Pirqe Abot 1:7, friendship and second-hand smoke

To prepare ourselves for the day of Shabu'ot, the day we received the Tora, it is customary to study *pirqe abot*, the "Chapters of the Fathers" which is a tractate of the Mishna composed around the Second Century. This Mishna does no deal with the technical details of the observance of specific Mitzvot, as usually the Mishna does, but with practical Jewish wisdom, values and mores.

There are many excellent English translations and commentaries of *pirqe abot*. My favorite is the Me'am Loez, written by rabbi Ytzhaq Magriso, 18th century, Turkey. He wrote his commentary originally in Ladino (Judeo- Spanish) and the book was published in 1747. Today we have a beautiful English translation of his book done by rabbi Aryeh Kaplan, z'l (see **here**).

Let me share with you a few insights from this book

The Mishna 1:7 talks about bad neighbors and bad friends. Exhorting us to be careful when choosing our company (or our children's company!).

*Rabbi Magriso warns of the danger of bad influences. Influence, positive or negative, is not perceived while taking place. We might realize the effects of bad influences on us or our children when it is already too late. Bad company is like second-hand smoke: I will bear the effects and consequences of smoking cigarettes even though I, myself, did not smoke.

*The Mishna warns us to keep away from a bad neighbor. Rabbi Magriso offers his interpretation of a bad neighbor. In his opinion a bad friend or neighbor is defined, primarily, by his or her character. A bad friend is an individual who suffers when sees you happy. Find neighbors and be among friends who are not jealous of you, and save yourself from a lot of trouble!

*Anticipating the era of Facebook, rabbi Magriso also sentenced: What is the best way to asses someone's character? What is the way to see if our children are in a good path? Look at his or her friends. Your circle of friends is the best indicator of who you are. Tell me who your friends are and I

will tell you who you are (or who you are about to be!)

Pirqe Abot English translation online, by Chabad.org
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