

Fair Hearing

December 28, 2023

**Q** A man in my shul wears hearing aids. May I speak to him on Shabbos, given that my voice will trigger electrical activity in the device?



**A** The *poskim* address several issues with hearing aids on Shabbos.

Among them are *hashma'as kol* (generating sound), *molid* (making something new), and the general issue of electricity.

R' Moshe Feinstein (Igros Moshe O.C. 4:85) rules that in circumstances where nonverbal communication—e.g., nodding or shaking the head—is available and practical, one should preferably employ it and not speak directly to someone wearing hearing aids. If this is impractical or one's interlocutor is a child, it is permitted, because it is questionable whether using electricity in this way—where no deliberate *melacha* is performed—is prohibited, so we may be lenient in case of need.

With regard to *hashma'as kol* on Shabbos, R' Moshe says that Chazal didn't intend to prohibit this in exceptional cases. And *molid* is also not a material concern because the sound isn't amplified (as it is with a microphone), only directed into the ear. (See also Piskei Teshuvos 277 note 35.)

People may *lechat'chilah* speak to each other even if a hearing aid user is nearby, because they have no intention of activating his device, following the principle of *davar she'aino miskavein* (ibid.).

R' Shlomo Zalman Auerbach (Minchas Shlomo Vol. 1 *siman* 9 3:7) permits speaking directly to the wearer even *lechat'chilah*, because causing a change in the electrical current of an already-active device is insignificant, so it is neither a *melacha* (*makeh bapatish* or *boneh*) nor an act of *molid*. The Tzitz Eliezer (Vol. 6 6:13) adds that since the mechanical sound that speech induces in the device is ephemeral, causing it is not regarded as *melacha*.