Havdallah Program
**Nitai HaArbeili says: Distance yourself from a bad neighbor; don't attach yourself to (befriend) a wicked person; and don't divert your mind from [the possibility that] bad things [can happen to you].**

This is also a lesson in how one is to perfect his relationship with other people with whom he is close, but who are outside of his home. Following the lesson from a perspective of "ahava," looking to do the positive , Nitai HaArbeili teaches how this is done from a perspective of "yirah," distancing from the negative.

First, one is taught to distance oneself from a bad neighbor, avoiding the negative consequences that can arise from being in his proximity, as we are taught "Woe to the evil person and woe to his neighbor" (Sukka 56b; see Rashi on ther first verse in Parshath Korach - this week's Parsha in Israel, next week's Parsha overseas).

Next, we are warned against attaching ourselves to a wicked person. (The word used is "hitchaber," which comes from the root "chibur," connection, and serves as the root of the word "chaver" which is loosely translated as "friend.") (See Divrei HaYamim II 20:37, about G-d's anger at one who attaches himself to a wicked person.)

The question that needs to be asked is why the Tanna used two different phrases -- "distance yourself from " and "don't attach yourself to" which say basically the same thing!

Even if you didn't initiate a relationship with a bad neighbor but he approached you, you are told to actively distance yourself from evil neighbors who want to get close to you. But to acquire friends requires proactivity on your part, and it is sufficient that you do not seek out relationships with evil people in order to be distanced from wicked friends.

(In other words, rather than instructing us to distance ourselves from evil friends, we are told to refrain from attaching ourselves to them to begin with. The precision in the language should be noted: Neighbors can "happen to us" without any action on our part, so, when necessary, we must create the distance. Friends require active cultivation. It should not be necessary to actively distance oneself from evil friends - refraining from an attachment is enough. The practical ramifications of this Mishna, in terms of choosing a community in which to live, meeting our social responsibilities, as well as outreach to Jews who are distant from Torah, all need to be scrutinized on a case by case basis, in consultation with local Rabbis and Torah scholars.)

The final lesson of this Mishna is that a person should realize how susceptible he is to negative influences. Just as responsible people don't place themselves in physical danger, due to the possible damaging consequences, we should take equal care to avoid spiritual danger, whose likelihood is greater and whose consequences are more serious than physical danger. Connecting this to the earlier lessons of the Mishna also alludes to the fact that the power of evil resides close to a person, closer than his closest "neighbor" and more attached to him (in potential, at least) than his closes friend. Therefore a person has to avoid any attachment and constantly distance himself from bad influences. Just as exposure to physical danger can lead to the destruction of the human being, so, too, can exposure to spiritual danger.

The Tanna does not teach us "worry that bad things might happen to you," for it is not healthy and not proper for a person to constantly be in a state of worry and anxiety. (See the Maharal's Netivoth Olam, Netiv HaBitachon.) But it is proper that a person shouldn't divert his attention from the possibility of bad things happening. An example of one who fell in to this trap of being overly confident that "nothing bad can happen to me" was Haman, who was confident and reliant on his wealth and power, and found that literally overnight his entire life was turned upside down. This is the intention of "don't divert your mind from the possibility of bad things happening to you."

Rabeinu Yonah (on this Mishna) explains further that the last part of the Mishha is providing a reason for the beginning. A person shouldn't be confident that he can withstand the negative influences that come from association with wicked friends and neighbors. A person can be subjected to a "surprise attack" from where he least expects it, and should not become complacent about the destructive influences to which he is subjected. Therefore, distance yourself from a bad neighbor and don't attach yourself to a wicked person.

In summary for Mishna 6 and 7: First the Nasi, Yehoshua ben Prachia, taught about perfecting our interactions with those close to us in a way that parallels love of G-d, with positive actions to bring us close to those who represent G-d in this world. The foundation of his three lessons was teaching us what to actively do. Then, Nitai HaArbeili, the Av Beth Din, taught about our interactions with those close to us in a way that parallels fear of G-d, teaching us what NOT to do. Refraining from certain actions because of our fear of sin, distancing ourselves from those that lead us to violate His will, is what we are taught from the perspective of "yirat shaamayim" awe and fear of Heaven.

 So as we sing and rejoice together about the past week, think of the times you gave in to peer pressure and think of how you can avoid succumbing to it next week.