The Ritual of Tashlikh

In Hebrew, tashlikh (תשליך) means “you will cast off,” as in “casting off sins”, a phrase we hear a lot in High Holidays liturgy. Because sins aren’t tangible, for the tashlikh ritual we use small pieces of bread to represent our sins. We cast that sin-laden bread into flowing water to be carried away with the current. There are different interpretations of using bread: bread can represent the flour-offerings in the Jerusalem Temple, but it can also stand for the everyday life - exactly what we want to change.

With each item we cast into the water, we remember and name, aloud or to ourselves, an aspect of our behavior we want to “cast away.” The text traditionally associated with this ritual is Micah 7:18-20:

מְאֵהַ כִּיּוֹם, בְּנֵי עַם, וְעָלָיוּ, לְשָׁאֵרִית, נְשָׁרֵת, כַּהֲנָה, לְהַזְקִיק, לִפְעָמִי, כִּי בְּפִיקַּוֹ, הַזְקִיק
אֶזֶר לָעַד, הַזְקִיק, לְיַעֲקֹב, אֱמֶת תִּתֵּן, לְיַעֲקֹב, אֱמֶת תִּתֵּן, לְיַעֲקֹב. אַפּוֹ לָעַד, הַזְקִיק
חֶסֶד, חָפֵץ, כִּי, אַפּוֹ לָעַד, הַזְקִיק
לָשֶׁרִית, פֶּשַׁע עַל וְעֹבֵר
עָו נָשֵׂא, כָּמוֹךָ אֵל מִי, לְיַעֲקֹב אֱמֶת תִּתֵּן. חַטֹּאותָם כָּל, יָם בִּמְצֻלוֹת וְתַשְׁלִיך; נַחֲלָתוֹ נֹתֵינוּ עֲו יִכְבֹּש, יְרַחֲמֵנוּ יָשׁוּב. הוּא קֶדֶם מִימֵי אֲבֹתֵינוּ נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ אֲשֶׁר לְאַבְרָהָם חֶסֶד.

“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 ancestors from days of old.”

In many of the parks and waterways around the Lehigh Valley we understand that using bread can be problematic for the environment. Bread thrown in waterways feeds fish and ducks and other waterfowl. These processed grains are no longer ones that the animals can handle. There are fines in many of these local areas that preclude using bread.

As a community we often use other naturally present items which could have washed into the waterway on their own. Seeds, nuts, twigs and leaves from local trees and weeds are good alternatives for the bread pieces we would have brought from home. This focus on environmental stewardship is a fundamental tenet of Judaism. It also has been a big part of our Am Haskalah community’s commitment to improving our world. As you participate in these tashlikh rituals, we hope you contemplate the ways you can enter the new year with a renewed commitment to our responsibility to that world.
Sources for Tashlikh

The ritual of tashlikh is not explicitly mentioned in the Torah or the Talmud and there’s no formal liturgy. There are endless opportunities to create a ceremony that resonates with your Judaism. On this source sheet, you can find a few inspirational sources for tashlikh in the comfort and safety of your home.

Psalm 130 - ק׳׳ל
A song of ascents. Out of the depths I call You, O LORD.

O Lord, listen to my cry; let Your ears be attentive to my plea for mercy.

If You keep account of sins, O LORD, Lord, who will survive?

Yours is the power to forgive so that You may be held in awe.

I look to the LORD; I look to Him; I await His word.

I am more eager for the Lord than watchmen for the morning, watchmen for the morning.

O Israel, wait for the LORD; for with the LORD is steadfast love and great power to redeem.

It is He who will redeem Israel from all their iniquities.

A Prayer for Tashlikh

By Rabbi Rachel Barenblat

Here I am again
ready to let go of my mistakes.

Help me to release myself
from all the ways I’ve missed the mark.

Help me to stop carrying
the karmic baggage of my poor choices.

As I cast this bread upon the waters
lift my troubles off my shoulders.

Help me to know that last year is over,
washed away like crumbs in the current.

Open my heart to blessing and gratitude.
Renew my soul as the dew renews the grasses.

And we say together:
Amen.

Source: https://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/prayer-tashlikh
Sowing Bread in the Sea: A Psalm for Tashlich

By Ted Merwin

Oh God, who is like You?
We come to you heavy laden
Groaning with the weight of our sins
And the sins of our community and elected officials
Will You take us back in love?
Will we turn our hearts 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 nested communities which make up our city,
Communities which strive to live together in peace
Ever-renewed themselves by the coming of immigrants
Ever struggling to feed and house and clothe themselves
Ever waiting for bread

God, we shed our sins and the sins of our city
As an animal slips from its skin which has withered and decayed
As a plant drops leaves and leaves fruit
As a molecule trades its membrane for a new coat of cells

If you keep account of sins, O Creator,
Who will survive?
As the trees turn over their leaves,
And the canopy of green turns to crimson and gold,
Then shudders and shatters and subsides
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 ever kindled anew

By Your word the heavens were made,
By the breath of Your mouth, all their host Have been true to the spirit of Your creation
You heap up the ocean waters like a mound,
And hoard the deep in vaults, but Most of it we cannot see
Most of the time we are blind to the wonders of Your world
Just as we are blind far too often to the oppressions with which We have tarnished Your creation
For poverty and inequality and violence are our own inventions
With which we bludgeon, intimidate and abandon each other

As the season turns, as we choose elected officials, begin a school year
Let us be reminded that everything in life Renews itself
All evil, all that is deadening and rot can be cast away
We know tomorrow we may eat
Of the fish who consume this bread
We put our trust in You, Creator of All That You will ever keep watch upon us,
Saving us from death
Preserving us from fear
Sustaining us in the spiritual and moral famine
Which threatens to engulf and overwhelm us all

We cast this bread as a token of 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
The 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 dismantle injustice in our name
In order to more perfectly love You, ourselves and each other

Source: https://rac.org/rosh-hashanah-sowing-bread-sea-psalm-tashlich
Below is a special worksheet for tashlikh. On this worksheet you can record things you want to cast off, keep, or bring into the New Year in many aspects of life. It's a more holistic approach to this ritual.

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Source: [https://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/tashlikh-ritual](https://www.ritualwell.org/ritual/tashlikh-ritual)