

RISING FROM THE ASHES

by Rabbi Yaakov Menken

"Take to yourself pure olive oil..." [27:20]

The Tzeror HaMor offers a homiletic explanation of the need for pure oil. Israel is compared to an olive: just like an olive produces its pure oil only when it is crushed, so too we see the Nation of Israel at its finest when it faces difficult trials.

Israel is also compared to oil, which cannot mix with other liquids - rather, it always rises to the top. Even if you shake and mix Israel among the other nations of the world, we always remain distinct.

The Tzeror HaMor then focuses on the connection between these two attributes: it is specifically in the face of great difficulties that Israel separates out and rises up.

The Rebbe of Klausenberg was imprisoned in a Nazi camp during the Holocaust, but he retained his dedication to G-d and Judaism throughout. He even continued to wear Tefillin, which he had hidden with him.

One day, a Nazi guard discovered him with his Tefillin. He fell upon the Rebbe, beating him furiously. Then, once the Rebbe had fallen, the guard placed his foot on the Rebbe's face, pressing the bottom of his boot into the Rebbe's cheek. "Now," mocked the guard, "do you still think you are the chosen people?"

The Rebbe replied, "as long as you are up there, and I am down here, I *know* we are the chosen people."

It is specifically when facing trials that Israel can rise up and demonstrate its best qualities. The Nazis tried to make themselves the "super-race," while dehumanizing the Jews. What happened was just the reverse: the Nazis are considered *inhuman* by all humans, while the Jewish people are rising from the ashes...

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