



Season One Episode 2

Central Guest: Rabbi Dr. Shai Held

בבלי עבודה זרה יז ע"א | Babylonian Talmud Avoda Zara 17a

translation from www.sefaria.org

The Gemara asks: **And** is it correct that one who repents of the sin of forbidden sexual intercourse does **not** die? **But isn't it taught** in a *baraita*: **They said about Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaiya that he was so promiscuous that he did not leave one prostitute in the world with whom he did not engage in sexual intercourse. Once, he heard that there was one prostitute in one of the cities overseas who would take a purse full of dinars as her payment. He took a purse full of dinars and went and crossed seven rivers to reach her. When they were engaged in the matters to which they were accustomed, a euphemism for intercourse, she passed wind and said: Just as this passed wind will not return to its place, so too Elazar ben Durdaiya will not be accepted in repentance, even if he were to try to repent.**

This statement deeply shocked Elazar ben Durdaiya, and **he went and sat between two mountains and hills and said: Mountains and hills, pray for mercy on my behalf**, so that my repentance will be accepted. **They said to him: Before we pray for mercy on your behalf, we must pray for mercy on our own behalf, as it is stated: "For the mountains may depart, and the hills be removed" (Isaiah 54:10). He said: Heaven and earth, pray for mercy on my behalf. They said to him: Before we pray for mercy on your behalf, we must pray for mercy on our own behalf, as it is stated: "For the heavens shall vanish away like smoke, and the earth shall wax old like a garment" (Isaiah 51:6).**

He said: Sun and moon, pray for mercy on my behalf. They said to him: Before we pray for mercy on your behalf, we must pray for mercy on our own behalf, as it is stated: "Then the moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed" (Isaiah 24:23). He said: Stars and constellations, pray for mercy on my behalf. They said to him: Before we pray for

ומעבירה לא והתניא אמרו עליו על ר"א בן דורדיא שלא הניח זונה אחת בעולם שלא בא עליה פעם אחת שמע שיש זונה אחת בכרכי הים והיתה נוטלת כיס דינרין בשכרה נטל כיס דינרין והלך ועבר עליה שבעה נהרות בשעת הרגל דבר הפיחה אמרה כשם שהפיחה זו אינה חוזרת למקומה כך אלעזר בן דורדיא אין מקבלין אותו בתשובה

הלך וישב בין שני הרים וגבעות אמר הרים וגבעות בקשו עלי רחמים אמרו לו עד שאנו מבקשים עליך נבקש על עצמנו שנאמר (ישעיהו נד, י) כי ההרים ימושו והגבעות תמוטינה אמר שמים וארץ בקשו עלי רחמים אמרו עד שאנו מבקשים עליך נבקש על עצמנו שנאמר (ישעיהו נא, ו) כי שמים כעשן נמלחו והארץ כבגד תבלה

mercy on your behalf, we must pray for mercy on our own behalf, as it is stated: "And all the hosts of heaven shall molder away" ([Isaiah 34:4](#)).

Elazar ben Durdaiya said: Clearly **the matter depends on nothing other than myself. He placed his head between his knees and cried loudly until his soul left his body. A Divine Voice emerged and said: Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaiya is destined for life in the World-to-Come.** The Gemara explains the difficulty presented by this story: **And here** Elazar ben Durdaiya **was** guilty of **the sin** of forbidden sexual intercourse, **and yet he died** once he repented. The Gemara answers: **There too, since he was attached so strongly** to the sin, to an extent that transcended the physical temptation he felt, **it is similar to heresy**, as it had become like a form of idol worship for him.

When **Rabbi** Yehuda HaNasi heard this story of Elazar ben Durdaiya, **he wept and said: There is** one who **acquires his share** in the World-to-Come only **after many years** of toil, **and there is** one who **acquires his share** in the World-to-Come **in one moment. And Rabbi** Yehuda HaNasi further **says: Not only are penitents accepted, but they are even called: Rabbi**, as the Divine Voice referred to Elazar ben Durdaiya as Rabbi Elazar ben Durdaiya.

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צבא השמים

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