

## **And behold! An olive leaf it had plucked with its bill. (8:11)**

The *Midrash* teaches that, in addition to representatives of every living creature which Noach brought with him into the *Teivah*, Ark, he also brought seeds and shoots from all types of vegetation. The purpose was simple: He and all the creatures would survive, but what would they eat? From what would they sustain themselves? There was one plant which he did not take: the olive. In their commentary to the Torah, the *Baalei Tosfos* explain that the olive cannot endure one full year out of the soil. Thus, it would not have survived on the Ark. Therefore, it is interesting that when Noach sent the dove out to investigate if the Flood waters had finally receded, it returned with an olive leaf. How did the olive survive the Flood? Everything else perished. This teaches us that, when Hashem commands us to do something, it is not necessarily for our sake as our only means of salvation. Hashem can do anything, and every option continues to be available to Him. He decided that Noach should spend one hundred and twenty years building an ark, and that he and all the living creatures which were spared the effects of the Flood should escape on it. This does not mean that the Ark was the only medium of rescuing Noach. Hashem could have saved him through a host of different paths. He wanted the Ark! Indeed, the olive had no ark, yet it remained standing in full bloom despite the waters of the Flood.

Every avenue for escape and salvation is open to Hashem. He does not require Noach or the Ark. He simply wanted to provide Noach an opportunity for *zechus*, merit, to go down in history as the man who rescued humanity. Hashem does not require man's assistance. This is one of the *yesodei ha'daas*, principles of our belief. We have been gifted a plethora of Torah to study and *mitzvos* to observe, purely for our own reward. The world does not require our input in order to achieve its purpose. Our activities are solely for our own benefit.

Following the European Holocaust, during which the world of Torah was almost destroyed, some of the remnants, firebrands plucked from the burning flames of destruction, assembled in Yerushalayim to discuss how these few remaining *Roshei Yeshivah* could band together to create a renaissance, a rebuilding of the Torah world that once was. Everyone spoke passionately about the terrible loss, the irreparable damage that the Torah world had sustained, and each gave his advice concerning the future. They knew that they had to build, but how?

In the midst of the discussion, the **Ponevezer Rav, zl**, rose from his seat and declared, "*Rabbosai*, my dear colleagues! You are all mistaken in your approach toward rejuvenating Torah. The Torah does not need our help! Hashem made a promise *Ki lo sishkach mipi zaro*, 'It (the Torah) will not be forgotten from His children.' The world of Torah will blossom with or without us. The question that confronts us is not, 'What will happen to the world of Torah?' No! The question is: 'How can we be involved? How can we share in its rebuilding?' What are we willing to do in order to have a *zechus* in the regeneration of Torah in the post-Holocaust era? What are we prepared to do to have a part in Torah study in which future generations will be involved?"