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What the Rabbis Heard: Deafness in the Mishnah

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Introduction

This article examines deafness in Jewish antiquity as expressed in the Mishnah,[1] the foundation document of rabbinic Judaism. Ancient Greek and Roman attitudes towards disability and deafness are surveyed in order to establish the context within which the Mishnah was formulated, and to assess whether, and to what extent, Greco-Roman beliefs may have influenced the rabbis and Jewish law on matters pertaining to deafness.

Particular focus is given to (a) infanticide and gratitude as two opposing responses to disability in antiquity; and (b) the common belief that hearing and speech are precursors to intelligence. The major findings of this article are that while the rabbis of the Mishnah did not adopt the Greco-Roman practice of infanticide in response to the birth of a child with a disability, they did incorporate Greco-Roman beliefs about the connections between hearing, speech, and intelligence into Jewish law. This article surveys the Mishnah in order to elaborate on these points and discuss their implications for the participation of deaf people in Jewish life.

Disability: A time to kill, a time to bless

This section explores two distinct responses to disability in ancient times: murder, and gratitude.

Ancient Greece and Rome

In ancient Greece, infanticide was an accepted response to the birth of a child with a disability. Hippocrates raised the question, "which children should be raised?"[2] The responses of Plato (c. 427-347 B.C.E.) and Aristotle (c. 384-322 B.C.E.) make clear that people with disabilities were not among those slated to live. Plato stated, for example:

> This then is the kind of medical and judicial provision for which you will legislate in your state. It will provide treatment for those of your citizens whose physical and psychological constitution is good; as for

> the others, it will leave the unhealthy to die, and those whose psychological constitution is incurably corrupt it will put to death. That seems to be the best thing for both the individual sufferer and for society.[3]

Aristotle was in full agreement: "With regard to the choice between abandoning an infant or rearing it, let there be a law that no crippled child be reared."[4]

Plato and Plutarch go so far as to provide detail on the process of making the decision about who should live and who should die. Plato stated: "...we must look at our offspring from every angle to make sure we are not taken in by a lifeless phantom not worth the rearing."[5] Plutarch maintained that the decision lay with the tribal elders rather than with the father.[6] The mother, apparently, was not part of the decision-making process.

In Rome (c. 450-449 BCE), contemporary Roman custom was codified in a legal document known as the Twelve Tables. Although certain parts of the Twelve Tables became antiquated, they never were repealed. They remained, at least in theory, the foundation of Roman law for the next 1000 years.[7] The Twelve Tables granted the male head of the family (the paterfamilias) exclusive power over his sons and daughters, including power over life and death.[8] Table IV of the Twelve Tables states: "kill quickly... a dreadfully deformed child."[9] The life and death power of the paterfamilas disappeared by the second century C.E., and by the third century C.E. abandoning a child was considered murder.[10]

Ancient Judaism

In contrast to the evidence of infanticide as a response to disability in ancient Greece and Rome, the Mishnah records no debates on whether people with disabilities should be allowed to live; infanticide is never even raised as a possibility. Quite the contrary - the rabbis cherish life and see human variety as evidence of God's greatness. This is evident in the Mishnah and later rabbinic literature. For example, M. Sanhedrin 4:5 states:

> ...whoever destroys a single soul.., Scripture accounts it as if he had destroyed a full world; and whoever saves one soul.., Scripture accounts it as if he had saved a full world.....declare the greatness of the Holy One...for man stamps out many coins with one die, and they are all alike, but the King of Kings, the Holy One... stamped each man with the seal of Adam, and not one of them is like his fellow.[11]

The Mishnah also states: "One is obliged to bless for the evil - just as one blesses for the good...Whatever treatment God metes out to you, thank Him very, very much."[12] Moses Maimonides (1135-1204) later explains (in his commentary on this Mishnah): "There are many things that seem good initially, but turn out evil in the end. Hence the wise man is not confounded when great troubles befall him, since he

does not know what will eventuate."[13]

But how does all of this relate to disability? Other than not killing children with disabilities, how is society to respond, according to the Tannaim? They are to respond with gratitude and blessing. This is evident in two blessings of rabbinic origin: the "True Judge" blessing and the "varied creatures" blessing. M. Brachot 9:2 directs: "On hearing bad tidings, (one) says: 'Blessed is the True Judge.'" The Tosefta[14] clarifies the application of this blessing to disability: "[One who sees] an amputee, or a lame person, or a blind person, or a person afflicted with boils, says, "Blessed [are you Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe], the True Judge."[15] As for varied creatures, the Tosefta also directs:

> One who sees an Ethiopian, or an albino, or a [man] red-spotted in the face, or [a man] white spotted in the face, or a hunchback, or a dwarf (or a cheresh or a shoteh or a drunk person) says, "Blessed [are you Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe who creates such] varied creatures.[16]

The Jerusalem Talmud, a later rabbinic elaboration on the Mishnah,, discusses the differences between the "True Judge" and "varied creatures" blessings:

> This teaching [to say the blessing, 'the True Judge'] applies [to those who see persons with disabilities who were born] whole and later were changed. But if [one sees a person who] was born that way he says, 'Blessed [are you Lord our God, Ruler of the Universe who creates such] varied creatures."[17]

Judith Abrams concludes, "If one is born without disabilities and they later develop, then the disabilities are a judgement from God. Those born with disabilities, however, are simply among God's varied creatures."[18] In either case, it is evident that both the Tannaim and the later rabbis considered encountering persons with disabilities as occasions to bless and thank God, not as occasions to kill.

Speech, Hearing, and Intelligence

Oral debate and dialogue were core activities at the heart of the ancient world. In the Greco-Roman world, this was manifest, for example, in Plato's Socratic Dialogues (and the Socratic method of teaching by questioning), in the emphasis on both tragic and comic plays,[19] and in the speeches, debate and discussion in the Roman Senate. In ancient Judaism, rabbinic law was passed down from one generation to the next by means of oral and aural transmission of knowledge. Indeed, "Torah sh'be-al peh" - Torah from the mouth, or Oral Torah[20] - transformed Judaism from a biblical to a rabbinic religion.

Words were critical to ancient society.[21] What, then, did

the ancients understand about deafness and deaf people?

Ancient Greece and Rome

Martha Edwards, in her extensive discussion of disability in ancient Greece, notes:

> Language was the hallmark of human achievement, so muteness went beyond a physical condition. An inability to speak went hand-in-hand with an inability to reason, hand-in-hand with stupidity. Plato (Theaetetus 206d) has Socrates say that anyone can show what he thinks about anything, unless he is speechless or deaf from birth.[22]

Aristotle made profound connections between hearing, speech, intelligence.[23] In a statement that was to have profound implications for the education of deaf individuals henceforth, Aristotle stated:

> ...it is hearing that contributes most to the growth of intelligence. For rational discourse is a cause of instruction in virtue of its being audible... Accordingly, of persons destitute from birth of either sense, the blind are more intelligent than the deaf and dumb.[24]

Aristotle also asserted that "Men that are born deaf are in all cases also dumb;[25] that is, they can make vocal sounds, but they cannot speak."[26] Benderly, describing this statement as "widely mistranslated," notes that: " Because many took 'speechless' to mean 'stupid,' the authority whose word ruled Western thought for over a thousand years appeared to state that the congenitally deaf were necessarily congenital morons."[27]

The passionate emotion in Benderly's writing is common in the history of deafness - and no wonder. The link between hearing, speech, intelligence, and the ability to learn has had staggering educational consequences.[28] Radutsky reports, for example,

> ...the Romans did not consider deafness a separate phenomenon from mutism and... consequently, many believed all deaf people were incapable of being educated. Ancient Roman law, in fact, classified deaf people as 'mentecatti furiosi' - which may be translated roughly as raving maniacs - and claimed them uneducable.[29]

The Roman writer Pliny the Elder (23-79 C.E.), in Natural History, writes: "there are no persons born deaf who are not also dumb."[30] As Benderly has noted, confusion over the terms "dumb," "stupid," and "mute" has had serious repercussions for deaf people throughout history.

Ancient Judaism

The Tannaim appear to have incorporated Aristotelian connections between hearing, speech, and intelligence into Jewish tradition. The Mishnah sets forth two types of categories through which to examine deafness. The first is a larger category, into which deaf people fit, and the second is a series of smaller, more deafness-specific categories. The larger category is grouped as "cheresh, shoteh ve-katan" - "a deaf-mute, a mentally defective person, and a minor." This category is noteworthy in its apparent linking of deafness and muteness[31] with cognitive abilities and moral reasoning. The more specific categories include: "deaf mute";[32] "deaf and can speak";[33] one who has "become a deaf-mute";[34] a "deaf-mute who recovered his senses";[35] a "deaf-mute" who "recovered his speech";[36] and "deaf."[37]

These categories are noteworthy in two respects. First, their focus on "senses" and speech suggests parallels to Aristotelian thought and demonstrates the importance of hearing and speech to the Tannaim. Second, the categories demonstrate a recognition of human difference - including differing abilities and modes of communication in deaf people.

The major concern of the rabbis seems to have been whether a deaf person (cheresh) could develop da'at - knowledge, intelligence, morality, reasoning abilities.[38] It is here that Aristotle's pronouncements regarding the connections between speech, hearing, and intelligence seem to be paralleled: voice is connected to soul and imagination; audition is connected to rational discourse; hearing is connected to intelligence.

Both with respect to participation in society and responsibility for wrongdoing, these beliefs had serious, real-life consequences. On the one hand, social and religious opportunities were limited for deaf people. M. Arachin 1:1 states, for example, "...a deaf-mute, a mentally defective person, and a minor" may not vow or dedicate the worth of another, because they possess no understanding (da'at) (to formulate vows nor to make assessments). On the other hand, deaf people appear to have been treated leniently with respect to criminal justice situations. For example, the Mishnah describes situations where able-bodied persons were held responsible and punished for damage or wrongdoing, but deaf persons were not. M. Baba Kamma 8:4 states, "It is a bad thing [for anyone] to knock against a deaf-mute, a mentally defective person, or a minor, since he that wounds them is liable, whereas if they wound others they are not liable." And according to M. Baba Kama 4:4,

If an ox of a person of sound senses gored an ox of a deaf-mute, or a mentally-defective person, or a minor, he is liable; but if one belonging to a deaf-mute, or a mentally-defective person, or a minor gored an ox of one of sound senses, he is exempt.

Deaf people, it seems, could injure others (or let their animals injure others) and get away with it.[39] Why? The rabbis, like Aristotle, seem to have linked deafness with some sort of moral or cognitive deficiency. Rabbinic pedagogy

relied heavily on verbal communication. Prime activities included verbal arguing, discussing, and questioning. Without the ability to participate in the discussions and arguments, deaf people may have been seen as having no way to develop or communicate halachic or other reasoning skills.[40]

The link between deafness (cherish) and intelligence-understanding (da'at) for the rabbis, as for Aristotle, appears to have been speech. M. Terumoth 1:1 and 1:2, when examined together, illuminate this point. M. Terumoth 1:1 states,

There are five who may not separate the priest's share of the produce, and if they do so their separation is not valid... a deaf-mute (cheresh), an insane person (shoteh), and a minor (katan) ....[41]

Compare this to M. Terumoth 1:2:

> A deaf person -- such as can speak but can not hear (cheresh ha-m'daber v'aino shomayah lo) -- should not separate... but if he did so his separated priest's share is valid.

In M. Terumoth 1:1, the cheresh has no chance of his separation being valid. In M. Terumoth 1:2, he does. The cheresh in 1:1 "may not" separate. The cheresh in 1:2 "should not" separate. Legally, this may have been a major distinction. In 1:1, if a cheresh separated anyway the separation still was not valid. In 1:2 it was. And what was the only difference between the deaf people in the two Mishnaic traditions? Speech. As if to answer any remaining question, M. Terumoth 1:2 continues: "The cheresh of whom the Sages have spoken in all cases is one who can neither hear nor speak."

Even without the linking of hearing and intelligence, the simple ability to hear and speak clearly had important implications for participation and leadership in rabbinic society. Take, for example, the religious obligation to recite the "Shema," a defining prayer in the Jewish liturgy. The Hebrew word "Shema" typically is translated as "hear." The first line of the prayer reads: "Hear O Israel, the Lord is our God, the Lord is One."[42] The Mishnah records the following debate:

> If someone read the Shema but did not hear it, he fulfills his obligation. Rabbi Yose said, He has not fulfilled his obligation.[43]

Pinchas Kehati (a recent commentator), noting that "R. Yose's ruling is the norm," explains: "[He has not fulfilled his obligation].. to read the Shema, since the verse reads, "Hear..." make audible to your ear what your mouth has to say (Gemara)." However, it is worth noting that an alternate translation of the word "shema" is "understand." The first Tanna, Kehati explains, "interprets Shema to mean "understand" (as in II Kings 18:26-tr), hence, 'Shema - In any language

that you understand.' It is permissible, then, for one to recite the Shema in any language he understands."[44] The mishnah continues:

> If one read the Shema without enunciating the letters properly, R. Yose says, He has fulfilled his obligation. Rabbi Yehudah says, He has not fulfilled his obligation.[45]

In this instance R. Yose's ruling also prevails. However, Kehati notes that "..ab initio one is required to pronounce the letters precisely and to take care not to run two identical or similar letters into one..."[46] While people with hearing and/or speech impairments are not explicitly discussed in this mishnah, questions certainly arise: can a deaf person who cannot hear or speak clearly fulfill the obligation to recite the Shema? Could the anonymous Mishnah's interpretation of "shema" as "understand" rather than "hear" mean a deaf person could fulfill the obligation by reciting the prayer in sign language, if that is a language he or she understands?

These are questions of Jewish law best examined in a separate venue;[47] for now, it is worthwhile simply to note the importance of hearing and speech to the rabbis of the Mishnah. Similarly, the Rosh Hashanah liturgy requires Jews to "hear the sound of the shofar."[48] The Mishnaic tractate on Rosh Hashanah states, " A deaf-mute, an imbecile, and a minor cannot fulfill an obligation on behalf of the many. This is the general rule: whoever is not liable to an obligation, cannot fulfill that obligation on behalf of the many."[49] Kehati offers the following commentary:

> Resuming the discussion of fulfilling the obligation of blowing the shofar on behalf of others, the mishnah teaches that a person can do so only if he himself is liable to that obligation. A deaf-mute, an imbecile... and a minor... are not liable to the commandment of the shofar, and therefore they cannot fulfill an obligation on behalf of the many... According to one opinion, a person who is deaf but can speak may also not fulfill this obligation on behalf of others, for the essence of the commandment is "to hear the sound of the shofar", and since he does not hear, he is exempt.[50]

Finally, Tannatic rulings demonstrate an impressive awareness of deafness-specific issues. For example, the existence of a separate category for an individual who had "become a deaf-mute"[51] suggests an understanding of age-of-onset (of deafness) as a critical factor in speech and language development. And it is clear that the Tannaim understood that deaf people communicated both manually and orally. For example, M. Gittin (5:7) states, "A deaf-mute (cheresh) may transact business by signs and be communicated with by signs" - and then continues, "Ben Bathyra says, he may

transact business and be communicated with by lip movements in matters concerning movable property." And M. Yevamot (14:1) states, "Just as he marries by gesture so he may divorce by gesture."[52] The nature of these activities (marriage, divorce, business dealings) require intelligence, reason, and knowledge -- da'at. So perhaps the rabbis (at least some of them, some of the time) understood that meaningful, abstract concepts (as well as detail) could be communicated manually, and that deaf people might have some access to da'at.

Conclusion

The Jewish Bible, known in Hebrew as the Torah, was the basis of the rabbinic discussion and exegesis that led to the development of the Mishnah and later Jewish law. And so it is perhaps fitting to end this article with a story from Torah - the story of the great leader and prophet Moses, who had a speech impairment.

According to the Book of Exodus, God commanded Moses to free the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. Moses, however, hesitated: "Please, O Lord, I have never been a man of words. I am slow of speech and slow of tongue." God responded, "Who gives man speech? Who makes him dumb or deaf or seeing or blind? Is it not I, the Lord? Now go, and I will be with you as you speak..." Still Moses protested: "Please, O Lord, make someone else Your agent."[53] And then, in what I can describe only as the first reasonable accommodation in the Torah, God assured Moses that Aaron, his brother who "speaks readily" - would join him and speak for him.[54] And with that, Moses helped form a band of former slaves into a new nation, witnessed revelation, and delivered to the world the Ten Commandments.[55] Whatever one believes about the origin, truth, or veracity of the biblical text, the Torah demonstrates, through the story of Moses, the enormous potential of each human being. Moses should have been killed when he was an infant -- Pharaoh had decreed the murder of all newborn Hebrew boys, and Moses was one. Imagine the implications.

Given the central role of Torah in Mishnaic and later Jewish law and tradition, it is not surprising that the Mishnah credits a person who saves a single soul with having saved a whole world.[56] It is not surprising that the Mishnah does not decree (or even contemplate) the murder of children with (or without) disabilities. It makes sense that the Mishnah is able to envision alternative means of communication for people who are deaf or who have speech impairments.

At the same time, the ancient Jews did live amongst the ancient Greeks and Romans. It is therefore not surprising that the rabbis, as evidenced in the Mishnaic canon, incorporated into Jewish law Greco-Roman beliefs linking hearing, speech, intelligence, and morality. It is clear, however, that the rabbis viewed all people, including deaf people, as unique individuals. The Mishnaic delineation of multiple categories of deafness resulted in not every deaf person being "categorically" disqualified or exempt from the

performance of specific mitzvot.[57] The rabbis observed deaf people, paid enough attention to notice detail, and deemed deaf people worthy of life, legal rulings, and protections. From the standpoint of deaf history, these are all extremely positive developments.

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Comments and feedback on this article are welcomed and may be sent to: gracerbon@airbridge.net.

Notes

1. The Mishnah documents the debates, rulings, and sayings of the Tannaim, five generations of rabbis who lived c. 50 B.C.E. through 200 C.E. A whole body of literature and legislation developed from the text of the Mishnah. Generations of rabbis (known as the Amoraim and Savoraim, c. 200-700 CE), debated and analyzed the Mishnaic canon and from it, further developed Jewish law. The debates and discussions of the Amoraim and Savoraim are embodied in the Babylonian Talmud. Judaism continued to develop, with each successive generation studying the Mishnah, Talmud, and ensuing rabbinic works, and applying them to the issues of their day. The Mishnah consists of 63 tractates, or sections, and covers a broad array of topics such as ethics, civil law, damages, agriculture, holidays, women, children, marriage, divorce, religious ritual, and Jewish liturgy. Discussions of disability and deafness are scattered throughout; therefore, the examples in this article are given in the context of a variety of issues. For a survey of Rabbinic literature and introduction of its constituent documents, see Strack and Stemberger, 1996. On the Mishnah, pp. 108-148.

2. As quoted in Winzer (1997:82).

3. The Republic, Book III, 409e-410a.

4. Politics, 7, 1335b.19-21.

5. Theaetetus (160E-161A), as quoted in Martha L. Edwards (1996:82).

6. Plutarch's Lives, Vol. I., Lycurgus, 16.

7. Lewis and Reinhold (1990:107-8) also note that Cicero (106 B.C.E.- 43 C.E.) reported that in his time, boys were

required to memorize the Twelve Tables (Laws II. xxiii. 59).

8. Casson (1998:10-11), noting that infanticide was practiced throughout ancient times, adds that the decisions of the paterfamilias were made "not necessarily in consultation with the mother." Casson (1998: 10-11) also notes other reasons for infanticide, such as poverty (on the one hand), and the division of property amongst too many heirs (on the other). Carcopino (1968:77) adds that girl babies and "bastards" were victims of exposure.

9. Lewis and Reinhold (1990: 110). The Twelve Tables were instituted as a means of plebian protection against patrician magistrates, and as a means of equality before the law.

10. Carcopino (1968:77).

11. Individual sayings, laws, and discussions within the Mishnah also are called mishnahs, and are cited according to Tractate. For example, the mishnah quoted above is located in chapter four of Tractate Sanhedrin. Its citation reads "M. Sanhedrin 4:5" because it is the fifth mishnah in chapter four of Tractate Sanhedrin.

12. M. Berakhot 9:5.

13. Kehati commentary to M. Berakhot 9:5.

14. The Tosefta is a compilation of Tannaitic sayings not included in the Mishnaic canon. See Strack and Stemberger, pp. 149-163.

15. T. Berakhot 6:3. Translation follows Judith Abrams (1998:118).

16. T. Berakhot 6:3. Translation follows Judith Abrams (1998:118-19).

17. Y. Berakhot 9:1. Translation follows Judith Abrams (1998:119). On the Jerusalem Talmud, Strack and Stemberger, 164-189.

18. Judith Abrams (1998:119).

19. E.g. Euripides, Aristophanes, Sophocles, Aeschylus

20. "Oral Torah" refers to the belief that Moses received two Torahs on Mt. Sinai -- one written, one oral. The basis for this belief is in M. Avot 1:1, and is extrapolated in part from the appearance of the plural "Torot" in Leviticus 26:46. The phrase in Leviticus reads, "These are the decrees, the ordinances, and the teachings (Torot) that God gave, between Himself and the Children of Israel, at Mount Sinai, through Moses." "Torot" is plural of the word "Torah," suggesting that two Torahs were given to Moses. The rabbis explained that the first Torah was the written one (Torah she-bi-ktav), and the second was the oral one. For further discussion, see Elon (1994:190-227), Safrai (1987:35-120), and Shiffman (1991:177-200).

21. Boman, discussing the origins of the Greek "logos" (word), notes, "Logos, word, came from... "to speak". The basic meaning of the root leg- is, without doubt, 'to gather' ...to put together in order, to arrange... The deepest level of meaning in the term 'word' is thus nothing which has to do with the function of speaking - neither dynamic spokeness.. nor the articulateness of utterance - but the meaning, the

ordered and reasonable content... Logos expresses the mental function that is highest according to Greek understanding" Boman (1970:67).

22. Martha Edwards (1995). Physical Disability in the Ancient Greek World. UMI Dissertation Services, p. 101.

23. In On the Soul, Book II, 420b.5, and 420b.29-421a.1, Aristotle also said that the soul resides in the windpipe and the areas of the body that create speech, and that "voice is sound with a meaning."

24. Sense and Sensibilia, 436b.16-437a.15.

25. Benderly (1980: 107) translates "dumb" as "speechless."

26. History of Animals, Book IV, 9, 536b.4.

27. Benderly (1980:107).

28. Ancient ideas of speech as an indicator of intelligence set the stage for what later became a communications debate so passionate that Benderly called it "a holy war... a conflict as fierce as any that ever sundered a party cell or shattered a religious denomination." Known initially as the "War of Methods" and later as the "oral/manual controversy," the debate focused on whether deaf people should communicate by speaking or signing (Brill, 1984:17, Benderly, 1980:vii-8, Lane, 1984, Lane and Phillips (1984), Spradley and Spradley (1978), Winefield, 1987).

29. Radutsky, 1993:239. Pliny (Natural History 35,21), however, does record a celebrated debate when the grandson of Quintus Pedius, a former consul who was appointed by Caesar as his joint heir with Augustus, was born mutus. Both Augustus and the orator Messala agreed that the grandson, also named Quintus Pedius, should have lessons in painting. Apparently the child made great progress before he died at an early age.

30. As cited in Wright, 1969:136, and Benderly, 1980:107.

31. The cochlea, inner ear and mechanisms of hearing actually have no direct bearing on the vocal chords or the ability to speak. The reason "deaf speech" sounds different is that deaf people cannot hear how sounds are pronounced.

32. M. Terumoth 1:1.

33. M. Terumoth 1:2.

34. M. Yevamoth 14:1; M. Sotah 4:5.

35. M. Gittin 2:6.

36. M. Baba Kamma 4:4.

37. M. Sanhedrin 8:4.

38. Abrams, 1998.

39. See also M. Sanhedrin 8:4, in which hearing children of deaf adults also appear to be treated leniently.

40. "Halachah" means Jewish law.

41. The "separation" under discussion is the Heave-offering (terumah) -- the portion of one's harvest that must be given to the priests in the Temple before one can eat from one's harvest. The remaining two who may not separate are "he who separates the priest's-due from that which is not his own, and a non-Jew who separated from that of a Jew even by permission."

42. This prayer comes from Deuteronomy 6:4, and

articulates the Jewish belief in one God.

43. M. Berakhot 2:3.

44. Kehati on M. Berakhot 2:3. "Tanna" is the singular form of the Hebrew word "Tannaim."

45. M. Berakhot 2:3.

46. Kehati on M. Berakhot 2:3.

47. For a more current discussion of Jewish law and deafness, for example, see Mordechai Shuchatowitz's "Halacha Concerning Jewish Deaf and Hard of Hearing" published by the Orthodox Union (undated).

48. A shofar is a ram's horn. When blown, it creates a loud sound. For a survey of the Jewish holidays, including Rosh Hashana, see Greenberg (1988).

49. M. Rosh Hashanah 3:8.

50. Kehati commentary on M. Rosh Hashana 3:8.

51. M. Yevamoth 14:1, M. Sotah 4:5.

52. Blackman (1963) alternately translates "sign" (M. Gittin 5:7), and "gesture" (M. Yevamot 14:1). The Hebrew in both instances stems from the root letters reish, mem, zayin. Alcalay (1996:2462) defines this, in part, as "hint, imply, sign, gesture." Blackman defines it as "sign, deaf and dumb language" (see footnote to M. Yevamot 14:1).

53. Exodus 4:10-13.

54. Exodus 4:14-16.

55. The Book of Exodus details the life of Moses.

56. M. Sanhedrin 4:5.

57. "Mitzvot" is plural of "mitzvah," a Hebrew word meaning "commandment."

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