

Opportunity Knocks: The Poor At The Door

דְּרַבִּי עֲקִיבָא הָוּא לִיה בְּרַתָּא, אָמְרִי לִיה כַּלְדָּאֵי: הֵהוּא יוֹמָא דְעַיִלָּה לְבִי גִנְנָא, טָרִיק לָהּ חִיּוּנָא וּמִיתָא. הָוּה דְאִיגָא אֲמִילְתָּא טוּבָא. הֵהוּא יוֹמָא שְׁקִלְתָּא לְמַכְבְּנָתָא, דְצִתָּא בְּגוּדָא, אֲתַרְמִי אִיתִיב בְּעִינִיה דְחִיּוּנָא. לְצַפְרָא כִּי קָא שְׁקִלָּא לָהּ. הָוּה קָא סָרִיד וְאֲתִי חִיּוּנָא בְּתַרְהּ. אָמַר לָהּ אַבּוּהּ: מָאֵי עֲבַדְתָּ? אָמְרָה לִיה: בְּפִנְיָא אֲתָא עֲנִיָּא, קָרָא אַבְבָּא, וְהוּוּ טָרִידִי כּוּלִי עֲלִמָּא בְּסַעוּדָתָא, וְלִיכָּא דְשִׁמְעִיהּ. קָאִימְנָא, שְׁקִלְתִּי לְרִסְתֵּנָאֵי דִיהֶבֶתִּי לִי, יְהִבְתִּיהּ נִיהִלִּיהּ. אָמַר לָהּ: מְצוּהָ עֲבַדְתָּ! נִפְק רַבִּי עֲקִיבָא וְדַרְשׁ: "וּצְדָקָה תַצִּיל מִמָּוֶת" (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 פֶּתַח וְהַקְדוֹשׁ בְּרוּךְ הוּא עוֹמֵד עַל יְמִינוֹ, דְּכֹתִיב: "כִּי יַעֲמֵד לְיָמִין אֲבִיוֹן" (תהלים קט:לא). אִם נִתְתָּ לוֹ, דַּע מִי שְׁעוֹמֵד עַל יְמִינוֹ וְנוֹתֵן לָהּ שְׂכָרָהּ. וְאִם לֹא נִתְתָּ לוֹ, דַּע מִי שְׁעוֹמֵד עַל יְמִינוֹ פּוֹרַע מִמָּהָ 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)