

And Tzedakah Will Save From Death

Bavli Shabbat 156b

And from that which transpired to Rabbi Akiva as well it can be derived that there is no constellation for the Jewish people, as Rabbi Akiva had a daughter, and Chaldean astrologers told him that on the same day that she enters the wedding canopy, a snake will bite her and she will die. She was very worried about this. On that day, her wedding day, she took the ornamental pin from her hair and stuck it into a hole in the wall for safekeeping, and it happened that it entered directly into the eye of the snake. In the morning, when she took the pin, the snake was pulled and came out with it.

Her father Rabbi Akiva said to her: What did you do to merit being saved from the snake? She told him: In the evening a poor person came and knocked on the door, and everyone was preoccupied with the feast and nobody heard him. I stood and took the portion that you had given me and gave it to him. Rabbi Akiva said to her: You performed a mitzva, and you were saved in its merit. Rabbi Akiva went out and taught based on this incident that even though it is written: "And charity will save from death" (Proverbs 10:2), it does not mean that it will save a person only from an unusual death, but even from death itself.

Does it matter that this story takes place at the time of a wedding? Why or why not?

Is it significant that the "instrument" of death was to have been a snake?

What do you think is meant by the claim, "Tzedakah saves a person from death itself?" What are the varying meanings of this statement.

Metzudat David on Ecclesiastes 3:12:1 Rabbi David Altschuler Composed: c.1740 - c.1780 CE. Commentary on the Prophets and Writings (Nach) written by Rabbi David Altschuler in the 18th century. It is primarily based on the commentary of Radak, but also draws on other sources. After Rabbi David Altschuler's death, his works were completed by his son, Rabbi Hillel Altschuler, who instituted the division of the commentary into two parts. Known collectively as "Metzudot", Metzudat Tzion explains unfamiliar and difficult words found in the text, while Metzudat David delves into the meaning of the text.

I know (because) I have studied the ways of the world and what is beneficial, that there is no person that is better or more praiseworthy among people than one whose way is to be happy and to do good, kindness and Tzedaka while he is alive.

What are your thoughts about doing tzedakah when you're alive versus having it come from your estate?

Think of some individuals you believe to be praiseworthy for their tzedakah work, would you have had the same thoughts about that individual if they had waited until they were dead to leave their money to tzedakah? Why or why not?

Mishneh Torah, (Rambam) Gifts to the Poor 10:1 Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon 1137 – 1204 CE (Rambam, also known as Maimonides) was perhaps the greatest intellectual and spiritual figure of post-Talmudic Judaism. He wrote indispensable works of philosophy, Halacha, commentary, and responsa. Born in Spain, his family fled while he was still a youth. After an extended period in Morocco, he settled in Egypt, where he became Nagid (leader) of the Jewish community. His works were all foundational in their field. He was the first to produce a comprehensive commentary on the entire Mishnah. His great work of philosophy, *Moreh Nevuchim*, spawned an entire discipline and had incalculable influence upon enthusiastic promoters and vehement opponents alike. His code of law, *Mishneh Torah*, is the first and unsurpassed comprehensive code of Jewish law and practice. He also served as court physician to the Muslim leader Saladin. All of his works were written in Judeo-Arabic except for *Mishneh Torah*, which was written in a magnificent Hebrew. The precision of his expression is legendary. His descendants served as *Negidim* of Egypt for another four generations.

We must be especially careful to observe the mitzvah of tzedakah, more so than any other positive mitzvah, for tzedakah is a sign of the righteous [tzadik] lineage of Abraham, our father, as it is said, (Genesis 18:19) For I have singled him out, that he may instruct his children and his posterity [to keep the way of the LORD] by doing what is just [tzedakah]. See Babylonian Talmud Yevamot 79a. The throne of Israel is established and the religion of truth stands only on tzedakah, as it is said, (Isaiah 54:14) You shall be established through righteousness [tzedek]. And Israel will only be redeemed through tzedakah, as it is said, (Isaiah 1:27) Zion shall be saved in the judgment; her repentant ones, in the retribution [tzedakah].¹⁷⁶ See Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 139a.

How do you (did you) instruct your children to give tzedakah? What exactly did you choose to teach your children?

Who taught you about giving tzedakah? What did you learn specifically about doing tzedakah.

Isaiah 54:14 Isaiah ("Yeshayahu") is the fifth book of the Prophets and is known for its visions of universal peace and renewal. Beginning in the period of the First Temple against the backdrop of a rising Assyrian empire and Israel on the decline, Isaiah rebukes Israel for abandoning God and pursuing corruption, calls for change, and warns the nations of their ultimate downfalls. The last third of the book contains comforting prophecies about returning to Jerusalem and redemption.

(14) You shall be established through righteousness. You shall be safe from oppression, And shall have no fear; From ruin, and it shall not come near you.

How does this verse relate back to the story of Rabbi Akiva's daughter?

Do you believe that ruin will not come to those who establish themselves through righteousness (tzedakah)?

יִזְכּוֹר י'

(י) אֵל מְלֵא רַחֲמִים, שׁוֹכֵן בְּמִרוֹמִים, הַמָּצֵא מְנוּחָה נְכוֹנָה עַל כִּנְפֵי הַשְּׂכִינָה, בְּמַעֲלַת קְדוּשִׁים וְטוֹהָרִים כְּזֹהֵר הָרָקִיעַ מְזֻהָרִים, אֶת נִשְׁמַת (שֵׁם הַנִּפְטָר בֶּן שֵׁם אָבִיו) שֶׁהִלֵּךְ לְעוֹלָמוֹ, בְּעֵבֹר שְׂבִלִי נֶדֶר אֶתֶן צְדָקָה בְּעַד הַזְכָּרַת נִשְׁמָתוֹ, בְּגֹן עֵדוֹן תִּהְיֶה מְנוּחָתוֹ, לָכֵן בְּעַל הָרַחֲמִים יִסְתַּיְרֶהוּ בְּסִתְרֵי כִנְפָיו לְעוֹלָמִים, וְיִצְרֹר בְּצִרּוֹר הַחַיִּים אֶת נִשְׁמָתוֹ, ייִ הוּא נִחְלָתוֹ, וְיִנַּח עַל מִשְׁכְּבוֹ בְּשָׁלוֹם. וְנֹאמַר אָמֵן.

Yizkor Composed: Rhineland, 1100 CE Text of the communal prayers that are said in memory of deceased relatives and community martyrs. The word "Yizkor" (May God remember) comes from the first word of the prayer.

(10) O Power, full of mercy, who dwells on high, establish proper rest upon the wings of the Divine Presence, on the levels of the holy and pure ones [who] shine like the splendor of the firmament, [for] the soul of (the name of the departed, son of the name of his father) who went to his world, because I will - without making a vow - give charity for the memory of his soul; let his rest be in the Garden of Eden. Hence, Master of mercy, cover him in the cover of His wings forever and bind his soul with the Binding of life (God). God is his inheritance and let him rest upon his place of repose in peace. And let us say Amen.

How does this yizkor prayer relate to the idea that Tzedakah saves one from death?

How do you understand the phrase "bind his soul with binding of life?"

What customs relate to yizkor/yahrzheits in Jewish communities today?