

“And they shall take unto you pure, beaten olive oil for the light.” (27:20)

The *Midrash* cites the *pasuk* in *Yirmiyahu* (11:16): “*Hashem has called you a verdant olive tree.*” Why did Yirmiyahu compare *Klal Yisrael* to an olive tree? The *Midrash* explains that while all drinkable liquids mix with one another, oil stands alone. Likewise, *Klal Yisrael* does not mix with other nations. In an alternative exegesis, the commentators suggest that when other liquids mingle one cannot tell which liquid is above and which is below. Oil, regardless of with what it is mixed, always rises to the top. So, too, when *Klal Yisrael* performs the will of the Almighty, they ascend to the top; they are above the nations of the world. At first glance, no difference between these two explanations is evident. In any event, *Klal Yisrael* should not mix with the other nations. What is the difference if we are on the top or on the bottom?

Horav Yosef Konvitz, z.l., explains that the first statement of the *Midrash*, that *Klal Yisrael* does not mix with others, refers to a time when we are living in *Eretz Yisrael*. In our own land, we are in a sheltered environment protected from the harmful effects of the outside world. Even then we are adjured not to mix, not to marry outside of the faith. The second idea mentioned by the *Midrash* applies to *Klal Yisrael* in *galus*, exile among the nations of the world. Who will protect us? How are we to secure ourselves from acculturation, from eventual assimilation? The answer is the *Torah*: only by adhering to the *Torah* and fulfilling its *mitzvos* do we have the antidote to assimilation. We rise to the top when we are fortified with the *Torah*. We may add that when *Klal Yisrael* studies *Torah* and keeps the *mitzvos*, we are respected by those around us. We develop a stature, an image which people respect. The *Torah* refines us and it is obvious. We rise above the nations of the world with the “buoyancy” imbued in us through the *Torah*.

Moshe *Rabbeinu* grew up in Pharaoh’s home, in an environment whose culture and way of life vilified *Torah*. From Egypt he moved on to Midyan, to the home of Yisro. Although Yisro was not an Egyptian, he was still far from being a devout, pious Jew. Yet, Moshe did not mimic his way of life. He did not acculturate. What protected him? His *emunah*, faith in Hashem, elevated him, gave him the fortitude to overcome whatever challenges and obstacles stood in his path. Yosef *Ha’tzaddik* before him relied on his faith to overcome the constant trials with which he was confronted. It worked for them; it will, likewise, work for us.