

Tashlikh



- 1. Go to your favorite local body of water.**
- 2. Bring stale bread with you.**
- 3. Take some time to think over the past year.**
- 4. For each piece of bread you throw in, let that represent something from the past year which you're ready to cast off.**

Count your blessings and eat something sweet to celebrate the New Year.

TASHLIKH: Casting Our Sins Away

On the first day of Rosh Hashanah, Jews traditionally proceed to a body of running water, preferably one containing fish, and symbolically cast off their sins. The *Tashlikh* ceremony includes reading the source passage for the practice, the last verses from the prophet Micah (7:19), “He will take us back in love; He will cover up our iniquities. You will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea.” Selections from Psalms, particularly Psalm 118 and Psalm 130, along with supplications and a kabbalistic prayer hoping God will treat Israel with mercy, are parts of Tashlikh in various communities.

HISTORY OF TASHLIKH

The custom developed around the 13th century and became widespread despite objections from rabbis who feared superstitious people would believe that Tashlikh, rather than the concerted effort of teshuvah, had the power to change their lives. Religious leaders were particularly opposed to the practice of tossing bread crumbs, representing sins, into the water, and even shaking one’s garments to loosen any evil clinging to them was discouraged.

Superstitious rites most likely did influence ceremony. Primitive people believed that the best way to win favor from evil spirits living in waterways was to give them gifts. Some peoples, including the Babylonian Jews, sent “sin-filled” containers out into the water. (The Talmud describes the practice of growing beans or peas for two or three weeks prior to the new year in a woven basket for each child in a family. In an early variation of the Yom Kippur kaparot ritual, the basket, representing the child, was swung around the head seven times and then flung into the water.) Kurdistan Jews threw themselves into the water and swam around to be cleansed of their sins.

THE SYMBOLISM OF WATER

To make the practice symbolic rather than superstitious, the rabbis gave it ethical meaning. Through Midrash, they connected the water with the Akedah, the binding of Isaac. When Abraham was on his way to sacrifice Isaac, they said, Satan (which could be understood as the voice inside Abraham telling him not to kill his beloved son) tried to stop him. When Abraham refused to heed his voice, Satan became a raging river blocking Abraham’s way. Abraham proceeded nevertheless. When the water reached his neck and he called out for God’s help, the waters immediately subsided.

Water was also seen as symbolic of the creation of the world and of all life. Kings of Israel were crowned near springs, suggesting continuity, like the King of Kings’ unending sovereignty. Since the prophets Ezekiel and Daniel each received revelation near a body of water, it was seen as a place to find God’s presence. As the element of purification, water also represents the opportunity to cleanse the body and soul and take a new course in our lives. (Later rabbis continued to protest against the ritual, on grounds that it encouraged new sins by creating a social situation where people could gossip and men and women mingle, as Isaac Bashevis Singer’s story “Tashlikh” illustrates.)

Although the rabbis preferred that Tashlikh be done at a body of water containing fish (man cannot escape God’s judgment any more than fish can escape being caught in a net; we are just as likely to be ensnared and trapped at any moment as is a fish), since this is, after all, a symbolic ceremony, any body of water will do, even water running out of a hose or a faucet.

If the first day of Rosh Hashanah falls on Shabbat, Ashkenazi Jews [Jews of European descent] do Tashlikh on the second day (so as not to carry prayer books to the water, which would violate Sabbath laws). Sephardic Jews [Jews of Mediterranean and Middle Eastern descent] perform the ritual even on the Sabbath [as do a number of liberal Jews]. The ceremony can take place any time during the holiday season through Hoshanah Rabbah at the end of Sukkot.

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TASHLIKH: To Cast Away Our Sins

During this season of repentance, we are called upon to do T'shuvah, to return to God in sincerity and in truth. Through prayer and study, reflection and ritual, we strive to begin the new year in a spirit of humility, self-scrutiny, and spiritual renewal.

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

הַשְׁלִיכוּ מֵעַלְיֶיכֶם אֶת-כָּל-פְּשָׁעֵיכֶם אֲשֶׁר פָּשַׁעְתֶּם בָּם.
וַעֲשׂוּ לָכֶם לֵב חָדָשׁ וְרוּחַ חָדָשׁ:

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

Ezekiel 18:31

אָבִינוּ מִלְּכֵנוּ חַנּוּנוּ וַעֲנֵנוּ כִּי אֵין בָּנוּ מַעֲשִׂים.
עֲשֵׂה עִמָּנוּ צְדָקָה וְחֶסֶד וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ:

*Avinu mal-keynu, honey-nu va-aneynu,
ki eyn banu ma-asim,
Asey imanu tz'dakah va-hesed v'hoshi-eynu.*

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

(Line 5 begins with the word "Tashlikh" indicating the name of the service)

מִן־הַמַּצָּר קָרָאתִי יְהוָה. עָנְנִי בַמֶּרְחֹב יְהוָה:

מִי־אֵל כְּמוֹךָ נִשְׂא עֲוֹן וְעֵבֶר עַל־פֶּשַׁע לְשֹׂאֲרֵית נִחַלְתּוֹ.

לֹא־תִחַזֵּיק לְעַד אַפּוֹ כִּי־תִפֵּץ חֶסֶד הוּא:

יָשׁוּב יִרְחַמֵּנוּ יִכַּבֵּשׁ עֲוֹנֹתֵינוּ.

וְתִשְׁלִיךְ בַּמַּצְלוֹת יָם כָּל־חַטָּאתָם:

חַסֵּן אֲמַת לִיעֶקֶב חֶסֶד לְאַבְרָהָם.

אֲשֶׁר־נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאַבְתָּינוּ מִיְמֵי קֶדֶם:

לֹא־יִרְעוּ וְלֹא־יִשְׁחִיתוּ בְּכָל־הָר קִדְשֵׁי.

כִּי־מָלְאָה הָאָרֶץ דַּעַה אֶת־יְיָ. כַּמַּיִם לַיָּם מְכַסִּים:

In my distress I cried out to the Lord;
He answered me and set me free.

Who is like You, O God, forgiving iniquity and pardoning the transgression of the remnant of Your people!

You do not retain Your anger forever, for You delight in lovingkindness.

You will again have compassion upon us, subdue our iniquities, and cast all our sins into the depths of the sea.

You will show faithfulness to Jacob and lovingkindness to Abraham, as you promised our ancestors from days of old.

They shall not hurt nor destroy in all My holy mountain;

For the earth shall be full of the love of the Lord

As the sea is full of the waters that cover it.

Psalms 118:5; Micah 7:18-20; Isaiah 11:9

Let us cast away

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 sin of pride and arrogance, so that we can worship God and serve His purposes in humility and truth.

הַשִּׁיבֵנוּ יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְנָשׁוּבָה חֲדָשׁ יָמֵינוּ כְּקֶדֶם:

*Ha-shiveynu Adonai eyleha v'na-shuva,
Hadeysh yameynu k'kedem.*

Turn us back to You and we shall return;
Renew our lives as in days of old.

THE THIRTEEN ATTRIBUTES

יְיָ אֱלֹהֵינוּ רַחוּם וְחַנוּן. אֶרֶךְ אַפַּיִם וְרַב־חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת:
נֹצֵר חֶסֶד לְאַלְפִים. נֹשֵׂא עוֹן וְפֹשֵׁעַ וְחַטָּאָה וְנִקְיָה:

*Adonai Adonai Eyl rahum v'hanun,
Ereh apa-yim v'rav hesed ve'emet.
No-tzeyr hesed la-alafim,
Nosey avon va-fe-sha v'hata-a v'nakey.*

The Lord is ever-present, all-merciful, gracious, compassionate, patient, abounding in kindness and faithfulness, treasuring up love for a thousand generations, forgiving iniquity, transgression and sin, and pardoning the penitent.

Exodus 34:6-7

Sing forth to the Lord

Sing forth to the Lord, O righteous;
Joyously sing to Him a new song.

He loves what is right and just;
The earth is full of the Lord's faithful care.

For he spoke and the world was;
He commanded and it endured.

Happy is the people whose God is the Lord,
The people he has chosen to be His own.

He fashions the hearts of all;
He discerns all their doings.

We set our hope on the Lord,
He is our help and shield.

In him our hearts rejoice,
For in His holy name we trust.

May we enjoy, O Lord, Your faithful care,
As we have put our hope in You.

Selected from Psalm 33

TASHLIKH SUPPLEMENT:

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Taking a few crumbs to Tashlikh from whatever old bread is in the house lacks subtlety, nuance and religious sensitivity. I would suggest that we can do better. Instead:

For ordinary sins, use - White Bread
For exotic sins - French Bread
For particularly dark sins - Pumpernickel
For complex sins - Multi-grain
For twisted sins - Pretzels
For tasteless sins - Rice Cakes
For sins of indecision - Waffles
For sins committed in haste - Matzah
For sins committed in less than eighteen minutes –
Shmurah Matzah
For sins of chutzpah - Fresh Bread
For substance abuse/marijuana - Stoned Wheat
For substance abuse/heavy drugs - Poppy Seed
For arson - Toast
For timidity - Milk Toast
For high-handedness - Napoleons
For being sulky - Sourdough
For silliness - Nut Bread
For not giving full value - Short bread
For jingoism - Yankee Doodles
For telling bad jokes - Corn Bread
For being money-hungry - Enriched Bread or
Raw Dough
For telling small lies - Fudge
For war-mongering - Kaiser Rolls
For promiscuity - Hot Buns
For racism - Crackers
For sophisticated racism - Ritz Crackers
For being holier-than-thou - Bagels
For unfairly up-braiding others - Challah
For provocative dressing - Wonton Wrappers
For snobbery - Upper Crusts

For indecent photography - Cheese Cake
For trashing the environment - Dumplings
For the sin of laziness - Any Very Long Loaf
For being hyper-critical - Pan Cakes
For political skullduggery - Bismarcks
For over-eating - Stuffing Bread or Bulkie Rolls
For gambling - Fortune Cookies
For pride - Puff Pastry
For cheating - Bread made with Nutrasweet and
Olestra
For being snappish - Ginger Bread
For dropping in without calling beforehand –
Popovers
For trying to improve everyone within sight -Angel
Food Cake
For being up-tight and irritable - High Fiber or
Bran Muffins
For sycophancy - Brownies
For rearing children incompetently - Raisin Bread
For immodest behavior - Tarts
For causing injury or damage to others - Tortes
For hardening our hearts - Jelly doughnuts
For abrasiveness - Grits
For recurring slip ups - Banana Bread
For davening off tune - Flat Bread
For impetuosity - Quick Bread
For silliness - Nut Bread
For risking one's life unnecessarily - Hero Bread
For auto theft - Caraway
For excessive use of irony - Rye Bread
For larceny (especially of copyright material) –
Stollen

Please note that the first letter of the last 13 entries form an acrostic of the author, “r-i-c-h-a-r-d-i-s-r-a-e-l”, Richard Israel. This is a traditional Jewish way in which rabbis who wrote the prayers “signed” their name.

Remember, you don't have to show your crumbs to anyone.

For those who require a wide selection of crumbs, an attempt will be made to have pre-packaged Tashlikh Mix available in three grades (Tashlikh Lite, Medium and Industrial Strength) at your local Jewish bookstore.