

### 1. Talmud, Pesachim 53b

What did Chananiah, Mishael and Azaryah see, such that they gave themselves to the fiery furnace for the sanctity of the Name? They deduced from the frogs to themselves. The frogs were not commanded regarding the sanctity of the Name, and yet the text says, "They will ascend into your house... and your ovens and your dough." When is dough beside the oven? When the oven is hot! We are commanded regarding the sanctity of the Name, how much more so!

### 2. Shifra Epstein, *Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah in the Fiery Furnace (The Daniel-Shpil)*, In Geveb: Journal of Yiddish Studies Nov. '15 <https://ingeveb.org/texts-and-translations/hananyeh-mishael-and-azaryeh-in-the-fiery-furnace-the-daniyel-shpil>

*Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah in the Fiery Furnace, the Daniel-shpil* for short, is a translation from Yiddish of excerpts from a *pirem-shpil* (Purim play in Bobover Yiddish), performed by the Bobover Hasidim in their old *beit midrash* (house of study and prayer) on 48th St., Borough Park, Brooklyn. Presented here are scenes two, five, six, and seven of the original seven scenes.

The Bobover Hasidim are a community of Holocaust survivors and their descendents established in Borough Park, Brooklyn under the leadership of the late Bobover Rebbe, R. Shlomo Halberstam (1906-2000) after the Second World War.

The Bobover Hasidim appropriated the traditional Eastern European *purim-shpil* and elevated it to a major event in their celebration of Purim. The Bobover believe that the *shpil* is a powerful and evocative performance capable of opening the gates of heaven before their rebbe, where he can intervene before Gd on behalf of his followers. For the Bobover, the *Daniel-shpil* is such a *shpil*. In the center of the *Daniel-shpil* is the survival of Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah and Daniel from the attempts by Nebuchadnezzar to convert them.

### The Story

#### 3. Daniel, Chapter 3 (JPS 1985, courtesy sefaria.org)

<sup>1</sup>King Nebuchadnezzar made a statue of gold sixty cubits high and six cubits broad. He set it up in the plain of Dura in the province of Babylon. <sup>2</sup>King Nebuchadnezzar then sent word to gather the satraps, prefects, governors, counselors, treasurers, judges, officers, and all the provincial officials to attend the dedication of the statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up. <sup>3</sup>So the satraps, prefects, governors, counselors, treasurers, judges, officers, and all the provincial officials assembled for the dedication of the statue that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up, and stood before the statue that Nebuchadnezzar had set up. <sup>4</sup>The herald proclaimed in a loud voice, "You are commanded, O peoples and nations of every language, <sup>5</sup>when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, zither, lyre, psaltery, bagpipe, and all other types of instruments, to fall down and worship the statue of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar has set up. <sup>6</sup>Whoever will not fall down and worship shall at once be thrown into a burning fiery furnace." <sup>7</sup>And so, as soon as all the peoples heard the sound of the horn, pipe, zither, lyre, psaltery, and all other types of instruments, all peoples and nations of every language fell down and worshiped the statue of gold that King Nebuchadnezzar had set up.

<sup>8</sup>Seizing the occasion, certain Chaldeans came forward to slander the Jews. <sup>9</sup>They spoke up and said to King Nebuchadnezzar, "O king, live forever! <sup>10</sup>You, O king, gave an order that everyone who hears the horn, pipe, zither, lyre, psaltery, bagpipe, and all types of instruments must fall down and worship the golden statue, <sup>11</sup>and whoever does not fall down and worship shall be thrown into a burning fiery furnace. <sup>12</sup>There are certain Jews whom you appointed to administer the province of Babylon, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego; those men pay no heed to you, O king; they do not serve your god or worship the statue of gold that you have set up."

<sup>13</sup>Then Nebuchadnezzar, in raging fury, ordered Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego to be brought; so those men were brought before the king. <sup>14</sup>Nebuchadnezzar spoke to them and said, "Is it true, Shadrach, Meshach,

and Abed-nego, that you do not serve my god or worship the statue of gold that I have set up? <sup>15</sup>Now if you are ready to fall down and worship the statue that I have made when you hear the sound of the horn, pipe, zither, lyre, psaltery, and bagpipe, and all other types of instruments, [well and good]; but if you will not worship, you shall at once be thrown into a burning fiery furnace, and what god is there that can save you from my power?"

<sup>16</sup>Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego said in reply to the king, "O Nebuchadnezzar, we have no need to answer you in this matter, <sup>17</sup>for if so it must be, our Gd whom we serve is able to save us from the burning fiery furnace, and He will save us from your power, O king. <sup>18</sup>But even if He does not, be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your god or worship the statue of gold that you have set up."

<sup>19</sup>Nebuchadnezzar was so filled with rage at Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego that his visage was distorted, and he gave an order to heat up the furnace to seven times its usual heat. <sup>20</sup>He commanded some of the strongest men of his army to bind Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, and to throw them into the burning fiery furnace.

<sup>21</sup>So these men, in their shirts, trousers, hats, and other garments, were bound and thrown into the burning fiery furnace. <sup>22</sup>Because the king's order was urgent, and the furnace was heated to excess, a tongue of flame killed the men who carried up Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. <sup>23</sup>But those three men, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, dropped, bound, into the burning fiery furnace. <sup>24</sup>Then King Nebuchadnezzar was astonished and, rising in haste, addressed his companions, saying, "Did we not throw three men, bound, into the fire?" They spoke in reply, "Surely, O king." <sup>25</sup>He answered, "But I see four men walking about unbound and unharmed in the fire and the fourth looks like a divine being."

<sup>26</sup>Nebuchadnezzar then approached the hatch of the burning fiery furnace and called, "Shadrach, Meshach, Abed-nego, servants of the Most High Gd, come out!" So Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego came out of the fire. <sup>27</sup>The satraps, the prefects, the governors, and the royal companions gathered around to look at those men, on whose bodies the fire had had no effect, the hair of whose heads had not been singed, whose shirts looked no different, to whom not even the odor of fire clung. <sup>28</sup>Nebuchadnezzar spoke up and said, "Blessed be the Gd of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego, who sent His angel to save His servants who, trusting in Him, flouted the king's decree at the risk of their lives rather than serve or worship any god but their own Gd. <sup>29</sup>I hereby give an order that [anyone of] any people or nation of whatever language who blasphemes the Gd of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego shall be torn limb from limb, and his house confiscated, for there is no other Gd who is able to save in this way." <sup>30</sup>Thereupon the king promoted Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego in the province of Babylon.

### 3:1-12 Attack on the Jews

#### 4. Rabbi Abraham ibn Ezra to Daniel 3:2

*Achashdarpanim* and the others mentioned afterward constitute seven levels of hierarchy, in Arabic, but we don't know the meaning of *adargazraya* and those listed after them. One Spanish sage explained *adargazraya* as *adirei gazrin*, but there is no need for this. Let us leave these explanations, for they will not help.

#### 5. Talmud, Sanhedrin 93a

Three plotted: Gd, Daniel and Nevuchadnezzar. Gd said, "Let Daniel leave, lest people say they were saved in his merit." Daniel said, "I will leave, lest 'Burn their idols in fire' be fulfilled with me." Nevuchadnezzar said, "Let Daniel leave, lest people say, 'He burns his god in fire.'"

#### 6. Don Isaac Abarbanel, Ma'ayanei haYeshuah, Maayan 6 Tamar 3

The tale-bearers hit upon an opportunity, seeing Chananiah, Mishael and Azaryah in the act; when the music was heard and all fell on their faces and bowed toward the statue, they saw that Chananiah, Mishael and Azaryah did not bow, and they conveyed their tale. They did not speak about Daniel because they did not see him... And because of this haste, Daniel did not know of it; he found out only after the miracle. Perhaps the king also hastened to act before Daniel would find out, lest he come to ask for mercy before Nevuchadnezzar or before Gd.

### 3:13-18 Jewish recalcitrance

#### 7. Midrash Tanchuma, Tzav 3

I burned His house and I exiled His nation, and He did not oppose me in His own house. Will He conquer me in mine?

### 3:19-30 In and out of the furnace

#### 8. Rashi to Sanhedrin 92b

"One should not alter [his clothes]" lest he appear confused and afraid. Let his foes be ashamed before him.

#### 9. Talmud, Pesachim 118a-b

When wicked Nevuchadnezzar cast Chananiah, Mishael and Azaryah into the fiery furnace, Yorkemu, agent of hail, stood before Gd and said, "Master of the Universe, I will descend and chill the furnace and save the righteous from the fiery furnace." Gavriel said to him, "Gd's might is not thus; you are the agent of hail, and all know that water extinguishes fire. I am the agent of fire, I will cool it from inside and heat it outside, a miracle within a miracle!"

#### 10. Don Isaac Abarbanel, Ma'ayanei HaYeshuah, Maayan 6 Tamar 3

Perhaps the fourth man mentioned by Nevuchadnezzar was Daniel. The four were peers; he saw the miracle done for them and thought it was in Daniel's merit... When Nevuchadnezzar called them to leave the fire, he only called three.

#### 11. Rashi to Daniel 3:25 (based on Sanhedrin 95b)

"He resembles the malach I saw when Sancherev's forces were burned (Isaiah 37)." Nevuchadnezzar was there...

#### 12. Talmud, Sanhedrin 92b-93a

When wicked Nevuchadnezzar cast Chananiah, Mishael and Azaryah into the fiery furnace, Gd said to Yechezkel, "Go resurrect the dead in the Valley of Dura." When he resurrected them, the bones came and slapped that wicked one in the face. He said, "What are these?" They said, "The peer of these men is resurrecting the dead in the Valley of Dura." He recited Daniel 3:33... Rabbi Yitzchak said: Molten gold should be poured into the mouth of that wicked one; had the malach not slapped his mouth, he would have put all of the songs and praises of David in Tehillim to shame!... Rabbi Tanchum bar Chanilai said: When Chananiah, Mishael and Azaryah exited the fiery furnace, all of the nations slapped 'the enemies of Israel' in the face, saying, "You have a Gd like this and yet you bow to a statue?!"...

### Impact of this story

#### 13. Don Isaac Abarbanel, Ma'ayanei HaYeshuah, Maayan 6 Tamar 3

The entire statue, head to toe, was of gold, demonstrating that all empires to come after him and reign over the world would be from his descendants and the Babylonian Empire, and not only the head, but also the arms and thighs and loins. And so he instructed that they gather from all of the nations and tongues throughout his empire, and that all would fall and bow before that idol, to hint that they would be humbled and conquered before his reign, eternally. Therefore, this was performed with music, like a king's coronation... Our sages understood that the statue was a memorial for his god, as a matter of idolatry; I have come to explain the text.

#### 14. Genesis 11:1-4

And the entire land was of one language and unified speech. And when they travelled from the east, they found a plain in Shinar, and they dwelled there. And one said to another: Let us make bricks and create a fire. And the bricks were stones for them, and the clay was mortar for them. And they said: Let us build a city, and a tower with its head in the heavens, and we will make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered across the earth.

15. Rabbi Moses Maimonides, Letter to 12<sup>th</sup> century Moroccan Jewry

It is known, what happened to Israel in the days of wicked Nevuchadnezzar, that all who were in Babylon bowed to the statue, other than Chananiah, Mishael and Azaryah. Gd said regarding them in Isaiah 29:22, "Jacob should not be ashamed now and his face should not be whitened now." Perhaps 'the craftsmen and the smiths' were among those who bowed, if they were in Babylon then, but we have never seen anyone who called them wicked or non-Jews or invalid as witnesses. Gd did not assign to them guilt as idolaters, because they were forced. And so Megilah 12a says, "They put on an appearance, and so I will put on an appearance in the days of Haman."

16. Talmud, Ketuvot 33b

The pain of lashes may be considered a punishment harsher than death, for Rav taught: Had the Babylonians whipped Chananiah, Mishael and Azariah, they would have worshipped the idol!

17. Commentary of Tosafot (12<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> century Western Europe) to Ketuvot 33b אילמלי

This is shocking; how do we know [that they would have bowed under torture]? The Talmud says, "When they took out Rabbi Akiva, he said: I was pained about 'with all of your soul' all my life, wondering when it would come to my hand and I could fulfill it!" It sounds like 'with all of your soul' applies even under heavy torture as experienced by Rabbi Akiva, whose flesh they combed with iron combs, and certainly, if one was only whipped. Rabbeinu Tam explains that this statue was not actually an idol; it was made for the king's honour.