Teaching Empathy to Our Leaders: Elisha and the *Isha HaShunamit*:



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8And it was that day that Elisha went as far as Shunem, and there was a prominent woman who prevailed upon him to eat a meal; and it was, whenever he would pass, he would stop there to eat a meal. **9**And she said to her husband, "Behold now I know that he is a holy man of God, who passes by us regularly. 10Now let us make a small walled upper chamber, and place there for him a bed, a table, a chair, and a lamp; and it will be that when he comes to us, he will turn into there. 11 And it was one day that he went there, that he turned into the upper chamber and lay down there. 12And he said to Gehazi his servant, "Call this Shunemitess;" and he called her, and she stood before him.

13 And he said to him, "Please say to her, 'Behold you have busied yourself on our account with all this trouble. What is there to do for you? Can we speak on your behalf to the king or to the general of the army?' " And she said, "I dwell in the midst of my people."

14 And he said, "Now what can we do for her?" And Gehazi said, "Indeed, she has no son, and her husband is old."

15 And he said, "Summon her," and he summoned her, and she stood at the doorway. 16 And he said, "At this time next year, when you will be alive like now, you will be embracing a son." And she said, "No, my lord, O man of God, do not fail your maidservant." 17And the woman conceived and bore a son, at this time a year later, which Elisha had spoken to her. 18 And the child grew up; and it was one day that he went out to his father, to the reapers. 19 And he said to his father, "My head! My head!" And he said to the servant, "Carry him to his mother." 20 And he carried him and brought him to his mother, and he sat on her knees until noon, and he died. 21 And she went up and laid him on the bed of the man of God, and she closed about him and left. 22 And she called her husband and said, "Please send me one of the servants and one of the she-asses; and I will run up to the man of God and return." 23And he said, "Why are you going to him today; it is neither the New Moon nor the Sabbath." And she said, "It's all right."

ת וְיְהִי הַיּוֹם וַיִּעֲבֹר אֱלִישָׁע אֶל שׁוּגֵם וְשָׁם אִשָּׁה גְּדוֹלָה וַתַּחֲזֶק בּוֹ לֶאֱכָל לָחֶם וַיְהִי מִדִּי עָבְרוֹ יָסֻר שָׁמָּה לֶאֱכָל לָחֶם: ט ותּאמֶר אֶל אִישָׁהּ הִנָּה נָא יַדַעְתִּי כִּי אִישׁ אֱלֹקִים קְדוֹשׁ הוּא עבֵר עָלֵינוּ תְּמִיד: י נַעֲשֶׂה נָא עֲלַיַּת קִיר קְטַנָּה וְנָשִים לוֹ שָׁם מִטָּה וְשֻׁלְחָן וְכִּסֵּא וּמְנוֹרָה וְהָיָה בְּבֹאוֹ

יא וְיִהִי הַיּוֹם וַיִּבֹא שָׁמָּה וַיִּסַר אֶל הָעֲלָיָה וַיִּשְׁבֵּב שַׁמַה:

יב ויאמר אֶל גִּיחֲזִי נַעֲרוֹ קְרָא לֵשׁוּנַמִּית הַזֹּאת וַיִּקְרָא לָה וַתַּעֲמֹד לְפָנָיו: יג ויאמר לוֹ אֱמָר נָא אֵלֶיהָ הִנָּה חָרַדְּתְּ | אֵלֵינוּ אֶת כָּל הַחֲרָדָה הַזֹּאת מֶה לַעֲשׁוֹת לֶךְ הְיִשׁ לְדַבֶּר לָךְ אֶל הַמֶּלֶךְ אוֹ אֶל שַׁר הַצְּבָא וַתּאמֶר בְּתוֹךְ עַמִּי אָנִכִי ישָׁבֶת: יד ויאמֶר וּמֶה לַעֲשׁוֹת לָה וַיֹּאמֶר גִּיחֲזִי אֲבָל בֵּן אֵין לָה וְאִישָׁה זָקַן: טוּ וִיּאמֶר קְרָא לָה וַיִּקְרָא לָה וַתַּעֲמֹד בַּפַּתַח:

טז ויאמֶר לַמּוֹעֵד הַזֶּה בָּעֵת חַיָּה אַתְּ (כתיב אַתְּי) חבֶקֶת בֵּן וַתּאמֶר אַל אֲדנִי אִישׁ הָאֱלֹקִים אַל תְּכַזָּב בְּשִׁפְחָתֶךָ: יז ותַּהַר הָאִשָּׁה וַתֵּלֶד בֵּן לַמּוֹעֵד הַזֶּה בָּעֵת חַיָּה אֲשֶׁר דָבֶּר אֵלֶיהָ אֱלִישָּׁע: יח וַיִּצְא אֶל אָבִיוּ אֶל הַקּצְרִים:

יט ויאמֶר אֶל אָבִיו רֹאשִׁי | רֹאשִׁי וַייֹּאמֶר אֶל הַנַּעַר שָׂאֵהוּ אֶל אִמוֹ: בּ משוֹעבר מבטבר על אמל:

ב וַיּשָּׁאֵהוּ וַיְבִיאֵהוּ אֶל אִמּוֹ וַיִּשֶּׁב עַל בִּרְכֵּיהָ עַד הַצָּהְרֵים וַיָּמת:

כאַוַתַּעַל וַתַּשְׁכָּבֶהוּ עַל מִשַּת אִישׁ הָאֱלֹקִים וַתִּסְגֹּר בַּעֲדוֹ וַתֵּצֵא:

ָּהָשֶּׁלִּים וַוּנְיְאָה בַּעַרוּןוּנְצָּא. כבּ וַתִּקְרָא אֶל אִישָּׁהּ וַתּאמֶרְ שִׁלְּחָה נָא לִי אֶחָד מִן הַנְּעָרִים וְאַחַת הָאֲתנוֹת וְאָרוּצָה עַד אִישׁ הָאֱלֹקִים וְאָשׁוּבָה: כג וַיֹּאמֶר מַדּוּעַ אַתְּ (כתיב אַתְּי) הֹלֶכֶת (כתיב הֹלֶכֶתי) אֵלָיו הַיּוֹם לֹא חֹדֶשׁ וְלֹא שַׁבָּת וַתֹּאמֶר שָׁלוֹם:

24 And she saddled the she-ass, and she said to her servant, "Drive and go forward. Don't keep back from riding because of me unless I tell you." 25 And she went and came to the man of God, to Mt. Carmel; and it was when the man of God saw her from afar, that he said to Gehazi his servant, "Here is that Shunemmitess. 26"Now please run toward her, and say to her, 'Are you well? Is your husband well? Is the child well?' " And she said, "We are well." 27 And she came to the man of God to the mountain, and she took hold of his feet; and Gehazi approached to push her away. Now the man of God said, "Let her be, for her soul is bitter to her, and the Lord hid it from me and did not tell me." 28And she said, "Did I ask for a son from my lord? Did I not say, 'Do not mislead me?'" 29And he said to Gehazi, "Gird your loins and take my staff in your hand and go. If you meet anyone, do not greet him, and if anyone greets you, do not answer him: and you shall place my staff on the lad's face." 30 And the lad's mother said, "As the Lord lives and by your life, I will not leave you." And he rose and went after her. 31And Gehazi went ahead of them, and he placed the staff on the lad's face, and there was no sound nor any attention; and he returned toward him and told him saying, "The lad has not awakened." 32And Elisha came into the house, and behold the lad was dead, laid out on his bed. 33 And he came and closed the door about both of them; and he prayed to the Lord. 34 And he went up and lay on the child, and placed his mouth on his mouth and his eyes on his eyes and his palms on his palms, and he prostrated himself upon him: and the child's flesh became warm. 35And he returned and walked in the house once here and once there, and he went up and prostrated himself upon him: and the lad sneezed up to seven times, and the lad opened his eyes. 36 And he summoned Gehazi and said, "Call this Shunemmitess." And he called her, and she came to him, and he said, "Pick up your son." 37 And she came and fell at his feet and bowed to the ground; and she picked up her son and departed.

כד ותַחַבש הַאַתון ותאמר אַל נערה נהג ַולֶךְ אַל תַעַצַר לִי לְרַכָּב כִּי אם אמרתי לך: **כה**וַתֶּלֶרְוַתָּבא אֵל איש האלקים אל הר הַבַּרִמֶל וַיִהִי כִּרְאוֹת אִישׁ הָאֱלֹקִים אֹתָהּ מנגד ויאמר אל גיחזי נערו הנה הַשׁוּנַמִּית הַלַּז:

בו עַתָּה רוּץ נָא לִקְרָאתָה וֵאֱמַר לַה הַשַּׁלוֹם לָּךָ הַשָּׁלוֹם לְאִישֵׁךְ הַשָּׁלוֹם לַיַּלֵּד ותאמר שלום:

כזוַתָּבא אֵל אִישׁ הַאֵלקים אֵל הַהַר ותַחַזַק בָּרַגְלַיו וַיִּגַשׁ גִּיחַזִי לַהַדְפַה וַיִּאמַר אָישׁ הַאֱלֹקִים הַרְפָּה לַהּ כִּי נַפַּשׁהּ מרה לַה וַה' הֶעלִים ממני ולא הגיד לי: **כח**ותאמר השאלתי בן מאת אדני הלא

אָמַרתִי לא תַשְלֵה אֹתִי:

כטוַיאמר לְגֵיחָזִי חַגֹר מָתְנֵיךָ וִקַּח מִשְעַנִתִּי בָיַדְרָ וָלֶךְ כִּי תִמְצֵא אִישׁ לא תָבָרְכֵנוּ וִכִי יָבָרֶכָךָ אִישׁ לֹא תַעַנְנוּ וְשַּׁמִתַּ משענתי על פני הַנָּעַר:

לותאמר אם הַנַעַר חַי ה' וחֵי נַפְשָׁךָ אָם לַוַתּאמר אַעַזבֶּר וַיִּקָם וַיַּלֶּךְ אַחַרֵיהַ:

לא וגחזי עבר לפניהם וישם את הַמִּשְעֵנָת עַל פָּנֵי הַנַּעַר וְאֵין קוֹל וְאֵין קשב וַישַב לִקרַאתוֹ וַיגַד לוֹ לֵאמר לא הַקִּיץ הַנַּעַר:

לבַנַיַבֹא אֱלִישָּע הַבָּיתָה וְהִנֵּה הַנַּעַר מֵת משכב על מטתו:

לג וַיִּבא וַיִּסגר הַדֵּלֶת בעד שניהם ויתפלל :'אל ה

לד וַיַּעַל וַיִּשְׁכַּב עַל הַיַּלֶד וַיַּשֶׂם פִּיו עַל פִּיו ָועֵינַיו עַל עֵינַיו וַכַפַּיו עַל כַּפָּיו (כתיב כַּפַּו ויגהַר עַלַיו וַיָּחָם בָּשַׁר הַיַּלֵד:

לה וַישַׁב וַיַּלֶךְ בַּבַּית אַחַת הַנַּה וַאחת הַנָּה וַיִּעַל וַיִּגְהַר עָלָיו וַיִּזוֹרֶר הַנַּעַר עַד שָׁבַע פִּעָמִים וַיִּפְקַח הַנַּעַר אֵת עֵינַיו: לוֹ וַיִּקְרָא אֶל גֵּיחֲזִי וַיֹּאמֵר קְרָא אֵל **לו**ֹ וַיִּקרָא אֶל הַשְׁנַמִּית הַזֹּאת וַיִּקְרָאֵהָ וַתַּבֹא אֱלַיו ויאמר שאי בנך:

לזותָבא וַתִּפּל עַל רַגלָיו וַתִּשְׁתַחוּ אָרצָה ותשא את בנה ותצא:

I. The Shunamite Woman: Another עקרה story?

1. Isha Shunamit - אשה שונמית	Sarah
grew up" (<i>pasuk</i> 18), "ואשה זקן", "husband is old" (<i>pasuk</i> 14), "ותעמוד"	Similar words: "ויגדל הילד", "the child' grew up" (<i>Breishit</i> 21:8), "וְאַבְרָהָם וְשָׂרָה", "And Avraham and Sarah were elderly" (<i>Breishit</i> 18:11), "וְשִׂרָה", "And Sarah was listening from the doorway of the tent" (<i>Breishit</i> 18:10)
Hachnasat Orchim (creates room/home for Elisha)	Hachnasat Orchim (Avraham invites in 3 guests)
Promise of a son:	Promise of a son:
למועד הזה כעת חיה את חבקת בן"	"לַמּוֹעֵד אָשׁוּב אֵלֶיךָ כָּעֵת חַיָּה וּלְשָׂרָה בֵן"
"At this season next year you will be embracing a son" (pasuk 16)	"At this season when I return to you, Sarah will be expecting a son" (<i>Breishit</i> 18:14)
Expresses doubt:	Expresses doubt:
ותאמר אל אדוני איש האלוקים <u>אל תכזב" בשפחתך</u> "	1
"She replied: Please, my lord, man of G-d, do not delude your maidservant". (pasuk 16)	"And Sarah laughed to herself saying, after I have become worn out, will I become smooth? And my husband is old" (Breishit 18:12)
No celebration/thanking of G-d	Big feast (Breishit 21:8). No explicit thanking of G-d, but implied, Brit Milah
Never told that she is an עקרה/cannot have children explicitely	We know that she is an עקרה/cannot have children
Child is in dangerous situation - seems to die and then recovers	Child put in dangerous situation - Akeidat Yitzhak - then is saved

2. Hannah vs Isha Shunamit:

Shmuel Alef, 1:	<u>שמואל א:א</u>
(26) She said: "Please my Lord, as you live, my Lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you and prayed to the Lord. (27) It was this boy I prayed for and the Lord has granted me what I asked of Him (28) I, in turn, hereby lend him to the Lord. For as long as he lives he is lent to the Lord", and they bowed before the Lord.	ַרוֹ) וַתּאמֶר בִּי אֲדֹנִי חֵי נַפְשְׁךָ אֲדֹנִי אֲנִי הָאשָׁה הַנִּצֶבֶת עִמְּכָה בָּזֶה לְהִתְפַּלֵּל אֶל-יְקֹוְק: (כז) אֶל-הַנַּעַר הַזֶּה הִתְפַּלָּלְתִּי וַיִּתֵּן יְקֹוְק לִי אֶת-שְׁאֵלָתִי אֲשֶׁר שָׁאַלְתִּי מֵעִמּוֹ: (כח) וְגם אָנִכִי השְׁאַלְתֵּהוּ לִיקוֹק בַּל-הַיִּמִים אָשָׁר הַיִּה הוּא שֵׁאוּל לִיקוֹק

II. A Lesson for Elisha - Part #1: The Limits of a Navi

3. Elisha and Isha Shunamit	Sarah and the Angels
Melakhim Bet: 4:17:	Breishit 21:2
"ותהר האשה ותלד בן למועד הזה כעת חיה <u>אשר דבר אליה אלישע</u> "	(ב) וַתַּהַר וַתֵּלֶד שָׂרָה לְאַבְרָהָם בֵּן לִזְקָנָיו <u>למוֹעד אִשִּׁר–דּבָּר אֹתוֹ אֱלֹהִים:</u>
"The woman conceived and bore a son at the same season the following year, as Elisha had assured her".	"And Sarah conceived and gave birth to a son to Avraham in his old age, at the same season as G-d had assured him"

4. Gemara Ta'anit 2a

Rabbi Yochanan said: There are three keys in the hand of the Holy One, blessed be He, that were not entrusted to the hand of ואלו הן: <u>מפתח של גשמים, מפתח של חיה,</u> an agent, and these are they: The key of rain, the key of a woman giving birth, and the key of the resurrection of the dead.

.4 גמרא תענית ב

אמר רבי יוחנן: שלשה מפתחות בידו של הקדוש ברוך הוא שלא נמסרו ביד שליח, <u>ומפתח של תחיית המתים.</u>

5. Elisha and Isha Shunamit	Neviei Ba'al/False Prophets at Har Carmel
Melakhim Bet: 4:	Melakhim Alef: 18:
לא) וְגַחֲזִי עָבַר לִפְנֵיהֶם וַיָּשֶׂם (לא)	
אֶת–הַמִּשְׁעֶנֶת עַל–פְּנֵי הַנַּעַר וְאֵין קּוֹל ַ	ַלַעַלוֹת הַמִּנְחָה וְאֵיוִ–קּוֹל וְאֵיוִ–עֹנֶה וְאֵיו
ואין קשב	ַ קשָב:
(31) Gehazi went ahead and placed the	(29) When noon passed, they kept trying
staff on the boy's face, but there was no	to prophecize until the time of the offer-
sound or response.	ings, but there was no sound , and none
	who responded or heeded.

6.

Elisha's Actions:

- 1. Send Gehazi to put staff משענת on child. Doesn't work.
- 2. Goes to house in person. Closes door. Prays.

(לג) וַיִּבא וִיסגר הדלת בעד שניהם ויתפלל אל-יקוק:

"He went in, closed the door behind the two of them and prayed to the Lord".

3. Performs medical procedure - which works.

7. Mehilta, Mesekhta de-Amalek 1 (Translation: Virtual Bet Midrash)

'Where are you going?' they asked Gehazi. 'I am going to revive the dead,' he replied. 'How can you revive the dead,' they retorted, 'such power is only in the hands of G-d who is the Giver and Taker of life!' Gehazi answered: 'My master, too, has the power to give life and to take it away.'

7. מחילתא, מסכתא דעמלק, א
אָמְרוּ לוֹ: "לְהֵיכָן אַתָּה הוֹלֵךְ גֵחֲזי?" אָמַר לָהֶם: "לְהֵיכָן אַתָּה הוֹלֵךְ גֵחֲזי?" אָמָר לָהֵם: "לְהַחֲיוֹת מֵת?" וְהַלֹא הַקּלדֶשׁ בָּרוּךְ הוּא מַמִית וּמְחֵיֶה, שֶׁנֶאֱמֵר (שמ"א ב ו): "ה' מֵמִית וּמְחַיֶּה, שֻׁנֶאֱמֵר (שמ"א ב ו): "ה' מֵמִית וּמְחַיֶּה."
וּמְחַיֶּה". אָמַר לָהָם: "אף רבּי ממִית וּמַחִיה."

8. Melakhim Bet, 5:

- (9) And Naaman came with his horses and with his chariots, and he stood at the doorway of Elisha's house.
- (10) And Elisha dispatched a messenger to him, saying, "Go and immerse yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored to you, and you will become clean." (11) Now Naaman became incensed, and he
- (11) Now Naaman became incensed, and he went away, and he said, "Here I thought that he would come out to see me, and he would stand and call in the name of YHVH his God, and he would raise his hand toward the spot and cure the mezora."...
- (14)And he went down and immersed himself in the Jordan seven times according to the word of the man of God: and his flesh was restored like the flesh of a young lad, and he became clean. (15) And he returned to the man of God, he and his entire camp; and he came and stood before him: and he said, "Behold, now I know that there is no God in all the earth except in Israel. And now, accept a gift from your servant."

<u>8. מלכים ב, פרק ה:</u>

- (ט) וַיָּבֹא וַעֲמָן בסוסו בְּסוּסִיו וּבְרָכְבּוֹ וַיְּעֲמֹד פֶּתַח–הַבַּיִת לֶאֶלִישָׁע: (י) וַיִּשְׁלַח אֵלָיו אֱלִישָׁע מַלְאָךָ לֵאמֹר הָלוֹךְ וְרָחַצְתְּ שֶׁבַע–פְּּעָמִים בַּיִּרְדֵו וָיָשֹׁב בְּשָּׂרָךָ לְךָ וּיְהָרָ:
 - (יא) וִיּקִצף נִעְמָן ויִּלֹדְ וִיּאמֶר הּנָּה אָמֵרְתִּי אַלִי יִצא יָצוֹא וְעָמִד וְקָרָא בְּשִׁם-יִקּוְק אֵלֹהִיו וְהַנִיף יְדוֹ אָל-הַמֶּקוֹם וְאָסף הַמִּצֵרָע: ...

(יד) וַיֶּלֶד וַיִּטְבּל בַּיּרְדֵּן שֶׁבַע פְּעָמִים כִּדְבַר אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים וַיִּשְׁב בְּשָּׁרוֹ כִּבְשַׂר נַעַר קטן וַיִּטְהָר: (טו) וַיָּשָׁב אֶל–אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים הוּא וְכָל–מַחֲנִהוּ וַיִּבֹא וַיִּעֲמֹד לְפָנָיו **וַיִּאמִר הִנָּה–נְא יִדעִתִּי כִּי אִין אֵלהִים בְּכָל–הָאָרָץ כִּי אִם–בְּישִׂרְאל** וְעַתָּה קח–נָא בְרָכָה מֵאֵת עַבְדֶּךָ:

III. A Lesson for Elisha - Part #2: Empathy

Further Reading:

- "He is a Holy Man of G-d", R' Mosheh Lichtenstein, http://etzion.org.il/vbm/english/archive/haftara/04haftara.htm
- "Sipur Ha-Shunamit", R' Mordechai Sabato, http://etzion.org.il/vbm/english/alei/7-4sabato.rtf
- "Elisha and the Shunammite Woman", R' Alex Israel, http://etzion.org.il/en/shiur-06-chapter-4-part-2-elisha-and-shunammite-woman
- "The Double Embrace", R' Elhanan Samet, Megadim 13.