

D.I.Y. (Do it yourself) TASHLICH

CASTING OFF

Tashlich is a ritual attached to the end of Rosh Hashanah. After announcing the New Year with the shofar blasts, the next steps in the Days of Awe process is to begin the hard work of teshuvah, repentance and return to our most ethical selves. Tashlich consists of throwing “shmutz” into water symbolizing what we hope to achieve in reality; a casting off of our mistakes, our errors, our missing of the mark; our ‘sins.’

Tashlich is also part of the indoor/outdoor rhythm of the High Holidays. Rosh Hashanah services are largely indoors, Tashlich takes place outside; Yom Kippur services are also interior (physically and spiritually), but afterwards we are instructed to go outdoors and begin building a shukkah.

Tashlich has a very serious intent, but the ritual is uncomplicated and lends itself to a “Do it yourself” ceremony at this time of quarantine and social distancing. Sometime on Rosh Hashanah day (traditionally late afternoon/early evening), go to a natural body of water-pond, lake, river, stream. You can sing a water song (I like “the Water is Wide,” “By The Waters of Babylon” is another favorite), and/or reflect on your favorite experiences involving water. Take in and appreciate the natural surroundings. You can recite Reb Nachman’s prayer of expressingspirituality in the natural world:

“Master of the universe, grant me the ability to be alone. May it be my custom to go outdoors each day, among the trees and grasses, among all growing things. There, may I express all that is in my heart. May all grasses, trees and plants awake at my presence. Send the power of their life into my prayer, making whole my heart, my actions, and my speech through the life and spirit of all growing things.”

Next, think about some negative behaviors you would like to shed to become an even more loving, generous and righteous person. Then, you want to say those behaviors out loud and toss stuff into the water and watch them drift away. Traditionally, the stuff has been breadcrumbs, but that has gone out of favor as we have learned more about the effects of human food on wildlife. More environmentally conscious choices are

crumbs, lint from your pocket, or a little grass from the ground near the body of water.

Take your shmutz and recite the passage from the biblical prophet Micah that inspired the ceremony: And you will cast off (tashlich) all your sins into the depths of the sea.” Take your time and consider how you can transform yourself over the next ten days culminating in Yom Kippur. Go to the edge of the water and throw the stuff in, watching it flow away.

Regard this casting ritual as a beginning, not an end. Once you have symbolically released your shmutz, it is time to figure out how to make amends for it and how to truly go forward without it.

Conclude with a song or prayer for peace.

Additional Readings:

“This water washes all the earth. From this water drink atheists and Buddhists and Christians and Confucians and Hindus and Jews and Muslims and Wiccans and the indigenes of every continent. We gather at the water to see and hear each other, all of us. And, to reflect upon ourselves. Waters can wash away our terror and our rage, waters birth us, fulfill our thirst and give us a mirror to see ourselves in.”

Tashlich In The City (Adapted from Psalm 130)

We come to You groaning with the weight of our sins.

And the sins of our community and elected officials.

Racism, abandoned buildings, police brutality, the achievement gap...

Will You take us back in love? Will we turn our heart and deeds to You?

As You have brought forth bread from the earth, so we cast it into the sea,

Renewing the cycle of life, closing a circle which ripples into infinite circles.

Like the many communities that make up our city, communities which strive to live together in peace.

Let us repaint the colors of our lives in a city too often painted starkly Black and White.

In which the contrasts between rich and poor are etched so deeply that
Your wrath is kindled anew.

We have tarnished Your creation, for poverty and inequity and violence are
our own inventions with which we bludgeon, intimidate, and abandon each
other.

Though we hope to cast away evil today, we know that tomorrow we may
eat of the fish who consume this bread.

We cast this bread as a token in our faith in You.

As a pledge to ourselves to take care of each other better, to attend to the
needs of all in our communities, to the good of the city as a whole.

To attune ourselves to the spirit of Your creation, we let loose and let free
little pieces of ourselves that have dishonored us.

The little pieces of ourselves that have betrayed our neighbors and blighted
our common good.

The little pieces of ourselves that have helped erect and not diminished
injustice in our name.

In order to more perfectly love You, ourselves, and each other.

**Finally, here is my favorite Tashlich custom (interesting, but not
necessarily advisable):**

On Rosh Hashanah, the Jews of Kurdistan would go to a river that flows at
the foot of a hill and say the prayers of casting. Afterwards, they all jump in
the water and swim around like the fish of the sea, instead of only shaking
the dust from the hems of their clothing on the bank of the river. They claim
that by this act they are purified of their sins, for the waters of the river
wash away all the sins they have committed during the past year.

Le shana tova-May Tashlich contribute to making 5781 a happy and
meaningful New Year for you all!