

Make for yourself an Ark of gopher wood. (6:14)

The *Teivah* which transported Noach, his family and the multitude of creations on board is the symbol of salvation. Noach's Ark personifies an island of calm in a sea of storm.

The *Chidushei HaRim*, cited by his grandson, the *Sefas Emes*, translates *teivah* alternatively as "word." The *Teivah* of old refers to the words of the Torah and *tefillah*, prayer, which are contemporary man's salvation. The *Talmud Makkos* 10a compares the Torah to the *Arei Miklat*, Cities of Refuge, detailed at the end of *Sefer Bamidbar* (35:9-34). When we immerse ourselves in the words of the Torah, and when we employ the holy words of prayer to entreat Hashem, we connect ourselves to the spiritual source of Creation and take refuge from the outside world. The words of the Torah serve as the medium which links us to the spiritual lights within each Hebrew letter. Indeed, as the *Shelah Ha'kadosh* notes, the name *Yisrael* is an acronym which stands for the words, *yeish shishim ribo osisyos laTorah*, "there are 600 thousand letters in the Torah," each letter corresponding to a soul. Indeed, the words of the Torah are our only true refuge from a morally bankrupt world which is drowning in a sea of iniquity.

Perhaps, the significance of "words" has greater efficacy in *Torah Sheh'Baal Peh*, the Oral Law. We have been in *galus*, exile, for over two thousand years. Yet, we have survived and, in many ways, even thrived. *Am Yisrael*, the nation of *Yisrael*, survives because of its adherence to Torah – especially *Torah Sheh'Baal Peh*, which gives meaning to *Torah Sheh'b'ksav*, the Written Law. The Romans developed the concept of nationalism, national autonomy and power. This is in direct contradistinction to the vision of Hashem, His Torah, His nation. We are not autonomous. We belong to Hashem, and only to Him we have fealty. Those of our brethren who refuse to capitulate to national and nationalistic values and culture are the enemies of the state, its successors and the church.

This is indicated by Rabbi Yochanan ben Zakai's reply to Vespasian. He did not ask for Yerushalayim's sovereignty. He asked for "*Yavneh v'chachameha* – Torah, its laws, and the *chachamim*, its teachers." The Torah does not stand as a religion while the nation submits to the demands of the host nation in which it finds itself. The Torah demands our total subservience to it. Our overriding attention should be to the Torah. This is why we are called the Torah "nation."

We are called the "People of the Book." Actually, we are the People of the Speech, since this defines our essence. Through our clinging to *Torah Sheh'Baal Peh*, we are able to bring *Malchus Shomayim*, Heavenly sovereignty, to the world. Torah is the lifeblood of our nation, and, through it, we retain allegiance to Hashem. The Torah – its laws, and Divine scope of life – is taught to the youngest children in elementary school. It is not an abstract set of laws which govern a nation. It is what makes up the core of the nation. It is our national identity.

Torah Sheh'Baal Peh is alive and well in the *bais ha'medrash*. It is the dynamic force that binds and elevates us. It is the words of the *Torah Sheh'Baal Peh* that have maintained us as a nation

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devoted to Hashem. It is our pathway to *shleimus*, perfection, and our refuge from the dangers of a godless society.