

"For she said, 'Let me not see the death of the child', and she sat at a distance, lifted her voice and wept.... 'Fear not for Hashem has listened to the cry of the young boy because he is there.'" (21:16,17)

The angel told Hagar not to worry, for Hashem had listened to the child. The *Torah* seems to imply that Hashem listened only to Yishmael, not to Hagar. Why were her cries ignored? Is there a more sensitive cry than a mother's anguished plea for the life of her child?

Horav Dovid Feinstein, Shlita, responds that the answer lies in the text of the *pasuk*. Hashem answered Yishmael, "*because he is there*". He was praying for himself, not for anyone else. This is consistent with the words of *Chazal* that Hashem listens to the prayers of someone who is sick more than to the individual who prays on his behalf. Hence, Yishmael's prayers for his own welfare were answered before his mother's.

Horav Feinstein explains that a mother's tormented cry for her suffering child is profound and intense. There are, however, personal concerns that can not be divorced from the actual plea. This personal plea is what distinguishes a mother's cry for her child from the child's own prayer. Thus, when Hagar said, "Let me not see the death of the child," a tinge of personal pain was reflected, the pain she would feel if her child were to die. The sincerity in one's own prayer for himself can not be equalled.

This, explains *Horav Feinstein*, is the reason behind the concept in *Berachos 13a*. *Chazal* say, "Whoever prays for someone else and he himself needs the same thing, he will be answered first." Only one who is in need of the exact same assistance that he is requesting for someone else can sensitize himself to pray emphatically and in the same manner as the one who is the object of his prayer. He can put himself in his friend's position and cry genuine tears. Hence, this supplicant will be answered first.

We may suggest another reason that Hashem responded to Yishmael more than He responded to Hagar. This writer once heard mentioned that the prayers of a sick person for himself are heeded first, because he can not divorce himself from his illness. Others empathize with him, cry with and for him, but they can go home and have a respite from the tragedy. They can momentarily forget the disease that is destroying their friend. One who is stricken with disease can never have a reprieve from his illness. It is always present. Thus, his prayer is more heartfelt.

This is the meaning of the *pasuk*, "Because he is there." Yishmael can not leave and "go away." He is there; he is stricken with the illness. It was his prayer to which Hashem listened.