

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

The translation of *yafli*, “shall dissociate,” 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 not submit to one’s *yetzer hara*, evil inclination; to withstand the pressures of one’s *taavos*, physical desires, takes a very strong person. Such a person performs an astounding act. This type of change requires greatness. It is a *peleh*, wondrous act of heroism, to be able 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, and 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 stranglehold 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 grip of his *yetzer hara*, evil inclination, he is a *peleh*, 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 place to light up. Rabbi Akiva went out and requested that the man enter the *bais ha’medrash*. He 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 overpowering that I almost lost myself and sinned. At one point, the woman had acquiesced, but first she 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 *peleh*, an astounding person – an awesome person – is able to overcome his natural gravitation to sin.

There are those who although gripped by desire, say, “I can stop whenever I want.”

*Rav Yeruchem* emphatically states that this is not true. This person is ashamed to admit that he is too weak to break the hold the *yetzer hara* has on him. He is just a “regular” person. He is not a *peleh*.