

A Guide to *Tashliḥ* -- DIY!



1 When to perform *Tashliḥ*? On *Rosh Hashana* – or not! Traditionally we cast our sins on the afternoon of the first day, except (like this year) when that falls on Shabbat – so this time around, ideally it's the afternoon of Day Two. That said, if you're unable to perform the ceremony on *Rosh Hashanah*, it can happen *any* day during the 10 days until *Yom Kippur*. Timing hardly matters – it's *kavanah*, intention, that counts!

2 Where? A natural body of water you can access easily and safely – or not! At *Tashliḥ* we metaphorically cast our sins into a body of water – preferably a stream or river, where you can watch your deeds being swept away by the current! (Or the sea: see prooftext, below, #5). **SAFELY**, we said – with others, **ONLY** with **masks!**

- If you can't safely and easily get to the water's edge -- or choose to cut your carbon footprint by not driving at all! -- just place a small amount of tap water in any basin or bucket, drop your biodegradable 'sins', and afterward, pour it on the ground. Everywhere on Earth is part of a watershed, after all!

3 Do a little *Tashliḥ* prep: Examine what you've struggled with this past year. Each of us faces mistakes, sins, accidents, and more. We're all affected by the careless and/or malicious actions of others. Whatever we find in ourselves isn't solely a moral failing; none of us is beyond repair (that is the whole point of *teshuvah*, this season's focus on introspection, apology/restitution, and repentance!). Have the **courage to be honest** with yourself during this period of review -- as you take a hard look both inside, and at the world around you.

- Pro tip: we call this time *Cheshbon HaNefesh*, literally soul-accounting – a time for real reckoning with what we actually did – how we spent our resources and our time; the impacts of our actions upon others; what we said (or didn't), and how we said it. Be your own accountant, and reckon it right!

4 Take a meditative walk. After you've thought about your actions over the past year, take it deeper yet, by taking some sustained time to consider how you can improve in the upcoming year. Try taking a quiet walk (or a reflective quiet sitting time) to meditate on ways you can change your behavior, be the better person you wish to be, and return to a framework of Holiness in the next year. Keep a pad or digital device nearby, to capture insights, and shape them later into firm commitments! This step transforms our work of *Tashliḥ* into a movement forward into the new year, rather than primarily dwelling on the past.

5 Read the passages of *Tashliḥ*, and check out or use the attached self-paced service. The source passage for *Tashliḥ* comes from the last verses of the Book of Micah (7:18-20); you'll also find prayers, poetry, song, and meditation to help guide your at-home or "down by the riverside" practice.

Prooftext: יְשׁוּב יְרַחֵמֵנוּ יְכַבֵּשׁ עֲוֹנוֹתֵינוּ וְתִשְׁלֵךְ בְּמַצְלוֹת יָם כָּל-חַטָּאוֹתֵם: (from Micah 7:19, also in the Shabbat Shuvah haftarah): "God will once again be compassionate to us, and will cover up our misdeeds, and will cast (*tashlich!*) all the people's sins into the depths of the sea."

6 Collect your "sins". Old-school: bread. But what a waste of edible food – and an over-burden on already fertilizer-laden watersheds, where new nutrients lead to algal blooms & dead zones! To be one with Creation on the anniversary of Creation, we strongly recommend small bits of dried leaves, tiny twigs, or anything natural you find on the ground (whatever will eventually blow away or drop into the creek of its own accord).

- Pro tip: One fallen leaf, ripped into small pieces with great intention, covers many sins!

- Rabbi Robin Nafshi's New Hampshire shul uses bird seed – throw in just a few; feed the flyers!
- Extra credit: bring a plastic bag & pack out any litter you find – clean up, while casting sins!

7 Walk to the body of water (basin, yard, etc). Be intentional. As you're getting there, keep thinking about your past year, and what you'd like (or plan!) to do better in the year ahead.

8 Sing, if it feels appropriate – or play / stream a thematic song. Here are some possibilities:

- **Eili, Eili:** *Eili, Eili shelo yigameri l'olam. Haḥol v'hayam, rishrush shel hamayim, b'rak hashamayim, t'filat ha-adam.* [Oh God, my God, I pray that these things never end: the sand and the sea; the rush of the waters; the crash of the heavens; the prayer of the heart. (Hannah Szenes)]
- **Hashiveinu:** *Hashiveinu Adonai eileḥa v'nashuvah. Ḥadeish yameinu k'kedem.* [Cause us to return to you, God, and we will return. Renew our days, as of old. (Lam./Eicha 5:21)]
- **Avinu Malkeinu:** *Avinu malkeinu (or Mekoreinu Eloheinu, Imeinu Malkateinu, etc), choneinu va-aneinu, ki ein banu ma-asim. Asei imanu tzedakah vachesed, v'hoshi-einu.* [Our father-king/source-God/mother-queen etc, be merciful and answer us, though we have few good deeds to show. Treat us with righteousness and loving-kindness; and deliver us].
- **Down by the Riverside:** *I'm gonna lay down my sword and shield -- down by the riverside... I ain't gonna study war no more....* [(Lo Yisa Goi el goi cherev, lo yilmadu od milchamah (Isaiah))]
- **I Want to Hear Somebody Pray:** *I want to hear somebody pray (x2) -- down in the valley or over yonder, I want to hear somebody pray. [...to hear somebody's song... to see justice and love... etc]*
- **Magnificence:** *There is so much magnificence – in the ocean -- the waves are coming in, the waves are coming in || Halleluyah. (2-part round) Or: The river is flowing, growing & flowing; the river is flowing, down to the sea // Mother, carry me; your child I will always be; mother carry me, down to the sea.*
- **Sanctuary:** *Oh God prepare me to be a sanctuary; pure and holy, tried and true. And with thanksgiving, I'll be a living sanctuary for You. || V'asu li mikdash v'shaḥanti betoḥam.*

9 Offer a prayer of your hopes for the new year. Talk to God (or the Universe) -- out loud, or in your head -- about your past year, and how you plan to do better going forward. Try to be as honest as possible about what has happened during the year, and how you want improve yourself – how you want to walk differently in the world, in the coming year. Some optional guiding questions for this sacred work (which should continue through Yom Kippur, and all throughout the year!):

- Have I used my time wisely, to care for myself and those I love?
- Was I there for people who needed me? Did I allow others to be there for me?
- Do my relationships – with those nearby, and through society and world – reflect *k'dushah* (holiness)?
- The kind deed: did I perform it, or postpone it? The unnecessary word: Did I say it, or hold it back?
- Did I acquire mostly possessions -- or did I primarily acquire insights, knowledge, connections?
- Have I done my part? Not solving big problems (like injustice, racism, climate change); but helping?
- Was I a reasonably bold, forward-thinking, meaning-making version of myself? If not, how can I be?

10 Cast your sins into the water. After your introspection and your prayer, reach down and grab your metaphorical sins (leaves, twigs, seeds, etc.), and throw them into the water. Intentionally. Reflectively. As you cast each away, one by one, breathe out -- and watch them wash away. Take all the time you need. Then once you're done, there are still 8 more days of repentance, and 363 more of the year – **use them well!!!!**

Sample/Starter Tashliḥ Ceremony -- A Ritual for Renewal for the New Year

Return Again

(or another song – see DIY guide)

Return again, Return again
Return to the land of your soul [2x]

Return to who you are,
Return to what you are,
Return to where you are born and reborn again.

Return again...

*Hashiveinu, Hashiveinu, Adonai, elecha --
v'nashuva -- chadesh yamenu k'kedem!*



Why Perform Tashliḥ?

Especially on Rosh Hashanah, this ceremony reinforces the reflection we began in our earlier prayers, and readies us for the week of awe and repentance that takes us to Yom Kippur. We do this to help make our teshuvah (repentance) real, by casting symbols of our 'sins' into the water. Through this, we express our hope to be **forgiven** for past misdeeds, and our commitment to **self-improvement**. This means really searching our memories and our souls, naming what we did wrong, and doing deep t'shuvah (repentance), so we do better next time.

Why is Tashliḥ (ideally) by Water ?

The prophet Micah says that G'd will sweep our sins away, to the depths of the sea. And almost every creek, pond, lake or river eventually finds its way there. It also teaches us about watersheds, and ecosystems, and how connected we are with all the people and all the species but upstream and downstream from us. (That's why we use natural things like leaves & twigs).

According to some customs, the body of water we visit should have fish in it -- perhaps because of that inter-species connection, or perhaps symbolically we are like fish, easily caught up in the 'net' of Divine (and human, and self!) judgment. *Tashliḥ* ceremonies differ all over the world -- Jews in Kurdistan often recited *Tashliḥ* prayers near a river, then jumped into the water and swam around! Some use bread, some bird seed, some found natural objects. There's no right or wrong way to do this, as long as you are moved by it to deepen your t'shuvah (introspection & repentance).

Water has memory. The water that makes up you and me, has passed through at least four humans, and, or animals, before us. -- *Olaf, Frozen 2*



What We Are Told
by Rabbi Vicki Hollander

We are told:
Go and learn from the water and
Cast away our crumbs,
Remnants of that which sustains us.

*We are told:
Go and learn from the water.
For the water's face appears serene,
While beneath, she teems with life,
Entire worlds unseen.
Reminding us it is time to look within ourselves.*

We are told, go and learn from the water.
For she contains remnants of primeval floods, forms of chaos.
Reminding us of layers within ourselves
That rise and swell, forces of darkness that struggle to
Dim the forces of light
And as the year is birthed yet again
We are urged to look at the water,
To learn from the water and to listen well.

*And we come and cast that which weighs us down,
And release it to the water,
That we might leave the shore lighter, cleansed by water's lips.
A step closer toward coming home*

Avinu Malkeinu (or another Song – see DIY guide)

Avinu Malkeinu [or “Mekoreinu Eloheinu”]: she-ma ko-lei-nu
Eternal, 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, though we’re not yet who we ought to be.
Please love us, be generous with us, and help us!

Avinu Malkeinu choneinu vaaneinu

ki ein banu maasin.

Aseih imanu tz'dakah v'chesed v'hoshi-einu.

אָבִינוּ מַלְכֵנוּ חֲנֻנוּ וְעֲנֵנוּ

כִּי אֵין בָּנוּ מַעֲשִׂים.

עֲשֵׂה עִמָּנוּ צְדָקָה וְחֶסֶד וְהוֹשִׁיעֵנוּ.

Tashliḥ – Letting Go, Casting Away...

THIS IS THE MOMENT! Silently reflect, and be one with nature, as you cast off your ‘sins’ (represented by bits of leaf or twig or seed or crumb), one by one, into the water.
Optional: use Psalm 130, Rabbi Josh Lesser’s poem, or another passage as a **kavanah** (holy intention) for this outward action of inner reflection ...

Psalm 130



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

Rabbi Joshua Lesser, Cong. Bet Haverim, Atlanta, 2000: each crumb tells a story

Some say they are sins
That may be so
But I say that each crumb tells a story
Tales from the past year
Stories that no longer serve me
or my purpose
They served some purpose, mind you
just not the Purpose
Fables I had concocted in my head
Funny ones that were at someone's expense
Mean ones that had some recompense
And there were those that had
almost no common sense
Yet there were the stories I relied upon
Some call them fancy names
like excuse, justifications, or complaints and
reasons
It doesn't matter what names you give them
What's important is that they are so darn

comfortable
like a friend you outgrew, but is familiar
all the same
Now I realize that stories can be sweet as honey
Just as sticky too
Hard to part with or make do
Sometimes they even seep
deep down into the bones
like the cold truth
But I come to this river on the birthday of the world
and I make a deal with Her
I'll give up these dear tales of mine to the river
if She swaps some in their place
better ones because I know how to bargain
Sounds like a haggling of cosmic proportions
You may say it's just another tale
But that is exactly what happens by the river on the
birthday of the world

Oseh shalom bimromav
Hu ya'aseh shalom aleinu
V'al kol Yisrael, v'al kol yoshvei teivel.

עשה שלום במרומיו
הוא יעשה שלום עלינו
ועל כל ישראל, ועל כל יושבי תבל.

Ya'aseh shalom, ya'aseh shalom
Shalom aleinu v'al kol Yisrael.

יעשה שלום יעשה שלום,
- שלום עלינו, ועל כל ישראל -

Ya'aseh shalom, ya'aseh shalom
Shalom aleinu v'al kol yoshvei teivel.

יעשה שלום יעשה שלום,
שלום עלינו, ועל כל יושבי תבל.

V'imru: Amen

ואמרו, אמן

May the one that makes peace in high places -- make peace for us, for all Israel, and for all who dwell on earth --

and let us say, Amen.



After casting the sins (leaves, twigs, seed, crumbs) into the water:

This is to Me like the waters of Noah -- for just as I have sworn that the waters of Noah should no more flood the earth; so have I sworn that I will not be angry with you, or rebuke you. For the mountains may move and the hills shake; but My kindness shall never depart from you, nor shall My covenant of peace be taken away – says YHVH, who has taken you back in Love. (Isaiah 54:9-10)

Just for Fun...

Tashliḥ Crumb List (original by Richard J. Israel, 1997; expanded since)

Taking a few crumbs to Tashliḥ 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 - Bagged sandwich Bread | For more complex sins - Multi-grain |
| For particularly dark sins - Pumpnickel | For sins of indecision - Waffles |
| For sins committed in haste - Matzah | For sins of ḥutzpah - Fresh Bread |
| For sins committed in less than eighteen minutes - Shmurah Matzah | |
| For substance abuse/ marijuana - Stoned Wheat, others use Poppy Seed | |
| For arson - Toast | For timidity - Milk Toast |
| For high-handedness - Napoleons | For being sulky - Sourdough |
| For not giving full value - Short bread | For silliness - Nut Bread |
| For telling bad jokes - Corn Bread | For twisted acts and thoughts - Pretzels |
| For greed - Enriched Bread or Raw Dough | For auto theft - Caraway |
| For telling small lies - Fudge | For war-mongering - Kaiser Rolls |
| For promiscuity - Hot Buns | For snobbery - Upper Crusts |
| For unfairly upbraiding others - Challah | For being holier-than-thou - Bagels |
| For judging others' clothing - Wonton Wrappers | For too many selfies - Cheese Cake |
| For trashing the environment - Dumplings | For laziness - Any Very Long Loaf |
| For over-eating - Stuffing Bread | For gambling - Fortune Cookies |
| For pride - Puff Pastry | For being snappish - Ginger Bread |
| For recurring slip ups - Banana Bread | For davening off tune - Flat Bread |
| For impetuosity - Quick Bread | For excessive use of irony - Rye Bread |

L' Shanah Tovah
Have a sweet year!

