

From the Rabbi's Desk
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Stories with a Twist [190]

Whenever the Charity Collectors Would see Elazar of Birta They Would Hide from Him

Insights into Babylonian Talmud Ta'anit 24a



Background to Our Story

Elazar of the village of Birta



http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elazar_ben_Judah_of_Bartota

Eleazar b. Judah of Bartota (or Eliezer, Lazar or Elazar; Instead of Bartota: Biria, Birta, Birtota, or Bartuta; or in short: Eliezer ben Judah or Eleazar of Bartota; Hebrew: אלעזר בן יהודה איש ברתותא) was a Jewish Tanna of the third generation of the Tannaic era. He was the pupil of R. Joshua ben Hananiah and a contemporary of R. Akiva ben Joseph, whom in many times disputed the statements Eleazar delivered in the name of R. Joshua, and then himself delivered his own version of R. Joshua's statements. His is recorded merely few times in the Mishnah and the Talmud, and half of his recordings there are statements in the name of his Rabbi. His student Gamaliel II steted in his name, and also Shimon bar Yochai, who was also his student, would deliver statements in his name as well.

Dowry



<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dowry>

A dowry is the transfer of parental property to a daughter at her marriage. A dowry establishes a type of conjugal fund, the nature of which may vary widely. This fund may provide an element of financial security in widowhood or against a negligent husband, and may eventually go to provide for her sons and daughters. Dowries may also go toward

establishing a marital household, and therefore might include furnishings such as linens and furniture.

Tzedakah



<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tzedakah>

Tzedakah [[tseda'ka](#)] or ṣ'daqah [[ṣ'əḏa:'qa:](#)] in Classical Hebrew (Hebrew: צדקה; Arabic: صدقة), is a Hebrew word literally meaning justice or righteousness but commonly used to signify charity, though it is a different concept than charity because tzedakah is an obligation and charity is typically understood as a spontaneous act of goodwill and a marker of generosity. It is based on the Hebrew word (צדק, Tzedek) meaning righteousness, fairness or justice, and it is related to the Hebrew word Tzadik meaning righteous as an adjective (or righteous individual as a noun in the form of a substantive). In Judaism, tzedakah refers to the religious obligation to do what is right and just, which Judaism emphasises are important parts of living a spiritual life. Maimonides says that, while the second highest form of tzedakah is to give donations anonymously to unknown recipients, the highest form is to give a gift, loan, or partnership that will result in the recipient supporting himself instead of living upon others. Unlike philanthropy or charity, which is completely voluntary, tzedakah is seen as a religious obligation, which must be performed regardless of financial standing, and must even be performed by poor people. Tzedakah is considered to be one of the three main acts that can annul a less than favorable heavenly decree.

Collectors of Tzedakah

Any city with a Jewish population is obligated to appoint official Charity Collectors – men who are of good repute and who are known for their honesty. Every *Erev Shabbos* these men circulate through the Jewish neighborhoods and collect from each family amounts of money that they are capable of donating. These Collectors then use the monies to purchase food which they distribute to the poor who are residents of the city in amounts that will suffice for each poor person to eat for seven days. This collection and distribution is called the *Kupah*. A city also appoints Charity Collectors who, on a daily basis, collect from every courtyard donations of bread, cooked foods, fruits, or money, from anyone whose heart so moves him to give. The collection is distributed to the transient poor in the evening. Every transient poor person is given enough to suffice for the next day. This collection and distribution is what is referred to as the *Tamchui*. (Maimonides: Laws of Gifts to the Poor. Chapter 9: 1 & 2)

Orphans and Widows (Exodus 22:22-23)

You shall not afflict any widow or orphan. If you afflict him at all, and if he does cry out to Me, I [God] will surely hear his cry.

Dinar



The dinar was probably the most common monetary term in the rabbinic literature of the Talmud. During the Tannaitic times, the dinar refers to the silver denarius, whereas the aureus is called a gold dinar. During the second half of the third century there is a change in the usage of the word. The unqualified dinar comes to refer to the aureus (later, the solidus), the gold dinar, while the silver denarius is specifically called.

In the Talmud, the Zuz and the dinar are used interchangeably, the difference being that the Zuz originally referred to the Greek Drachma (which was a quarter of the Greek Tetradrachm weighing approximately 17 grams) while the Dinar referred to the later Roman Denarius (which was a quarter of the Tyrian shekels and had the same weight as the Jerusalem Shekels and the Roman provincial Tetradrachms at approximately 14 grams).

By the Temple Service!

A common form of oath at the Talmudic period.

Consecrated Property (Hekdesh)

JEWISH VIRTUAL LIBRARY

http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/judaica/ejud_0002_0008_0_08693.html

Hekdesh (Heb. הֶקְדֵּשׁ), consecrated property, property dedicated to the needs of the Temple; in post-talmudic times the term *hekdesch* without qualification (*setam hekdesch*) came to mean property set aside for charitable purposes or for the fulfillment of any other *mitzvah*.

The Text: Babylonian Talmud Ta'anit 24a

אֶלְעֹזֵר אִישׁ בִּירְתָא כִּד הוּוּ חֲזוּ לִיה גַּבְאֵי
צְדָקָה, הוּוּ טָשׁוּ מִיְמֵהּ, דְּכָל מַאי דְהָוָה גַּבְיָהּ
יְהִיב לָהּ. יוֹמָא חַד הָוָה סָלִיק לְשׁוּקָא
לְמִיזְבֵּן נְדוּנָא לְבִרְתֵיהּ. חֲזִייהוּ גַבְאֵי צְדָקָה
טָשׁוּ מִיְמֵהּ.

אֶל וְרַחֵט בְּתַרְיֵיהּ. אָמַר לָהּ: אֲשַׁבְעַתִּיכֶם.
בְּמַאי עֲסַקִיתֶינּוּ אָמְרוּ לִיה: בֵּיתוֹס וִיתוּמָת.
אָמַר לָהּ: הַעֲבֹדְהוּ שָׁחַן קוֹדְמִין לְבֵתִי.
שָׁקֵל כָּל דְהָוָה בְּתַרְיָהּ וְיִהְיֶה לָהּ. פֶּשׁ לִיה
חַד וְזוּנָא, וְבֵן לִיה חִטִּי, וְאַשְׁמִיק שְׂדֵינָהּ
בְּאֶבְלָבָא.

אֲתַאי דְבִיתָהּ, אָמְרָה לָהּ לְבִרְתֵיהּ: מַאי
אֲיִתִי אֲבוּךָ? אָמְרָה לָהּ: כָּל מַה דְאֲיִתִי,
בְּאֶבְלָבָא שְׂדֵינָהּ. אָתַיָא לְמִסְתַּח בְּבָא
דְאֶבְלָבָא, חֲזַת אֶבְלָבָא דְמִלְיָא חִטִּי, וְקָא
נְסַקָא בְּצִינְרָא דְדָשָׂא, וְלֹא מִסְתַּח בְּבָא
מְחִטִּי. אָזְלָא בְרַתֵיהּ לְבֵי מְדָרְשָׁא. אָמְרָה
לִיה: בָּא וְרֵאָה מַה עָשָׂה לָךְ אַוְהַבְרָן אָמַר
לָהּ: הַעֲבֹדְהוּ הָרִי הֵן הַקְדַּשׁ עֲלֶיךָ, וְאַיִן לָךְ
בְּהֵן אֵלָא בְּאַחַד מִעֲנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל.

Whenever the charity collectors would see Elazar of the village of Birta, they would hide from him, as any money he [Elazar] had with him he would give them.

One day, Elazar went to the market to purchase what he needed for his daughter's dowry. The charity collectors saw him and hid from him. He [Elazar] went and ran after them, saying to them: I adjure you, tell me, in what mitzvah are you engaged?

They [The charity collectors] said to him: We are collecting for the wedding of an orphan boy and an orphan girl.

He [Elazar] said to them: I swear by the Temple service that they take precedence over my daughter. He took everything he had with him and gave it to them.

He [Elazar] was left with one single dinar, with which he bought himself wheat, and he then ascended to his house and threw it into the granary.

Elazar's wife came and said to her daughter: What has your father brought?

She said to her mother: What he brought he threw into the granary.

She went to open the door of the granary, and saw that the granary was full of wheat, so much so that it was coming out through the door knob, and the door would not open due to the wheat.

Elazar's daughter went to the study hall and said to her father: Come and see what He Who loves you has performed for you.

He [Elazar] said to her: I swear by the temple service, as far as you are concerned this wheat is consecrated property, and you have a share in it only as one of the poor Jews.



Explaining the Structure of the Story

What is the sequence of events in the story?

Comprehension and Analysis Questions

- ❓ Why would the charity collectors hide from Elazar of Birta?
- ❓ Why did the charity collectors go to the market?
- ❓ Why did Elazar of Birta go to the market?
- ❓ Why did the charity collectors hide from Elazar of Birta when they saw him in the market?
- ❓ Why did Elazar of Birta run after the charity collectors?
- ❓ Why did Elazar of Birta give everything he had but a dinar to the charity collectors? ❓ Why did Elazar of Birta keep a dinar?

Elazar's wife came and said to her daughter: What has your father brought?

She said to her mother: Whatever he brought he threw into the granary.

- ❓ Please explain this exchange between Elazar's wife and her daughter. Do you think they knew what Elazar had brought from the market at the moment of this exchange? Why yes? Why not?

Bonus ❓ Who went to open the door of the granary? Why?

- ❓ Why was the granary full of wheat?
- ❓ How do we know that Elazar's daughter believes the granary full of wheat is a miracle?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

- ❓ Who is "He Who loves you"?
- ❓ Why doesn't Elazar of Birta allow his daughter to use all the grain (to sell it for example)?

Answer 1 _____

Answer 2 _____

Answer 3 _____

Answer 4 _____

More Analysis Questions

? How do you think Elazar's wife and daughter feel about their husband and father's devotion to help those in need?

"The Twist" – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from the Text

! Charity begins at home! - What the charity collectors tried to explained to Elazar of Birta but he wouldn't listen!