

א ב י ס ל ת ו ר ה !

June 13, 2025

THE PARSHA NEWSLETTER
OF MAIMONIDES SCHOOL

ט"ז סיון תשפ"ה · בהעלתך

The Fear of Freedom

By Menshi Trachtenberg '26

In this week's פרשה, something strange happens. Just as בני ישראל begin their journey in the desert, the תורה says: "וַיְהִי הָעַם כְּמַתְאֲנָנִים רָעַ בְּאָזְנֵי ה' "and the people were like complainers; it was evil in the ears of Hashem" (במדבר י"א:א). On the surface it seems like it is just normal complaining but we are left wondering: why is the nation complaining, and what exactly are they dissatisfied with? The פסוק does not explain the complaint itself directly, but the תורה goes on to describe two separate complaints from the people. "וַיִּבְכוּ גַם בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל וַיֹּאמְרוּ מִי יַאֲכִלֵנוּ בְּשׂוֹר: וְזָכְרָנוּ אֶת־הַדָּגָה אֲשֶׁר־נֹאֲכַל בְּמִצְרַיִם הַחֵם אֶת הַקֶּשֶׂאִים וְאֶת הָאֲבִטְחָיִם אֲשֶׁר־שָׁנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל "and שני ישראל also cried and said 'who will feed us meat?' We remember the fish that we ate in Egypt for free; the cucumbers, the watermelons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic" (במדבר י"א:ד-ה). Both complaints seem to be about missing the food they ate in Egypt - specifically, the fish, and the meat. While at first they seem like complaints about food, a closer look reveals something deeper; a deep yearning for the past. עם ישראל have been slaves in Egypt, but even in their slavery, they had familiarity. They had routine, and strangely, even a sense of comfort of the known, even if it was unpleasant. Now, as they journey through the desert, they are faced with the unknown. The daily מן, the lack of food variety, and the challenges of living inside of the wilderness are starting to wear on them. This reaction seems to teach us that people often prefer the discomfort of the familiar over the

uncertainty of freedom; however, the מפרשים go even deeper:

"כמתאוננים" explains that the word "כמתאוננים" comes from the root of און, meaning a complaint without reason. According to רש"י, this was not a valid concern — they were just looking for an excuse to rebel.

רובנו notes that the use of the prefix "כ" in כמתאוננים, as if they were complaining, suggests that they didn't even voice their thoughts. They were too afraid to voice them to משה, but Hashem heard what was in their hearts. That is why the פסוק says, "וישמע" — Hashem heard, even though משה did not.

ספרנו adds a great insight: their complaints were not coming from real suffering at all. Rather, כדי לנסות את ה', they were testing Hashem, challenging him to see how he would react. It was not about food, it was about lack of spiritual commitment, about resisting the requirements of being Hashem's chosen people.

So what can we learn from all of this? These commentaries help us see that it isn't really about the food. It's a story about fear of responsibility, spiritual resistance, and the challenge that comes with true freedom. It's about stepping into the unknown, and instinctively wanting to run back to what they knew, even if it meant slavery. Just like בני ישראל, we sometimes resist growth — not because life is too hard, but because it is unfamiliar to us. We fear change, even when it leads to something better. But the message of this פרשה is clear: if we want to truly be free, we have to learn to move forward, even when it is hard. We have to trust that the journey is taking

This month's issue is not sponsored! If you would like to sponsor a future month of A Bisl Torah please visit our website

To read past issues or sponsor future visit ABISLTORAH.ORG

us somewhere meaningful. May we all find the strength to step forward into the unknown, with trust in Hashem and faith that the journey is leading us to something greater.

Waving in Judaism

By Mark Druskin '26

The concept of תנופה, or waving, is used many times in the תורה, and throughout all of תנ"ך, in many different contexts. A theory, as to the meaning of this motion in the eyes of G-d, is that 1) it can physically separate the object being waved from whatever is left behind and indicate that it is for G-d, and 2) the תנופה seems, in some cases, to confer some aspect of the item being waved onto whatever it is being waved over, like the כהנים conferring the presence and blessing of G-d onto the people, by spreading their hands. Several times in תורה, when discussing the מלואים and the שלמים, Hashem uses the concept of תנופה to indicate the separation of the fats, which are given to the כהנים, from the rest of the meat of the animal (ויקרא ז: ל) (ויקרא ח: כ"ז), (ויקרא י: ט"ו קרבן), (ויקרא י"ג: א). This is similar to the עומר, where G-d describes the separation of the עומר from the rest of the grain, and discusses its "waving" to do so: "וַיְהִי־יָמֵינוּ אֶת־הָעֹמֶר לִפְנֵי ה' לְרִצְנָכֶם" "and he shall wave the עומר before Hashem on your behalf" (ויקרא כ"ג: א).

In other contexts, however, we see a different side to הניפה: At the end of יתרו, פרשת יתרו, Hashem prohibits hewing (cutting or chopping) the stones of the מזבח. The reason for this is: "כִּי חֲרָבַךְ הִנְפַתְּ עֲלֵיהֶן" "for by waving your tool upon them you have profaned them" (שמות כ: א). This produces an interesting second interpretation of the concept

of תנופה; the reason we are forbidden from using iron cutting tools on the altar is because the blade transfers the concept of death onto the holy altar of life. This is done, not by the cutting itself of the stone, rather, "כִּי חֲרָבַךְ הִנְפַתְּ" - because the sword was waved over the stone.

These are two opposite conceptions of one symbolic action: one version of the action separates and purifies, whereas the other actually bestows the aspect of the waved onto those it is waved over. It is like a concept of קדושה, which most writers seem to say is, in general terms, separation - but a sort of separation that can dwell inside something and fill it.

This understanding of the concept of תנופה helps explain the inauguration of the לויים in the first עליה of פרשת בהעלותך. First, בני ישראל lean their hands on the לויים - an act like the second use of תנופה, where the nation designates the לויים as their emissaries by "sharing" with them their person. The first type of תנופה is shown when אהרן and משה lift the לויים and wave them, separating the לויים from בני ישראל, who simultaneously transferred some of themselves to the לויים. Besides demonstrating משה and אהרן's tremendous strength, this is a textbook example of תנופה. With our new understanding of תנופה, we can, hopefully have a better understanding of the significance of the service in the משכן.



Receive A BISL TORAH
on WhatsApp

A BISL TORAH

is published weekly
at Maimonides School,
Brookline, Massachusetts

EDITORS-IN-CHIEF
Eitan Orkaby '27
Theo Fraenkel '28

EDITORS
Eliana Goldenholz '26
Anna Szalat '28
Noah Levy '29

FACULTY ADVISOR
Rabbi Yaakov Jaffe

FOUNDERS
Binyamin Orkaby '24
Ephraim Fischer '24
