

“Aural Assaults”

By Rabbi David Wolpe

Where can one go to escape noise? In the mall, an insipid, repetitive music endlessly plays. On public transport, there is not only private music, but public music for those few who do not have iPods to listen to their own selections. Is there no understood advantage to quiet? How many conversations must be missed at wedding and b’nai mitzvah parties before people recognize that the volume of the band is probably in inverse proportion to its skill?

Of course bland or blaring music is not the only assault on our ears. There are cellphone conversants whose volume exceeds that of a carnival barker, and the usual street complement of drills, leaf blowers, revving engines and creaking cranes.

Sensitivity to noise is not new. Julius Caesar reportedly tried to halt chariot racing over Rome’s cobblestones because of the clatter it caused. The 19th century philosopher Schopenhauer in his essay, *On Noise*, writes, “The general toleration of unnecessary noise — the slamming of doors, for instance, a most unmannerly and ill-bred thing — is direct evidence that the prevailing habit of mind is dullness and lack of thought.”

When asked what the orchestra should play while he was dining at a posh London restaurant, George Bernard Shaw caustically replied: “dominoes.”

The Psalmist said it best: “To You, O God, silence is praise.” (Ps. 65:2)