

Parsha Ponders

Korach | June 25, 2020 | 4 Tamuz 5780

*The danger of scoffing*¹

וידבר אל-קרח ואל-כל-עדתו לאמר בקר וידע יקוק את-אשר-לו וגו' זאת עשו קחו-לכם מחתות וגו'
[Moshe] spoke to Korach and his assembly, saying: "Tomorrow morning it shall be known who is Hashem's...Do this: Take for yourselves firepans"²

This week's *parsha* details the rebellion of Korach. He challenged the leadership of Moshe and Aharon, convincing a group of the greatest sages of Israel to join his cause. Korach claimed that Moshe was making everything up³. He claimed that Moshe was a false prophet. Moshe challenged this band of rebels to a test to determine who was the true prophet of Hashem. The next morning, they would all take firepans and put incense on them. Through this act of Divine service, it would become clear who was Hashem's chosen leaders. The result was that those that banded with Korach were burned to death by their firepans, whereas Moshe and Aharon emerged unscathed. This validated their rightful place as the leaders of the people, and prophets of Hashem.

Why did they have to come up with this whole firepan test? Seemingly, there was a much simpler test that would have sufficed. Six days a week the Jews would receive miraculous bread from Heaven called *munn*. It had many miraculous properties, besides its tremendous abundance. Our Sages teach us⁴ that the *munn* was a sort of barometer for a person's spiritual standing. If they were completely righteous, the *munn* would in the morning literally land by their doorstep. If they were wicked, the *munn* would fall outside the camp⁵, requiring a journey to go out and collect it. Everyone in between's standing would also be evident from where their *munn* landed. Why didn't Moshe just tell everyone to see in the morning where Korach and his *munn* would fall⁶? The one who had the *munn* by their doorstep would be righteous, and the one whose *munn* would be outside the camp would be wicked.

One suggestion is that it wasn't possible⁷. Until that point, Korach hadn't done anything wrong. He was originally very righteous⁸, and must have had the *munn* land on his doorstep. The day he created his rebellion, is when he became completely wicked. However, the *munn* didn't fall on the day of Korach's rebellion⁹. This is how despised discord is before Hashem. He withheld the *munn* from everybody because of the feud. There was no way then to determine who was righteous and who was wicked¹⁰.

¹ Based on Ta'amah D'Krah by (Rav Chaim Kanievsky *shlita*) to Numbers 16:5,6

² Numbers *loc. cit.*

³ מדבר בעדת קרח...אתמול מביאשין כנגד משה ואומרים לא משה נביא אמת ולא אהרן כהן גדול ולא תורה מן השמים (Koheles Rabbah 10:2); שאמר קרח לא משה נביא ולא אהרן כהן גדול ולא תורה נתנה מן השמים (Yalkut Shimoni Korach § 752, seemingly based on Tanchuma Yashan Korach Hosafah 2)

⁴ Yoma 75a

⁵ Rashi *ad. loc.*

⁶ See Derushim Nechmadim parshas Korach by the Maharam Shif (printed at the end of Chullin), who says that indeed Moshe tried to prove his innocence with the *munn* (albeit for a different accusation, see Sanhedrin 110a)

⁷ Sheivet Mussar Chapter 37

⁸ HaEmek Davar to Numbers 16:1 says Korach was the *gadol hador*. See also Tiferes Yehonasan *ad. loc.*

⁹ Rav Chaim Kanievsky presumes the Sheivet Mussar had some source in Chazal for this suggestion. This explanation assumes that the *munn* would have fallen after the rebellion started, and not that it would have already fallen that morning. I'm not sure what time of day it would have fallen then

¹⁰ Presumably, since the reason it didn't fall was because of *machlokes*, it wouldn't have fallen until the *machlokes* was resolved. Moshe had no choice then but to find some other means of settling it. However, if Korach's claim was that Moshe was making everything up, then seemingly the latter's *munn* would never have fallen close to his door. Shouldn't that have been enough proof of his innocence? It seems from the continuation that Rav Chaim

Moshe instead concocted the firepan test, which ultimately proved successful anyways. However, there's a simpler explanation than this, which penetrates the human psyche.

The danger of *machlokes*, discord, and *leitzaanus*, scoffing, is that they're almost impenetrable. No matter how many proofs and reproofs you offer, they bounce right off¹¹. Korach's main tactic against Moshe was scoffing at the laws he taught them¹². Scoffing has the dangerous ability to take something serious and make it meaningless¹³. If Moshe tested them with the *mun*, Korach and his band would have had a thousand explanations for why their *mun* fell so fall away. They would claim that it was because they didn't rebel enough. Had they made a stronger effort, Hashem would have been pleased with them. Moshe knew these dangers, and he knew he had to put a stop to the discord at once. He suggested instead a test with the firepans, squashing Korach's rebellion and returning the peace to the people¹⁴.

Good Shabbos

Kanivsky is focusing more on Moshe showing how wicked Korach is, rather than him trying to vindicate his own character. Indeed, Rav Chaim doesn't even mention Korach's claim that Moshe was making everything up

¹¹ See also "The power of scoffing", <https://parshaponders.com/vayakhel-pekudei-5778/>

¹² See Rashi to Numbers 16:1 for the laws he scoffed at. See also <https://parshaponders.com/korach-5778> for a deeper explanation for Korach's arguments

¹³ Mesillas Yesharim Chapter 5

¹⁴ Rav Chaim Kanivsky offers a final suggestion: perhaps the *mun* only showed who was righteous or wicked specifically with regards to observing the laws of the *mun*. It would therefore prove irrelevant in this context