתו גדול יותר מסתם שליח, וה"ה לגבי תפילה עליו, והוא משום שהיא כגופו, וכתב רש"י (בראשית כא יז): יפה תפילת החולה מתפילת אחרים עליו והיא קודמת להתקבל, א"כ אשתו כגופו תפילתה קודמת להתקבל לאחרים, ובפרט אם היא אשת ת"ח, הרי זה נחשב כתפילת ת"ח עליו.

*Translation: Issue: A person who is ill would like someone to visit the Western Wall to pray for him, should he send his friend or send his wife? Answer: the following question is recorded in Maseches Menachos 93b: why did the Torah provide one verse to exclude the need to put one's hand on an animal sacrifice when the offering is being made by an agent and another verse to exclude the need to put one's hand on an animal sacrifice when the offering is being made by the principal's wife. The Gemara answers that if the Torah only provided a verse to exclude the need to put one's hand on an animal sacrifice when the offering is being made by an agent which is permitted because the agent stands in the place of the principal, but he is not like an extension of the principal's body, we would have thought that if the agent is his wife, since she is considered an extension of her husband's body, she is required to put her hands on the animal sacrifice. From these words we can conclude that the authority of a wife exceeds that of a mere agent. Therefore that would be case concerning Tefila as well because she is considered an extension of his body (think Eve who was created from the ribs of Adam), and Rashi wrote (Bereishis 21, 17) superior is the prayer of an ill person than the prayers of others for him. It is accepted more readily; therefore the prayers of a wife who is considered an extension of her husband, are more readily accepted than the prayers of others and particularly if she is a Torah learned individual, then it is considered the prayer of a learned person.*

חשוקי חמד מנחות – הערות דף צג' עמוד ב'  
ד. וקשה על דברי רש"י מהגמרא במסכת ברכות (דף ה' ע"ב) שאין חבוש מתיר עצמו מבית האסורים. ותירץ גיסי הגאון ר' חיים קניבסקי שליט"א: רפואה על ידי תפילה – עדיפה על ידי תפילת החולה יותר מתפילת אחרים, אך רפואה על ידי "צדיק גוזר והקב"ה מקיים" אינה יכולה להתבצע אלא על ידי אחרים, ועל כך אמרה הגמרא: "אין חבוש מתיר עצמו מבית האסורים". עכ"ד. (ספר מרפסין איגרי ע' שמג). ובר"א מזרחי (בראשית כא, יז על דברי רש"י) חילק, שתפילת החולה עדיפה כאשר הוא יכול לכויין בראוי, אבל במקום שמחמת

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1. Rav Yitzchak Zylberstein was born in Poland in 1934 and emigrated to the Holy Land while a child. He studied in Yeshivat Slobadka in Bnei Brak, and was a disciple of R. Yechezkel Abramsky and R. Shmuel Wozner. He married R. Yosef Shalom Elyashiv's daughter and is quite close to his father - in - law, as well as his brother - in - law, R. Hayyim Kanyavsky, and often cites their rulings.

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היסורים לא יכול לבוין כראוי, תפילת אחרים עדיפה. לפי"ז בעניננו שאשתו מתפללת עליו והיא כגופו, הרי אין לה את יסורי החולה ויכולה לבוין, וע"כ תפילתה עדיפה.

*Translation: You can raise a question with Rashi's position from a Gemara in Maseches Brachos 5b which provides that a person who is captive cannot free himself from jail. My brother-in-law, the Gaon, Rabbi Chaim Kanevsky said: Recovery from an illness by prayer is more effective when undertaken by the sick person himself rather than by others but a recovery through the means of "a righteous person decrees and G-d fulfills" cannot be undertaken except by others and that is what the Gemara had in mind when it provided that "a captive is incapable of freeing himself." Rabbi Miz'rachi commenting on the words of Rashi (Bereishis 21, 17) agrees that the prayers of the sick person is more effective when he can concentrate upon his prayer but in a situation when a person's illness interferes with his ability to pray properly, the prayers of others are more effective. Accordingly, concerning our question, when a wife who is considered an extension of her husband's body, prays for her husband, her ability to concentrate on her prayer is not disturbed by illness, therefore her prayer would be superior to that of a friend.*