

בס"ד

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Chapter IV

22 Menachem Av, 5785 – August 16, 2025

Compiled from the works of
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The Lubavitcher Rebbe

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An Outline of the Rebbe's Explanation of Pirkei Avos Chapter IV

Likkutei Sichos Volume 19, Pages 44 - 46

Chapter IV

פרק ד', משנה י"ט: שמואל הקטן אומר: בנפול אויביך אל תשמח, ובכשלו אל יגל לך, פן יראה ה' ורע בעיניו והשיב מעליו אפו.

Chapter 4, Mishnah 19: Shmuel the Small would say¹, "When your enemy falls, do not be happy. When he stumbles, do not let your heart be glad, lest Hashem sees (this behavior), and it displeases Him. (It can cause that) He will turn His anger from him (to you)."

The Simple Explanation

Torah provides us with all the teachings by which we must govern our lives. To use a twenty-first-century metaphor, we can say that Torah is the user's manual that comes with each Jew. Our Sages would say many things, teaching us lessons regarding all aspects of our lives. Why do we find throughout Pirkei Avos that a particular Sage "would say?" Each one said so many things! We see this in our Mishnah: "Shmuel the Small *would say*."

The explanation is that each Mishnah quotes a teaching that a particular Sage would often teach, and it is a teaching upon which he would focus. So here, Shmuel Hakotton, the Small, frequently rebukes people with this verse from Mishlei². One may not take pleasure from one's enemy falling, which can have unexpected ramifications.

Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah

Throughout the Mishnah, each Sage quoted is teaching us something he learned from his teachers in the previous generation. Each one adds something to the canon of the Oral Law. How is it that here, a Mishnah merely quotes an explicit verse from the Tanach? It does not seem to add anything to our understanding of the Torah.

Furthermore, everything in Torah is precise. Torah never uses an extra word. Yet in the verse which Shmuel the Small repeated, there seems to be a redundancy. First, the verse discusses how to react (or, more accurately, *not* to respond) when one's enemy falls. It then discusses the

1. Mishlei (Proverbs) 24:17-18.

2. See the commentary of the Bartenura to our Mishnah.

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appropriate reaction when his enemy stumbles. It would seem that one of the two is superfluous. Both terms, fall and stumble, appear to be synonymous.

Furthermore, the reaction for each is different. When one's enemy falls, he is told not to be happy. However, when his enemy stumbles, he is commanded not to let his heart be glad. We need to understand the reason for this (seeming) repetition.

The Explanation

This can be understood as follows³. The word "falls" (*Nefillah* - נפילה) implies a total collapse. It means a descent from which it is seemingly impossible to recover. Contrast this with the word "stumbles" (*Kisholon* - כישלון). This is not as severe as *Nefillah*. It implies one who is temporarily down; however, there is "a light at the end of the tunnel." He will be able to pick himself up again.

This also explains the difference between the two reactions, which one must not display. Happiness (*Simchah* - שמחה) implies a revealed state of joy, i.e., being openly happy. One must not express one's happiness toward the complete collapse of one's enemy. However, "gladness of the heart" (*Gilah* - גילה) implies an internal state of joy, meaning joy that is not openly displayed. One may be tempted to harbor such feelings toward an enemy who has temporarily stumbled.

This explanation highlights the commentary of the Machzor Vitri⁴. He explains that "the enemy" regarding whom our Mishnah refers is one's opponent in the "Battle of Torah." This expression refers to a debate between two sages on the meaning of a particular aspect of the Torah. There are two such types of debates. At times, two scholars will disagree on the logic behind an ordinance of the Torah, and they will argue over the reason for a particular ruling. The second sort of disagreement is when two scholars discuss what the actual Torah law is, and they disagree over the final verdict and how one must conduct oneself in practice.

In the second sort of debate, when one scholar emerges "victorious," the other is defeated. One can't conduct oneself according to two contradictory opinions. In such a case, the "victor" might be tempted to rejoice over his fellow's defeat openly.

However, a debate over the reasoning and the logic behind a law is not the same. Even if one loses the argument, it only means that one's logic is not accepted. It does not mean that he is incorrect. Only his understanding of the teaching they were debating was wrong. In this instance,

3. See the commentary of the Midrash Shmuel to our Mishnah.

4. See the comments of the Machzor Vitri to our Mishnah.

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there would be no cause to rejoice over his companion's defeat openly. However, one may be tempted to rejoice inwardly.

Therefore, Shmuel Hakotton comes to teach us the following. If one proved that his colleague's opinion as to what the law is was incorrect, he must not boast. Even if he proved that his fellow's reasoning was mistaken, he must not even rejoice inwardly.

We can also understand the answer to our first question from the above. Shmuel Hakotton explained that this verse urges those who may have won an opponent in "the Battle of Torah." Whatever sort of debate it was, one must never be happy due to one's fellow's loss.

Adapted from the Sichah of 24 Teves, 5738 and Shabbos Parshas Vo'eschanan 5737)

I hope you gained as much by reading this as I did by translating and adapting it.

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May they merit to be a source of Chassidic pride
to their family and a Torah light to their community

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May she go from strength to strength
In health, happiness, Torah, and mitzvot

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כ"ק אדמו"ר נשיא דורנו מליובאוויטש

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לזכות
חיילי "צבאות השם"
חיים, עדן עודד, זכרי' מתן, ונח אריאל שיחיו
מאריס

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נדפס ע"י הוריהם
הרה"ת ר' מנחם מענדל וחי' מושקא שיחיו
מאריס

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לאריכות ימים ושנים טובות עד ביאת גואל צדק
ומתוך בריאות הנכונה ולשנת ברכה והצלחה בגו"ר

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