

# A NEW FOUND FREEDOM

by Rabbi Label Lam

*HASHEM spoke to Moshe saying: Speak to the children of Israel, and you shall say to them: A man or woman who sets himself (yafli) apart by making a Nazirite vow to abstain for the sake of the Lord...For the entire duration of his abstinence, he is holy to HASHEM. (Bamidbar 6:1-8)*

Yafli: He separates himself or he does something wondrous, because most of the world is going after their desires. (Ibn Ezra)

What does it mean to be a Nazir? Of course there are technical points having to do with stepping away for thirty days from any contact with wine, dead bodies, or cutting hair. What's the reason for this discipline? It could be that the person wants a new spiritual beginning and through the discipline of becoming a Nazir he jumpstarts the process of self-improvement.

Wine is intoxicating and the person can become too lightheaded and silly with drink. By coming into contact with dead bodies he may become morose and depressed. Therefore he is looking to strike a balance between these two tendencies. By not cutting his hair and letting it go wild, he is committing himself to change his focus, like a typical mourner, to turn his eyes inward. That is where all the solutions are found.

Nowadays it is possible for a person to change his life with a simple 30 or 40 day regimen. Why would someone take on a dramatic change? I remember going to get a coffee for my Rebbe very early in the morning. He declined the coffee and when I questioned why he had halted drinking coffee, he replied in a curious way, "I discovered the coffee was drinking me!!" I did not have an idea what he meant. I was mystified. Later I came to understand his statement and new self-discipline.

Rabbi Yosef Yozel Horowitz, the Alter from Novardok told a story to illustrate how people tend to deceive themselves about how involved they are in their indulgences. I only read my emails, headlines, sports etc. but I can stop when I want. I only smoke a few cigs a day but can halt any time. I only eat such and such but only when I'm a little anxious but I am under control.

The story he told describes a fellow being pulled forcefully by two burly policemen. As he passes by you discover it is your friend Chaim. "Chaim!" you shout out to him, "What did you do that the police are taking you away?" Chaim answers casually, "Nothing at all. I'm taking them to the jailhouse!" "Hmmm", you wonder, "If it is true that you are taking them, even though it looks like they are pulling you, then show it is true by taking 30 steps (12 steps) in the opposite direction. If you can do

that without being clobbered, then I can believe what you say is true."

My Rebbe was telling me that we think we are reading the newspaper but the newspaper is reading us. We may think we are listening to the news but the radio but the radio is listening to us. We might deceive ourselves into thinking we are eating up a piece of cake but the cake is really eating us up. Someone just may feel that he is shopping at the mall but the mall is shopping him. We have yielded our freedom to these small and permissible habits that like the ropes that bound Gulliver anchor us in a given orbit of behavior.

We may believe we are free but by taking a few forceful steps in the other direction we are declaring our freedom from the powerful lure of these tiny strings that bind. This is what's so wondrous about the Nazir, as he arrests himself and thereby declares **a new found freedom**.

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