



English Halacha Topics

Dedicated by Mr. and Mrs. Mayer and Chaya Rivka Fischl

Hearing Aids

The Gemara asks, can a cheresh annul his wife's vows? No, because the verse says, "her husband hears her vow" – and he cannot hear. The cheresh referred to here is one who cannot hear and cannot speak, as we'll explain later.

What if, the Sfas Emes wonders, the husband heard her vow but then became deaf before he had a chance to annul it? Can he do hafarah? Perhaps he could, as the verse stresses that he "hears her vow," which he did. On the other hand, it is more logical to assume that he cannot annul, since when he performs the annulment he is not capable of hearing (Y.D. 234:25).

Concerning the halachos of forming a minyan for prayer, the Shulchan Aruch (O.C. 55:8) states: A cheresh who can speak but not hear, or can hear but not speak, is likened to one of healthy mind and can join. But one who cannot hear nor speak is likened to a mentally handicapped person or a minor, and cannot. In our days arises the question of one who was born unable to hear and through a hearing aid can hear, and then learns to speak. Is such hearing considered as such l'halacha, or not? Technically, he still isn't really hearing on his own power; but practically he is able to hear and speak, so maybe that's enough?

Rav Moshe Feinstein zt"l surmises that he has the status of one who can speak but not hear. That suffices to be classified as healthy-minded. Artificial hearing does not constitute hearing, however. The hearing aid does not change his inherent abilities. He compares it to an converse topic – if bugs appear in food only if examined with a microscope. They are not taken into account halachically, because one cannot see them on his own (Igros Moshe E.H. 3:33).

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נדרים דף ע"ג

On the other hand, Rav Shlomo Zalman Auerbach zt"l inclined to say that it is considered hearing. The hearing aid enhances and magnifies the ear's ability to hear, and indeed, he can hear very well with it. Even so, when it comes to mitzvos based on hearing, such as shofar, we would not say he is actually hearing. It is like hearing an echo of the shofar, which is not sufficient (Shulchan Shlomo Refuah 2, Cheresh). See similarly in Minchas Yitzchak 3:41.

This is about his status in general. Other sheilos arise with hearing aids. Can he raise the volume on Shabbos? If it turns off on Shabbos, can he turn it back on? Shulchan Shlomo permits hearing aids to be used on Shabbos, as long as they have been turned on before Shabbos. The volume can also be adjusted on Shabbos, as long as no wires change color as a result (which would be mav'ir).

Regarding if it turned off on Shabbos, some Poskim permit turning it back on. Rav Neuwirth zt"l (Kuntress Yair L'Ozen 51) ruled that one should ask a non-Jew to do it. If that's impossible, one may rely on the psak of Rav Shlomo Zalman that another Jew can do it. See further in Shu"t Chelkas Yaakov 2:41 and Tzitz Eliezer 6:6.

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