



REFUGE IN AN ARK

It was touch and go for No'ach and his family.

All around them was deluge and devastation. Their ark, buffeted on all sides by the elements, could have become their Titanic.

But though the rest of civilisation was overtaken by the destruction, the No'ach family came out alive. They emerged from the ark and began to rebuild history.

God had determined that they would survive, and survive they did - and all because of an ark that gave them shelter and protection.

The rabbis say, "ma'asei avot siman labanim" - "the deeds of the fathers are an augury for their children", and this, like many a Biblical narrative, seems to be a parable of later events.

The Jewish experience has echoed the No'ach story too many times to count. Buffeted by hostility on every side, the Jewish people may well have doubted whether Jews and Judaism would survive into the future.

Had it not been for centuries of

unremitting persecution, we should now have numbered hundreds of millions. The world, and we have to say it was largely the Christian world, did all it could to bring Jewish history to an end.

Yet God, who determined that No'ach would live to face another day, determined that the Jewish people, though with numbers tragically depleted, would survive what Shakespeare calls "the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune".

Like No'ach, our means of survival was an ark. Our ark was, however, an Ark with a capital A - the Ark of the Torah. Clinging to the life of Torah gave us a rallying-point, a purpose, an identity.

Not that the Ark was a physical shield against the cruelty of riot, massacre, pogrom and Holocaust, but it was our means of defiance and determination not to give in.

Kol HaKavod to the firmness of our ancestors. But the struggle is not over. Not so much physically but spiritually and culturally.

If we want to be Jews tomorrow, there is only one way - not to demean, dilute or downgrade the Ark and its sacred contents. Unless we live with Torah we do not live as Jews.