

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 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.

Suggested Prayers and Readings

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?
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 His power to redeem; May he redeem Israel from all sin.
Psalm 130

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 lovingkindness. 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 fathers from days of old.

מי אל כְּמוֹךָ, נִשְׂא עוֹן וְעָבַר עַל פְּשָׁע, לְשִׂאֲרֵית, נִחַלְתָּנוּ: לֹא הִחֲזִיק לְעַד אָפוּ, כִּי חָפַץ חֶסֶד הוּא.
יָשׁוּב וְרַחֲמֵנוּ, יִכְבֹּשׂ עֲוֹנֵתֵינוּ; וְתִשְׁלִיךְ בְּמַצְלוֹת יָם, כָּל חַטָּאוֹתֵם.
וַתִּתֵּן אֶמֶת לְיַעֲקֹב, חֶסֶד לְאַבְרָהָם, אֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאַבְתֵּינוּ, מִיְמֵי קֶדֶם.

Micah 7:18-20

None shall hurt or destroy in all My holy mountain, for the love of the Lord shall fill the earth as the waters fill the sea.

לֹא-יִרְעוּ וְלֹא-יִשְׁחִיתוּ, בְּכָל-הָר קִדְשֵׁי: כִּי-מְלֵאָה הָאָרֶץ, דְּעָה אֶת-יְיָ, כַּמַּיִם, לַיָּם מְכַסִּים.

Isaiah 11:9

Cast away from yourselves all your transgressions, and create within yourselves a new heart and a new spirit.

הִשְׁלִיכוּ מֵעַלְיֵכֶם, אֶת-כָּל-פְּשָׁעֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר פָּשַׁעְתֶּם בָּם, וַעֲשׂוּ לָכֶם לֵב חֲדָשׁ, וְרוּחַ חֲדָשָׁה

Ezekiel 18:31

*Avinu malkeynu, honey-nu va-aneynu, keyn banu ma-asim,
Asey imanu, tz'dakah va-chesed v'ho-shi-eynu.*

Our Father, our King, graciously answer us, although we are without merits;
Deal with us charitably and lovingly save us.

A Tashlich Prayer

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 greater 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 our people everywhere.

Let us cast away the sins of pride and arrogance so that we may worship God and serve His purposes in humility and in truth.

(From Machzor Hadash, edited by Rabbi Sidney Greenberg & Rabbi Jonathan D. Levine, c. 1978 by the Prayer Book Press of Media Judaica, Inc. Reprinted by permission.)

Turn us to You, O Lord, and we shall return; renew us as in days of old.

Hashiveynu Adonai eylecha v'na-shuva Chadysh yameynu k'kedem.

הַשִּׁיבֵנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְנִשׁוּבָה חֲדָשׁ יִמְיֵנוּ כְּקֶדֶם.

You may now throw your bread into the body of water symbolizing the casting away of your sins

Creating Liturgy: The Building Block of a Tashlich Service

Tashlich can be recited independently or as a communal ritual. Summoning us to spend time outdoors after a morning spent inside the synagogue, the ceremony also provides an opportunity for creative liturgy. The tashlich ceremony is an ideal family activity, providing an opportunity for parents and children to perform a ritual together. Children may prepare the bread crumbs for “casting” and then distribute them to the various members of the family. Parents can also explain the ritual to the children as they walk to the water’s edge and assign each family member a different reading.

Looking Back

- During the past year, what has made you really happy?
- What do you really regret not doing last year? What opportunities did you miss?
- Whom do you wish you had not hurt? How might you make up for what you did?
- What was a Jewish high for you this past year? What was a Jewish low for you this past year?

Looking Forward

- What new goals have you set for yourself for the coming year?
- How would you like to do things differently in the coming year?
- How will you enhance your life Jewishly during the coming year?

Today is the Birthday of the World

- What two wishes do you have for the world on its birthday?

The water is pure, teaching us that this is time to cleanse ourselves and wash away all of our mistakes. Today we begin a new year of goodness. Today, as we throw away our crumbs, let us rid ourselves of all bad habits and any grudges that we may have had. May we always feel God’s love for us and now that God will help us improve ourselves in this new year.

Let’s Create Our Own Family Blessing

May God bless your with _____

May you be _____

May this Rosh Hashanah fill you with _____

(From Jewish Family Matters, by Ronald and Leora Issacs, published by The United Synagogue Commission on Jewish Education)