

## Let us deal wisely with them. (1:10)

The mentality required to enslave an entire nation of people constitutes a unique form of “wisdom.” As descendants of the original tribes who came to Egypt, *Bnei Yisrael* enjoyed respect, admiration, and prominence. Their ancestor, Yosef, was Pharaoh’s viceroy. How did their stature suddenly plummet to such a low degree that they were conscripted as menial slaves, performing harsh labor for the Egyptians? Are we to believe that Pharaoh’s “wisdom” was responsible for this feat?

The *Sforno* presents a new perspective in understanding the meaning of the term, “dealing wisely” with the Jews. He claims that the Egyptians did not originally intend to enslave the Jews. Rather, they planned to make conditions so unbearable for them that they would leave of their own volition. Sensitive to the public opinion of other nations, the Egyptians deviously attempted to rid themselves of the Jewish problem deviously. Pharaoh lacked the courage to expel the Jews. Consequently, he created conditions by which he hoped the proud Jews would leave en masse. The Egyptians were convinced that the dignified Jews would never work at building treasure cities. Instead they taxed them financially. All they wanted from the Jews was tax money, which they hoped the Jews would refuse to give them. They relied on Jewish pride not to yield to such an indignity, so that the end result would be the Jews’ self-motivated emigration from Egypt.

By indirectly confronting the Jews--through taskmasters who would afflict them--the Egyptians hoped that the Jews would choose to leave. **Horav Benzion Bruk, zl**, expounds on *Sforno*’s words. The Egyptians were taken aback at the Jews’ response to the taskmasters. Instead of expressing anger and disgrace at being placed under taskmasters, the Jews agreed to build the treasure cities as a way of paying the tax. They did not fight; they did not argue; they did not offer any dissent. How did they permit themselves to be so cruelly degraded?

Instead of leaving Egypt in dignified anger, they degraded themselves by consenting to build the Egyptian treasure cities. When the Egyptians saw how *Bnei Yisrael* had debased themselves, they added insult to humiliation and actually enslaved the Jews. The Jews’ loss of self-esteem precipitated their downfall. Their decision to build the Egyptian cities was the catalyst that led to their total conscription as Egyptian slaves.

Self-esteem is more than a necessary character trait; it is an essential prerequisite for maintaining oneself on the high level of a *ben Yisrael*. We are confronted daily with challenges to our faith and tests of our belief in the Almighty. Only by maintaining our Jewish self-esteem, by proudly demonstrating our pride in being *bnei Torah*, will we succeed in not denigrating ourselves before the world. The weak among us submit. First, we give in on little issues. Later, we are compelled to yield concerning issues that go to the very core of our soul, issues that reflect our belief in Hashem and our adherence to His *Torah*. We have been bequeathed an unparalleled gift, the *Torah*. It should be our source of pride, the *raison d’être* of our lives. The *Torah* is our greatest weapon against spiritual deterioration.