Women's Whispers: Falling on deaf ears

By VIVA HAMMER
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And the Lord said to him, Who gave man a mouth? Or who makes him dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord?

Breezing past the mirror on the way out to work one morning, I halted, looked again. “My hearing aids!” I thought, annoyed at myself. Then I smiled. I was so accustomed to seeing my husband’s aided ears that mine appeared naked and incomplete.

Perhaps a year before, I was pacing my apartment, talking to a friend on the phone.

“Sara, I don’t know what to do about this Aaron I met on Purim. I really like him, but he’s hearing impaired and that gives me the shivers. In kindergarten, my mother made me sit next to the girl with cerebral palsy; it made me puke! I just shrivel up when I see a deformity. What should I do?”

“It’s fine to be turned off,” Sara sympathized. “But a week ago you speculated with me ad nauseam as to whether or not he admired you at the seuda, and we devised all kinds of plots to get you a date. Can’t you pretend you’re not prejudiced just for once? Hey, he might be a gem!”

So I went out, holding down the revulsion, remembering how he’d smothered his sister’s kids with kisses the first time I met him, and thinking I wouldn’t mind a few of those myself.

Aaron can’t use the phone, so in the beginning his mother arranged our dates. This was de rigueur in Aaron’s crowd, where a matchmaker intermeddles herself between every budding couple, but I found it rather unromantic to talk to my date’s mother every time I wanted to see him. So after a while, we started faxing each other instead.

Invitations to meet sprouted out of every fax machine at my office. I used to wander from station to station, looking for Aaron’s illegible scrawl, so conspicuous without cover sheet or salutation. I never sat forlornly near the phone, waiting for that call. My missives came via Speedy the mailman, and if a fax didn’t come one day, I figured the mailroom must have mislaid it because of Aaron’s impossible handwriting.

I began coming into the office on Saturday nights and Sundays so we could talk by fax, and when things became more intimate, we wrote in Hebrew. One day, there was a voice mail, afraid and distant. I trembled and tried to keep it forever, and all the ones that succeeded it, until my mailbox became hopelessly full and they were all wiped.

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After that, the documentation of our courtship disappears. The only other thing that came over the fax was a draft wedding invitation. My secretary called me, aghast, “Are you getting*married*?”

I couldn’t believe the entire firm didn’t know. Hadn’t they been watching me for months, hovering over fax machines, waiting for love letters?

When we were engaged, we met the doctor who had assured my in-laws that of course it would be possible for the little hearing-impaired boy to study texts written in [**Aramaic**](http://newstopics.jpost.com/topic/Aramaic_language) and Hebrew with a Yiddish-speaking rebbe. The doctor watched agape as Aaron delivered one of his signature lectures, using a plethora of sources to build a complex argument in full oratorical style. I was puzzled by the doctor’s reaction.

“I understood that many children lost hearing as a result of the medication Aaron took,” I said. “What are the others doing?”

 “They’re in sheltered workshops,” he answered.

I laughed. The only useful role Aaron could take in such a place would be as director.

The hardest thing is the telephone. Before my husband got a phone for the deaf, I had to make all the calls: for him, me and us. I arranged job interviews, study partners and doctors’ appointments. And I had to come up with excuses as to why the person on the other end couldn’t speak to the object of the call. The phone became such a source of tension that one night Aaron got up in a deep sleep and vomited over it. It took weeks to get the phone fixed, and for I while I too sat in isolated silence, neither hearing nor being heard by the world outside.

But that was in the olden days, Aaron reminds me. Today we have e-mail, and he’s almost on par with regular humans – almost.

When I wrote to my anxious parents about why I was marrying a hearing-impaired person, I explained that handicap is a figment of the mind – of the individual and of the society in which she lives. I reminded them of a story my father tells, from a time when he lived in places where heaps of Jewish bodies lay in carts and on street corners, their rotted flesh polluting the pure European soil on which they lay. My father looked up and saw the birds flying above and thought, “How the birds must pity us, maimed without wings, who never rise above the earth from the first moment in which we emerge onto it to the last in which we fold back into it.”

How indeed.

*And the Lord said to him, Who gave man a mouth? Or who makes him dumb, or deaf, or seeing, or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? (Exodus 4:11)*

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