

A man or woman who shall disassociate himself by taking a Nazarite vow of abstinence for the sake of Hashem. (6:2)

The translation of *yafli*, “shall disassociate,” follows *Rashi*, who views the *Nazir* as someone who breaks with society’s norms, seeking to separate himself from the temptations of his environment. It is a noble position to take, one to which not all of us can aspire. **Ibn Ezra** takes it a step further. He defines *yafli* as wonderment. The *nazir* is doing something astonishing. It is truly out of the ordinary to undertake a vow that will sever oneself from the *taavos*, physical desires, which others find so “life-sustaining.” *Ibn Ezra* is teaching us a powerful lesson. To overcome one’s habits; to deny oneself a deferment to his *yetzer hora*, evil inclination; to withstand the pressures of one’s *taavos*, physical desires, takes a very strong person. Such a person commits an astounding act. To change requires greatness. It is a *pele*, wondrous act of heroism, to break away from one’s *taavos*, desires.

In his *Daas Torah*, **Horav Yeruchem Levovitz, zl**, elaborates upon this theme, deriving from *Ibn Ezra* that one who follows his cravings is a true slave to his desires. He is not in control of his life. His desires are in control of him. The mindset of a slave is one in which he wholly subjugates himself to his master. A person who is intrinsically a free man does not sell himself. His self-esteem just does not allow for that. One who sells himself is by nature already a slave. His self-esteem has long been gone. As a slave, he has no self-image. He is a component of his master.

Likewise, the *baal taavah*, one who is a slave to his physical desires, has no natural ability to break the strangle-hold that his desires have on him. The *taavah* beckons, and he immediately responds: “*Hineni*. I am here.” He has no choice, no ability to say no. His “master’s” choice is his choice. He is always thinking of ways to satisfy his lusts, because that is what a slave must do: always think of ways to earn the master’s praise.

Thus, when a person is able to extricate himself from the vice grip of his *yetzer hora*, evil inclination, he is a *pele*, an astounding person. He was able to go against his natural proclivity. He said no! The *Yerushalmi* teaches that Rabbi Akiva was once teaching his students when a man who passed by the *bais ha’medrash* caused the entire *bais ha’medrash* to light up. Rabbi Akiva asked the man to enter the *bais ha’medrash* and asked, “What have you done that creates such an aura about you?”

The man explained, “I lusted for a certain woman. It had become so over-powering that I almost lost myself and sinned. At one point, the woman had acquiesced, but she first rebuked me for what I was about to do. I listened to her and overcame my desire.” We see a clear indication from *Chazal* that breaking a desire is a compelling deed. It shows strength of character that only an “astounding” person possesses. This is what *Ibn Ezra* is teaching us. The average person falls prey to his physical passions. The one who is a *pele*, an astounding person, an awesome person, is able to overcome his natural gravitation to sin.

There are those who, albeit ensconced in the grips of desire, comment, “I can stop whenever I want.” *Rav Yeruchem* emphatically states that this is untrue. This person is ashamed to admit that he is too weak to break the hold the *yetzer hora* has on him. He is just a “regular” person. He is not a *pele*.