

From the Rabbi's Desk  
Rabbi Manes Kogan  
Hillcrest Jewish Center  
183-02 Union Turnpike, Flushing, NY 11366  
[rabbikogan@hillcrestjc.org](mailto:rabbikogan@hillcrestjc.org)

## Stories with a Twist [266]

**My teacher, must one who claims one hundred dinars from another spend one hundred dinars for one hundred dinars?**  
(Insights into Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 31b)



### Background to Our Story

#### Johanan bar Nappaha



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johanan\\_bar\\_Nappaha](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johanan_bar_Nappaha)

Johanan bar Nappaha ([Hebrew](#): יוֹחָנָן בֶּר נַפְחָא *Yohanan bar Nafḥa*) (also known simply as Rabbi Yochanan, or as Johanan [bar](#) Nafcha) (lived 180–279 CE) was a leading [rabbi](#) in the early era of the [Talmud](#). He was an [amora](#) of the second generation.

Johanan's opinion is quoted thousands of times across the [Jerusalem](#) and [Babylonian Talmuds](#). The compilation of the Jerusalem Talmud is generally ascribed to him.

Opinions vary on whether "bar Nappaha" (literally "son [of the] blacksmith") derives from his father's profession, or from the name of his ancestral region, or perhaps represents a physical or psychological quality of his.

He was born in [Sepphoris](#) in the [Roman-ruled Galilee](#) (then part of [Syria Palaestina](#) province). His father, a blacksmith, died prior to his birth, and his mother died soon after; he was raised by his grandfather in Sepphoris. [Judah ha-Nasi](#) took the boy under his wing and taught him [Torah](#). Due to the disparity in ages, though — Johanan was only fifteen years old when Rabbi Yehudah died — Johanan was not one of Yehuda's prime students; rather, he studied more under Rabbi Yehudah's students. It is said that he sat seventeen rows behind [Rav](#) (Abba Arikha) in the school taught by Rabbi Yehudah Ha-Nasi. He studied Torah diligently all his life, even selling a field house and an olive shed that he had inherited from his parents in order to be able to devote his time to study; after that was spent, he lived a life of poverty.

When the time came to start teaching Torah, Johanan decided to move from Sepphoris to [Tiberias](#), so as not to show disrespect to great rabbis in Sepphoris who did not have their

own centers of Torah study. He was considered, however, the greatest rabbi in the [Land of Israel](#), and was even esteemed in the other center of Rabbinical [Judaism](#), [Babylonia](#) — so much so that after the deaths of [Abba Arikha](#) and [Samuel of Nehardea](#) in Babylonia, Johanan was considered by Babylonian Jews as the greatest rabbi of the generation. He started a school in [Tiberias](#), and let anybody in if they wanted to learn, a controversial move at the time. He laid the foundations for the Yerushalmi ([Jerusalem Talmud](#)). He cites many traditions relating to the destruction of the [Second Temple](#).

His colleague, [Shimon ben Lakish](#), was also his brother-in-law. He is believed to have never left Israel in all his life, a rare feat for rabbis in those days, who frequently visited [Babylonia](#). Johanan was known for being healthy and of a goodly countenance and reportedly lived more than one hundred years. The Talmud relates of him: *"He that wishes to see the beauty of Rabbi Johanan, let him bring a silver chalice when it comes out of the silversmith's refinery, and let him fill it with the red kernels of a pomegranate, and then let him adorn the chalice around its brim with red roses, and then place it between the sunlight and the shade. The emanating radiance would be somewhat similar to the beauty of Rabbi Johanan."* Another Talmudic story about him relates that Johanan was accustomed to go and sit at the gates of the bathing place. He said: "Let the daughters of Israel look at me when they come up from the [mikvah](#) and their children will be as handsome as I am and they will learn Torah like I do." He then said a special verse so no jealousy or haughtiness would result from this.

[Eleazar ben Pedat](#) succeeded Yohanan as head of the Tiberias school. Another student was [Rabbi Isaac the smith](#).

### **Eleazar ben Pedat**



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eleazar\\_ben\\_Pedat](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eleazar_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 2nd and 3rd generation (third century).

He was a Babylonian by birth and of priestly descent. In his native country he was a disciple of Samuel, and more especially of Rav, whom he in after years generally cited by the appellation "our teacher," and whose college he revered above all others, recognizing in it the "lesser sanctuary" of the Diaspora, spoken of by [Ezekiel](#) (xi. 16) as promised to the exiles in Babylonia (Meg. 29a; Yalk., Ezek. 352).

When and why he left his native country is not stated; but from the data extant it appears that his ardent love for "the land of Israel" (Ket. 111a), and the superior opportunities which Palestine afforded for religious practices (Yer. R. H. ii. 58b; Ket.112a), impelled him to emigrate thither —and at a comparatively early age, since some of Rabbi's contemporaries were still alive and active (B. B. 87a; Hul. 110a). Indeed, it seems that for a time Eleazar even attended the lectures of R. Ḥiyyah (Yer. Ket. ix. 33b; Yer. B. M. x. 12c) and of [R. Hoshaiah](#) (Yer. Yeb. iv. 5d). This was for him a period of hard study, which gave rise to the homiletic remark that the Biblical saying (Prov. v. 19), "Be thou ravished always with her love," was well illustrated by Eleazar b. Pedat at [Sepphoris](#), who was so absorbed in his studies as to be unconscious of all worldly needs ('Er. 54b).

Later, Eleazar became attached to the college founded by [Rabbi Johanan](#) at [Tiberias](#) (Yer. [Ber.](#) ii. 4b; [Tem.](#) 25b; [Ker.](#) 27a), where his scholarship procured him great honors. In the city he was associated with Simon b. Eliakim in the office of judge (B.Ḳ. 117b), and at the college he occupied the position of colleague-disciple of Johanan (Yer. Sanh. i. 18b), who himself repeatedly admitted that Eleazar had enlightened him (Yer. Meg. i. 72c; Yer. Sanh. iii. 21b), once declaring that "the son of Pedat sits and interprets the Law as did Moses at the direct inspiration from the Almighty" (Yeb. 72b). After the death of Simeon b. Laḳish,

Eleazar was chosen to fill the position of assistant to Johanan (B. M. 84a). When Johanan became disabled through grief at Simeon's death, Eleazar presided over the college (Yer. Meg. i. 72b), and after the death of Johanan succeeded him in the office of head master.

The fame of Eleazar as an expert expounder of the Law having reached Babylonia, his most prominent contemporaries there addressed to him intricate halakic questions, to which he returned satisfactory answers (Beḥah 16b; Yer. Ḳid. i. 60c; B. B. 135b; Ḥul. 86b). This happened so often that he became known in his native country as the "master [i.e., legal authority] of the land of Israel" (Yoma 9b; Giṭ. 19b; Niddah 20b); and anonymous decisions introduced in the Babylonian schools with the statement ("They sent word from there"; Beḥah 4b; Giṭ. 73a) were understood, as a matter of course, to emanate from Eleazar b. Pedat (Sanh. 17b).

There are no data to show how long Eleazar survived R. Johanan, but the probability is that he died about 279 C.E.

### Zuz (Jewish coin)



[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zuz\\_\(Jewish\\_coin\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zuz_(Jewish_coin))



A Zuz (Hebrew-זוז; plural zuzzim Hebrew-זוזים) was an ancient Jewish silver coin struck during the Bar Kochba revolt, as well as a Jewish name for the various types of non-Jewish small silver coinage, used before and after the period of the revolt.

The name was used from the Greek era of drachmas, through the Roman era of Denarius, and then as the quarter denomination of Bar Kochba coinage. The Jewish insurrectionists' zuz were overstruck on Roman Imperial denarii or Roman provincial drachmas of Vespasian, Titus, Domitian, Trajan and Hadrian. Four Zuz, denarii or drachmas make a Shekel, a Sela or a Tetradrachm.

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).

The Zuz is mentioned in the [Passover Haggadah](#) in the [Passover song Chad gadya, chad gadya](#) (One little goat, one little goat); in which the lyric of *dizabin abba bitrei zuzei* (Which Father bought for *two zuzim* ([half shekel](#))) repeats at the end of every stanza. It may be significant that two zuzim equal the half-shekel tax required of every adult male Israelite in Exodus 30:13.<sup>1</sup>

### The Text: Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 31b

פִּי אֲתָא רַב דִּימִי אָמַר רַבִּי יוֹחָנָן: הַתּוֹקֶף אֶת תְּבִירוֹ בְּדֵין, אֶחָד אוֹמֵר: "נָדוּן כָּאֵן", וְאֶחָד אוֹמֵר:  
"יְנַלֵּךְ לְמָקוֹם הַזֶּה" – כּוֹפִין אוֹתוֹ וְיֵלֵךְ לְמָקוֹם הַזֶּה.

אמר לפניו רבי אלעזר: רבי, מי שנושה בקבירו מנה, יוציא מנה על מנה?! אלא, כופין אותו ודן בעירו.

איתמר נמי: אמר רב ספרא אמר רבי יוחנן: שנים שנתעצמו בדין, אחד אומר: "נדון כאן" ואחד אומר: "גלף למקום הוועד" – כופין אותו ודן בעירו. ואם הוצרך דבר לשאול פותבין ושולחין.

When Rav Dimi came from Eretz Yisrael to Babylonia, he said that Rabbi Yoĥanan says: With regard to one who attacks another in judgment, i.e., tenaciously raises legal claims against another, and one of the litigants says: Let us go to court here in our locale, and the other one says: Let us go to the place of the Assembly, i.e., the Sanhedrin, or another High Court, the former litigant is compelled to go to the place of the Assembly.

Rabbi Elazar said before him: My teacher, if so, must one who claims a debt of one hundred dinars from another spend one hundred dinars of travel and lodging expenses for the one hundred dinars he wants to collect? Rather, one is compelled to appear and be judged in a court that presides in his own city.

It was also stated that Rav Safra says that Rabbi Yoĥanan says: With regard to two who were struggling in judgment, one of whom says: Let us go to court here, and one of whom says: Let us go to the place of the Assembly, the latter litigant is compelled to appear and be judged in a court that presides in his own city. And if the local court needs to ask a higher court about a certain matter, the judges write to the Assembly, and the higher court sends its response.



**Explaining the Story** - What's going on in our story? (The sequence of events)

## Comprehension and Analysis Questions

**?** Why do you think Rabbi Yoĥanan said that if one of the litigants says: Let us go to court here, and one says: Let us go to the place of the Assembly, the former litigant is compelled to go to the place of the Assembly?

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

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

**?** What is Rabbi Elazar’s logic to oppose his teacher’s ruling?

**?** Rabbi Elazar introduces his challenge to Rabbi Yoĥanan by calling him “my teacher.” Besides rabbinic protocol and sincere respect, what could have prompted Rabbi Elazar to preface his challenge by calling Rabbi Yoĥanan “my teacher”?

**?** How do they address the problem that a local court is not as knowledgeable as a higher court?

**Bonus ?** Rabbi Elazar’s challenge to Rabbi Yoĥanan becomes the new unchallenged ruling. Why?

### “The Twist” – Or the Lessons We Can Learn from These Texts



**!** A solution that is not a solution, is not a solution!

epilogue