



Talmud Tales – Session 11 – Free Will

BT Shabbat 156b

Rabbi Akiva had a daughter. Astrologers told him, “On the same day that she enters under the wedding canopy, a snake will bite her and she will die.”

He was very worried about this prediction. On the day [of her wedding], she happened to be holding the ornamental pin from her hair and stuck it into a hole in the wall. By chance, the pin penetrated the eye of the snake [coiled behind the wall] and remained stuck there. In the morning, when she took out the pin, the dead snake was pulled and came out with it.

Her father Rabbi Akiva said to her, “What did you do?”

She told him, “Last night, a poor person came and knocked on the door. Everyone was preoccupied with the feast and nobody heard him. I took the gift you had given me and gave it to him.”

Rabbi Akiva said to her, “You performed a mitzvah, and you were saved by its merit.”

Rabbi Akiva went out and taught “And charity will save from death” (Proverbs 10:2), not [merely] from an unusual/unnatural death, but even from death itself.”