



Talmud Tales – Session 24 – Power of a Mitzvah

BT Menachot 44a

It has been taught on Tannaite authority: Said R. Nathan, “There is no mitzvah in the Torah so minor that its observance is not rewarded in this world. And as to the world to come, I do not even know how great it is. Go and learn that lesson from the mitzvah of *tzitzit*.”

There was the case of a man who was meticulous about observing the mitzvah of *tzitzit*. He heard that there was a prostitute in one of the cities by the sea, who charged a fee of four hundred gold *dinarim* (pieces) for her services. He sent her four hundred gold pieces and made a date with her. When the date came, he came and sat down at the door of her house. Her slave girl went in and told her, “That man who sent you the four hundred gold pieces has arrived and is sitting at the door.”

She said, “Let him come in.”

When he came in, she had prepared for him a pile of seven beds (one atop the other), six of silver, the uppermost one of gold. Between the beds were six silver ladders, and a golden ladder led to the uppermost one. She went up and took her place on top of the top one, completely nude. He too came up on the ladders to take his place, completely nude, at her side. But the four *tzitzit* came out and slapped his face.

He got down and sat down on the ground, and she too got down and sat on the ground.

She said to him, “I swear by the Roman Emperor, I am not letting you go until you tell me what flaw you saw in me!”

He said to her, “[I swear] by the Temple service, I never saw a more beautiful woman than you in my whole life! But there is a certain religious duty that the Lord, who is our God, commanded us, and it is called *tzitzit*. And concerning that mitzvah it is written, ‘I am the Lord your God’ (Num. 15:41) two times. The meaning is, ‘I am the One who is going to exact retribution from you, and I am the One who reward in the future.’ Now these *tzitzit* appeared to me like four witnesses [testifying against me].”

She said to him, “I am not letting you go until you tell me what is your name and the name of your town and the name of your master and the name of the study hall where you have learned the Torah.”

He wrote it all down and put it in her hand.

She arose and sold all her possessions. [She gave] a third of her money to the government, a third to the poor, and a third she took in hand, as well as the bedding. She came to the beit midrash of R. Hiyya. She said to him, “Rabbi, instruct me and convert me.”

He said to her, “My daughter, is it possible that you have laid eyes on one of the students?”

She took out the slip of paper in her hand and gave it to him.

He said to her, “Go and take possession of what you have purchased.”

The very same bedding that she had spread out for him illicitly she now spread out for him lawfully.

Such is the reward [for observing the mitzvah of *tzitzit*] in this world. Who knows how great is the reward in the world to come!