

Naso

Seeing the Saddled Elephant

When a man or woman will express a nazir vow to Hashem...

Bamidbar 6:2

A *nazir* is a person who chooses to refrain from doing certain things for a period of time, namely drinking wine, eating grapes, cutting his hair and coming into contact with the dead. When his time is up (depending upon what time limit he chose), he then brings sacrifices and cuts his hair. The word used for expressing one's vow is the word "*yaflea*." Ibn Ezra⁶²³ explains that the word *yaflea* comes from the root *peleh*, which means a "wonder." The *nazir*, says Ibn Ezra, has done an absolutely wondrous thing, for most of the world simply follows their desires blindly without ever curbing them.

Shimon HaTzaddik is recorded in the Gemara⁶²⁴ as telling the story of an amazing *nazir* that he once met:

A *nazir* once came from the south. He was attractive, with beautiful eyes and perfectly braided hair. I said to him, "My son, what convinced you to vow to destroy this lovely hair?" He told me, "I was a shepherd for my father in my town, and I went to draw some water from the spring. I saw my reflection in the water and my *yetzer hara* pounced upon me, seeking to take me out of the world! So I told him, 'Wicked one, how dare you grow arrogant in a world that is not your own...I swear to shave you off for the sake of Heaven.'" I got up and kissed him on the head, and said, "My son, may there be many more *nazirs* like you; it was about you that the verse said, 'When a person will *yaflea* to make a Nazarite vow...'" R. Meir Arik⁶²⁵ explains that Shimon HaTzaddik was so impressed with this man's wondrous ability to control himself that he declared the man a *peleh*, just as Ibn Ezra explained a *nazir* is meant to be.⁶²⁶

If one sees an elephant in a dream, teach our Sages,⁶²⁷ this represents *pelaos* (wonders) being done for him. But, say the Sages, this is only if the elephant is

623 S.v. *yaflea*

624 Nedarim 9b

625 *Tal Torah*, ad loc.

626 In light of our essay from Bereishis about redheads, it is worth noting that in Yerushalmi, Nedarim 1:1, this remarkable *nazir* is identified as being a redhead. He was wondrous for controlling his passion, and even more so when we discover that his hair indicated an even greater level of challenge to overcome.

627 Brachos 56b

wearing a saddle.⁶²⁸ If not, then it is not a good sign at all. In Hebrew, an elephant is called a *pil*, phonetically similar to *peleh*. But what is it about the elephant that is so wondrous? And what is it about the saddle that turns the vision of an elephant into a positive dream?

After using the bathroom,⁶²⁹ we make a blessing acknowledging God as *maflea laasos*, “He who cures all flesh.” The words *umaflea laasos*, found first in the book of Shoftim,⁶³⁰ are explained by R. Moshe Isserles⁶³¹ as follows: He explains that the word *peleh* describes the incredible wonder of Hashem’s taking physical bodies and imbuing them with spiritual souls. The idea that a body and soul can live in harmony is nothing short of a *peleh*, and that is the meaning of this blessing.

The word for verbally expressing something is *yaflea*. The book in Rambam’s *Yad Hachazaka* that deals with vows and speech is called *Haflaah*. R. Yitzchak Hutner⁶³² explains this in light of the above comment of R. Moshe Isserles. Nothing expresses that the body standing in front of you is imbued with an intelligent, thinking soul more than speech. Animals can communicate in only the most basic of ways. Humans can speak, and the fact that we are both physical and imbued with a soul at the same time is manifest in the *peleh*, the awesome wonder, that is speech, or *haflaah*.

An elephant is, quite simply, massive. His brute strength is awesome. Despite his weight, however, he is not confined to lazing around. He can move miles every day. Such power in this, the biggest of animals,⁶³³ represents physical strength. If this powerful creature is wearing a saddle, thus showing that it can be controlled by humans and used for their purposes, then it begins to represent the *peleh* that is physicality and spirituality working together.

The *nazir*, who decides to limit his indulging in the physical world, is a man of *peleh*. He is a man who has connected the physical and the spiritual in a meaningful way. While the rest of the world runs wild, he is capable of seeing the bigger picture, and curbing his desires. He has seen the saddled elephant – and wonders will be done for him.

628 See also Rashi, *ibid.*, 57b, s.v. *dimisrag*, that this could also mean “in reins.”

629 See *Siddur Yaavetz*, p. 123, where he explains the statement of our Sages (Brachos 57b) that evacuating one’s bowels is a taste of the pleasure of the World to Come, for through it, one rids oneself of the extra filth and through this process, the base physical parts of the food are separated out, bringing complete joy. In the World to Come, there will be no eating or drinking, for there will no longer be any bad mixed in along with the good; only good will exist.

630 13:19

631 Rema, *Orach Chaim*, 6:1

632 *Pachad Yitzchak*, *Pesach* 15:3, *Shavuos* 43:9–10. See also Maharal, regarding Moshe and the power of speech, in his *Gevuros Hashem* 21.

633 *Sefer Habris* (quoted by R. Chaim Kanievsky in *Perek Bishir* 76) says that the elephant is the largest animal.