

## Hearing Problems Article

Shema Yisroel??? Hearing Problems

Are you following Shabbat services better these days? Maybe it's because there have been some physical changes to the sanctuary. Large-print page numbers are now visible on the bimah. The B'aal T'fillah's stand has been moved to the middle of the sanctuary, next to the mechitzah. This allows many of us to hear more clearly and keep up with the service.

Many of us in the Boomer generation and beyond need some help to hear clearly. When someone is talking – or davening -- we may strain to hear and only perceive what sounds like mumbling. Microphones and speakers are not a solution on Shabbat. What can we do?

We begin losing our hearing around age twenty. This is a normal part of aging. Other causes of hearing loss are exposure to loud music or a noisy work environment. Hearing loss can also be due to a virus or bacteria, heart condition, stroke, head injury, tumor, and certain medicines. Some 24 million Americans have a hearing loss, including one out of three people by age 65 and half of those over 85. That's a lot of people in our congregation!

**Why is Rabbi Tessler easier to understand than most other speakers?** Primarily, he uses some key techniques that improve communication, from which we all can learn. First, he does not shout. He physically moves closer to the congregation when he talks. He faces the audience, and moves around so everyone sees his mouth every few seconds. Next, he speaks slowly and clearly. He may rephrase a sentence in different words to make sure everyone understands the concept. If there is background noise (whispering from the congregants or noise from the atrium), he will stop talking until it ceases, to reduce background noise. He also keeps his hands away from his mouth in order to avoid obstructing the view of his lips. **These are techniques everyone should use when talking to someone who is hearing impaired.**

When someone has a hearing loss, the emotional consequences are many. They may feel embarrassed, frustrated, angry, have low self-esteem, or be impatient. Many such people will withdraw from social events in order to avoid these feelings. Misinformation, rejection, loss of friends and conflict result from not hearing messages correctly. This is especially seen in seniors. Trying to talk in the atrium during kiddush is most difficult, if not impossible. However, if people get their food and walk into a quieter place to talk, like the kiddush room, this can improve their socializing. It is futile for an individual with a hearing impairment to try to carry on a conversation in a noisy restaurant or at a bar mitzvah table. It makes more sense to go into a quieter area and try to talk.

Remember, what you can't hear, can hurt you. So if you suspect a hearing loss, discuss it with your doctor who will likely refer you for an evaluation by an audiologist and an otologist. For more information, an organization called SHHHH--Self Help for Hard of Hearing People in Bethesda, (301-657-2248. TTY: 301-657-2249) provides wonderful information to people with hearing losses, their relatives and friends.