

בס"ד

PIRKEI AVOS OF THE WEEK

Perek IV

23 Menachem Av, 5779 – August 24, 2019

Compiled from the works of
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The Lubavitcher Rebbe

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

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Chapter IV

פרק ד', משנה י"ט: שמואל הקטן אומר: בנפול אויביך אל תשמה, ובכשלו אל יגל לבך, 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 of 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 is it that we find throughout Pirkei Avos that a particular Sage "would say?" Each one said so many things! We find this in our Mishnah; "Shmuel the Small *would say*."

The explanation is, that each Mishnah quotes a teaching which a particular Sage would often teach. It is a teaching upon which he would focus. So too here, Shmuel Hakotton, the Small, would frequently rebuke people with this verse from Mishlei². One may not take pleasure from the fact that his enemy fell. It can have unexpected ramifications.

Difficulties in Understanding the Mishnah

Throughout the Mishnah, each Sage who is quoted is teaching us something which he learned from his teachers in the earlier generation. Each one is adding something to the canon of the Oral Law. How is it that an entire Mishnah simply quotes an explicit verse from the Tanach? It does not seem to add anything to our understanding of 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 react) when one's enemy falls. It then discusses the appropriate reaction when his enemy stumbles. It would seem that one of the two is superfluous.

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

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

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Both terms, fall and stumble, seem 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 told not 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 implies 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.” It is clear that he will be able to pick himself up once 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 display his joy toward the complete collapse of his enemy. However, “gladness of the heart” (*Gilah* - גילה) carries the implication of an internal state of joy, meaning one which 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 in the meaning of a certain aspect of Torah. There are two such types of debates. At times two scholars will disagree as to the logic behind an ordinance of the Torah. 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. They argue over what the final verdict is, how one must conduct himself in practice.

In the second sort of debate, when one scholar emerges “victorious,” the other is totally defeated. It is impossible for one to conduct himself according to two contradictory opinions. In such a case, the “victor” might be tempted to openly rejoice over his fellow's defeat.

However, a debate over the reasoning, the logic behind a law is not the same at all. Even if one loses the argument, it only means that his logic is not accepted. It does not mean that he is totally incorrect. Only his manner of understanding the teaching which they were debating was wrong. In this instance, there would be no cause to openly rejoice over his companion's defeat. However, one may be tempted to inwardly rejoice.

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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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 gloat. Even if he proved that his fellow's reasoning was incorrect, he must not even rejoice inwardly.

From the above we can also understand the answer to our first question. Shmuel the Small's explained that this verse is an exhortation to those who may have won an opponent in "the Battle of Torah." Whatever sort of debate it was, one must never be happy as a result of his fellow's loss.

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

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Mr. **Sholom Moshe** ben Reb **Shlomo Meir** Hacoheן ע"ה **Cohen**

Passed away on Shabbos Parshas Beshalach, 13 Shevat, 5779

May His Soul be bound in the Eternal Bond of Life

*

DEDICATED BY HIS FAMILY שיחיו

**מוקדש לזכות
כ"ק אדמו"ר נשיא דורנו מליובאוויטש**

* * *

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חיילי "צבאות השם" חיים ועדן עודד שיחיו מאריס

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נדפס ע"י הוריהם

הרה"ת ר' מנחם מענדל וזוגתו מרת חי' מושקא שיחיו מאריס

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ת. נ. צ. ב. ה.

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