

"And Yosef died and all the brothers and the whole generation." (1:6)

The *Ohr Hachaim* states that the specificity of this posuk is deliberate. The enslavement of the Jewish people evolved gradually in three stages. As long as Yosef was alive the Jews were admired and held in high esteem. After he passed away, the Jews were no longer revered, and were accepted only as equal to the Egyptian citizen. With the passing of Yosef's brothers this equality disappeared, only to be replaced with contempt and ridicule. However, it was only after the original generation of immigrants passed away that the Egyptians had the audacity to enslave the Jews. From this we learn that although the Egyptians were very evil, they could not enslave the Jews as long as they had respect for them. It was only after the Jews were held in contempt that this enslavement could then occur.

We may suggest that there are two aspects to this matter. First, the Egyptians could not enslave a nation that was prominent and which they held in esteem. Second, had the Jewish people not demeaned themselves, had they not lost their sense of self-respect, this enslavement could not have transpired. A person who maintains their self-respect cannot be degraded into slavery. A people cannot be degraded unless they permit themselves to be manipulated this way.

This is precisely the way the *yetzer hora* (evil inclination) is able to entice one into transgressing. He first attempts to paint a picture that legitimizes the various transgressions. Once this is accomplished, man becomes clay in the *yetzer hora's* hands to be molded in any way he chooses. It is our responsibility to maintain our stature in order that we be able to withstand the various enticements that lurk before us.