

If a man will have a wayward and rebellious son, who does not hearken to the voice of his father and the voice of his mother. (21:18)

Einenu shomeia, “does not hearken/listen” is the given translation. The word *einenu* means much more than “does not (listen).” It means he is not a listener; he is unable to listen; his ability to listen is (sadly) impeded. The Torah should have written (simply), *eino shomeia*: “(he) does not listen.” The *Ohr HaChaim HaKadosh* notes this change and derives from here that, when the *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, reigns over a person, or, rather, if the *yetzer hora* becomes part of this person, his ability to hear, listen, to accept, becomes so impeded that he is unable to listen. He does not just “not listen”; he is unable to listen. He becomes hearing-impaired.

The *yetzer hora* stands guard over a person’s ability to listen, thus impairing him, impeding his ability to change, to repent, to alter his nefarious ways and activities. This grants us a new outlook, a deeper understanding of those who – regardless of the number of times we reach out to them to refrain from sin – continue to ignore us. Why? Are their hearts made of stone? Are they hearing-impaired? Are they blind to the disaster they are courting? Yes! Once the *yetzer hora* has overwhelmed them, they are unable to think, see or do anything. They have become so enslaved to the *yetzer hora* that nothing penetrates their physical world. They might hear sound, but the message it conveys is unintelligible.

Perhaps this is why the Torah underscores Yisro’s ability to “hear” *vayishma* Yisro, “And Yisro heard” (everything that had happened to the emerging Jewish nation when they left Egypt). Was he the only one who knew what had taken place? The whole world was aware of what happened to the Egyptians: the Jewish People’s exodus and the eventual drowning of the entire Egyptian army. What makes Yisro different? He heard the message – they heard nothing but the sounds. Their *yetzer hora* blocked the message from entering into their hearts, from imbuing their lives with faith in Hashem. The maidservant at the Red Sea saw such an unprecedented Revelation that her experience was even greater than that of the *Navi Yechezkel*. Yet, as the venerable *Horav Chaim Shmuelevitz*, *zl*, would say, *Zi iz altz gebliben a shifcha*. “Nonetheless, she still remained a maidservant.” She saw; she heard – but did not change. Why? Her *yetzer hora* prevented the message from being processed. Thus, she remained a *shifcha*.

I have always wondered about this phenomenon. I have given classes to the most wonderful groups of Jews. They are kind, honest, virtuous, and wholly good. They never miss a class, despite the weather and the infirmity of advanced age. Can I say that my message has penetrated their psyches? Perhaps, but they still have neither made their homes kosher, nor decided to observe *Shabbos*. Are they deaf? Have I lost my ability to reach people? No – on both counts. The *yetzer hora* is working overtime and does not permit my message from getting across. One day, I hope the *yetzer hora* will be caught off guard, and then...