Tashlikh 5781

The symbolic casting off of our sins into water is a way to physically mark the internal process of teshuva. It allows us to turn a new corner and enter a new year released from our wrongdoings. While traditionally performed near a body of water (preferably one that flows into a larger body of water), tashlikh has taken many forms over the centuries, and can be (and has been!) adapted to fit changing circumstances.

If you are performing tashlikh at home, craft your own “body of water” (we recommend a large bowl) and designate something to toss into that bowl (traditionally bread/challah). We also invite you to select another object that will symbolize what you want to hold on to from this past year—something that you can similarly hold in your hand (marbles, etc) or something symbolic (a book, a photo, etc). Choose a place in your home that is quiet, and that you can intentionally make a place of reflection and prayer for the coming moments. Lay out the bowl, and place in a pile some ripped pieces of bread and the marbles (or other object).

Tashlikh begins with a reading from the book of Micah:

Mi el kahokha nosei avon v’over al pesha lish’eirit nakhalato, lo hekhzik la’ad apo ki-khafetz khesed hu. Yashuv y’rakhmeinu yichbosh avonoteinu v’tashlich bimtzulot yam kol khatotam. Titen emet l’ya’akov khesed l’avraham asher nishbata la’avoteinu mimei kedem.

Is there any divinity save You who forgives the sins and pardons the transgressions of the remnant, Your people? You do not maintain anger forever, for You delight in love. You will return to us compassionately, overcoming the consequences of our sin, hurling our sins into the depths of the sea. You will keep faith with Jacob, showing enduring love to Abraham, as you promised our ancestors in days of old.

(Micah 7:18-20)

Tashlikh isn’t just about “getting rid of.” Rather, the tossing is a means to tashlikh’s more powerful end: clarifying who we are. We cast away, but insodoing we also hold on. We get rid of what weighs us down, AND we recommit to what bolsters us. We notice what we need to shake off, as well as what we hope remains. What we are left with are the pieces of ourselves that are the purest and most intentional versions of who we are and who we want to be.

We enter the tashlikh ritual with this kavanna in mind.
Turn to your pile of symbolic objects, and pick out the pieces of bread. As you toss them into the bowl of water, as yourself: what from this year do I want to let go of? What do I need to cast away? Continue until all the bread has been tossed, and only the other object(s) remain. Next, pick up the remaining objects. As you place them in your hands, ask yourself: what from this past year do I want to take with me into 5781? What pieces of myself or my year am I clinging to for grounding or support? What do I stand for? If you are doing tashlikh with other people, have each person share one thing they are throwing into the water, and one thing they are keeping close.

Once you have concluded, take what is in your hand and place it somewhere in your home that you will encounter, see and notice. Let these objects be a symbol for you in the year to come - the sources of strength, of identity, and of resilience that you already have within you.

Next, bring the bowl over to a sink or other source of water. Turn on the tap so the water is flowing, and pour your bowl into the sink so the water gets washed away. While you are at the sink, you may choose to perform a symbolic ritual handwashing to cleanse your hands. Use this moment to honor the process you went through - the clarification, the letting go, the holding on.

The ritual concludes with reciting or singing the following words together (Psalms 118:5):

ミン חמאט קארתי יא, אנאני ומאָה יא.
Min ha-meitzar karati Yah, anani va-merḥav Yah.

From a narrow place I call out to God, God answered me through God’s expansiveness.