



Teshuvah Taco

Topic

Rosh Hashanah/Yom Kippur/Sukkot/Simchat Torah

Grade Level(s)

All

Goals for the Lesson/Activity

Students will

- Focus on one mitzvah that they can adopt or do better during the year
- Reflect on the *teshuvah* arc that begins in Elul and culminates at the end of Sukkot
- Fulfill the *mitzvah* of eating in the *sukkah* (calendar permitting)

Materials needed

Teshuvah Taco planning sheet

- Shell = Name
- Brown Box = Protein
- Yellow Curvy Strip = Filling 1
- Green Splat = Filling 2
- Red Circles = Filling 3

Art supplies. Possibilities include:

- Different-colored Paper
- Scissors
- Glue
- Markers
- Colored Pencils
- Felt

Edible Tacos. The menu could include:

- Hard and/or Soft Taco Shells
- Refried Beans
- Guacamole
- Shredded Cheese
- Lettuce
- Tomatoes
- Olives
- Taco Sauce

Prepare in Advance

You might choose to compile a list of suggestions of *mitzvot* on which students can focus during the upcoming year. You might also choose to brainstorm some ideas with the class.

Background for Teachers

October 4 is National Taco Day in the United States. In most years, it falls during the period of *Teshuvah* (repentance) that begins in the month of Elul and finishes at the end of Sukkot. This is the time of year that Jews reflect on how they have acted during the previous year and consider what they can do better in the upcoming year. Areas of focus include both *Bein Adam l'Makom* (how one interacts with God) and *Bein Adam l'Chaveiro* (how one interacts with other people). Traditionally, it is also the time of year when God decrees how the next year will be for each individual. If someone is supposed to receive a decree for a bad year, doing *teshuvah*



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(along with *tzedakah* (charity) and *tefillah* (prayer)) is one of the ways that the decree can be turned around.

According to tradition, we begin to look forward to Rosh Hashanah on *Rosh Chodesh Elul* (the beginning of the month of Elul, which is the month immediately before Tishrei, when Rosh Hashanah falls). Many congregations blow the shofar each morning (except for Shabbat) during the month of Elul as a way to prepare people for Rosh Hashanah. The focus on *teshuvah* reaches its peak during the *Yamim Nora'im* (the High Holidays, i.e. Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur). While we often think of the *Sha'arei Teshuvah* (gates of repentance) closing at the end of Yom Kippur, tradition teaches that the gates remain open during Sukkot. In fact, many congregations do *Hoshanot* (circuits around the synagogue during which people wave their lulav and etrog) each day of Sukkot to call out to God for help and success. The final *hoshanah* is *Hoshanah Rabbah* (the Great Hoshanah), which is said on the last day of *Chol ha'Moed Sukkot*, just before Shemini Atzeret/Simchat Torah, since the final decree is sealed on *Hoshanah Rabbah*.

Please note that students might be familiar with “hamburger paragraph writing,” which takes a similar model of filling a grain-based outside (topic and conclusion sentences) with proteins and complementary foods (detail sentences).

Description of Activities

1. Explain that the period from *Rosh Chodesh Elul* to the end of Sukkot is a period of *teshuvah*. Review the concept of *teshuvah* with your students. Refer to the Background for Teachers for more details.
2. Explain to students that October 4 is National Taco Day.
3. Tell students that they will be building a *Teshuvah Taco*.
 - a. Brainstorm a list of possible mitzvot for students to work on. You might also present your own list.
 - b. Ask students to pick one mitzvah that they would like to start doing during the upcoming year or that they would like to do better. The mitzvah does not necessarily need to come from the lists generated.
 - c. Students are the shell that holds the elements of their tacos.
 - d. Their *mitzvah* is the protein (the meat or the beans) that goes inside the shell.
 - e. They should then choose several fillings for their tacos. In other words, they should choose several steps that they can take that will help them to perform their chosen *mitzvah*.
 - i. You might want to encourage students to think of how, just as they **fulFILL** the *mitzvah*, they will fill their taco shells.



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- ii. Some taco samples are included below, but students can create their own recipes based on the brainstorm and based on their own ideas of what foods represent the different elements of their *Teshuvah* Tacos.
 - f. Students use the ingredients to build their tacos.
 - i. You might want to provide the template available on JTeach.org so that students can organize their thoughts.
 - ii. Students use the provided art supplies to construct their *Teshuvah* Tacos.
 - g. Students explain what each layer of their taco represents.
4. When students have finished building their *Teshuvah* Tacos, invite them to enjoy a real taco meal. You can have this meal in the sukkah if the timing works.
5. Have check-ins periodically (approximately every 6-8 weeks) to monitor progress.
 - a. You might choose to have students “take bites” (i.e. remove a piece) from their tacos as they internalize their chosen *mitzvot*.
 - b. You might choose to have students leave their own tacos intact but to have more taco-eating opportunities while students discuss their progress.

Samples:

Protein/Mitzvah	Filling #1	Filling #2	Filling #3
Chicken = <i>Bikur Cholim</i> (Visiting the Sick)	Avocado = Making a schedule to visit the hospital once per month	Lettuce = Writing cards to give to people in the hospital	Olives = Collecting toiletries for those who need to spend the night with ill relatives
Refried Beans = Saying <i>Modeh Ani</i> every morning	Tomatoes = Setting the alarm to wake up five minutes earlier	Cheese = Keeping a copy of the prayer on one's nightstand	Cilantro = Asking one's parents to give reminders
Ground Beef = Lighting Shabbat Candles Each Week	Guacamole = Keeping a supply of nice candles	Jalapeno = Acquiring a nice pair of candlesticks	Taco Sauce = Setting up candles on Friday afternoon
Fish = Not Speaking <i>Lashon Hara</i> (Not speaking behind other people's backs)	Cabbage = Pausing five seconds before saying something about someone else	Sour Cream = Telling other people to stop when they speak <i>Lashon Hara</i> to you	Salsa = Making sure to speak well of others