

Lesson Plan: Isaiah Chapter 6, Part 1

Goals:

- Students will be able to use Yeshaya Perek Vav, verses 1-6, as an introduction to the themes of ישעיה:
 - God as Transcendent, Universal Monarch
 - Difference Between God and Human Kings
 - God as Author of all Events
- To Understand the Background of פסוקי קדושה בתפילה and reflect upon their import.
- To Develop Skills in Reading רד"ק, and in Understanding his Handling of Theologically-Difficult Verses

Introduction: Frontal Teaching, Using PowerPoint

The introduction should highlight the fact that this chapter contains a Vision of God. (Advanced classes can learn the term “Theophany.”)

- Trigger Question: What events in Tanakh describe a Prophet “seeing God.” Students may suggest מעמד הר סיני or the vision of Moshe in the cave after מעמד הר סיני -- and teacher can point out that the chapter we are about to learn also describes a prophet seeing God and is therefore the Haftara for the Parasha that contains מעמד הר סיני. (If students suggest events such as Yaakov and the angel, they can be reminded of the difference between seeing God and seeing an angel.)

The teacher then discusses the Question “How can a person see God?” which is developed in powerpoint slides 2-3. The teacher presents Radak, who is based on גמ' יבמות מט ע"ב:

- His Answer: מאירה שאינה מאירה (lit., a blurry mirror)
- Explanation: Vision requires processing in the mind. The vision and experience are meant to communicate information about God. The visual image is not clear, one has to think about its meaning.

The teacher uses this Radak as a segue into a key point: by describing a Vision, in which the Prophet sees God, the Navi is actually trying to get us to think about “Who is God?” “What are His most important characteristics?” These questions are raised in verses 1-4, in the next segment of the lesson.

- I advise teachers not to raise the debate in the Abarbanel and in other מפרשים about whether this is the first chapter in Isaiah, chronologically, since students lack background to appreciate this.

Activity 1: Students Read Verses 1-4, Use Worksheet 1

- Students should identify the “sensory overload” of the first four verses, including the prophet’s seeing the throne scene (vv. 1-2) and the smoke (v. 4), hearing the voices (v. 3) and sensing the trembling of the lintel (v. 4). All of these create a sense of awe and terror (question 1)
- Students should understand that the seraphim’s covering of their faces and bodies expresses the embarrassment they feel in the Presence of God and the distance between them and God (question 2).
- Students should identify the mixing of heavenly and earthly locations in this scene (question 3).
- Students should begin to reflect on the meaning of “קדוש,” and connect its meaning to the scene in vv. 1-4.
- Advanced students should note the mixing of tenses in these verses (q. 5)

Frontal Teaching on Kedusha, Using PowerPoint

After students have completed questions 1-3 on the worksheet, the teacher should review the sheet and highlight two key points:

- A. All that the prophet sees, hears, and senses highlights the power of God and the distance between God and angels. Even the seraphim, who seem to be angels, hide their faces and bodies and express how the world is full of God’s Importance. (The teacher can connect the word kavod to the verb kabbed, which the students certainly know from Aseret ha-Dibberot.)
- B. The vision of God’s power is not “just” in heaven or “just” on earth. It’s in both. (This is discussed in question 3 and in powerpoint slide 4.)

Teacher should then have students complete questions 4-6 on the worksheet. Rather than reviewing these questions, teacher should teach the Radak, highlighting the idea of God as above all of the locations and worlds seen in the vision. Focus on the word נעלה as explaining God. The שרפים are obviously “out of this world” and nevertheless their attitude to God is one of fear and trepidation: (Review בשתים יכסה פניו ובשתים יכסה רגליו, and on their declaration of קדושה.) (Radak is in powerpoint slide 5)

- Ask students to visualize a throne room, and to describe what surrounds the throne – they should come up with the idea that these are people who assist the king. (If they have trouble, see powerpoint slide 6- <http://sen.parl.gc.ca/jday/Photos/SenateChamber.jpg> for an example. The large throne is for the king/queen, the one at the right is for his/her consort, and the one in front is for the Speaker of the Senate, who is his/her subject. Around the thrones are seats for the pages and other assistants. At the table in the center sit the recorders and officers.) – But in the throne room in Yeshaya’s vision, the שרפים do not assist God in any way – they withdraw from Him and are in awe of him, as we see from their covering of faces and legs, and they declare his “separateness” (קדושה) to each other.
- Move to issue of time – at what point in time is this vision happening? Highlight the mixture of tenses in vv. 1-4, and note how this leads to the Targum קדיש לעלם

ולעלמי עלמיה – God is “beyond the 4th dimension” – beyond time. (powerpoint slide 7)

- Ask – How is the idea of “God beyond time” related to קדושה? (קדושה = beyond all worlds, time is a function of the world, discuss this briefly as related to theory of relativity)
- Ask – How would you react in this throne room? (Probable answers: Terror, or “Hey, G(g?)od, what’s up?”)
- Use these to highlight Yeshaya’s reaction in v. 5, and his emphasizing distance from God. Even though Yeshaya is a נביא and on a high level, nevertheless, there is a huge distance between him and God. Whatever possible טומאה inheres in Yeshaya cannot possibly reach God, and so Yeshaya sees God as “out of his league.” Yeshaya is so “out of God’s league,” that he can’t even speak God’s praise (Ibn Ezra).
- Use this to teach the Kuzari (4:3), emphasizing the line “מטוהר משידבק בו שמץ” (powerpoint slide 8)
- Teach פסוק ו' – Does the שרף really solve the problem of Yeshaya’s טומאה separating him from God? Teach the Midrash in Rashi to explain what the שרף does – punishes Yeshaya for saying דילטוריא about the Jews (עם טמא שפתים). (powerpoint slide 9) Emphasize that this is a midrash, but emphasize the moral lesson the midrash is teaching: people cannot attain קדושה of God and מלאכים, but they can attain a certain level of טהרה by showing concern for each other, and seeing the best in each other (תפילת ר' אלימלך מליזנסק) in powerpoint slide 10). Therefore, we join together in saying קדושה in Tefilla --- we can’t act like מלאכים unless we are willing to join with others, and see the best in others, even if we are frustrated with other people.