

MENTAL HEALTH TASHLICH

What is Tashlich (Tashlikh)?

Tashlich, meaning “you will cast,” is a tradition that usually takes place on Rosh Hashanah afternoon. During Tashlich, individuals go to a body of water and recite the last verses (7:18-19) from the prophet Micah:

“You will again have compassion upon us, subduing our sins, casting all our sins into the depths of the sea.” (Micah 7:19)¹

Tashlich is a representation of expressing repentance, acceptance and forgiveness. We acknowledge any harm we have done, accept that we have harmed others and forgive ourselves with a commitment to move forward and do better.

Rabbis have encouraged using a body of water containing fish for Tashlich, reminding us just as a fish cannot escape being caught suddenly in a net (Ecclesiastes 9:12), people can never escape God’s judgment. However, since Tashlich is a symbolic ceremony, some of its elements are flexible. Any body of water will do—even a hose or a faucet. Sometimes people toss crumbs into the water to represent casting away their sins into the sea.

While Tashlich most often happens on the afternoon of Rosh Hashanah, it can occur on any day except Shabbat from Rosh Hashanah through the end of Sukkot.

Mental Health and Tashlich

For some Jews, this year’s High Holy Days will be different than in past years. Some of us might not be able to attend services, go on traditional Tashlich walks or celebrate the new year with family and friends. Despite this, we can practice building mental health resilience and develop skills that strengthen our well-being in tandem with Jewish traditions.

Drawing upon the **middah**, Jewish value, of **yesod** (יָסוּד), or groundedness, we can incorporate mental well-being into Jewish traditions. Yesod is about balance. In Jewish tradition it is said,

¹ Translation from: Rabbi Ruth Ross and Cantor Roland Roth of Congregation Beth Shalom, September 2008

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“Every person should have two pockets so he can reach into one or the other, according to his needs. In one pocket, carry a note that says ‘**Bishvili Nivra Ha’Olam**—For my sake, the world was created.’ In the other pocket, a note that says, ‘**Anochi afar va’efer** —I am dust and ashes.’” (Rabbi Simcha Bunim of Przysucha, 19th century CE).

At its core, this means we need to learn to hold two ideas at the same time: 1) I am worthy and have value simply by being me and 2) I have flaws and have made mistakes, so I need to grow. These two seemingly opposite, but actually synchronous ideas, mirror the themes of repentance, acceptance and forgiveness that create the Tashlich tradition.

Tashlich Activity

This year, consider practicing this mental health walking meditation that incorporates both *yesod* (groundedness) and **kavanah**, the Jewish value dedicated to the act of creating an intention or engaging with the sincere feelings and direction of the heart.

Traditional Tashlich Prayer

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 fathers from days of old. (Micah 7:18-19) ²

DO Think about your actions this past year. What are you most proud of, and what would you do differently?

SAY “Who is a God like You, forgiving iniquity and pardoning the transgression of the remnant of Your people?”

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DO Think about your strengths and how they have helped you act from a place of compassion to enact positive change in your life and the lives of others.

SAY “You do not maintain anger forever, but You delight in loving-kindness.”

DO Think about your intentions behind the actions you have taken that you are not proud of. If the intentions were good, think about how you might translate them into new actions. If you don’t feel good about your intentions, think about how you’d like to respond differently in the year to come.

SAY “You will again have compassion upon us, subduing our sins, casting all our sins into the depths of the sea.”

DO Take a breath and envision letting go of your thoughts. Visualize them as crumbs, floating down a river. Now set a new intention for how you’d like to treat others, and yourself, this year.

SAY “You will show faithfulness to Jacob and enduring love to Abraham, as You promised our fathers from days of old.”