

**Title**  
***Parashat Hukat-Balak***  
**July 4, 2020**  
**Prue Thorner, Darshanit**  
**Temple Aliyah, Needham**

Notes on the parashah:

- The reason these two powerful parsha'ot are linked is because the second day of Shavuot this year was a Shabbat. Doubling these up allows us in the diaspora to re-align our readings with the parsha'ot read in Israel.
- Chapter 19, of Bamidbar, verses 4–22 are also read on the Shabbat after Purim to prepare for the pilgrimage to Jerusalem that would be held on Pesach, so the people will be purified.
- **Hukat** opens with the laws concerning purification by using the body of the Parah Aduma—the Red Heifer. The heifer must be absolutely without blemish. She is slaughtered and burned as a sacrifice in front of the High Priest who has to sprinkle her blood before the tent of meeting. The purification ritual defiles the priest and those who take part in it.
- Rabbi Joshua of Siknin says in Bereshit Rabbah: there are four mysterious laws in the Torah:
  - the Levirate marriage, in which if a married man dies his brother must marry his widow;
  - the prohibition against mixing linen and wool;
  - the Scapegoat, which is sent into the desert to expiate our sins;
  - and the Parah Adumah. Rabbi Joshua infers that this last one is related to the sin of the Golden Calf. Rabbi Johanan ben Zakkai responded to his students who question him that we are not to question these four laws, or to look for reasons behind them, just to accept them.
- Then in Chapter 20, the people arrive in the Wilderness of Zin (anecdote about seeing the Wilderness of Zin) where Miriam dies, and immediately the people cry out for water and they remonstrate against Moses and Aaron, asking why they have been brought to this evil place. Hashem tells Moses to speak to the rock to bring forth water. Moses doesn't speak to the rock—he strikes it with his rod in anger and says “Hear this, you rebels, are we to bring forth water from this rock?”
- Interestingly he uses the word “Mor'im” although it's translated as rebels (Mord'im) although Mor'im actually means ‘teachers.’

- Is this an error in transcription of the Torah? There are instances where letters are transposed or even missing elsewhere in the Torah. We don't know if this is the case here.

This brings to my mind the rebels we see pulling down statues and burning vehicles. Are they rebels or are they also our teachers, opening our eyes to racism we were blind to?

- Aaron dies on Mount Hor and his robes are handed down to his son Eleazar. The parsha continues with all the battles that the people of Israel had to fight to move toward the Promised Land.

Shabbat Shalom!