

Tashlich - Casting our Sins Away

Micah 7:18-20

Who is a God like You, forgiving iniquity and pardoning the transgression of the remnant of Your people? You do not maintain anger forever but You delight in loving-kindness. You will again have compassion upon us, subduing our sins, casting all our sins into the depths of the sea. You will show faithfulness to Jacob and enduring love to Abraham, as You promised our ancestors from days of old.

This year we are doing things a little differently. Health concerns and maintaining appropriate social distance while trying to talk and sometimes having to so quite loudly as well as having no idea as to how many people will attend have caused us to rethink how we do Tashlich this year.

So below you have sources upon which to reflect, information about a hike you can take and a ceremony you may use for Tashlich. At 3:00 pm on the second day of Rosh Hashanah, we - Kathy Reynolds and Jonathan Bernhard, will be at Franklin Canyon by the first main parking lot (to the left as you come down the hill and before you start the loop around the reservoir) to guide, answer questions, and chat...all while wearing masks and maintaining appropriate distances. This will enable you to do Tashlich at your own pace with whatever pod you feel comfortable. You may of course also just take all of this and just do Tashlich whenever you wish! All good by us!! Enjoy and Shanah Tovah!

For Study

A few things to reflect on when it comes to darkness.

The first source is from a collection of Rabbinic midrashim/teachings on Genesis. This teaching focus on the use of the words “very good” on the sixth day of creation. On all the other days of creation, God says that it was good. Why on this day does God say, very good? The answer offered is that on this day God created the “yetzer ha’ra/the evil inclination.” And why was this good? Well...read on.

And God saw everything that He had made, and found it **very** good.

Genesis 1:31

Rabbi Nahman said in the name of Samuel, “The words ‘very good’ refer to the yetzer ha’ra – (evil inclination) impulse towards the self”

“But is the impulse towards the self a very good thing? What an astonishing thing to say!!”

““Were it not for the impulse towards the self,” he (Rabbi Nahman) answered, “men would not build homes, take wives, have children, or engage in business.”

Genesis Rabba 9:7

This source is a poem from Mary Oliver. And it has a similar perspective as our rabbinic source; darkness isn’t all bad.

(In my sleep I dreamed this poem)

Someone I loved once gave me

a box full of darkness.

It took me years to understand

that this, too, was a gift.

Mary Oliver

Both sources challenge our intuitive reaction to darkness. We are naturally inclined to distance ourselves from the negative. These two sources invite us to look at things differently and to see that darkness, our inclination towards selfish, etc., also have important positives. In one source the negative, the impulse towards the self that so often bursts out as outright selfishness, is a very part of who we are as human beings. It is a part of the very fabric of who we are...and it performs essential functions. In Mary Oliver's poem, it is not as clear what the source of darkness is or how exactly it came into her life. But even so, she eventually saw that it was gift.

This Tashlich, I invite you to sit, to breathe, to reflect and to ask yourself: Can you accept the rabbinic point of view that a certain amount of selfishness is essential? How do you relate to those dark and less attractive parts of your own soul? Do you hide from them? When have you found darkness to be a gift?

Tashlich: The ritual

Tashlich is a remarkable ceremony - symbolic and concrete all at the same time. Through this ritual, we express not only our desire to be free from sin but our continuing hope that we will be forgiven for past misdeeds. On the afternoon of the first day of Rosh Hashanah -- or on the second day, if the first day is a Shabbat -- it is customary to go to a flowing body of water and to recite prayers while "casting" our sins (represented by bread crumbs) into the water. As we read in Micah: "You will cast (Tashlich) all your sins into the depths of the sea" (7:19). By performing Tashlich, we signify our hope that God will overlook our failings during the past year and grant us favor in the year to come. The preferred "order" for the bodies of water is (1) the sea, (2) a river, (3) a lake, spring, or fountain. If there is no such water within walking distance; in the case of inclement weather; or if one did not perform the ceremony on Rosh Hashanah for any reason, then Tashlich may be performed at any time up to Yom Kippur.

According to some customs, the body of water we visit should have fish in it. It has been suggested that this helps to remind us of our precarious existence and thus puts us in the mood to repent. It has also been suggested that we may be compared to fish caught in the net of divine judgment. While it is traditional to shake out the hems of one's clothing to ensure that all "sins" have been disposed of, Tashlich ceremonies differ all over the world. The Jews of Kurdistan had a custom to recite the Tashlich prayer near a river and then to jump into the water and swim around, instead of only shaking out the hems of their clothing.

TASHLICH SERVICE

Today we come to this body of water to perform the Tashlich ceremony, seeking symbolically to “cast away” our accumulated sins and transgressions so that we may purify our hearts and our souls, as the new year begins.

(At this point in time, it is appropriate to gather some leaves to put in Heavenly Pond - if you are at Franklin Canyon - as they specifically ask that we do not feed the wildlife.)

Let us cast away the sin of deception, so that we will mislead no one in word or deed, nor pretend to be what we are not.

Let us cast away the sin of vain ambition, which prompts us to strive for goals which bring neither true fulfillment nor genuine contentment.

Let us cast away the sin of stubbornness, so that we will neither persist in foolish habits nor fail to acknowledge our will to change.

Let us cast away the sin of envy, so that we will neither be consumed by desire for what we lack nor grow unmindful of the blessings which are already ours.

Let us cast away the sin of selfishness, which keeps us from enriching our lives through wider concerns and great sharing and from reaching out in love to other human beings.

Let us cast away the sin of indifference, so that we may be sensitive to the sufferings of others and responsive to the needs of people everywhere.

Let us cast away the sin of pride and arrogance, so that we can worship God and serve God's purpose in humility and truth.

Avinu Malkeinu Avinu Malkeinu, our God, hear our prayer.

Avinu Malkeinu, we have sinned before you. Eternal, our God, have mercy upon us and upon our children.

Avinu Malkeinu, inscribe us for blessing in the book of life. Eternal, our God, grant unto us a year of happiness.

Avinu Malkeinu, Be gracious and answer us, for we have not done enough good deeds. Please love us, be generous with us, and help us.

אָבִינוּ מַלְכֵנוּ חָנּוּנוּ וְעֵינּוּ כִּי אֵין בְּנוּ מַעֲשִׂים עָשָׂה עֲמָנוּ צְדָקָה וְחֶסֶד וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ

Avinu Malkeinu Chanenu va'aneinu (2x) ke ein banu ma'asim. Aseh imanu tzdakah vachessed - Aseh imanu tzdakah vachessed, v'hoshi'enu. (repeat)

(At this time, we place our leaves in the water, as we cast them away and leave them behind.)

Psalm 130

Out of the depths I call to You; Lord, hear my cry, heed my plea. Be attentive to my prayers, to my sigh of supplication. Who could endure, Lord, if You kept count of every sin? But forgiveness is Yours: therefore we revere You. I wait for the Lord; my soul yearns. Hopefully I await His word. I wait for the Lord more eagerly than watchmen wait for dawn. Put your hope in the Lord, for the Lord is generous with mercy. Abundant is God's power to redeem; May God redeem the people Israel from all sin.

Amen

(This service was adapted from the work of my colleague Rabbi Michael Beals. What works is his, what doesn't is mine.)