

Parsha Pearls

Noach 5768

And G-d spoke to Noach, saying: "Go out of the ark, you and your wife, your sons and their wives with you." (8:15-16)

The Midrash Tanchuma compares Noach's leaving the ark after the Flood to the story of Chananya, Mishael and Azariah emerging from the fiery furnace of Nevuchadnezzar, told in the Book of Daniel, Chapter 3.

Nevuchadnezzar built a giant golden statue and forced all his officers and state governors to bow to it, among them the three Jewish officers Chananya, Mishael and Azariah. When they refused, they were summoned before the king and threatened with death in the furnace. "They replied and said the king: 'Nevuchadnezzar, we do not hesitate to answer you on this matter. Our G-d, Whom we worship, can save us from the fiery furnace, and from your hand, O king. But even if He does not save us, let it be known to you, O king, that we will not worship your god, and we will not bow to the golden image you erected'" (Daniel 3:16-18).

When the king heard this, he ordered the furnace heated up seven times hotter than usual, and Chananya, Mishael and Azariah bound and cast into it. But G-d saved them and they were unharmed by the fire. When Nevuchadnezzar saw them walking freely inside the furnace, together with the angel Gavriel, he came to the door of the furnace and said,

"Servants of the Most High G-d, come out!" And then they came out (ibid. v. 26).

The Tanchuma explains this story based on the verse in Koheles 8:2, "I keep the word of the king, but on the matter of the oath of G-d – do not be confounded before him." A Jew must keep the decrees of the king of the land of his exile in all matters, except when the king orders the Jew to violate the Torah. Then the Jew is bound by his oath to G-d and must not be afraid of the king.

Thus, Chananya, Mishael and Azariah called the king by his name, Nevuchadnezzar, to signify: When it comes to paying taxes and other laws, you are our king. But if you tell us to violate the Torah, you are not our king, but simply Nevuchadnezzar.

When the king saw that they had miraculously survived, he told them, "Come out, for the Holy One, blessed is He has already freed you and made miracles for you." They said, "We will only come out with the permission of the king – I keep the word of the king. Under his authority we were cast in, and under his authority we will emerge." This conduct, says the Tanchuma, they

learned from Noach, who entered the ark by G-d's command and emerged by G-d's command.

What parallel does the Tanchuma see between Noach and Chananya, Mishael and Azariah? Noach and his family were the sole survivors of the Flood. The whole world was wiped out and they miraculously survived. Had Noach not been a righteous man, he might have walked out of the ark with pride and arrogance, crediting himself with the ability to survive the Flood. Perhaps he might have initiated plans to prevent another flood. But this would have been missing the lesson of this unique event in human history. Instead, Noach humbly realized that G-d had brought the Flood and saved him, and he stood ready to accept G-d's next command to come out of the ark.

In the same way, by accepting the laws of gentile kings and rulers during exile, Jews are showing G-d that they accept His decree of exile. The only exception is when the king orders Jews to violate the Torah – then the way to

show allegiance to G-d is to disobey the king. Chananya, Mishael and Azariah were placed in a situation where they had to disobey the king, but they wanted to make it clear that this was the exception, not the rule. They told the king, "We will only come out of the furnace when you tell us to do so. We recognize that it was not our own power that saved us, but G-d alone. We therefore show our humility before G-d by displaying obedience to the king."

We Jews today are survivors of a long exile, and it is clear that we did not survive by our own power, but because of G-d's special protection, as He promised in the Torah, "And even so, when they are in the land of their enemies, I did not reject them nor despise them, to destroy them, to annul My covenant with them, for I am Hashem their G-d" (Vayikra 26:44). We must humbly recognize this and accept the exile upon ourselves: to live peacefully with the gentile nations and obey their laws, until G-d Himself commands us to emerge from exile.