

Lesson 16: Melakhim Alef ch 19

Goals:

1. Students will consider what type of experiences engender profound and lasting religious commitment. Can a lasting commitment to God be gained in a single, brief experience? They will consider this question, not only in relation to the narrative, but also in relation to their own lives.
2. Students will consider the character of Eliyahu both in Tanakh and in Jewish folklore, specifically the connections between the character in this narrative and the idea of Eliyahu visiting berit milla and seder pesah.
3. Students will develop skills in writing coherently about themes in Tanakh, especially in regard to complex characters.
4. Students will consider how the question of **ה' הוא האלהים על שני הסעיפים** relates to Jewish life in modern America.
5. Students will recognize the differences between Eliyahu and Elisha
6. Students will recognize the meaning of the comparative *mem* in Hebrew syntax.

Note:

Chapter 19 is a subtle narrative, and some of the points of this narrative may be difficult for less bright students to grasp. But the key point, highlighted in goal 1 above, should be accessed by all students, because of its importance in their own religious lives.

Lesson:

Part 1: Eliyahu at Horeb (verses 1-10)

Begin by asking students what Eliyahu's greatest accomplishment at Mount Carmel was. Use a smartboard to record answers, but group them into two parts:

1. Answers focused on the people's declaration "ה' הוא האלהים"
2. Answers focused on Eliyahu trying to change the leadership of the people: removing the 2

These answers are illustrated in slide 2.

First, focus in on the people who declare

ה' הוא האלהים

Ask students how the people who made this declaration changed their lives. When they woke up the next morning, what did they do? Did they act in a way that recognized God as sovereign? What actions would be required by this recognition? Develop a discussion focused on actions that acknowledge God's sovereignty, including obedience to Him on the one hand, and on the other hand, recognizing that all humans are equally subject to God, and therefore one has an obligation to help others.

Can such changes in action develop from a single declaration?

The answer is complicated, and students should recognize both:

- that such actions can change behavior;
- but that such actions don't necessarily change behavior.

Ask students if single religious experiences have changed their own lives. It is worth integrating here depictions from the experiences of students who have gone on one-year post-high school Israel programs, asking if a single action can change their lives.

Students should recognize that actions create identity (Aristotle/ Maimonides: "the heart follows the action"; Camus: "Man is what he makes himself"), and therefore religious transformations depend on sustained actions rather than on passing feelings.

Try to bring the discussion back to Melakhim by noting that we find no evidence that Israelites actions change, and this may give Eliyahu some cause for concern (as we see later on in the chapter at v. 10). Then note the other type of accomplishment, that related to Ahab.

Read 19:1-2 and ask students who in practice rules the country. Students should recognize that Ahab is weak and Jezebel rules in practice. Illustrate this with a hierarchy chart, or use slide 2.

Slide 2 also illustrates Eliyahu's escape route. The precise location of Mt Horeb is not the main point here, but students should see how far he is going from civilization.

Read verses 3 and the part of 4 before the etnahta. Ask students to figure out what Eliyahu is seeking in his escape. Answers should include:

- safety in Yehuda
- escape from civilization (going to the desert)
- solitude (leaving his servant-boy)

Ask students what overall feeling Eliyahu feels. Students should identify his depression and sadness from these actions, and then move to the second part of v. 4 in which Eliyahu declares his intentions.

Slide 4 illustrates his statement in the second part of v. 4. Students should understand two key points:

- Eliyahu is not committing suicide; he is saying that he has failed and asks God to remove him from this world;
- Eliyahu is comparing himself to his ancestors – students should recognize the comparative *mem* --- and feels that he has not filled his mission in creating change.

Having failed, he feels that it is time for him to leave.

IT is worth at this point engaging students in a discussion of two points:

- a. Did Eliyahu fail? Could he have acted differently and succeeded?

b. If he did, should he be allowed to "resign"?

Students should recognize that Eliyahu had a very difficult task ahead of him, and accusing him of failure is arrogant. Some students might suggest that had he undertaken a more gradual process of education, rather than the single event at Carmel, he might have been able to change people's actions more successfully. This is possible, but certainly Eliyahu feels he has failed.

Nevertheless, God does not allow Eliyahu to say "I failed; I quit." A person must always strive for improvement, while in this world, and Eliyahu is told that he must continue on a journey, not only a physical journey but also a journey of learning.

Then ask students to read on their own vv. 5-7 and answer two questions as they read (questions are illustrated in slide 5):

- a. What does the first visit of the angel teach Eliyahu?
- b. What does the second visit add to the first?

Students should realize that God refuses to allow Eliyahu to quit or end his life (that is the message of the first angel, who provides food. By telling Eliyahu to eat, God denies the request Eliyahu made in v. 4.)

Students should realize that the second visit teaches Eliyahu that he must go on a trip. The teacher should illustrate the meaning of the words: רב ממך הדרך – the way is more than you, i.e. you need to eat to survive it. (Students should recognize the comparative mem.) Ask the students if Eliyahu knows where he is supposed to go, and they should realize that he does not. Ask them to read vv. 8-9 on their own – and then bring in the Radak's comment that Eliyahu essentially wanders in the wilderness and winds up at Har Horev at the cave. Students should remember the incident of Moshe in נקרת הצור in Shemot 34, after the Egel. Like Moshe, Eliyahu has tried to teach Jews about God's sovereignty, and has experienced a setback.

Verse 10 is critical to understanding the whole chapter. Use slide 6 to teach this verse, and ask students to break it down into four accusations against the Jews in this verse (covenant abandonment, altar destruction, prophet killing, trying to kill Eliyahu). Ask students whether after the events at Carmel, we see any sign that things are not quite as bad as Eliyahu describes. Might Eliyahu be exaggerating? For example, students should remember that Ahab's running in front of Eliyahu is indicative of respect. Do the Jews really abandon the covenant?

Ask students: Is it possible that some Jews are trying to do "both"? To worship Baal while also remaining loyal? What is Eliyahu's attitude towards those Jews? Students should recall his demand (עד מתי אתם פוסחים על שני הסעיפים) that Jews choose. But if they refuse to choose and try to do both, have they abandoned the covenant?

This idea of על שני הסעיפים פוסחים has particular resonance for modern American Jews: the attempt to be part of the surrounding culture while also being part of Jewish tradition. In the time of Eliyahu, one element of the surrounding culture was worship of

Baal, and the clash between worship of Baal and loyalty to God is highlighted here. It is important to encourage students to think seriously about what elements of surrounding culture can co-exist with loyalty to God and which elements can't. Slide 7 is intended to help the teacher and students draw a sort of "map" or "values chart" of which elements in the surrounding culture are like Baal worship and cannot co-exist with loyalty to God, and which elements can. Depending on the nature of the class, and the teacher's own religious beliefs, different maps will emerge. I strongly suggest trying to focus the discussion on central core issues, rather than on issues on which there is legitimate halakhic controversy. (There is no point to argue over egalitarian tefilla, it is more critical to convey the serious nature of the prohibition on certain sexual acts.) Given the nature of contemporary American discourse, the discussion will necessarily engage sexual issues. (Think about whether the classroom dynamic will allow serious discussion, and how to create a dynamic that allows for this.)

After this discussion, ask students to write a short thoughtful essay of 1-2 pages on:

1. What key elements of the culture you live in are incompatible with loyalty to God?
2. What process does a person need to go through in order to cease practicing those incompatible elements?

In order to obtain thoughtful work, rather than pat answers, emphasize to students that they need to invest thought in creating an outline before writing.

Part 2: God's Response to Eliyahu at Horeb (verse 11-21)

Best to introduce this part of the lesson after students have written the essay described above, especially the second part.

Using slide 8, ask students to suggest answers to "What experiences get people to cease practicing those incompatible elements?"

Using point form, write down answers with concrete examples of such an experience in smartboard format, and keep them. If students suggest dramatic, "mind-blowing" experiences, ask them whether they think such experiences will create long-term change, but do not at this point engage in long discussions.

Then ask students to read on their own verses 11-13, in a brief havruta. Ask students to identify two points in common for the wind, earthquake, and fire, one of which is in the verse ('לֹא בַאֵשׁ הֵ'ה) and one of which they should figure out on their own. Slide 9 may be useful in focusing students.

Students should figure out that the wind, the earthquake and the fire are all dramatic and "mind-blowing" experiences.

Then pull out the smartboard answers from the question "What experiences get people to cease practicing those incompatible elements?"

Ask students to compare the experiences in which "God is not" (i.e. wind, the earthquake and the fire) with the experiences they listed. Students should recognize the key message of this passage: the dramatic experiences do not have "God in them" because they do not necessarily create long-term change in people.

Ask students which element in v. 11-13 have God in them. Students should recognize that the *קול דממה דקה* has God in it. Ask students to describe an experience of hearing *קול דממה דקה*. Students should realize that this is unlike the wind, the earthquake, or the fire, in that it is not dramatic. It might involve listening to a complex message, hearing words of rebuke, or hearing words of love from someone. The key question is willingness to listen to something non-dramatic. Explain how listening to words creates relationships in a way that seeing drama can't.

Then ask students to look at verse 14. Has Eliyahu changed as a result of his experiences of hearing the *קול דממה דקה*? Students should realize that verse 10 is exactly the same as verse 14, and that Eliyahu has not changed (I am not preparing a slide in order to encourage students to look for this simple point in their textbook.) If Eliyahu has not changed, can he convey to other Jews the importance of *קול דממה דקה*?

Students should be told that although Eliyahu continues to act as a prophet for the rest of Melakhim Alef, from this point on, we know that Eliyahu will be replaced as a prophet. Devote several minutes to discussing how great a man Eliyahu was, and why God chooses to replace him. The answer from these verses seems to be that Eliyahu does not, for whatever reason, change his answer as a result of *קול דממה דקה*. Perhaps Eliyahu places too much emphasis on dramatic events like the fire, earthquake, and wind, which are as dramatic as the show-down at Mount Carmel but don't ultimately create change in people.

Ask students, based on verses 15-18, to fill in the chart in slide 10. Students do not need, at this point, to deal with Hazael or Yehu – we will return to them in Melakhim Bet. But students do need to realize that Elisha will replace Eliyahu as prophet, and that he is here tasked with removing Baal worship from Israel. Ask students to think back on why it's important to remove Baal worship – students should know the key phrase "it's incompatible with loyalty to God" or *פוסחים על שני הסעיפים*.

Tell students that at this point, we get a short three verse story from which we can extract the difference between Eliyahu and Elisha. Ask students to read verses 19-21 in havruta and tell us one thing they learn about Elisha as a person. (Slide 11 provides vocabulary help here.) Students should realize that Elisha cares about relationships with people --- here his parents. Such relationships recur repeatedly in the Elisha stories, but rarely in the Eliyahu stories. Ask students if they can ever recall Eliyahu listening to someone, and thereby relating to someone.

Elisha's ability to care about relationships seems to be connected to the implied statement that God is in *קול דממה דקה*, and that by means of listening to this "voice" it is possible to encourage people to change themselves. Devote some discussion to "why do you need to listen to someone in order to get them to change how they behave."