



REALIZING THE IMPACT OF THOSE WE SEE



NEIGHBORLY ATTACHMENT

The story of Korach is an amazing story of how an individual who was of the greatest of the great fell. To say someone is great is nice, but to be great among greats is a much more difficult challenge. The Torah says: וַיִּקַּח קֹרַח בֶּן יִצְחָר בֶּן קֵהָת בֶּן לֵוִי וְדָתָן וְאַבְיָרָם וְיִזְחָר בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן וְאִירָא בֶן-עֵלְיָב וְאֹנִן בֶּן-פִּלֵּת בְּנֵי רְאוּבֵן, “And Korach, son of Yitzhar son of Kehas son of Levi, took for himself, along with Dasan and Aviram, sons of Eliav, and On son of Peles - descendants of Reuven” (Bamidbar 16:1). So Rashi says that because *shevet* Reuven were neighbors to Kehas and his children - since they resided next to each other in the *midbar* - they joined Korach in the machlokes: אוֹי לְרִשָּׁע אוֹי לְשִׁכְנֹו, “woe on to the *rasha* and woe on his neighbor.”¹

Now, you have to analyze this Rashi. It doesn't say that since they were friends they were influenced. It doesn't say they learned together. It doesn't say they joined together for any undertaking. What it says is that they were neighbors, and because they were neighbors, they joined the machlokes of Korach. This is a very big principle and a very frightening idea. Chazal tell us: אוֹי לְרִשָּׁע אוֹי לְשִׁכְנֹו. It's a famous Chazal. Now, what I always thought growing up was that this means that if you have neighbors, since you play with them, you hang out with them, and you're automatically *meshtetef* with them, they will have an influence on you. But it has nothing to do with the fact that they're neighbors per se. It just happens to be that they're neighbors, but anybody you hang around with that's not good company is going to have the same *hashpa'ah* on you. But the truth is, that's not what Chazal are telling us here. Chazal are telling us that the very fact you are living next to somebody, that itself creates an attachment (*חיבור*) between you and them. And that attachment is *mashpiah* on you לרע או לטוב.

WHAT DOES “SEEING” MEAN?

Now, what is it about neighborliness that causes that *חיבור*? What makes that *חיבור*? The answer to this question is - because you see them! This is a major *chiddush* many people are unaware of. Seeing somebody is a way of attaching yourself to somebody. Eyes are windows to a person's soul, and they bring into you what you see by others, and it becomes part of your essence. Where do you see that in the Torah? Where do you see the power of ראייה, seeing? In order to understand the power and essence of everything, you have to look at where the Torah mentions this concept for the first time. The first time the concept of ראייה appears in the Torah: “And Hashem saw everything that He had made and it was very good” (Bereishis 1:31). And if Hashem did not see it, it would not have been good? Hashem made it! Hashem said יְהִי. What does that mean that Hashem “saw”?

So the Ramban says that when Hashem said, “Let there be” - that's Hashem's אמירה, His act of saying, and that made things come into existence. But when

something comes into existence, it now has to be sustained to have a קיום. What sustains an object? The Ramban says, וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים. Seeing, ראייה, is what gives an object its קיום! You hear this amazing *peshat*? Do you see how powerful ראייה is? Hashem's ראייה is what gives something its existence. If Moshe Rabbeinu would look at you, do you know what that would do to you? That would give you a tremendous קיום. You know when that happened? When the Jews were counted. Chazal tell us that Moshe went around to peoples' tents and wanted to see everybody. He wanted to see the families. The Ramban (Bamidbar 1:45) asks, what was the purpose, the importance of seeing everyone? He says because seeing the people was a tremendous merit and elevation for them.²

If R' Chaim Kanievsky lays his eyes upon your face, you know what that is going to do? It's going to give you a *zechus*! Another example: Moshe Rabbeinu was not *zoiche* to walk into Eretz Yisrael, but Hashem told him that he would be able to see Eretz Yisrael. Well, what's the big deal about seeing the land? Yes, it is a big deal because seeing Eretz Yisrael means that Moshe Rabbeinu connected himself with everything in Eretz Yisrael, and he became attached to it. It also says in the Mishnah (Rosh HaShana, 1:6), “All people in the world come before Hashem, on Rosh Hashanah, like Bnei Maron.” Each person, one at a time. What's the purpose of that? Hashem can't gather all the people and look at them at once? Why look at them individually? So the Sefas Emes explains that by the fact that Hashem sees you - that gives you *חיות*, it sustains you and gives you existence. That gives you your life. This ראייה is how you are *mechber* yourself to Hashem. Just like it says, וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת כָּל, “and therefore - and therefore - וְהָנָה טוֹב מְאֹד.” It's not because Hashem sees it and retroactively, in the past, it's טוב מְאֹד. When a Hashem looks at something, that gives it a force to be sustained, and now it's טוב מְאֹד. Hashem looks at us on Rosh Hashanah, and it gives

¹ בשביל שיהיה שבת ראובן שרשי בחינתם תימנה שכן לקחת ובני החונים תימנה, נשתתפו עם קרח במחלתו - “אוי לרשע אוי לשכנו”

² וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָרֶץ כִּי טוֹב כְּתַב רַבִּינוּ שְׁלֵמָה: אִף בְּזֶה אֲנוּ צָרִיכִין לְדַבְּרֵי אַגְדָּה: רָאָה שְׂאִינֵנוּ רְאוּי לְהִשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בּוּ שְׂעִימֵי, וְהַבְדִּילֵנוּ לְצַדִּיקִים לְעֵתִיד לְבוֹא. וּלְפִי פִשְׁטוֹ כִּי פִרְשָׁה: רָאָהוּ כִּי טוֹב, וְאִין נָהָל לּוּ וְלַחֲשֵׁךְ לְהִשְׁתַּמֵּשׁ בְּעֵרֵבּוּבִיא, וְקָבַע לָהּ תַחֲמוֹ בְּיוֹם וְלָזֶה תַחֲמוֹ בְּלִילָהּ. וְרַבִּי אַבְרָהָם אָמַר (אֲבָן עֲזָרָה עַל בְּרֵאשִׁית אִי:ד'): וַיִּרְא - כְּמוֹ “וְרָאִיתִי אֲנִי” (קֵהָת בֶּן יִצְחָר) - וְהָיָה בְּמַחֲשַׁבַת הַלֵּב. וְטַעַם וַיִּבְדֵּל - בְּקִרְיַת הַשְּׂמוּת. וְאִין דְּבַרִּי שְׂנִיָּהּ נִכְוָנִים: שֶׁאֵם כֵּן, יִירָאָה כַעֲנַן הַמֶּלֶכֶה וְעֵצָה חֲדָשָׁה, שִׂיאֲמַר, כִּי אַחֲרֵי שֶׁאֲמַר אֱלֹהִים: “יְהִי אֹרֶךְ”, וְהָיָה אֹרֶךְ, רָאָה אֲפוֹתֵי כִי טוֹב הוּא, וְלֹכֵן הַבְּדִיל בֵּינוֹ וּבֵין הַחֲשֵׁךְ, כַעֲנַיִן בְּאֲדָם שֶׁלֹּא יֵדַע טִיבֵוּ שֶׁל דְּבַר עַד הַיּוֹתוֹ. אֲבָל הַסֹּדֵר בְּמַעֲשֵׂה בְרֵאשִׁית, כִּי הוּצַאת הַדְּבָרִים אֶל הַפּוֹעֵל יִקְרָא “אֲמִירָה”: “וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אֹרֶךְ” (כֹּאן), “וַיֹּאמֶר... הֵי רִקִּיעַ” (בְּרֵאשִׁית אִי:ו:); “וַיֹּאמֶר... תִּדְשָׁא הָאָרֶץ” (בְּרֵאשִׁית אִי:יא). וְקִיּוּמָם יִקְרָא “רְאִיָּה”, כַעֲנַיִן “וְרָאִיתִי אֲנִי” קֵהָתֵל (בֶּן יִצְחָר) וְכֵן “וְתִרְאָה הָאֵשֶׁה כִּי טוֹב הָעֵץ לְמַאֲכָל” (בְּרֵאשִׁית ג:י:). וְהוּא כַעֲנַיִן שֶׁאֲמַרְוּ (כְּתוּבוֹת קֵט א'): “רָוָה אֲנִי אֶת דְּבָרֵי אֲדָמוֹן”, וְכַמוֹהוּ (שְׂמוּאֵל ב טו כז): “וַיֹּאמֶר הַמֶּלֶךְ אֶל צִדּוֹק הַכֹּהֵן הַרְוֵאָה אֶתֶּה שְׂבַח הָעִיר בְּשִׁלּוֹם”. וְהַעֲבִיין, לְהַרְוֹת כִּי עֲמִידָתָם בְּחַפְצוֹ, וְאֵם הַחֲפֵץ יִתְפַּרֵּד רַגַע מֵהֶם - יְהִיוּ לְאִין, וְכַאֲשֶׁר אָמַר בְּכָל מַעֲשֵׂה יוֹם יוֹם: “וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב”, וּבְשִׁישִׁי כַאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁלַם הַכֹּל: “וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים אֶת כָּל אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה וְהָנָה טוֹב מְאֹד” (בְּרֵאשִׁית אִי:לא). כֵּן אָמַר בְּיוֹם הַרְאֵשׁוֹן הַבְּיּוֹת הָאוֹר: וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב, שְׂרָצָה בְּקִיּוּמוֹ לַעֲד. וְהוֹסִיף בְּכֹאֵן אֶת הָאוֹר, שֶׁאִילוֹ אָמַר טַחֵם: וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב, הִיָּה חוֹזֵר עַל בְּרִיאַת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְהָאָרֶץ: וְלֹא גָזַר בְּהֵן עֲדִיין הַקִּיּוּם, כִּי לֹא עֲמָדוֹ כֹּכָה, אֲבָל מִן הַחוּמֵר הַנְּבִרָא בְרֵאשׁוֹן - נַעֲשֵׂה בְשֵׁי רִקִּיעַ, וּבְשִׁלְשֵׁי נִפְרָדוֹ הַמַּיִם וְהַעֲפָר וְנַעֲשֵׂה הַיִּבְשָׁה שְׂקָרָה “אָרֶץ”, וְאִז גָּזַר בְּהֵם הַקִּיּוּם וְאָמַר בְּהֵם: “וַיִּרְא אֱלֹהִים כִּי טוֹב”.

³ וְהָיָה לִכְלִפְדֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לְבֵית אֲבָתָם וְגו' כִּי יֵצֵא צָבָא בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל, וְכֵן, וְלֹא הִבְיוּתִי טַעַם הַמְצוּה הַזֹּאת לְמָה צוּה בַּהּ הַקֶּבֶל”ה כִּי הִיָּה צוּרֵךְ שִׁיתִּיחוֹ לְשִׁבְטֵיהֶם בְּעַבּוּר הַדְּגָלִים אֲבָל יִדְעֵתִי לְמָה צוּה שִׁידְעוּ אֹתוֹ אוֹלֵי הַלְהוּדֵעִם חֲסוֹד עֲלֵיהֶם כִּי שִׁבְעִים נֶפֶשׁ יָרִדוּ אֲבוֹתֵיהֶם מִצְרִימָה וְעַתָּה הֵם כְּחֹל הַיָּם כִּי רֹכֵךְ בְּנֵי עֲשִׂרִים וְאַחֲרֵי כֵל דְּבַר וּמַגְפָּה יִמְנַם הַלְהוּדֵעִי כִּי הוּא מְשִׁיבֵי לְגוּיִם יִמְחֵן וְיִדְיוֹ תְרַפִּינָה זֶהוּ שֶׁאֲמַרְוּ רַבּוֹתֵינוּ מְרֹב חֲבַתָּם מוֹנָה אֹתָם כִּל שְׁעָה וְעוֹד כִּי הָבָא לְפָנֵי אֲב הַנְּבִיאִים וְאִחֵיו קֹדֵשׁ ה' הוּא נוֹדַע אֱלֹהִים בְּשִׁמוֹ יְהִיָּה לּוּ דְבַרִּי הַזֶּה זְכוּת חוּסִים כִּי בֹא בְּסוֹד הֵעָם וּבְכַתְּבֵי בְנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל זְכוּת הַרְבִּים בְּמַסְפְּרָם וְכֵן לְכוּלָם זְכוּת בְּמַסְפְּרָם שִׁמְנוֹ לְפָנֵי מִשָּׁה וְאַחֲרָי כִּי יִשְׁמִי עֲלֵיהֶם עֵינֵם לְטוֹבָה יִבְקִשׁוּ עֲלֵיהֶם רַחֲמֵי ה' אֱלֹהֵי אֲבוֹתֵיהֶם יוֹסֵף פְּעִמָּה כֵּסֵם אֶלְפֵי פְעִמָּה לְפָנֵי יַמְעִיט מַסְפְּרָם, וְכֵן.

LOOK INTO THE SEFER TORAH DURING YOUR ALIYAH

The power of looking at something is a tremendous *koach*. When you get an aliyah to the Torah, look at the Torah! It's extremely important to look at the words of the Torah! Why? We lift up the Torah by *hagbah*, and everyone looks at it. Why do you need to do that? I know it's the Torah - why do you have to lift it up and look at it? Answers the Chofetz Chaim, that looking at the words of the Torah gives a person a lot of קדושה! You want to feel holy in a positive way? You should look into the Torah and at its words, because you're looking at the holiest object in Am Yisroel. A Sefer Torah is mamash קדוש, קדוש, קדוש. If you look into it, you see it, you connect with it. It's a transfer of *kedusha* to yourself! Some people are wise, and they look.

HOW REBBI YEHUDA HANASI BECAME SHARP

Similarly, the Gemara (Eruvin 13b) says about Rabbeinu HaKodesh, who was discussing how he merited to become "sharp": "אמר רבי: האי דמסדדנא מסברא דחזיתיה לרבי מאיר מאחוריה, ואילו חזיתיה מקמיה הוה מסדדנא טפי - דכתיב: 'והיו עיניך ראות את מוריך', "Rebbi said, the fact that I am more incisive than my colleagues is due to the fact that I saw Rabbi Meir from behind him, (i.e., I sat behind him when I was his talmid)." Rabbi Meir would sit in the middle with some talmidim next to him and behind him and there were rows of people facing Rabbi Meir. The row where Rebbi sat was six rows behind Rabbi Meir, and he was able to see Rabbi Meir's back. He said that had he seen him from the front, he would be even wiser and sharper. You hear this? That's a *moreidike chiddush!* The Maharal explains, in a number of places, that the whole importance that the Torah puts at not looking at things that you are not supposed to see and looking at things you are supposed to see is because looking at something creates a *penimiusdike*, internal attachment. This is discussed mainly in the Sifrei Kabbalah, and the Maharsha (see below) brings this down from *mekubalim*, that when you look at something, it becomes attached to you. This is unreal! This is an unbelievable *koach!* It also says it in the Navi (Yeshaya 30:20), as the Gemara in Eruvin brings, וְהָיוּ עֵינֶיךָ רְאוּת אֶת מוֹרֶיךָ, "Your eyes should behold your teachers go to Eretz Israel and look at gedolim, at *kadoshim*. Just to look! Don't say a word.

SEEING RAV CHAIM KANIEVSKY

When I would be in the minyan of R' Chaim Kanievsky, I would not go to daven there, but I would stand next to him - he didn't sit in front of the shul - and I was watching him the entire time. To look at such a face?! To look at such a *kedusha*?! A living sefer Torah! I remember thinking and imagining what is written in this "living" Sefer Torah. In a regular Sefer Torah, I know what's written - it's the Chamishah Chumshei Torah - but in the living Torah scroll, like Rav Chaim, we have the entire Bavli, Yerushalmi, Medrash, Sifrei, Sifra, Mechilta, Sifrei Kabbala, everything is there! If you were to unwrap this scroll, it would go across the world! To look at such a person, a man who's *mufka* from Olam Hazeh completely!

The Chofetz Chaim said that in this world, we have an opportunity that we're not going to have in the next World. In this world, you can look at a righteous person, a tzaddik, an *adom gadol*, but in the Next World, you won't get near *tzaddikim*. You won't get within a million miles of their *mechitzah*! So he says, *chap areine* in this world. You know what it means to look at a man who's living in Olam Haba, while he's living in this world?! When I look at Rav Chaim Kanievsky, I think, "This is the man who's existing in Olam Haba right now." What is Olam Haba? Olam Haba is where you sit, and you learn Torah non-stop without any *hefsek*. You learn Torah *kol hayom kulo*. You have no *sheiychus* to bodily functions. Rav Chaim is a man who doesn't know if he ate breakfast or he didn't eat breakfast, if he ate lunch or he didn't eat lunch. They put food in front of him, and he eats it. The Chazon Ish (1878-1953) once testified about himself that he had no idea if he ate breakfast at all. He said it to R' Shlomo Lorincz (1918-2009): "I just know that whatever my wife puts here, I eat it. Afterward, I don't remember if I ate it or didn't eat it." I was thinking, "Is such a thing possible by me?" No, by me, it's not possible. If somebody were to ask me, "Did you go to the bathroom today?" I would say, "I don't know, I'll have to think about it. I don't know offhand." "How many times did you go?" "I have no idea!" B"H, I have no *sheiychus* to that, so I don't remember it. But there are some people who live in those details and can tell, for example, how many times they changed the diapers on their kid, etc. It's like Rav Chaim doesn't know if he is in this world because his world is *kulo Torah v'Avodah v'Chessed*. He's an *Olam Habadike* Yid in this world. It's *moiradik!*

I remember going and watching him as a *bachur*. I walked into Kollel Chazon Ish. It was a full *beis medrash*. I asked somebody, "Is R' Chaim Kanievsky here?" He said, "Sure!" I walked up to the front and started looking for Rav Chaim. I returned to the back, and asked, "Where is Rav Chaim Kanievsky?" They pointed him out to me, "He's over there." And I saw a person in his shirt sleeves, no jacket and hat, with a big *tallis katan*, draped over his *shtender*, in a deep sleep. "No, no," I said, "I am looking for Rav Chaim Kanievsky." I figured it was some guy who sits there to make sure that people don't come around and bother him. In those days, Rav Chaim wasn't so famous. I remember walking on the street one day, and I saw him walking. I was sure it was him. I ran up to him and asked if it was okay if I accompanied him. And he said, "Why not?" I accompanied him, and I asked him a few questions. He was a very friendly man. This is a living Sefer Torah and I'm watching that sefer Torah *leiging* in learning with my own eyes. He's a Sefer Torah. That's what he is. Do we have a *musag* what that is?

WHAT CAUSED YITZCHAK'S AVINU'S BLINDNESS?

But you know what we do see instead? We see *reshaim*, wicked people. And by seeing wicked people, that messes up our *penimiyus*. It puts rot in there. It makes us *farfoilet* from the inside in the most awful way. Who is greater than the *olah temima*, Yitzchak Avinu? He sacrificed his life for Hashem! He is the *shpitz*, he's the pinnacle of *avodas Hashem* and *mesirus nefesh*. There is no one like him. And yet the Torah says that his eyes were weakened, and he couldn't see. The Gemara (Megillah 28a) talks about why he couldn't see. Do you know what the Gemara says? He couldn't see because he looked at his wicked son, Eisav HaRasha.⁵

Yitzhach Avinu - that tzaddik - looked in the face of his son, Eisav HaRasha, and it blinded him! It messed him up! It's a very very serious חיבור, so it's a miracle that nowadays we can even see with thick glasses and we all are not walking around like

⁴ בראש השנה "כל באי עולם עוברין לפני כבני מרון" כו', דכ' "באור פני מלך חיים", ובראי' זו ד"באי עולם עוברין לפניו" מה ניתן לכל אחד חיות, וכמו בשעת הבריאה כתיב ביום הזה "וירא אלקים כו' אשר עשה והנה טוב" כו', ומזה נתקיים העולם, כן בכל שנה מתעורר ראי' זו לחדש קיום העולם, וכו'. (שפת אמת על ר"ה, תרמ"ד)
⁵ ר"א אמר עיני כחות שנאמר (בראשית כז, א) ויהי כי זקן יצחק ותכהין עיני מראות משום דאסתכל בעשו הרשע. והא גרמא ליה? והאמר רבי יצחק: לעולם אל תהי קללת הדייט קלה בעיניך, שיהי אבימלך קלל את שרה, ונתקיים בזרעה, שצאמר: "הנה הוא לך קסות עינים": אל תקרי "קסות", אלא "קסיות עינים"! הא והא גרמא ליה. רבא אמר, מהכא: "שאת פני רשע לא טוב"

R' Sheshes and R' Yosef, blind. You have to thank Hashem for that, but you have to know it's not a *davar pashut*.

DOR HAMABUL WAS MASHPIAH EVEN ON ANIMALS!

The Beis Halevi says that at the time of the flood the animals became messed up. How did the animals become messed up? They conducted themselves in their personal behavior in ways that were most foreign to animals. How does it happen?! The Beis Halevi says it happened because they were neighbors of human beings! There were people who were living at the time who didn't conduct themselves like human beings are supposed to in private affairs; they conducted themselves like animals, and that *yibor* in *meshpiah* on the behavior of the animals! You know what kind of a *moreidike zach* that is? They were *meshpia* on animals!

LIVE NEXT TO TZADDIKIM AND YESHIVOS!

In the beginning of Chumash Bamidbar, the Torah also teaches us about the tremendous *ma'alah* of a *raiah טובה* ("good seeing"), in a contradistinction of Korach and his *eidah*. The Kehas family was from the family of Leviim. It was the most respectable family around. *Shevet* Reuven lived next to them and joined the *machlokes* with Kehas because they were neighbors! It's very plausible that Korach never even talked to them because he was a giant - he was from the most illustrious family of Levim, the ones who carried the Aron. Just to look at someone who carried the Aron must have been amazing! They looked at Korach. But Korach was messed up, so they got messed up, too.

On the other hand, the pasuk (Bamidbar 3:38) teaches us that "Moshe, Aharon and his sons dwelled in front of Mishkan" and the encampment of Yehuda was near Moshe and Aharon and his sons, and next to them were Yesochar and Zevulun.⁶ And Rashi (ibid) says, טוב לצדיק טוב לשכנו, that because they were the neighbors of Moshe and Aharon and his sons, who were completely dedicated to being *osek baTorah*, *shevet* Yehuda became Gedolim b'Torah, Yisochar became Gedolim b'Torah, and even Zevulun became Gedolim b'Torah! Just because they were neighbors.⁷ Amazing! Unbelievable!

A person who is *zoiche* to live next to an *adom gadol* is in a *makom kodesh* - that is unbelievably valuable. As I mentioned, my *zeide* (R' Avigdor Miller) used to always say that the biggest *ma'alah* of his shul was where it was placed. The shul was three doors down from the Mirrer Yeshiva. He used to expound and extol the *mazel* of the *balabatim* in the shul, that they can walk out and rub shoulders with the Roshei HaYeshiva of the Mir in Brooklyn, with the *Rebbeim* of the Mir, with a *yungeleit* from the Mir and with the *bachurim* of the Mir. Even if they never said a word to them, just to see them is a *ma'alah* of such a degree that it's unbelievable!

NOT GAZING AT A RASHA ISN'T JUST A MIDDAH TOVA...

Knowing this preface now, we can understand the Gemara in Megillah (ibid), which says, אסור לאדם להסתכל בצלם דמות אדם רשע, it is prohibited the gaze at the face of a wicked person. The Maharsha explains, based on sifrei Kabalah, that *tumah* can actually be seen in the face of a rasha.⁸ So you know what will happen if you look? The *ruach ha'tumah* of that *rasha* now comes upon you! Just like by looking at the Sefer Torah, you get *kedusha* - so, too, by looking at the face of a *rasha* the same thing happens, but just the opposite. No difference! How many *aveiros* did he *chap*? How much *rishus*? How many sins did he commit? This is a *kli tamei*, a broken, impure vessel, full of *aveiros*! In Avos D'Rabbi Nassan (30:3) it says that someone who attaches himself to sinners, even though he never did their sinful actions, will nevertheless be punished just like them; and similarly, someone who attaches himself to those who do mitzvos, even if he doesn't emulate their behavior, he will receive *sechar* like them - obviously to a certain degree.⁹ Can you imagine that?!

Not to look at a *rasha* is not a *midas chassidus*. It says in the Gemara - *assur*! It's prohibited! There is a story about Maharil Diskin from Brisk (1818-1898), an *adom gadol she'baanakim*. He was a giant among giants! Once someone brought up trumped-up charges against him, and they hired a very fancy attorney, who was Jewish but wasn't frum, to defend him. R' Yehoshua Leib refused to pick up his eyes to look at that attorney. He talked to him, but he never looked at him! So the attorney asked him, "Why don't you look at me?" And he said it says in the Gemara it's prohibited to look at the face of a wicked person. He wouldn't do it. You understand?

When you look at a *rasha*, do you realize what happens? What is the mind of a wicked person preoccupied with? Is it preoccupied with a *cheshek haTorah*? Is his mind in a deep desire to study Torah? No. He's a *sonet Torah*. Does he have

an interest in attaching himself to Hashem? No. The last thing he wants is to attach himself to Hashem Yisbarach. So now you look at the face of a *rasha*, and then you want to daven. You know what you will discover? You will find out that your mind is completely befuddled, and you cannot attach yourself to Hashem. And you can't figure out where in the world this blockage came from. Now, people tell you, "דעתו של אדם מערבת עם הבריות" - you have to be nice to people." So you have to tell them what Mesilas Yesharim (5:26) says, that if people tell you this Chazal (that you have to be nice to people) you have to let them know that this statement specifically refers to someone who behaves like human being: אדם שעושים מעשי אדם. בבני אדם שיש להם דמות אדם, you should not be associated with them.¹⁰

SOME LESSONS FROM CORONAVIRUS

I learned this lesson from how people behave in the coronavirus. When I see people who are *makpid gamur* (very strict) with masks, gloves, and distancing, and even now - when the virus, Baruch Hashem, is largely behind us - they are still *choshesh* about a distant possibility that somebody may be asymptomatic, maybe there is a *sfeik sfeika* that something might happen to them.

⁶ והחנים לפני המשכן קדמה לפני אהל מועד מזרחה משה ואהרן ובניו שמרים משמרת המקדש למשמרת בני ישראל והזר הקרב יומת
⁷ משה ואהרן ובניו. וסמוכין להם דגל מחנה יהודה, והחונים עליו יששכר וזבולן - טוב לצדיק טוב לשכנו, לפי שהיו שכניו של משה שהיה עוסק בתורה, נעשו גדולים בתורה, שנאמר "יהודה מחקק" (תהלים ס, ט), "ומבני יששכר יודעי בינה וגו' מאתים" (דה"א י"ב) - ראשי סנהדראות, "ומזבולן משכים בשבט ספר" (שופטים ה, יד) (רש"י שם)
⁸ אסור להסתכל בצלם דמות אדם רשע כו'. והוא כענין קללת אלהים תלוי וגו' ע"פ חכמי המקובלים כי הכרת פניהם ענתה בם שיש בצלם דמות מראה אדם צורה רוחנית לטוב או לרע כפי מעשיו לצד הטרה או לצד הטומאה ואסור להסתכל לצד הטומאה ע"ד אל תפנו אל האלילים ומה"ט קמאר בסמוך דלא אסתכלי בעובדי כוכבים דצורתו מצד הטומאה ומייתי ליה של לולא פני גו' אם אביט ואם אראך שהוא לשון כפול מורה גם על הצורה הרוחני לצד הטומאה (חידושי אגדות על מגילה כ"ח א)
⁹ רבי עקיבא אומר כל המדבק בעבורי עבירה אע"פ שלא עשה כמעשיהם הרי זה מקבל פורענות כיוצא בהן וכל המדבק בעושי מצוה אע"פ שלא עשה כמעשיהם הרי זה מקבל שכר
¹⁰ והוא מה ששלמה מזהיר ואומר (שם כד): ועם שונים אל תתערב. כי אם יאמר לך אדם (כתובות יז): לעולם תהא דעתו של אדם מערבת עם הבריות, אף אתה אמר לו, במה דברים אמורים, בבני אדם שעושים מעשי אדם, אך לא בבני אדם שעושים מעשי בהמה. ושלמה מזהיר עוד (משלי יד): לך מנגד לאיש כסיל. ודוד הפלך אמר (תהלים א): אשרי האיש אשר לא הלך וגו', וכבר פרשנו, זכרונם לברכה (ע"ז ח): אם הלך, סופו לעמד. ואם עמד, סופו לשב. ואומר (תהלים כ): לא יאשיבתי עם מתי שוא וגו' שנאמר קהל מרעים וגו'.

But what is Hashem teaching me when I see them? Hashem is teaching me how I should conduct myself when I see an *adam rasha*. When you see a person who's against Hashem, who lives a life of sin and he is proud of it, and he is an *emese rasha*, you should put on masks, gloves, and wrap yourself into anything you can wrap yourself in - put on a burka - and distance yourself from him! Now, the guy will laugh at you, but you tell the guy, "I don't want to catch anything. You know, Dr. Fauci said 'to be careful,' so I am being extra careful." I don't know why the rabbis are not putting up signs that we have to wear "protective behavior" when we go amongst the *עם המון* and *reshaim* so as not to become infected and contaminated by their behavior.

TALKING WITH HORSE TRADERS RUINED YOUR KAVANAH

There was once a businessman who bought and sold horses. He came before R' Menachem Mendel of Riminov (1745-1815), a famous Chassidic Rebbe. This man poured out his heart to the rebbe, saying that he had a difficult time during prayer. He said that the most foreign thoughts would get into his mind when he would pray and he could not focus at all on his prayers. He said he tried to daven and ask Hashem for help, he tried *segulos* from *sefarim* to stop these foreign thoughts invading his mind, but nothing worked. So R' Menachem Mendel said to him, "Tell me your *seder hayom*." Describe to me what you do during the day. So the man said that he gets up, then he goes to work and he tells him all the things that he does the entire day before he goes to sleep. R' Menachem Mendel said, "In the morning you spend a lot of time with horse traders, people who sell and buy horses, right?" "Right." "Tell me, what kind of people are they? What kind of discussions and conversations do they hold?" And he already saw that they were not the greatest of tzadikim. R' Menachem Mendel said, "Ah, now I understand the issue at hand! All your foreign thoughts do not come from your own self. You should know that these מחשבות זרות - 'foreign thoughts' that are not yours." Do you see this unbelievable *chiddush*? You can have a thought that's not your thought! It somehow came into your mind, it's a stranger's thought, that's why it's called מחשבות זרות. "Because you were *mebadek*, because you connected with those people, and you looked at them and spoke to them. That is what putting those מחשבות זרות in your mind. But if you will be *mekabel* upon yourself to distance yourself from the bad influences, these מחשבות will leave your mind." As the story goes, the man did that and he found the key for him to be able to daven with a clear mind. Who knows how many of us have tried to daven, but because of something that we saw, some attachment to a *davar ra*, something that wasn't even our thought - but it's something that we picked up - entered our minds and messed up our tefillah.

There was once a big tzaddik, known as the Kadosh of Lechowicz, and one of his chassidim had a spirit (i.e. *dibbuk*) enter him and it caused him to speak all kind of *nivul peh* and *devarim asurim*. He started saying "things from the world" and his family was suffering tremendous humiliation with his behavior. The guy started breaking things, breaking windows. He was possessed by a spirit. So his children brought him to the Kadosh of Lechowicz, who was his Rebbe, and they asked him to save his chassid. They brought this man into the Rebbe's house and suddenly the chandeliers started shaking. The Kadosh of Lechowicz said, "Who has the chutzpah to come into my house and shake my chandeliers?!" At that point, they stopped shaking. It was the *ruach* in that person who caused this. The Kadosh of Lechowicz finally said, "I cannot help you, but I will tell you what happened: your father had a good friend and this friend died recently. This friend was a living, walking cesspool of evil and now, that he's in the next world, he is undergoing tremendous judgments. All the people who were attached to him are being affected by him. Your father was the most attached to him - so what your father is getting now is the *ruach ra* from his friend, and that's why I cannot help you. This is what your father absorbed from that friend. The only thing I can tell you is to be *mekabel*, as a family, to learn Mishnayos for that person's *neshama* to try to get him a *tikkun*, and if he will get his *tikkun*, your father will also get some respite and some *menuchas hanefesh*."

Rabbosai, let's take this seriously, and strengthen ourselves to look at tzaddikim and to avert our eyes from looking at *reshaim*. And if you have a neighbor who is a *rasha*, run away from him.

IN CONCLUSION

The episode of Korach's fall from greatness together with members of Shevet Reuven illustrates the power of being connected to an evil neighbor. When living next to somebody, you will inevitably see them, and that seeing creates an attachment between you and the person you see. Seeing something gives it a *koach* of *chiyus*, its essential existence. There are many proofs to this in the Torah: from וַיִּרְא אֱלֹקִים at Brias Haolam, to Moshe seeing Eretz Yisrael and looking at Am Yisrael, to Hashem looking at a person on Rosh Hashanah. We have a positive opportunity to be influenced for the good by looking at people and objects that are saturated with *kedushah*, such as a tzaddik and a Sefer Torah. The negative side of this phenomenon is expressed in the Gemara's issur of not looking at evil people and not associating with people who are saturated in evil. Whomever we associate ourselves with influences our behavior and the quality of our *tefillos*. This points us toward the obligation to look at tzaddikim, Roshei Yeshivah, and yeshiva bachurim, and to avoid the hazard of looking at *reshaim* in the same way you'd run to protect yourself from a plague. This week (bli neder), I will try to find one opportunity a day to look at a tzaddik, if possible in real life, and to focus on looking at holy objects in general, such as objects used for a mitzvah, or the letters in a sefer Torah. At the same time, I will seriously try to avoid looking at *reshaim*, such as on the news or in advertisements.