

Korach ben Yitzhar ben Kehas took (himself). (16:1)

In his commentary (*Shaar HaPesukim*) to *Parashas Korach*, the *Arizal* makes a somewhat cryptic statement. “The *gematria*, numerical equivalent, of Moshe (*Rabbeinu*, our quintessential leader) is 345. If one were to deduct the *gematria* of the name Hevel (son of Adam and Chavah, who was killed by Kayin), which is 37, the sum would equal 308, which is the *gematria* of Korach.” This implies much more than mere numbers. Ostensibly, removing “Hevel” – or whatever characteristics he has in common with the personality of Moshe – can produce a Korach. Conversely, “Moshe” and “Hevel” together seem to create a cure for a Korach. How are we to understand this?

Horav Tzvi Kushelevsky, Shlita, examines the individual identities of Moshe and Hevel, as opposed to Korach, in order to better understand the uniqueness and temperament of each. In general, people are divided into two types. The first is comprised of people who are personable, charismatic, ambitious and, thus, able to impact those around them via their influence. The second group is quite the opposite: humble, almost obsequious, and keep to themselves. They shun the limelight and seek to downplay their every activity. Obviously, the former have the advantage of affecting the lives of many. They inspire by deed and example, earning the respect and admiration of whomever comes in contact with them. Their influence spreads through their ability to reach the masses via the written and oral word. This is all wonderful, but carries with it the risk of haughtiness. When one is successful and earns the accolades of many, it can (and often does) go to his head.

The latter has the advantage of humility, which is not only a practical character trait, it is actually critical to one’s ultimate success. The downside is that, due to their remaining in the background, they have little opportunity to reach out proactively in order to transform the society around them. If one does not “step up to the plate,” he can hardly “knock the ball out of the park.” [This should not in any way imply that the *tzaddik* who sits in his corner learning all day does not impact his surroundings. He certainly does, by simply being there; those who see him are deeply inspired by his genuine devotion and commitment.]

In this vein, *Chazal* (*Gittin* 56a) relate that the humility of Rabbi Zecharyah ben Avkulas destroyed (played a role) in the destruction of the *Bais Hamikdash*. The Roman ruler had sent an offering which he wanted sacrificed on the *Mizbayach*, Altar. A *halachic* issue precluded sacrificing the animal in its present (blemished) condition. The *Sanhedrin* presented an innovative way of dealing with the problem. Rabbi Zecharyah disagreed. (A well-known man in Yerushalayim threw a party and invited many guests, among them distinguished sages, and his friend Kamtza. As would happen, the invitation went to Bar Kamtza, who happened to be this man’s enemy. When he saw his enemy seated at a table, the host immediately ejected him from his home. Bar Kamtza felt humiliated in the presence of the sages and planned his revenge. He went to Rome and told Caesar, “The Jewish People are planning a rebellion against you.” When Caesar demanded that he prove his claim, he said, “Send an animal to be sacrificed on their altar, and see if they will

accept it.” Bar Kamtza inflicted a blemish on the animal, which invalidated it. The sages were in a quandary as to how to react: Should they risk offending Caesar by not sacrificing the animal? Perhaps they should “relieve” Bar Kamtza of his life, so that he could not report back to Caesar. Rabbi Zecharyah *ben Avkulas* feared setting a precedent where people might say that a blemished animal can be offered on the altar, or, if they killed Bar Kamtza, people might say that one who offers a blemished animal on the Altar is put to death. As a result of his view, the animal was not sacrificed, and Caesar attacked Yerushalayim.) Rabbi Zecharyah’s unwillingness to budge either way led to the Roman invasion. This demonstrates that passivity can be destructive. (We have confronted similar dilemmas throughout history. This is not the forum for discussing the varied approaches our leaders have taken. They most always take into account the larger, broader picture and how it will affect *Klal Yisrael*. Their decisions, which are always based on the Torah, are far-reaching and decisive. They represent *daas Torah*.)

Having said this, let us return to the personalities which we originally mentioned and see how the unique personality of each came to the fore. Adam and Chavah originally had two sons: Kayin and Hevel. Their names alluded to their distinct temperaments. The name Kayin is derived from Kinyan, acquisition/acquire, conquest. Kayin did not allow for grass to grow under his feet. He moved, acted, had ideas and plans, and did not take a back seat to anyone or anything. Therefore, it was his idea to offer a *korban*. His idea was good; what he delivered, however, was flawed. Hevel was not a type A person. Hevel means nothingness, a term which reflects humility. Rather than he himself arriving at the idea of offering a *korban*, he sat back dispassionately and allowed Kayin to act.

They each had something to offer, but, as with all things, too much “good” without restriction, without “brakes,” can end up with a little “bad.” The Torah would like to see us “wed” humility with ambition, action with restraint, charisma with a little less glamour, in order to balance “good” without the negative side effects. Moshe *Rabbeinu* had it all. He was *Klal Yisrael*’s quintessential leader, who, from day one, never stopped caring for the people. He was their spokesman and representative, and he always acted on their behalf. Yet, he was the paragon of humility; indeed, he was the humblest man who ever lived. He was both Kayin and Hevel in one. He was able to take the positive aspect of ambition and meld it together with the positive side of humility to produce the consummate Torah Jew.

Korach, however, had all the ambition and family pedigree of Moshe (as they were related), but he failed to develop the level of humility that personified Hevel. Thus, he had nothing to restrain him from the abyss of rebellion. Humility would have knocked some sense into his head, explaining to him that he was insufficiently righteous, thus unsuitable to lead the nation. The *Rosh Yeshivah* adds that Korach’s punishment, being swallowed up and buried in the ground, was poetic justice and appropriate – an allusion to Kayin who brought his *korban* from the fruits of the ground.

We now understand the *Arizal*’s lesson in “math.” Moshe – who incorporates both humility and ambition – minus Hevel – who represent humility alone – equals Korach, who represents total

ambition. One must recognize his strengths and imbue them with the requisite humility in a manner that does not repress his ambition.