

Opportunity Knocks: The Poor At The Door

דְּרַבִּי עֲקִיבָא הָוּא לִיה בְּרַתָּא, אָמְרִי לִיה כְּלָדָאֵי: הֵהוּא יוֹמָא דְעַיִלָּה לְבִי גִנְנָא, טְרִיק לָהּ חִיּוּנָא וּמִיתָא. הָוּה דְאִיגָא אֲמִילְתָּא טוּבָא. הֵהוּא יוֹמָא שְׁקִלְתָּא לְמַכְבְּנָתָא, דְצִתָּא בְּגוּדָא, אֲתֵרְמִי אִיתִיב בְּעִינֵיה דְחִיּוּנָא. לְצַפְרָא כִּי קָא שְׁקִלָּא לָהּ. הָוּה קָא סְרִיד וְאֵתִי חִיּוּנָא בְּתֵרָה. אָמַר לָהּ אַבּוּהּ: מַאי עֲבַדְתָּ? אָמְרָה לִיה: בְּפִנְיָא אֲתָא עֲנִיָּא, קָרָא אַבְבָּא, וְהוּוּ טְרִידִי כּוּלִי עֲלֵמָא בְּסֵעוּדָתָא, וְלִיכָא דְשִׁמְעִיה. קְאִימְנָא, שְׁקִלְתִּי לְרִסְתֵּנָאֵי דִיהֶבֶתִּי לִי, יְהִבְתִּיה נִיְהִלִּיה. אָמַר לָהּ: מְצוּה עֲבַדְתָּ! נִפְק רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא וְדַרְשׁ: "וּצְדָקָה תַצִּיל מִמּוֹת" (משלי י:ב).

Rabbi Akiba had a daughter of whom the astrologers said to him: The very day that she enters her huppah/wedding canopy a serpent will bite her and she will die. He worried over this constantly. The day of 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 happened to pierce the eye of serpent. In the morning, when she drew her brooch out of the wall, the dead serpent trailed out along 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 my portion that you had given me, and I gave it to him. He said to her: You accomplished a mitzvah and for that reason you were saved. Rabbi Akiba then went out and, based upon this experience, expounded the verse: *And charity/tzedakah saves from death* (Proverbs 10:2). (Babylonian Talmud Shabbat 156B)

God In The Doorway

אָמַר רַבִּי אֲבִין: הָעֲנִי הִזָּה עוֹמֵד עַל פֶּתַחְךָ וְהַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עוֹמֵד עַל יְמִינוֹ, דְּכֹתִיב: "כִּי יַעֲמֵד לְיָמִין אֲבִיוֹן" (תהלים קט:לא). אִם נִתְּתָ לּוֹ, דַּע מִי שְׁעוֹמֵד עַל יְמִינוֹ וְנוֹתֵן לָךְ שְׂכָרְךָ. וְאִם לֹא נִתְּתָ לּוֹ, דַּע מִי שְׁעוֹמֵד עַל יְמִינוֹ פּוֹרַע מִמְּךָ דְּכֹתִיב: "לְהוֹשִׁיעַ מִשְׁפָּטֵי נַפְשׁוֹ" (תהלים קט:לא).

Rabbi Avin said: A poor person stands at the door and the Holy One, blessed be he, stands at his right, as it is written: *Because he stands at the right hand of the needy* (Psalms 109:31). If you gave him something, understand that the one who stands on his right will give you your reward. And if you did not give him anything, understand that the one who stands on his right will punish you, as it is written further: *[he stands at the right hand of the needy] to save him from those who would condemn him* (Psalm 109:31). (Leviticus Rabbah 34:9)