

Lesson Plan, Isaiah Chapter 6, Part 2

Goals: Integration of Prophecy, History, and Challenges Teens Face

1. Students will understand how historical information about the period of the prophet highlights the message of the prophecy.
2. Students will understand that the fundamental theological questions about Divine control remain relevant despite changed historical circumstances.
3. Students will reflect about the meaning of God's control of the world in their own lives.
4. More specifically, students will recognize that the Prophet is conveying a message relevant to their own lives: "Sensory overload" can result in overriding and ignoring ones moral compass. Students will understand the need for cognitive re-processing of sensory overload experiences.

Lesson Plan:

A. Trigger:

The teacher will trigger recall of yesterday's lesson, by mentioning that Yeshaya was in the throne room of God – he saw, heard, and felt God's power, and how "out of his league" God was.

- Teacher will ask a Trigger Question: Can you think of any experience you've had where you sensed something very very powerful? Ask for one thing in a movie, and one thing in real life. Have students write this down on a slip of paper, and fold it up, and leave it aside for 15 minutes. (Or have someone collect all the slips.)

B. Historical Journey for Students

The teacher will then ask students to hold the thought they had for a few minutes and give a brief introduction to the world of Yeshaya, beginning with the question "What was the most powerful force on earth in his time?" (Teachers are encouraged to see Georges Roux, *Ancient Iraq*, chapter 19 pages 305-319 for background.)

1. In Yeshaya's time, the most powerful force in the world was the empire of Assyria. In just 7 years (between 745 and 738 BCE), Assyria conquered all of Syria and Northern Eretz Yisrael. The kingdoms shown on the map (on powerpoint slide 11): Calneh, Arpad, Hadrach, Carchemish, Byblos, Tyre up to Damascus all fall one after the other in 7 years. (NOTE: The map is from the *MacMillan Bible Atlas*, 3rd edition, by Y. Aharoni, A. F. Rainey, Z. Safrai. Copyright to the publishers.)
2. By the time Uzziah died (sometime around 733 BCE), the king of Israel and the king of Judah were terrified of Assyria conquering them. They sent annual "tribute" gifts to the king of Assyria -- as a sort of "bribe" or "protection" money. (For more on this topic, you can see my article in *Hebrew Union College Annual* 78 [2009], pages 1-44).
3. The money had to be sent by special emissaries from Judah and Israel. They were treated to a tour of the Assyrian palace, and shown how powerful the Assyrian king was. This was done to encourage them to tell people back at

home how powerful Assyria was and to keep the “protection” money (like the mafia) coming.

The teacher will then focus on the specific experience of these emissaries, emphasizing that they are about to see the most powerful person in the whole world. Teacher can explain that we have a good idea of what the experience of these emissaries was like, since we have the remains of the palace into which they would have been received. It was built by King Ashurnasirpal II in what was then called Calah (and is now called Nimrud), and was still in use under King Tiglath Pileser III in 733. (The builder of the palace is not important to the lesson, but the fact that the palace was still in use in Yeshaya’s time, i.e. after 738, is very important.) Students should be asked to imagine that they are these emissaries, and they will now be given a virtual and visual tour:

- Entrance Hall – show pictures of people from far away lands, including monkeys, bringing gifts to the king, to show that he rules over the whole world (powerpoint slides 12-13)
- Magic animals with 4-wings at the doors, to keep away “Tum’a” that might cause the king to become sick. (slide 14)
- Along the way, guides keep talking to them and telling them how powerful the Assyrian king is and how he rules the world.
- Finally, they get into the Throne Room, which is very dark, lit only by specially directed light from the skylight, which forces them to look at pictures and at the king on his throne.
- Along the walls in the Throne Room are pictures of the king winning wars to show that he is more powerful than any other person in the world. (powerpoint slides 15-16)
- Opposite the entrance of the Throne Room, and again above the throne is this double image of the king worshipping the god (the figure above the tree is the god Ashur) while a magic wise man with 4 wings stands in back of him, protecting him. The tree represents the world – the message is that the god Ashur is in charge of the world, and the king worships him. The king is the representative appointed by the god Ashur. (powerpoint slides 17-18)
- The doors have pictures of the magic animals purifying them with the branch, to keep away Tum’a (slide 19).
- At the end of the visual tour, the messengers are given gifts to encourage them to come back with more money.

C. Discussion of Historical Journey

Teacher should then ask students to imagine they have undergone this tour.

The following teacher-student discussion should take place:

Q: How do you feel about the kingdom of Assyria? How do you feel about the God of Israel?

Expected answer: Students should express some awe of the kingdom of Assyria, and recognize God of Israel as pleasant and “heimish” but not a world power.

Q: What does this do to your willingness to obey God of Israel?

EA: Assyria is much cooler, more attractive, more awesome, more sexy, etc...

D. Linking Historical Journey to Text of Yeshaya

The teacher can then ask students to identify similarities and differences between what they learned about God in yesterday's lesson and what they learned about the king of Assyria today.

A chart on the board can be used, which ought to include these points:

- Similarity: Throne
- Similarity: In both cases, Seeing things; Hearing things; and Feeling things (Sensory Overload) – have them go back to the first question on the handout if necessary.
- Similarity: Both claim to be King of the world (Images in Assyrian throne room showing people from faraway lands bringing monkeys and שרפים saying (מלא כל הארץ כבודו).
- Similarity: Attendants around throne with many wings
- Difference: Attendants of Assyrian king protect him; attendants of God of Israel are in awe of him and cover their faces when they see him
- Difference: Attendants of Assyrian king keep him from becoming Tamei, attendants of God can take Tum'a away from Yeshaya the human, but God cannot become Tamei
- Major Difference: Assyrian King is POWERFUL, but he is susceptible to Tum'a and needs attendants to protect him. God is KADOSH, and therefore:
 - He is beyond any Tum'a/Tahara; and
 - He is beyond Time

The teacher should then briefly review both Targum Yonatan and Kuzari from yesterday's class, using powerpoint. (slides 7 and 8)

E. Drawing Key Conclusions from Comparison

The teacher should then focus on the following question, which is the pith of the lesson: In this vision of the throne room in פרק ו', how is Yeshaya trying to talk to the Jews who have seen the Assyrian throne room? Students should realize:

- The Assyrian king is בשר ודם
- Even the Assyrians think he can become טמא
- That means he can also die
- Only קדוש is ה' –
- Nothing in this world can touch Him
- He is Eternal, unlike human power.
- Ask students to go back to the slips of paper on which they wrote their experience of power. If the slips were collected at the beginning of the lesson, pull them out now and read some of the “real life experiences.” ---- How do the answers Yeshaya provides make you re-think some of how you processed your experiences?

F. Discussing Conclusions

The teacher must build on his/her relationship with the class to highlight the following points:

- When a person has “sensory overload” – seeing and hearing and feeling at the same time, he reacts with his feelings. (IOW: Things you see and hear act on your kishkes, not your brain. In a class of boys, you can use more direct and graphic language.)
- What Yeshaya forces Jews to do here is to take what they see and hear, and think it through in their mind --- Yeah, you saw the pictures on the wall and felt how cool and mighty the Assyrian king is. But now think about it – is he really that powerful? If so, why does he need magic attendants to keep him safe?
- The teacher may wish to introduce the term “Cognitive re-processing of experience,” referring to thinking about senses, instead of simply acting on the impulses that our senses send to our brains.

After considering these points,

- Now, look at the slips on which the students wrote their movie experiences. Ask: Did these involve more seeing and hearing than the real life ones, or less? Did they make you have more awe or less awe than the real life experiences?
 - Students should explain that there was more seeing and hearing, but they left them less awe-struck. Ask: Why?
 - Students Answer: Because you know it’s not real.
 - Teacher explains: You know in your brain that it’s not real, even though your eyes and ears are seeing and hearing it. That’s what Yeshaya is trying to get the Jews to do in פרק ו'. Yeah, the Assyrian king is overloading your senses with his power, but use your brain. Realize that he’s limited.
- Serious discussion with students: To what extent can you use your brain when challenged by “sensory overload” experiences that challenge your religious beliefs? This may be a good opportunity to discuss issues of materialism (being impressed by rich people and expensive cars) and instinctive sexual behavior.

G. Supplementary Material

The teacher may wish to use the following, either asking students to read the passage or simply asking them to think about it.

מתוך הספר *חבלים של חיים* באר, (ת"א 1998), עמ' 256-257.
 מצוטט בספר *מקדש מעט של ראובן* גפני (י-ם 2004), עמ' 21.
 דרשה של הרב שלום מרדכי שבדרון זצ"ל:
 "כל הכח של היצר הרע הוא רק בדמיונות"

אמשול לכם משל: כפרי אחד, מוז'יק, שלא ראה סינמה מימיו, בא לעיר הגדולה וראה מבחוץ איזה אולם שהחשיכו את חלונותיו ופתחיו, ועל הקיר, כך אמרו, רצות רצוא ושוב תמונות. רצה לראות מה זה...נכנס, התקרב יותר ויותר, עד שהגיע לקיר. אה, אתם מבינים, הוא לא רואה טוב. מה עשה? היתה לו בכיס בטריה גדולה (=פנס), הדליק אותה, והוא לא רואה כלום, קיר חלק. אין תמונות, אין כלום. התחילו לצעוק עליו: מה אתה עושה? אמר: מה אני עושה?! רציתי לראות טוב יותר. אמרו לו: מה עשית גולם איש? פה רואים רק כחשוך מצרים באולם. אתם מבינים, מורי ורבותי, כשנדלק האור, הקיר חלק ולא רואים כלום. הכוח של היצר הרע הוא רק פנטזיה, דמיונות שוא.