

From the Rabbi's Desk  
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## Stories with a Twist [192]

### All This and Only "a Possibility"?

Insights into Babylonian Talmud Ta'anit 25a



## Background to Our Story

### Elazar ben Pedat



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elazar\\_ben\\_Pedat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elazar_ben_Pedat)

Eleazar ben Pedat ([Hebrew](#): רבי אלעזר בן פדת) was a [Jewish Talmudist](#), known as an [amora](#), in the [Land of Israel](#), of the 4th generation (first half of the 4th century). He was his father's pupil ([Ber. 77b](#); [M. k. 20a](#)) and the assistant lecturer ("amora") of [R. Assi](#). If the latter asked him to repeat any of his father's sentences, if he himself had heard them from the lips of his father, he introduced them with the words: "So says my teacher in the name of my father", but in other cases he said: "So says my teacher in the name of R. Eleazar." He transmitted also sentences in the name of his father ([Yer. Yoma 39d](#)) and of [R. Hoshaiyah](#) ([Oshaya](#)) ([Yer. Suk. 54d](#)).

Pedat was an intimate friend of [Ze'era](#) and [Jeremiah ben Eleazar](#), who transmitted [halakic](#) sentences of his ([Yer. Ned. 38a](#)). Several of his [haggadic](#) interpretations have been preserved, including the following: "[Deut. i. 17](#) does not indicate presumption on the part of [Moses](#). On the contrary, he means to say: 'Bring difficult questions to me: I will decide them, if I can; if I can not, I will hear them and lay them before God for his decision'" ([Midrash Shmuel, xiv.](#)). He remarks, in connection with [Gen. i. 2](#): "It is a law of nature that the air moves on the surface of the water, even when the sun is shining with its greatest heat" ([Gen. R. ii.](#)).

### Bloodletting



<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bloodletting>



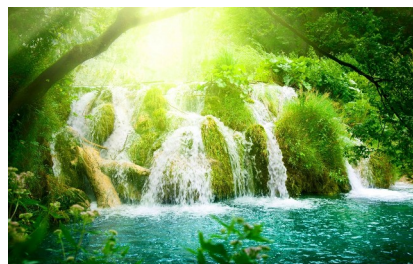
Bloodletting (or blood-letting) is the withdrawal of blood from a patient to cure or prevent illness and disease. Bloodletting was based on an ancient system of medicine in which blood and other bodily fluids were regarded as "[humors](#)" that had to remain in proper balance to maintain health. It is claimed to have been the most common [medical](#) practice performed by surgeons from antiquity until the late 19th century, a span of almost 2,000 years. In Europe the practice continued to be relatively common until the end of the 18th century. The practice has now been abandoned by modern style medicine for all except a few very specific [conditions](#). It is conceivable that historically, in the absence of other treatments for [hypertension](#), bloodletting could sometimes have had a beneficial effect in temporarily reducing [blood pressure](#) by reducing blood volume.

## The World to Come



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World\\_to\\_come](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_to_come)

The world to come, age to come, or heaven on Earth are [eschatological](#) phrases reflecting the belief that the "current world" or "current age" is flawed or [cursed](#) and will be replaced in the future by a better world or age or [paradise](#).



*HaOlam HaBa*, or "the world to come," is an important part of [Jewish eschatology](#), although [Judaism](#) concentrates on the importance of *HaOlam HaZeh* ("this world"). The [afterlife](#) is known as *Olam haBa*, *Gan Eden* (the Heavenly Garden of Eden) and *Gehinom*.

## An Hour of Sustenance

אָפֿשר דַּמְתִּילְדֵת בְּשַׁעֲתָא  
דְּמִזְוִיָּי Perhaps you would  
be born in an hour of sus-  
tenance. Our Sages say that  
whether people choose good  
or evil depends only upon  
themselves, and this choice is  
not decreed from on high.  
However, the characteristics  
of one's body and soul, as  
well as success, are part of  
the general order of things  
and depend upon a complex  
and intricate calculation of  
the entire structure of the  
world, and are not connected  
with an individual's good  
deeds.

### My Arrows on You

בְּךָ מִי אֵלֶיךָ My arrows on you.  
This response expresses joy  
and amusement, like an  
adult's reaction when a child  
answers a question with  
sharp wit.

### The Text: Babylonian Talmud Ta'anit 25a

רַבִּי אֶלְעָזָר בֶּן פִּדְתֵי דְחִיקָא לִיה מִיִּלְתָּא  
מוֹכָא. עֲבַד מִלְתָּא, וְלֹא הָוָה לִיה מִיִּדֵי לְמַטְעָם. שָׁקַל כְּרָא דְתוֹמָא וְשָׁדִיָּיה  
בְּפוּמִיָּיה. חֲלַשׁ לְבִיה וְנִים. אֲזוּל רַבְּנָן לְשִׁילְיָ בִיה, חִוּוּהוּ דְקָא כְּבִי וְחִיָּיה,  
וְנִפְק צוּצִיתָא דְנִרָא מֵאִפּוּתִיה. פִּי אֲחַעֵר, אָמְרוּ לִיה: מ"ט קִבְבִית וְחִיִּכְתָּ? אָמַר  
לָהּ: דְּהָוָה יְתִיב עִמִּי הַקֵּב"ה, וְאָמְרוּ לִיה: עַד מָתֵי אֲצַמְעַר בְּהַאי עֲלֵמָא? וְאָמַר  
לִי: אֶלְעָזָר בְּנִי, נִחָא לָךְ דְּאִפְכִּיָּה לְעֲלָמָא מְרִישָׁא? אָפֿשר דַּמְתִּילְדֵת בְּשַׁעֲתָא  
דְּמִזְוִיָּי. אָמְרוּ לְקַמְיָה: בּוּלִי הָאֵי, "וְאָפֿשר"? אָמְרוּ לִיה: דְּחִי טָפִי, אִי דְחִינָא? א"ל:  
דְּחִיָּית. אָמְרוּ לְקַמְיָה: א"כ, לָא בְּעִינָא. אָמַר לִי: בְּהַאי אֲנָרָא דְאָמְרָת "לָא בְּעִינָא",  
יְהִיבָנָא לָךְ לְעֲלָמָא דְאֲתֵי תְלִיסְרֵי נְהַרְוֹתָא דְמִשְׁחָא אֲפִרְסָמוֹן דְּכִינָן כְּפִרְת  
וְדִינְלֵת, דְּמַעֲנַנְתָּ בְּהוּ. אָמְרוּ לְקַמְיָה: הָאֵי, וְתוּ לָא? אָמַר לִי: וְלַחֲבַרְדָּא מָאֵי יְהִיבָנָא? אָמְרוּ לִיה: וְאִנָּא מְגַבְרָא  
דְּלִית לִיה בְּעִינָא? מְחִינָן בְּאִסְקוּמְלָא \*אִפּוּתָא, וְאָמַר לִי: אֶלְעָזָר, בְּרִי, \*גִּירִי בְּךָ, גִּירִי!

Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat was hard-pressed for money.

Once an act of bloodletting was performed on him, but he did not have anything to taste afterward. He took a clove of garlic and put it in his mouth. His heart became weak and he fell asleep.

The Sages came to inquire about his welfare. They saw him weeping and laughing, and a ray of light was shining from his forehead.

When he awoke they [the Rabbis] said to him: "What is the reason that you were laughing and crying?"

He [Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat] said to them: "The reason is that in my dream the Holy One, Blessed be He, was sitting with me, and I said to Him: 'Until when will I suffer such poverty in this world?'

And He [God] said to me: 'Elazar, My son, is it more convenient for you that I return the world to its very beginning? Perhaps you will be born in an hour of sustenance and not be poor.'

I said before Him: 'You suggest doing all this, to return the world to its beginning, and even then is it only a possibility that things will be different, not a certainty?' I said to Him [to God]: 'Are the years that I have already lived more numerous, or are that I will live more numerous?'

He said to me: 'Those years that you have lived are greater.'

I said before Him [God]: 'If so, I do not want You to recreate the world for the sake of a brief few years.'

He said to me: 'As a reward for saying: "I do not want," I will give you in the World-to-Come thirteen rivers of pure balsam oil as large as the Euphrates and the Tigris for you to enjoy.'

I said before Him: 'This and no more?'

He said to me: 'But If I give you more, what will I give to your colleagues?'

I said to Him: 'And do I request this from a person, who does not have enough?'

He [God] playfully snapped His finger on my forehead and said to me: 'Elazar, my son, My arrows I cast upon you! My arrows I cast upon you!'"



### **Explaining the Structure of the Story**

What is the sequence of events in the story?

### **Comprehension and Analysis Questions**

**?** Why did Elazar ben Pedat's heart become weak?

**Bonus ?** Why was Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat crying in his dream?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 3 \_\_\_\_\_

**Bonus ?** Why was Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat laughing in his dream?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 3 \_\_\_\_\_

**?** Why does God call Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat, "My son"?

**Bonus ?** Why is God willing to recreate the world for Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat?

**?** Why is it only a possibility that Elazar ben Pedat would have the fortune to be born in an hour of sustenance?

**?** Why did Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat finally reject God's offer to recreate the world for his sake?

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 3 \_\_\_\_\_

**Bonus ?** Do you think Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat expected a reward for rejecting God's offer to recreate the world for his sake?

**Bonus ?** Why did Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat say to God "This and no more?"

Answer 1 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 2 \_\_\_\_\_

Answer 3 \_\_\_\_\_

**Bonus ?** Why did God say to Elazar ben Pedat: "Elazar, my son, My arrows I cast upon you! My arrows I cast upon you!"?

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

**!** "All this and only a possibility?!" – Re-imagining an alternative life and the "reality check" of Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat.

**!** Thirteen rivers flowing with pure balsam oil" - The "consolation reward" Rabbi Elazar ben Pedat didn't ask for.