

Afterthoughts

by Yocheved Bienenfeld

R'FA'EINU HASHEM V'NEIRAFEI

The above request in the Shemoneh Esrei for health is the first of the two "material" requests we make in the first group of requests - the "personal" ones. After asking for the more spiritual needs of knowledge (ATA CHONEN L'ADAM DA'AT), repentance (HASHIVEINU), forgiveness (S'LACH LANU), and personal redemption (R'EI NA V'ON-YEINU), we suddenly jump - to switch gears, as it were - and proceed to ask for health and sustenance. But I think the gap can be closed if we look more closely at the wording in the request for health.

In trying to understand how we can ask R'FA'EINU (heal us) and then say V'NEIRAFEI (and we will be healed)? And similarly, why do we ask HOSHI'EINU (save us) and again state the obvious, V'NIVASHE'A (and we will be saved)? It seems we are faced with something which, on the surface, makes no sense.

Rav Schwab (Rav Schwab on Prayer, p.455) suggests we look at the source for these words which come from Yirmiyahu 17:14 - R'FAEINI HASHEM V'EIRAFEI, HOSHI'EINI V'I'VASHEI'A'. They are preceded, however, by the statement in verse 9, "The heart is crooked, more than any other organ and it is very sick..."

Given this context, we can see that the request of R'FA'EINU is not for healing the body, but rather for the healing of the soul. As Rav Schwab reminds us, the purpose of all physical illness is to make us aware that our NEFESH, our spiritual existence, is in need of repair. As such, what we are saying in this blessing is this: If Gd will aid in healing us spiritually and we do our part to complete the process, we will then merit the blessing for physical health.

In the next sentence in this blessing, when we say V'HA'ALEI R'FU'A SH'LEIMA...', we are addressing our physical needs. In sum then, this bracha actually incorporates both the spiritual and the physical and, as such, serves as the link between the two sections of requests.