

But they didn't listen to Moshe from impatience of spirit and from hard labor. (6:9)

One would think that, if someone were to appear at the domicile of a down-trodden slave to inform him that the end of his bondage is near and he would soon be a free man, his immediate reaction would be joy – overwhelming joy. Instead, when Moshe *Rabbeinu* informed *Klal Yisrael* that Pharaoh would no longer be their Master, they seemed impatient and not really interested in hearing his message of liberation. The Torah explains that they were victims of *kotzer ruach*, which *Sforno* interprets as: *l'hisbonein*, to comprehend, think it over; in short, they were plagued with an inability to process Moshe's message. They were unable to believe that the end was near, and they would soon be leaving for the Promised Land. Thus, *Sforno* explains, unlike Avraham *Avinu* whose *emunah*, faith, in Hashem was impeccable, they just could not get it together. As a result, they did not enter the Land. In place of them, their children, who were raised on a steady diet of *emunah* and *bitachon*, trust in Hashem, believed in Hashem, and entered the Land.

What is the meaning of *kotzer ruach*, and why was this “affliction” so overpowering that it caused the members of that generation to ignore Moshe's wonderful news and continue with business as usual, as if nothing had changed? *Kli Yakar* explains: *Neshimassan ketzarah k'ish mevuhah*, “Their breathing was short, like a person who is anxious, terrified, unable to think properly. Furthermore, Moshe posited that the nation had no interest in leaving Egypt. Indeed, if the people did not indicate their desire to leave, why should Pharaoh extend himself? What prevented the nation from thinking properly; processing their predicament; having a strong desire to leave their misery?

Denial. Refusing to acknowledge that something is wrong is a way of coping with adversity of all shapes and forms. Initially, short-term denial gives one time to adjust, to think, to accept, to prepare a coping mechanism. Long-term denial is dangerous. It does not allow one to acknowledge that he/she is confronting a difficult situation, thus downplaying the potentially devastating consequences. One can have a medical problem that requires a doctor's examination to diagnose the problem, severity and plan of treatment. When one denies the existence of the problem in the hope that it will vanish, he deprives himself of the appropriate action that might alleviate or cure the problem, until it is too late.

Klal Yisrael was having a difficult time accepting that they had plunged from honored status to wretched slaves. They entered Egypt as Yosef's family, and now Pharaoh no longer remembered Yosef. This was a difficult reality to accept. Their short-term denial became long-term, until they accepted this as their way of life. When Moshe came and informed them that Hashem would liberate them, their response was: “Why do we need liberation? We are not slaves.”

This form of denial has been plaguing us throughout history. From those who refused to leave Egypt (and succumbed during the plague of darkness) because they denied that they were slaves, to the most recent denials of anti-Semitism (it just does not exist), we have allowed denial to

assuage our consciousness, believing that if we say that we have no problem, it will go away. The consequence of denial can be devastating. If a person has an illness which he ignores, he will eventually succumb to it. If he acknowledges the illness and battles it head on, he has hope for survival. Likewise, with the difficulties that present themselves throughout our lives – both personal and national. They are messages from Hashem, messages to which He wants us to respond. By ignoring them, the portent of the message will not go away. If we want to survive, we must listen, digest and respond to the message.

A well-known story relates the reaction of the *Klausenberger Rebbe* to the reading of the *Tochachah*, Rebuke. It was *Parshas Ki Savo*, and the custom is to read the ninety-eight maledictions quietly and quickly because we do not dwell on curses. We dwell on blessings. The entire future of *Klal Yisrael* is foretold in this *parsha*. Sadly, not all of it brings joy to our hearts. These curses represent punishments which we would receive for distancing ourselves from Hashem.

It was shortly after the *Rebbe* arrived in America, broken in body, but not in spirit, a survivor of the Nazi's diabolical plan to murder European Jewry. That *Shabbos*, the *Rebbe* was listening to the *baal korei*, Torah reader, follow the custom of reading the *Tochachah* in a quiet, somber tone, when he banged on the lectern and called out, "Louder!"

The *baal korei* raised his voice a few decibels, but it was not enough to satisfy the *Rebbe*, who once again called out, "Louder, even louder! Read it the way you read any other *parsha*." The *baal korei* followed the *Rebbe's* instructions and read the *Tochachah* in the same tenor as he read the rest of the *parsha*. After he concluded, he asked the *Rebbe* why he had insisted on him reading in his usual loud tone.

"Let me explain to you why, in past generations, the *Tochachah* was read in a low tone. To the people of those generations, these curses were distant, unimaginable, mere words which they wanted to run through quickly, without dwelling on them. Our generation has sadly lived through the curses. We experienced firsthand what no other generation experienced. We are entitled to read the *Tochachah* out loud."

The *Rebbe* did not live in denial. He affirmed what he had experienced. We neither run nor hide from the curses, regardless of their message. We acknowledge, accept and take responsibility upon ourselves to make the necessary changes demanded of us. Denial is equivalent to lacking faith.