



We Are Great, We Do Good

Topic

Yom Kippur

Grade Level(s)

5th Grade – High School

Goals for the Lesson/Activity

Students will:

- Understand the idea of וִידוּי (*Vidui*, confessing)
- Reflect on the good things that they have done over the course of the year
- Gain positive reinforcement to continue to do good

Materials needed

- Samples of positive *Vidui* (See the examples of [Rabbi Binyamin Holtzman](#) and [Rabbi Avi Weiss](#).)
- Rav Kook's statement about the importance of positive *Vidui* (included at the end)

Technology needed

- Melody of traditional [Ashamnu](#)
- Devices for recording and editing videos

Background for Teachers

The וִידוּי (*Vidui*, confession of transgressions) section of the liturgy, which includes both the אֲשָׁמְנוּ (*Ashamnu*) and עַל חֵטֵא (*Al Cheit*) sections, is one of the centerpieces of the Yom Kippur prayer service. During this section, the congregation lists the categories of transgression that the community has been guilty of over the past year. During the *Ashamnu* part, in particular, the congregation recites these transgressions out loud. Through this confession, the community has the opportunity to reflect and do תְּשׁוּבָה (*teshuvah*, repent/return).

Recently, there have been efforts to tap into the psychology of positive reinforcement. These efforts find basis in the teachings of Rabbi Avraham Yitzchak Kook (among others). According to Rav Kook, one should confess both the good and the bad that one does: “Just as there is great benefit to repairing the soul through confession of transgressions... so too through the confession of *mitzvot* in order to gladden one's heart and to strengthen the ways of life in the path of God” (*Ein Ayah* on Mishnah *Ma'aser Sheini* 5:10). In essence, confessing the good things that one has done will give a person the reinforcement that one needs in order to continue to do good. To that end, some have



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composed group confessionals that emphasize the good things that communities have accomplished (see examples from Materials Needed section).

Note: Popular music often is filled with lyrics in which singers brag about how wonderful they are. This activity gives students the opportunity to give themselves positive reinforcement, through song, by emphasizing the positive accomplishments of a group in the context of doing good in the world.

Description of Activities

1. Students give compliments to each other by telling them something good that they have done. If students have been together for a while, they can recall things each other has done over the course of the year. If they are new, they can focus on the beginning of the school year.
 - a. Make sure to emphasize that students should speak about good deeds, not about how they look, how good they are at sports, etc.
Have a list of students' accomplishments in case students cannot come up with accomplishments themselves.
2. Play the music to *Ashamnu* section of the *Vidui*. If students are familiar with the melody, have them stand and sing the melody. Discuss with students how the music makes them feel.
 - a. Is it a happy or a sad tune? Explain.
 - b. What can be learned about what *Vidui* should do for you? Why is this the case?
3. Students look at the text of the *Ashamnu* section of the *Vidui*. Discuss:
 - a. What do the words convey?
 - b. How might listing all of these shortcomings make us feel?
4. Show students the quotation from Rav Kook. Discuss:
 - a. Why is it important to confess one's positive accomplishments?
 - b. How do you feel when you list the good things that you have done?
5. Divide students into groups of four or five.
6. Students write a song that tells of the good things they have done over the course of the year and produce a music video.
 - a. Categories of good things might include:
 - i. Things we have done for family members
 - ii. Ways we have helped the community
 - iii. Mitzvot we have performed
 - b. Full-Class Option: Students take the ideas from the individual groups and create a class production.
7. Post videos to Instagram or another appropriate site for students to watch and share.



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