

JCI CURRICULUM: UNIT 3: CHAPTER 2 – POVERTY IN AMERICA LESSON 1: THE RANGE OF NEEDS & OUR RESPONSIBILITY

LESSON 1: THE RANGE OF NEEDS & OUR RESPONSIBILITY (40-45 mins)

Goals

For students to:

- identify universal human needs.
- analyze the rituals of Yom Kippur through interpretation of traditional texts.
- compare the restrictions of Yom Kippur with the experience of poverty.
- reach a deeper understanding of the experience of poverty as being a lack of essential human needs.

Materials:

- Text sheets
- Pens

Procedure:

1) Framing exercise #1 (10 minutes)

- a) Ask each student to state an association between Judaism and eating or food. Write down the associations on the board. Hopefully there will be a good mix of associations, some cultural (e.g., lox and bagels, chicken soup), some religious (e.g., blessings, fasting).
- b) Ask: Given all these different ideas, what are some general things we can say about food and Judaism? Discuss briefly.

2) Text study Part #1 (15 mins): The concept of needs

- a) Ask the students to generate a list of items and services that they would consider absolutely crucial to human existence – things they simply could not do without.
- b) Introduce the Mishna text that you will hand out. Explain that the Mishna is one of the earliest works of Jewish law (*halakhah*) and was compiled around the 2nd Century C.E. Distribute the Mishna text:

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Mishna Yoma 8:1

On Yom Kippur it is forbidden:

- to eat,
- to drink,
- to bathe,
- to anoint oneself,
- to wear shoes,
- and to make love.

משנה מסכת יומא פרק ח משנה א

יום הכפורים אסור

באכילה

ובשתיה

וברחיצה

ובסיכה

ובנעילת הסנדל

ובתשמיש המטה

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- c) Ask students to compare their list to the list of activities forbidden on Yom Kippur.

2) Text study Part #2 (10 mins): The concept of affliction

- a) Explain that on Yom Kippur we are commanded to “afflict” ourselves.
b) Remind students that Rambam is also known as Maimonides and was a philosopher and codifier of Jewish law from the middle ages. This is his explanation of the Mishna text we just studied.
c) Hand out the second text:

Rambam's Commentary to the Mishnah Yoma 8:1

It is not detailed in the Torah which activities are forbidden on the day of fasting-atonement; rather, it uses the language of “affliction” five times. It came in the received tradition that this is to forbid five kinds of physical pleasures, and they are: consumption, bathing in water, anointing in oil, wearing shoes, and love-making. Each one of these is described in the Writings using the language of “affliction” (ע-נ-י).

פירוש המשנה לרמב"ם מסכת יומא ח:א

לא נתפרש בתורה איסור דברים אלו ביום צום כפור, אלא נאמר בו לשון ענוי חמש פעמים, אמר שבת שבתון וכו'. ואמר שבת שבתון וכו', ובעשור וכו', ואך בעשור וכו', והיתה זאת לכם וכו', ובא בקבלה שזה לאסור חמשה דברים מהנאות הגופות והם ההזנה והרחיצה במים והסיכה בשמן ונעילת הסנדל והתשמיש, ונאמר בכל אחת מאלו לשון ענוי בכתובים

- d) Have a student read the text aloud.
e) Write the Hebrew root עני on the board. Explain that this is the same root for “poor person.”

3) Chavruta Study (10 minutes)

- a) Divide the students into pairs and ask them answer the questions on the discussion sheet. They should come up with 2-3 responses for each question.

Chavruta Questions:

- The root of the word for “affliction” in Hebrew (ע-נ-י) is the same as that for “poor person.” Why do you think refraining from these five activities is so intimately linked to the experience of poverty?
- Are there other experiences that characterize the experience of poverty besides these?

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- Do you think that describing these things as “physical pleasures” (*hana'ot ha-gufot*) makes them more essential or less essential to life?
- b) Regroup.
- c) Invite students to share their answers and discuss.
- d) Ask students how it might affect their experience of Yom Kippur if they understood it to be connected to the experience of poverty?

4) Conclusion (5 mins)

Ask each student to share one concluding thought from the lesson