

## **Dvar Torah of Rabbi Judith Hauptman, 20 June 2026, Parashat Korach**

I dedicate this drash to the memory of Rabbi Stuart Kelman whose second bar mitzvah last year, at the age of 83, gave me the idea to celebrate a first bat mitzvah at the age of 83.

This synagogue reads Torah according to the triennial system. Instead of reading an entire Torah parashah, or portion, each Sabbath, we read just one-third. As a result, instead of reading the entire Torah in one year, it takes us three years.

Not long ago, my 11 yo Berkeley grandson told me that his bar mitzvah parashah in July of 2028 is likely to be a portion called Huqat. (Bar Mitzvah dates are not decided yet for 2028.) He asked to see the verses he would have to read that day. This was easy for me to show him because Elihu Welber gave me an excellent electronic tikkun. I scrolled to Huqat but I wasn't sure which third of the parashah we would be reading in 2028.

To find out, I wrote to Alice Webber, our Torah reading co-ordinator. She wrote back that in July 2028 we will be reading the last third of each parashah. But, she added, Huqat is sometimes doubled up with Balaq, the following Torah portion. I needed to find out if that would be the case in 2028.

A few days later, I was walking out of shul with Rebecca Whitman. Subject of my own bat mitzvah came up in our conversation. One thing led to another and I told her about my grandson's request. I guessed that if both Huqat and Balak are to be read on his bar mitzvah Shabbat in 2028, according to the triennial cycle he would read the last two-thirds of Balaq, the second of the two parashiyot. My logic: if in that year we read the third third of each parashah then we can treat Huqat-Balak as one long parashah and we would read the last two thirds of Balaq.

But Rebecca immediately told me that that is not how the triennial system works!! Were he to read the last two thirds of Balaq, the last third of Huqat might never get read in that three-year cycle: that is, if we read the first third of Huqat in the first year of the cycle, the second third of Huqat in the second year of the cycle, and then, if we read Huqat-Balak together in the third year and he reads the last two thirds of Balaq on that Shabbat, the last third of Huqat would not get read in that cycle of three years.

She further suggested I read the teshuvah about the triennial cycle on the Rabbinical Assembly (RA) website. It was written by R. Richard Eisenberg, a former JTS RS student of mine, and published in 1988. It gave many options. That is, it seems that there are many possible ways to read Huqat and Balak in any given three-year cycle. It can happen that in

the first and second years of a given cycle we read Huqat and Balak separately, and then in the third year we read them together. Or it can happen that for the first two years of a cycle we read Huqat-Balak together and then we read separately in the third year. And so on.

Why the many different possibilities? Why the need to sometimes read a double parashah? Let me give a partial answer. When Shavuot is celebrated on a Friday and Shabbat, as it was this year, we fall out of sync with Israel. Shavuot is only one day in Israel. This year, Israel celebrated Shavuot on Friday. For Israelis, since the day after Shavuot was an ordinary Shabbat, they read the next parashah in the cycle. For us, Shavuot is a two-day holiday and so that Shabbat was still Shavuot with a Shavuot Torah reading. We thereby lost one Shabbat for the regular Torah-reading cycle, which means we would need to double up at some later point. As for why we sometimes read Huqat by itself and sometimes together with Balak, that has to do with the alignment of the lunar-solar calendar in use by Judaism with the solar calendar of secular life. I won't provide details on that aspect.

I went and looked up the Torah reading schedule for the cycle in which we now find ourselves. 2026 is the first year of this three-year cycle. In both 2026 and 2027 we will be reading Huqat-Balak together. But in 2028, we will read Huqat by itself. Which third of Huqat would my grandson need to read in 2028, the third year of this cycle? The obvious answer seems to be the third third.

But to be sure, I sent an e/m to the reigning expert on the subject, Rabbi Miles Cohen, an old friend of mine, author of the synagogue *luah* (calendar) published each year. He sent me a very long response. He first commented that my grandson had, so to speak, hit the jackpot. There is more ink spilled on how to read Huqat and Huqat-Balak than on any other double parashah!!

Even more amazing, he continued, there is a debate about which third of Huqat to read in 2028. The Eisenberg schedule says to read the *first* third of Huqat, even though 2028 will be the *third* year of the three-year cycle and logically one would read the *third* third. Why the *first* third in the *third* year of the cycle? Because all of Huqat is going to be read in the first two years of the cycle, since it will be read along w Balaq. Therefore, according to Eisenberg, in the third year of the cycle, we should return to the *first* third of Huqat.

However, since it is counter-intuitive to read the *first* third of a parashah in the *third* year of a triennial cycle, many congregations balked at doing so and complained to the RA. R. Cohen acceded to these complaints and suggested to the RA to instead read the third third. His suggestion was accepted. But, he told me in the long e/m, the RA does not retract a teshuvah once it publishes it. The RA therefore maintains that one can read either the first

third of Huqat in 2028, as suggested by Eisenberg, or the third third, in 2028, as now suggested by him, R. Miles Cohen. Because of these options, R. Cohen could not, therefore, give me a definitive answer as to what to do at Netivot on July 1, 2028, because, in this situation, he said, each rabbi is empowered to decide for her shul which option to exercise.

I suspect you all want to know what we do here, at Netivot. Let me keep u in suspense a bit longer. I want to talk more generally. What is the history of public Torah reading? When was it first instituted? For what reason? The Torah itself, as stated in Deuteronomy 31:10-13, only requires the Torah to be read aloud once in seven years. At that public reading, not only men but also women and children are required to be present. This is a surprising but pleasing rule. The larger message of asking everyone to hear the public reading of the entire Torah is that the Torah belongs to everyone, not just to kohanim or men. It is the property of every Jew, and it applies to every Jew. The Book of Nehemiah, Chapter 8, describes one such public reading with explicit reference to the fact that women were in attendance. It goes on to say that tears began streaming down people's faces when they heard what, according to the Torah, they were supposed to be doing but were not doing.

The Mishnah, collection of Jewish law published orally in 200 CE, talks about the number of aliyot to be read on different occasions: on Shabbat morning; on Shabbat at Minhah; on Monday and Thursday mornings. This probably means that Jews were already reading the Torah in public around 2,000 years ago. There are also statements in the Talmud about calling up a woman or a child to read from the Torah on a Sabbath. The assumption seems to have been that Torah readers should be men. But if, on a given Shabbat morning, no men in attendance were capable of reading Torah, a knowledgeable woman could read instead, or even a child (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Megillah, 23a).

Many Conservative shuls adopted the triennial Torah reading system in the 1980s. In this system, there are fewer verses for each reader to prepare. Probably more relevant, this system of Torah-reading significantly shortens the Shabbat morning service while holding on to historical precedent and halakhic legitimacy. The decision could have been to stretch out each parashah over three weeks, reading one third of a parashah each week. It seems that it was done like that in ancient Israel. But that would put Conservative shuls out of sync with the rest of the Jewish world. Instead, we read one third of the given parashah each week and complete the entire Torah in three years. The beauty of adhering to this system is that you can discuss the parashah with any other Jew you chance upon during the week or on Shabbat, whether Orthodox, Conservative, Reform, Renewal etc. Each week thus has a designated parashah for the entire Jewish community. Let me give u a rather unlikely analogy: my three sons, when growing up in an apartment building in Manhattan,

would often wear NY Yankee jackets. That led them to have conversations with a wide range of people, including the doormen of the building where we lived. Like a sports team, a designated weekly parashah functions as a great unifier.

Time to end the suspense: I asked R. Chai which part of Huqat would my grandson read on July 1, 2028, if that turns out to be the date of his bar mitzvah. Her answer: we follow R. Cohen, which means we will read the third third!!! I had to take this long journey to find an answer to what I thought was an easy question my grandson asked me. But this arduous trek gave me new appreciation for the triennial cycle and for the larger issue of why Jews read Torah each week.

So even at the age of 83, a person can learn new things about old practices. And it took a community to help me unearth this new knowledge. Many thanks to all of you.

Shabbat shalom.