

Did I Hear That Correctly? Hearing Aids and Halacha

Many Mitzvos are fulfilled through *Sh'mia* (hearing), including Shofar, Megila, Kiddush, and Havdala. The Gedolei haPoskim are divided as to whether the use of a hearing aid is considered *Sh'mia* for Mitzvos.¹

In many cases, individuals who are hard of hearing can perceive sounds at short distances without assistance. When this is true, they should endeavor to position themselves near the *Ba'al Tokea* or *Ba'al Korei* to hear the Shofar or Megila directly, thus fulfilling their obligations according to all opinions. Another possible option is to read the Megila themselves, as explained below. However, those who are unable to hear without the hearing aid should listen to the Shofar or Megila while wearing the device, as several Poskim maintain that this is a valid practice.²

¹ R' Moshe Feinstein *zt"l* (*Igros Moshe O.C. 4:91:4*) discusses *Sh'mia* through a telephone; he is inclined to say that this does fulfill one's obligation. He also suggests (*ibid. O.C. 2:108, 4:126*) that hearing the Megila via a microphone should be valid, though he does not consider the *Heter* to be clear, thus, it is preferable to avoid this if possible. In another *Teshuva* (*ibid. O.C. 4:80*), he asserts that although the sound heard through a microphone may not be considered the speaker's actual voice, it is logical to consider it the actual voice in the case of a hearing aid.

R' Ovadia Yosef *zt"l* also differentiates between microphones and hearing aids. He agrees with those who hold that one does not fulfill the obligation of Shema, Tefila, Megila, or *Tekias Shofar* through a loudspeaker (*Yabia Omer O.C. 1:19*, and *Chazon Ovadia Purim p57*). However, regarding a hearing aid, he rules (*ibid. p56* and *Yabia Omer 7 O.C. 18:2, E.H. 17*, in a footnote) that one is *Yotzei me'Ikar ha'Din*. He explains that using a hearing aid is analogous to wearing glasses which is considered sight in all matters.

R' Shmuel Wosner *zt"l* (*Shevet haLevi 5:84*) holds that a person who hears the Megila via a loudspeaker should repeat the reading but without a Bracha. This is because *me'Ikar ha'Din* he has likely fulfilled his obligation, as per the view of R' Moshe Feinstein.

R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach *zt"l* (*Minchas Shlomo 1:9*) relates that he discussed this matter with the *Chazon Ish*. He maintains that a person does not fulfill his obligation with a hearing aid because the sound he hears is not the actual voice of the speaker or the *Ba'al Tokea*. However, the *Sefer Igeres haPurim* (p53) attests that the author heard from members of R' Nissim Karelitz *zt"l*'s household that one is *Yotzei*.

R' Yitzchak Yaakov Weiss (*Minchas Yitzchak 2:113*) cites R' Tzvi Pesach Frank *zt"l* who held that one can be *Yotzei Krias haTorah* or Megila with a hearing aid. See *Minchas Yitzchak* (3:38) and *Tzitz Eliezer* 8:11.

The *Or l'Tzion* (4:5:16) likewise states that hearing the Shofar with a hearing aid is invalid. The same conclusion is recorded in *Yevakshu miPihu* (p91-2) in the name of R' Yosef Shalom Elyashiv *zt"l*. R' Asher Weiss *Shlit"a* (*Minchas Asher 1:41, 2:97*) concurs.

² R' Asher Weiss *Shlit"a*, *Ozen Avdecha* p74.

In the following essay, we will clarify a few additional important points:

- If a person can hear without the device and the hearing aid merely enhances his hearing, should he remove it?
- Is it sufficient to remove the hearing aid from just one ear?
- Is it permissible to listen to *Krias haTorah* using a hearing aid?
- How can a hearing-impaired person who is not proficient in Megila reading manage to read it for himself?

Shofar and Megila

1. As stated above, if a person who wears a hearing aid can hear from a short distance without it, he should move closer to the Bima to hear the Shofar or Megila.³ Some also recommend turning off or removing the hearing aid.⁴ (If this means that he might miss a few words, he can read them himself from his own Megila during the *Kria*.)⁵
2. Some Poskim hold that if a person wears a hearing aid in one ear but can hear naturally with the other ear, he is *Yotzei* according to all opinions.⁶ Consequently, a person who wears hearing aids in both ears but can hear from a short distance without them only needs to move closer to the *Bima* and remove the hearing aid from one ear. However, others contend that those who do not permit hearing through a hearing aid would maintain that he must remove the devices from both ears.⁷
3. A woman with impaired hearing who listens to the Megila from the women's section but cannot hear it without her hearing aid(s) should ideally have the Megila read to her at home in a way that enables her to hear it without the devices.
4. A person who cannot hear at all without his hearing aid (or will miss words and be unable to complete them himself if he removes them) should recite the

³ The Sefer *Ashrei haIsh* (O.C. 3:43:18) cites R' Elyashiv who ruled that if a person with impaired hearing can hear without an aid (the device merely improves his hearing) he fulfills his obligation even while wearing it. (This is comparable to the ruling in *Chazon Ovadia* [*Purim*, p57] regarding hearing the Megila through a loudspeaker: if a person could hear it without amplification, he fulfills his obligation.) See the next footnote.

⁴ *Piskei R' Shmuel Kamenetsky Shlit"a* (*Purim* 8:8). This is also implied by R' Asher Weiss *Shlit"a* (see below, footnote 8). R' Moshe Sternbuch *Shlit"a* (*Teshuvos v'Hanhagos* 1:743) raises the possibility that even if a person could hear without the hearing aid, perhaps he should turn it off so that the natural voice does not mix with the amplified one.

⁵ See *Mishna Berura* 689:5.

⁶ R' Zalman Nechemia Goldberg *zt"l* (*Kovetz Techumin* 29, p385). See footnote 4.

⁷ R' Asher Weiss *Shlit"a* (*Ozen Avdecha* p79); *Shu"t Mishnas Yosef* (10:97). See footnote 5.

blessings and read the Megila himself.⁸ If he is not proficient in *Krias haMegila*, he should have a Kosher Megila in front of him and read along with the *Ba'al Korei*.⁹ (If he is doing this at home, he may have someone read the Megila to him – even from a printed and vowelized Megila – while he repeats it from a Kosher Megila.)

5. Even a completely deaf person is obligated to read the Megila to himself.¹⁰ The accepted ruling is that he should recite the Brachos as well.¹¹ However, a woman who cannot hear at all should read the Megila herself but not recite the Brachos.¹²

Krias haTorah

6. Some Poskim hold that one fulfills the obligation of *Krias haTorah* even when listening with a hearing aid. However, it is preferable to be stringent in this matter.¹³

Kiddush and Havdalah

7. According to those who maintain that one cannot be *Yotzei* the obligation of Brachos when hearing through a hearing aid, a person who cannot hear without the device¹⁴ should recite Kiddush and Havdala himself.¹⁵ However, as mentioned, some Poskim maintain that one is *Yotzei*.

⁸ *Yevakshu miPihu (Piskei R' Yosef Shalom Elyashiv, Purim 2:9)*. The same is true of those who hold that one is not *Yotzei* with a hearing aid – see introduction.

⁹ See *Mishna Berura ibid*.

¹⁰ *Biur Halacha 689:2 s.v. "Cheresh"*.

¹¹ *Hilchos Chag b'Chag (Purim 7, footnote 11), Shoshanas Yisrael (4:25 and footnote 30)* in the name of R' Shlomo Miller *Shlit"a*.

¹² *Hilchos Chag b'Chag ibid*. This is because many Poskim hold that women are only obligated to hear the Megila but not to read it, thus a deaf woman is certainly exempt. However, since some hold that women are obligated to read it, she is not exempt, but she should not recite a Bracha due to the lenient view of the Poskim [*Editor's note: and the rule of Safek Brachos l'Hake!*].

¹³ See *Teshuvos v'Hanhagos (2:83, 3:79)* who argues that the sound produced by the device is not the speaker's actual voice. However, he nevertheless concludes that one may still fulfill the obligation of *Krias haTorah* through a microphone since the mitzvah is to hear words of Torah. However, it is preferable to be stringent because some authorities require hearing from a Torah scroll read by someone obligated in the Mitzvah according to the principle of *Shome'a k'Oneh*.

¹⁴ A similar ruling applies if a person can hear at a close distance without the aid but he is far from the *Mekadesh* so he requires the aid.

¹⁵ If a person can hear without the aid and the device merely enhances his hearing, some Poskim rule that he fulfills his obligation. However, others argue that the natural voice is blended with the amplified sound and, therefore, it is preferable to remove the device. This issue is discussed at length in the first section and its related footnotes.