



Carrying the Weight

Topic

Teshuvah

Grade Level(s)

3rd-7th

Goals for the Lesson/Activity

Students will:

- Explore their feelings surrounding apologies and forgiveness
- Experience the metaphorical "weight" of their misdeeds in a physical sense
- Learn the four steps of *Teshuvah*
- Have an opportunity to plan for/practice/model asking for forgiveness

Materials needed

- 3-4 backpacks
- Slips of paper; 3-5 per student
- Large rocks -they should be of considerable weight so that a few, taken together, weigh five or more pounds depending on the age of your students; 3-5 per student. One source for rocks might be small pavers from a garden shop
- Rubber bands; 3-5 per student
- Pens or pencils
- Post-its
- Newsprint or whiteboard

Background for Teachers

The month of Elul is customarily understood as the time for self-reflection in preparation for the High Holy Days. We are to take stock of actions taken during the previous year and plan how to do better in the upcoming year. This process of assessing one's actions is traditionally broken into two realms, *Bein Adam l'Makom* (how one interacts with God) and *Bein Adam l'Chaveiro* (how one interacts with other people). This lesson will concentrate on interactions between people.

Teshuvah, תשובה, (literally "return") is usually translated as repentance. 'Doing *Teshuvah*' is a way of spiritual house cleaning to return to one's best self.

There are 4 steps to *Teshuvah*:

1. Reflecting on something you did or said that hurt someone
2. Feeling sorry about it and stop doing it
3. Apologizing to the person (and mean it 😊) and ask for forgiveness



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4. Resolving to do better and make a change (when met with the same circumstance, you do not repeat the same behavior)

Experiencing each of these four steps gives someone an opportunity to reflect, act, and move on, freeing up spiritual and emotional space for positive action and enjoyment in the future.

Each Rosh Hashanah presents Jews of every age an opportunity to “do *Teshuvah*”; making amends with those they might have wronged, and making a start fresh in the New Year.

Description of Activities

Activity #1: Warm-up

Recreate the following grid on a whiteboard or on newsprint and hang it up in the front of the room before class begins. As students arrive, ask them to write their responses on post-its and place them under their chosen answer.

Leave the answers hanging without comment – explain to the students that they will return to the grid later in the class period.

Which is harder for you? Why?		
To say you're sorry	OR	To accept someone's apology, and to forgive them

Activity #2: Carrying the Heavy Load

- Divide the class into small groups of 3-4 students; have the groups sit on the floor.
- Distribute a backpack, pens, rubber bands and a bundle of rocks to each group. Explain that, in preparation for the High Holy days, we evaluate our actions over the past year, and make corrections to get back on the right path. This is a personal process; each person must do it for themselves.
- Ask students to sit quietly for a few minutes and think about times during the past year that they hurt someone else, either by word or by deed, and write each event on a separate slip of paper.
- Have students choose a large rock. Ask students to take each slip of paper and wrap it around their rock, holding it in place with a rubber band. Have them place their completed rock into the backpacks one at a time until their packs are full.
- When all the groups have filled their backpacks, it's time for the *Teshuvah* crawl!



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- Each student in the group gets a turn to crawl to the end of the room and back with the weighted backpack on their back. Once each person has had a turn, stop the class for a moment and ask students how it felt to have a heavy load on them. This can be a brief conversation as they have more to do!
- Now tell students to empty their backpacks and take turns crawling without the rocks weighing them down.
- After everyone has had a turn, join together in a circle on the floor and discuss what just occurred, how it felt, and the significance. It is at this point the teacher should introduce the steps for doing *Teshuvah*.
- As the conversation warrants, refer to the opening question. What might be the hardest part of doing *Teshuvah* for them?

Activity #3 - 'Getting Ready to "Lose the Weight"'

Ask students to return to their places in the classroom. If you have collected the rocks, paper and pens, redistribute them, or ask students to take rocks, paper and pens with them from the earlier exercise. Ask each student to select one of the small slips of paper that they attached to their rock and to make a plan to do *Teshuvah*. Have them include where they will communicate, what method of communication they will use, possible words they might use.

While students are working, write the words "Where" "How" and "What" on the board or on separate pieces of newsprint. After five minutes, ask students to share suggestions for each of these categories. You may want to challenge students to think deeper than "at home" or "at school", instead thinking more specifically — around the kitchen table or at the playground. You may also choose to challenge them if they suggest apologizing through text message or to think of words beyond "sorry."

If your students are interested in role playing, you might ask for a few volunteers to practice their apologies and have others offer helpful advice.

Differentiation Options

Knowing that students learn in a variety of ways and modalities, the following options are provided to adjust the above lesson to meet the unique needs of your learners.

For learners who need more assistance

- Instead of writing how they've hurt someone they could simply write the name of the person they've hurt.



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- Have a teacher's assistant help with writing, drawing pictures or communicating verbally during writing exercises.
- If students are unable to crawl, investigate other ways for them to feel the weight — simply placing the pack on their back or lap, for instance. If a student is sensitive to sensory input and is unable to carry the pack, you might instead have them discuss or describe an uncomfortable feeling.

For learners who need extension opportunities

- *Have them create apology greeting cards.*
- *Ask them to write tips and prompts that other, perhaps younger, students can use.*