

"See, I present before you today a blessing and a curse. The blessing that you listen... and the curse if you do not listen." (11:26-28)

Why does the *Torah* seize upon "listening" as the requisite for blessing ? Why not action ? Are we not implored to "observe" and to "do" -- not merely to "listen" ? *Horav Shmuel Pinchasi, Shlita*, asserts that the source of blessing and its tragic counterpart is one's ability to "listen." Even prior to one's decision, one's ability to listen will determine whether his actions will result in blessing or curse. One who refuses to listen, who is afraid to confront the reality of truth, is relegating himself to a life of curse.

This form of listening does not refer to the mere act of gathering information without integrating it with other thoughts. The *Torah's* concept of *shmi'ah*, listening, includes carefully noting what one is hearing. This was Shlomo *Ha'Melech's* entreaty to Hashem, "*And You shall give your servant a listening heart*" (*Melachim I 3:9*). Does the **heart** listen ? It is the **ear** that listens! What is Shlomo *Ha'Melech* petitioning for ? Indeed, his desire was to have the ability to listen sensibly. He sought the awareness to integrate the knowledge with the sensitivity of his heart, so that the imparted information would inspire him to be a better individual.

Now that we have established that the nature of the illness is man's inability to listen, be it deliberate or inadvertent, we must determine its cause and subsequent cure. We suggest the following two reasons for an individual's lack of responsiveness to messages regarding his own well-being. One's hearing may be impaired as a result of a blockage. Alternatively, so much noise may be going on that -- even with perfect hearing -- he does not have a clue as to what is being said.

Let us address the first cause of impairment -- blockage. Probably the prime impediment is vested interests. This is consistent with *Chazal's* famous dictum in *Pirkei Avos 4:28* : "*Envy, desire and pursuit of honor, take one out of this world.*" One who is engaged in the pursuit of himself, whose main obsession in life is to glorify and gratify himself, obviously **cannot** and will **not** attend to what he is being told. His ears are stuffed with his obsessions. He will not respond to anyone who might stand in the way of his self-aggrandizement. One must first expunge that which is preventing the message from being heard. Consequently, his ability to listen will be so acute that he will become proficient in hearing and following even the most innocuous message.

The second source of impairment is noise. One may be blessed with an uncommonly sharp mind, an intuitive sense of perception, and an acute faculty for listening. If the noise is overpowering, however, it is all to no avail, for concentration is impossible. In order for one to "hear" the *dvar* Hashem, the word of Hashem, he must be in an environment in which there are no other alien "noises" which challenge his ability to hear properly.

Today, so many different noises, the sounds of different cultures and philosophies, compete for our undivided attention. By seeking refuge in a *Torah* milieu, we avail ourselves of the *dvar* Hashem, unimpeded and undiluted by those strange noises which are incompatible with *Torah* dictate. Once we hear the truth in all its clarity, no longer will there be within us the desire to listen to anything else -- because we have found the source of blessing.