

Opportunity At The Door: Elijah, Jesus, and Other Guests

Rabbi Steven G. Sager

Akiba worked as a shepherd for the wealthy Kalba Savua. The illiterate shepherd caught the eye of Rachel, Kalba Savua's daughter. She saw that even though Akiba was unassuming, there was something extraordinary about him. She said to him: If I am willing to be betrothed to you, will you learn in the academy of the sages? Akiba answered: Yes. So she betrothed herself to him in secret as her father would never approve her marriage to an illiterate shephard. When Kalba Savua learned what she had done, he drove her out of his house and vowed that she would not benefit from any of his property. At that, she went off and openly married Akiba. When winter came, they were so poor that they had to sleep in a straw shed. As Akiba picked the straw from her hair, he would say: If I had the means, I would give you a *Golden Jerusalem* brooch.

Just then, Elijah, disguised as a mortal, came and cried out at the door: Please give me a bit of straw! My wife is about to give birth and I have nothing for her to lie on. Akiba said to his wife: Look at this man! He does not even have the straw that we have! Soon after, she insisted: Go now, and learn Torah! He went away and for twelve years he sat in the academy learning from Rabbi Eliezer and Rabbi Joshua. At the end of twelve years, he arose and returned to his home bringing with him twelve thousand disciples. (Babylonian Talmud, Ketubot 62b-63a)



Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me. (Revelation 3:20)



Then the king will say to those at his right hand, "Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me." Then the Righteous will answer him, "Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?" And the king will answer them, "Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me." (Matthew 25:34-40)



Rabbi Akiba had a daughter of whom the astrologers said to him: The very day that she enters her wedding canopy a serpent will bite her and she will die. He worried over this constantly. At the end of the festive day before her wedding as she prepared to go to sleep she took off a brooch and stuck the brooch pin in the crack of the wall where it pierced the eye of a serpent. In the morning, when she drew her brooch pin out of the wall, the dead serpent trailed out with it.

Her father said to her: What did you do that saved you? She said to him: Last evening a pauper came and called out at the door but everyone was too busy with the feast and no one heard him. I got up, took the portion that you had given me, and I gave it to him.

He said to her: With your act, you fulfilled a commandment and for that reason you were saved. Rabbi Akiba then went out and, based upon this experience, expounded the verse: *And charity saves from death* (Proverbs 10:2). (Babylonian Talmud Tractate Shabbat 156b)



Easter Morning, by William Stafford

Maybe someone comes to the door and says,
“repent,” and you say, “Come on in,” and it’s
Jesus. That’s when all you ever did, or said,
or even thought, suddenly wakes up again and
sings out, “I’m still here,” and you know it’s true.
You just shiver alive and are left standing
there suddenly brought to account: saved.

Except, maybe that someone says, “I’ve got a deal
for you.” And you listen, because that’s how
you’re trained—they told you, “Always hear both sides.”
So then the slick voice can sell you anything, even
Hell, which is what you’re getting by listening.
Well, what should you do? I’d say always go to
the door, yes, but keep the screen locked. Then,
while you hold the bible in one hand, lean forward
and say carefully, “Jesus?”

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