חסידות

From the Chassidic Courts

SOCHATCHOV · SHEM MISHMUEL, LECH LECHA

Why these three martyrs matched Avraham's faith

Shem MiShmuel

Avraham's self-sacrifice at the fiery furnace was unique in that he had no precedent of miracle to rely on and therefore no basis for hope of being saved, unlike all later martyrs for kiddush Hashem (sanctification of the Divine Name) who could at least harbor some doubt of survival because they knew Avraham had been rescued. Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah stand apart from all these later martyrs because, after Yechezkel explicitly told them in Hashem's Name that they would not be saved, they still gave themselves up with absolute certainty of death, thereby matching the level of Avraham himself. AI SUMMARY

Year 5671.

In Midrash Rabbah, Rabbi Berechiah opened [his discourse with the verse]: "We have a little sister," etc. In the Midrash Tanchuma: "little" means that the Holy One, blessed be He, had not yet performed miracles for her; and in Midrash Rabbah: that while she was yet small she was gathering mitzvot (commandments) and good deeds.

"What shall we do for our sister on the day when she shall be spoken for" — on the day when Nimrod decreed concerning him [Avraham] to go down into the fiery furnace — "if she is a wall, we will build upon her" — if he maintains his words like a wall, etc. He said before Him: Master of the Universe, I am a wall, I maintain my words, and my breasts are like towers — this refers to Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah, etc.

It seems the explanation of why [the midrash] specifies Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah is as follows — for were there not many thousands and tens of thousands who gave themselves up for kiddush Hashem (sanctification of the Divine Name)? For behold, Avraham had not yet seen any miracle, as the Tanchuma states, and when he went down into the fiery furnace, no thought at all arose in his mind that he would be saved, for he did not know at all that there were miracles in the world. As for Noach, who was saved in the ark — that was, after all, in the way of nature, that it floated upon the face of the waters. But whoever gave himself up for kiddush Hashem after Avraham could at least entertain in his heart some doubt that he would be saved, since he had already seen that Avraham had been saved.

But Chananyah, Mishael, and Azaryah, who asked the prophet Yechezkel whether the Holy One, blessed be He, would uphold [His promise] for them, and he answered them in the Name of the Holy One, blessed be He: "As I live, I will not be inquired of by you" — so that when they gave themselves up for the sanctification of His Name, may He be blessed, it was without any doubt whatsoever that they would be saved. Thus they were in the likeness of Avraham Avinu, peace be upon him.

