

Lesson 3: Melakhim Bet Chapter 4

Goals:

1. Students will develop further their skills in reading Biblical narrative, focusing on fluency in rapid reading and on identifying and understanding the 2nd person feminine form.
2. Students will develop their skills in comparing Biblical narratives and understanding aspects of characterization techniques used in the Bible.
3. Students will consider how narratives provide evidence for character-development.
4. Students will consider the different characters of Elisha and Eliyahu and reflect on the responsibility of the prophet to empathize with the people.

Note:

This chapter is the haftarah for וירא, and this is one reason to give preference to this passage over others in the book.

Lesson, part 1: Introduction

Introduce the lesson by presenting the following story (available on <http://www.zusha.org.il/story/%D7%90%D7%94%D7%91%D7%AA-%D7%90%D7%9E%D7%AA/>) and in many other formats:

רבי משה לייב מססוב סיפר כי למד כיצד יש לאהוב את עם ישראל מכפרי שיכור אחד.
פעם אחת היה הרבי בחברתם של כמה כפריים ששתו והיטיבו לבם ביין.
אמר אחד מהם לחברו: "תגיד, אתה אוהב אותי?"
ענה לו חברו: "בטח! אני אוהב אותך מאוד!"
" –אם באמת אתה אוהב אותי תגיד מה חסר לי ומה כואב לי עכשיו!" – אמר הראשון. אך הכפרי השני שתק, שכן לא ידע מה להשיב.
"אז למדתי מה זו אהבת אמת", אמר הרבי מססוב.

Encourage students to define "אהבת אמת" based on this story. (I suggest avoiding the English "true love" which has a romantic component, whereas this story does not, and the lesson also does not deal with romantic love.) Students should understand that care for others requires understanding their needs.

Then, ask students how one person who cares about another might determine the other person's needs.

Students will offer various suggestions, but focus on the answer "ask them."

Then, ask students to read the first two verses of Chapter 4 in Melakhim Bet and identify where Elisha seeks to understand the woman's needs. Students may suggest that after verse 1, Elisha understands the woman's needs (which is probably true) but others may point out the words *לך אעשה* in verse 2. And indeed, the words indicate a concern for the other's

needs, and an attempt to determine these. (It is true that the words in v. 2 could be read as an attempt by Elisha to determine what resources the woman has. Nevertheless, the use of similar words further in the chapter, and the actions of Elisha, both indicate his concern for determining the woman's needs.)

Then, tell the students that the chapter contains two stories, one vv 1-7 and one in vv. 8-37, and ask students to find in the second story the verse in which Elisha asks "what do you need"? Show students the chart in slide 3, in which the actions in both stories are schematized. Students should identify the words **לך מה לעשות** in verse 13. Using the chart, emphasize that the link between the woman's problem in each story and Elisha's actions is the question Elisha asks.

Students should come away from this introduction with the sense that "To solve a person's problem, Elisha asks to understand what the person wants." Remind students that Eliyahu never asked this sort of question of anyone, and on the contrary, Ovadia (in Melakhim Alef 18:12) described Eliyahu as a sort of otherworldly character, carried away by the spirit of God. Elisha here, seems different.

Lesson, part 2, Verses 1-7

Begin by teaching verse 1, using slide 4 for vocabulary, but asking students to divide up the verse on their own (using **טעמי המקרא** especially the *zakef katon*), and translate it. More advanced students should be told to see Rashi on verse 1 and find the justification for Rashi by reading again through Melakhim Alef ch 18 verses 1-14.

All students should be able to restate the woman's problem; more capable students should be able to explain Rashi's identification of the woman based on the words **"ירא את ה'".**

Ask students at this point: If Elisha is God's emissary, it follows that he can tell the woman that God will solve the problem by a miracle (e.g. filling her house with gold), without the woman's actions. As you read the story, think about why the solution Elisha uses is preferable to the woman.

Read verse 2, and ask students to identify the one thing the woman has in her house (slide 5). Ask students to think (but not explain) about why this item becomes the vehicle for the miracle.

Then, using slide 6, ask students to identify the instructions Elisha gives the woman (in verses 3-4), the actions (in verses 5-6) remembering to divide using **טעמי המקרא**. Students should write (in their notebooks, paper or digital) short summaries of the instructions (vv. 3-4) and the actions (vv. 5-6). More advanced students should be told to read and try to explain Targum Yonatan on verse 1, in which he explains how the woman got into this mess, and how that story more fully explains why Elisha does not do a direct miracle here. If they have completed that task, ask them to read Melakhim Alef 17:17-24 and be ready to summarize the story to the class.

Then, ask students to explain what the instructions and actions were, and then read together verse 7, and explain the word **נשיך** (your debt), referring back to **נושה**. Ask students to explain why Elisha emphasized that the woman needed to sell oil to pay off her debt. Why was it important that she do the selling? Various answers are possible, but all should relate to the woman's own participation in raising funds for herself, and the importance of feeling that by doing actions on her own, she: a) was redeeming herself and being a good mother to

her children; or b) was giving value to the hard-earned money and would be careful not to get into debt again; or c) was empowering herself (a popular phrase of unclear meaning).

Emphasize to students that Elisha clearly feels it important that this woman raise the money needed. In this way, Elisha is concerned about what the woman needs – not only money, but dignity and a sense that what she is doing is important. Return to Elisha's question in verse 1 by using slide 7 – Elisha asks "מה אעשה לך" -why is the woman's answer "I have nothing," so important? The woman feels that she has nothing, and Elisha convinces her that she has something.

Students will probably recognize the similarity of this story to the Hanuka story of the oil; students should recognize that this story precedes the Hanuka one and is the prototype for it. The teacher can wax poetic about possible thematic connections.

Lesson, Part 3: verses 8-37

Before beginning this part of the narrative, tell students that this part of the story involves Elisha reviving a child. Ask students who did this earlier? Students should remember the story of Eliyahu in Melakhim Alef 17:17-24. Ask students who remember or re-read that story to summarize it, noting that when Eliyahu revives the child, there is almost no communication between Eliyahu and the woman.

In contrast, the story of Elisha reviving a child is one focused with Elisha's concern for the woman's needs and empathy for her.

Ask students to read verses 8-10, and explain who cares for whom in these verses?

Students should realize that these verses describe the Shunamite woman and her husband caring for Elisha.

Then, tell students that verses 11-17 contain "scene one" of the story. Ask students, to read these verses, and find in them the way that Elisha cares for the Shunamite in return (Vocabulary is in slide 8).

Brighter students should be asked to identify what worries the Shunamite in verse 16, and to see Rashi there, in which Rashi bases reads this verse as foreshadowing verses 18-37 in the story.

After having read and discussed verses 8-17, students should be able to summarize:

1. How the Shunamite and her husband care for Elisha
2. How Elisha asks her "What can I do for you?" and how his promise that she will have a child only comes after he finds out what her needs are
3. How the Shunamite woman responds to Elisha's promise: אל תכזב בשפחתך. Students should understand the idea of כזב, something that "deceives" or "is not reliable." The woman asks for a reliable son.

Verse 18 starts "scene 2" in the Shunamite story. (Like scene 1, in verses 11, this scene starts with the words ויהי היום.)

Then, assign parts of the narrator, the Shumanite woman, her husband, the boy and a servant to five students, and act out verses 18-24 inclusive. After acting these out, recall the Shunamite woman's response to Elisha's promise in verse 16, and explain that this is indeed "a show of lack of reliability." What will Elisha do?

Then, using the worksheet, ask students to read and analyze verses 25-30. In discussion, after the students have done the worksheet explain to students:

Elisha cares for the woman's feelings, while Gehazi is more removed and concerned about Elisha's honour. Elisha does not seem to care at all for his own honour.

For this reason, the woman desperately wants to solve the problem through Elisha, not through Gehazi.

Then, ask students to read verse 31, and note that Gehazi does not solve the problem.

Then, ask students to read verse 32 – does Elisha solve the problem? Who solves the problem? Emphasize that the tefila in verse 32 is what solves the problem, but that his tefila is channeled through Elisha, who began by asking *מה אעשה לך*, and who cares for what the woman needs all the way through the narrative.

Lesson: Conclusion

In summary, ask students to write a short essay explaining how Elisha's behavior in reviving the woman's son differs from that of Gehazi in this chapter, and from that of Eliyahu in Melakhim Alef 17. Students should recognize Elisha's care for the woman's needs.

Using that essay, go back to the story of R. Moshe Leib, and ask students how the behavior of Elisha here, although it is not romantic, encapsulates one aspect of true love, that translates romantic love into something lasting and not based solely on passion.