

The Dee Pirkei Avot Project

**נִתַּי הָאַרְבֵּלִי אוֹמֵר: הֲרַחֵק מִשְׁכָּן רָע, וְאַל תִּתְחַבֵּר לְרָשָׁע,
וְאַל תִּתְיַאֵשׁ מִן הַפּוֹרְעָנוֹת.**

Nitai the Arbelite would say: Distance yourself from a bad neighbor, do not become attached to a wicked person, and do not abandon faith in (divine) retribution

The statements "Keep a distance from an evil neighbour" and "do not become attached to the wicked", seem to be teaching us very similar things, only with slightly different language. Isn't 'keeping a distance' and 'not becoming attached' the same thing? And what is the difference between 'an evil neighbour' and 'a wicked person'? An evil neighbour is not necessarily a bad person, but it is their proximity to you that is the problem. They could be a righteous person but their interests, ambitions, life plans, could encourage you to take a different path to the one intended for you- whether in terms of friendships, education, career. You need to keep a distance from this "neighbour" so that you can make the right decisions about your own life.

On the other hand, when the mishna talks about 'a wicked person', perhaps this is somebody who actually does live an evil lifestyle and has wicked traits. This time, instead of keeping your distance, you must draw them close and befriend them and hopefully through your positive influence, they will change. In the same way that negativity and evil can rub off on others, so too can our kindness. But, and this is crucial, we have to be careful not to become "attached" in the sense of being influenced by them. Be aware of what is "wicked", try and lead by example, but be careful not to get drawn in or influenced.

The third statement is seemingly unconnected here, but it is teaching us that although sometimes it might not look like it, and it might look like bad people are doing better than good people, we should not lose faith that someday wicked people will be punished by G-d, either in this world or in the world to come. It is important that we believe that G-d cares about all human actions and takes them into account because that is what will make a just and fair society in this world.

Discussion points:

How can we know what the right path for us is, and what we must distance ourselves from? In what ways can we ensure that our positivity impacts people who need our example in order to improve themselves?

How can we help ourselves maintain faith in the fact that G-d will bring punishment to wicked people when we see evil in the world?

לעילוי נשמת:

לאה בת רפאל הכהן וציפורה
מאיה אסתר בת הרב אריה מרדכי ולאה
רינה מרים בת הרב אריה מרדכי ולאה

Idea by Shiri Kleinberg, childhood friend of Maia Dee
from London



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