

And they shall take for you pure, pressed olive oil. (27:20)

Chazal (*Midrash Rabbah*, *Shemos* 36:1) quote the *pasuk* in *Yirmiyahu* (11:16), *Zayis raanan yefei pri to'ar kara Hashem shemecha*, “Hashem named you verdant olive tree, fair, with choice fruit” to indicate the comparison of *Klal Yisrael* to olive oil. *Chazal* state three characteristics of the Jewish People which mimic the characteristics of olive oil. First, the olive does not give forth its oil until it has been smashed and pressed. Likewise, (some of) the Jewish People return to Hashem through *teshuvah*, repentance, once they have suffered at the hands of anti-Semites of all creeds, who have persecuted them with all forms of afflictions. Second, oil and other liquids do not mingle with one another. Oil’s viscosity is such that it cannot mix with any other liquids. Likewise, the Jew, regardless of how hard he may try to be accepted, at the end of the day, the acceptance is only superficial. They put on a good show of caring for and seeking our friendship, but beneath the façade lays the same feelings of insecurity – catalyzed by animus, as always. Third, even when one is able to combine oil and water, the oil will rise to the top. Likewise, when *Klal Yisrael* performs the will of Hashem, all recognize them as being special in human decency, ethical/moral character.

If I may add that, by nature of his biological affinity with the *Avos HaKedoshim*, holy Patriarchs, every Jew manifests the special characteristics that identify the Jew and his likeness with olive oil. This identification is stronger and more pronounced due to his affiliation with and devotion to the Torah. Perhaps this is why Hashem instructed Moshe *Rabbeinu* to “take the olive oil to you,” a requirement for the oil to be brought to Moshe to certify its purity. Our quintessential leader is the symbol of Torah. As such, the olive oil must be the essence of purity, because it exemplifies the Torah which is Divinely authored, its pristine nature preserved through the generations via the agency of “Moshes” of each generation. The Torah refines and enhances one who studies and adheres to its *mitzvos*. A Jew is a Jew, regardless of his level of commitment. A Torah Jew exemplifies Hashem's ideal for His chosen people.

Horav Zev Weinberger, zl, suggests that *Chazal*’s three *peshatim*, expositions, on how the Jew is equated with olive oil reflects three types of Jews (or Jewish practices). The first is the non-practicing, totally assimilated Jew, who, if it were to be his choice, would revoke his “membership” in this august group. He has little to no background, or he is so turned off that he wants to run as far away as he can. He requires the anti-Semite to remind him he has no exit strategy from Judaism. The hatred of the anti-Semite is filled with such vitriol that he will seek out any drop of Jewish blood that a person possesses – regardless of how many generations have passed since a member of his family has affiliated with *Yiddishkeit*. How sad it is when one needs the *goy* to remind him that he is Jewish. Anti-Semitism has a long history of affecting Jewish identity. Individuals have responded to religious animus by turning inward, reflecting on their heritage, culture and faith. It is not easy for someone who has never known or suddenly has realized – that running away is to no avail, that he has an identity – one that is characterized by strength, resilience, pride and determination.

Second, are those Jews who, despite their alienation from Torah and *mitzvos*, draw the line at intermarriage. They, like oil which does not mix well with other liquids, will neither destroy their own bloodlines, nor permit their offspring to do so. Ultimately, they understand that the Jewish nation is as different from the gentile world as oil is different from water. The spiritual “viscosity” of each one of the two does not mesh well with the other.

Last, is the Jew whose deep-rooted sense of commitment and devotion to his religious observance motivate him to take pride in celebrating his heritage. The pride he has in his religious identity leads to a sense of belonging, understanding that he is part of something much larger than himself. He is part of the *am Hashem*, the chosen nation of Hashem. He seeks peaceful coexistence with the outside world as long as such engagement will not adversely affect his religious priorities. We want the world to recognize and respect Hashem. This cannot succeed if we are extremist or separatist. People will respect Judaism when they admire the Jewish People. This does not mean compromising our religious devotion. On the contrary, people respect honesty and applaud individuals who remain true to their commitments. When we make religious concessions, we sell ourselves and the religion we represent short.