

**When all Yisrael comes to appear before Hashem...in the place He will choose. You shall read this Torah in their ears... Gather together the people...so that they will hear so that they will learn...and be careful to perform all the words of this Torah. (31:11,12)**

Once every seven years, on the first day of *Chol Hamoed* that followed the *Shemittah* year, all of *Klal Yisrael* was enjoined to gather together at the *Bais Hamikdash* to listen to the king read from *Sefer Devarim*. He would read pesukim that dealt with our allegiance to Hashem, the Covenant, and reward and punishment. The primary doctrine of Jewish life is the *Torah*. Without it, we are nothing. With it, we have the capacity for attaining the greatest spiritual rewards. Consequently, it is only proper that all Jews stand in affirmation of the *Torah*. *Chazal* infer from the *Torah's* emphasis upon "so they hear" that a person who is W"X deaf in one ear is exempt from appearing during *Hakhel*. The phrase "*in their ears*," stated in the plural, implies that the *Torah* must be heard with both ears. In order for the *Torah* to permeate one's entire essence, he must be listening with both ears.

Why is the *mitzvah* of *Hakhel* the only *mitzvah* which demands that one pay undivided attention to the reading -- to the point that -- he whose hearing is impaired is exempt from the *mitzvah*? There is a *mitzvah* to "hear" the sound of the shofar. Yet, no rule exempts one who does not hear with both ears. Indeed, one who is hearing-impaired is not exempt from the *mitzvah* of *tekias shofar*.

The *mitzvah* of *Hakhel* addresses the area of Jewish education and the need to inspire all Jews with *Torah* knowledge. In order to be successful in reaching out to the masses, it is inherent that people are listening with both ears, giving their undivided attention to the speaker. The question arises: Do we reach out to all Jews? What are the priorities in Jewish education? What about Jewish outreach? Are we to concern ourselves with those who listen with only one ear, or with those who permit the message to enter one ear and let it exit the other ear? Some Jews would like to hear, but ignorance prevents them. Others think they know everything so they are unable to hear the *Torah's* message. They turn a deaf ear to anything which is remotely religious. It is difficult to reach out to the individual who has no interest in listening. It is even more difficult to teach the one who blatantly refuses to listen. These people are spiritually hearing-impaired. When transmitting *Torah* to others, our priorities should focus upon those whose hearing is acute, whose "ears" are open to the sound of *Torah* knowledge, whose hearts and minds are open to inspiration.