

Tashlich – Casting Away One’s Sins

Introduction

Tashlich, the ceremony of symbolically tossing one’s sins into a body of water, usually takes place on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, although it can be done until Hoshana Raba at the end of the festival of Sukkot. The ceremony consists of reciting prayers asking God to treat us with mercy. Some people throw pieces of bread representing their sins into the water; others forbid this practice seeing it as superstitious.

Tashlich in Jewish Texts

The following text is from the *Kitzur Shulchan Arukh* which was composed in Uzhgorod (c.1844–c.1864) by Shlomo Ganzfried. The *Kitzur Shulchan Arukh* is a summary of the *Shulchan Arukh* of Joseph Karo and states what is permitted and what is forbidden without ambiguity, emphasizing the customs of the Jews of Hungary at that time.

Read the description of the tashlich ceremony and answer the questions following.

Kitzur Shulchan Aruch 129:21

After the *Minchah* service, you should go to a river [or stream]... There is another reason [for this custom]; for on this day we proclaim the kingship of the Holy One, blessed is He, over us, and it was the custom to anoint kings near a river bank as a sign that their kingdom may endure without end. It is preferable that [this river] should be outside the city limits and it should contain fish (as a reminder that we are compared to living fish who are caught in a net). We too, are caught in the net of death and judgment, and as a result [we will be inclined] to think more of repenting. Another reason is to symbolize that the evil eye shall have no power over us, just as [it has no power] over fish, and that we may be fruitful and multiply as the fish. Others say the reason is that fish have no eyelids, and their eyes are always open, the purpose is thus to arouse the compassion of the All-Seeing Eye above us.) But if there is no river that contains fish you may go to any river, or to a well, and you should recite the verses, *Mi keil kamocha* (Who, Almighty, is like you) etc. as it is written in the prayer books in the text of *tashlich*. You should then shake the ends of your clothes, symbolizing your resolve to cast

קיצור שלחן ערוך קכ"ט:כ"א
 לאחר תפלת מנחה, הולכין אל
 הנהר... ועוד יש טעם, מפני
 שאנו ממליכין היום את הקדוש
 ברוך הוא עלינו, והדרך הוא
 למשח את המלכים אצל הנהר,
 לרמז שתמשך מלכותם) וטוב
 שיהיה מחוץ לעיר ויש בו דגים
 (לזכר שאנו משולים כדגים חיים
 הללו שנאחזים במצודה, כך אנו
 נאחזים במצודת המות והדין,
 ומתוך כך נהרהר יותר בתשובה.
 עוד טעם, סימן שלא תשליט בנו
 עין רעה כמו בדגים, ונפרה
 ונרבה כדגים. ויש אומרים,
 הטעם, כי לדגים אין גבינים
 [עפעפים] ועיניהם תמיד
 פתוחות, כדי להתעורר עינא

away your sins, and to examine and scrutinize your ways, from now on; so that your clothes will be white and innocent of all sin. If the first day of Rosh Hashanah is on Shabbat you go [to the stream for *tashlich*] on the second day.

פְּקִיחָא דְלַעֲיִלָא) וְאִם אֵין שָׁם נְהַר
 שְׂיִישׁ בּוֹ דְגִים, הוֹלְכִין לְנְהַר אַחֵר
 אוֹ לְבָאָר, וְאוֹמְרִים הַפְּסוּקִים מִי
 אֶל כְּמוֹךְ וְכוּ' כְּכַתוּב בְּסֻדְרוֹתִים
 בְּסֻדְרַת תְּשַׁלִּיחַ. וּמִנְעָרִים שׁוּלֵי
 הַבְּגָדִים, וְהוּא לְרִמְזָא בְּעַלְמָא, לְתַן
 לֵב לְהַשְׁלִיחַ אֶת הַחַטָּאִים וְלַחֲפֹשׁ
 וְלַחְקֹר דְרַכְיוֹ מֵהַיּוֹם וְהַלְאָה,
 שְׂיִהְיוּ בְּגָדָיו לְבָנִים וְנִקְיִים מִכָּל
 חַטָּא. אִם חַל יוֹם רֵאשׁוֹן בְּשַׁבָּת
 הוֹלְכִין בְּיוֹם שְׁנֵי (תַּקְפַּג וּבִסִּידוֹר).

1. List at least three features of the tashlich ceremony, as described in the *Kitzur Shulhan Arukh*.
2. The *Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* mentions several reasons for performing the ceremony in as described. Explain one of the reasons.

Tashlich in Primary Sources

Below are three primary sources from the National Library of Israel. Answer the questions following each picture.



Tel Aviv, 1971, Dan Hadani Archive, National Library of Israel

1. Which elements of the description in the *Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* can you see in the photograph?



[Tashlich Ceremony, early 1900s](#), National Library of Israel

1. How do you think this booklet was used?
2. What languages are used in the booklet? Where do you think it was used?
3. The text from the *Kitzur Shulhan Arukh* mentions using a prayer book during the ceremony. Why might someone prefer using this booklet?

תשליך בגן הבוטאני של ניו יורק

גוי יורק 1 (סט"א) — כ"18.000
 יהודים השתתפו אהמול באמירת תפילת תשליך כאגמים של הגן הבוטאני של ברוקלין, בהשתתפות הרבי מלובכין, מנהיגם של חסידיו הברדי.

הרשות להשתמש בגן הבוטאני לצרכי אמירת תשליך ניתנה על ידי מנהל ד"ר ג'ורג' אברי. הוסבר לשלטונות כי אילולא ניתנה הרשות להשתמש בגן הבוטאני, היו צריכים יהודים קשה סים רבים ללכת לגן ציבורי אחר במרחק של כ-1.5 קילומטר.

[Tashlich in the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens, HaTzofeh 1962](#), Jpress – National Library of Israel

Translation:

Tashlich in the New York Botanic Gardens

New York - Approximately 18,000 Jews participated yesterday in saying the Tashlich prayer at the lakes in the Brooklyn Botanic Gardens, with the participation of the Lubavitcher Rebbe, the leader of the chassidic Chabad movement.

How did it go? Let us know! learning@nli.org.il

Permission to use the Botanic Gardens for the purpose of saying "Tashlich" was given by its director, Dr. George Avery. It was explained to the authorities that if they were not given permission to use the Botanic Garden, it would be very difficult for the Jews to walk to another public park 1.5 kilometers away.

1. How did the tashlich ceremony in the Botanic Gardens differ from the one pictured above on the beach in Tel Aviv?
2. What do the locations of all three resources tell you about the prevalence of tashlich?

Tashlich in Oral History

Below are sections of two oral histories, recorded by Centropa, which describe the tashlich ceremony as practiced in Ukraine and Romania.

Read the descriptions and answer the concluding question below.

For Yom Kippur everyone strictly fasted. Before the Yom Kippur holiday, everyone left town and went to the river, threw in crumbs for the fish and prayed. It's called tashlich (tashlich – an expression describing the symbolic casting away of sins. Devout Jews gather by a river and recite prescribed passages that speak of God's willingness to forgive a repentant sinner). Because there were a lot of Jews living in the town, they didn't go to the river all together, but in groups. In every group there would be someone who would lead prayers.



--Nikolai Mesko Salamonovic , Ukraine

[Centropa](#)

On the second day of Rosh Hashanah you went to a course of water – that was the custom, it was something traditional – and you shook your pockets clean, you threw in the water everything you had in your pockets – meaning you cast away all the sins you committed during the year, you throw them into the water. People go Tashlich – meaning we are going there to shake our sins. In the morning, after the religious service was over at the synagogue, the Jews of Dorohoi went to do the taslich by the hundreds. We went at the town outskirts to the Jijia river, to a place they call Trestienii Bridge, and everyone shook their pockets clean there".

--Simon Meer, Romania

1. What did you learn about tashlich from the oral histories?
2. Which resource is most similar to the descriptions of tashlich in the oral histories?
3. What are the similarities?

Wrapping it up!

When tashlich was first developed, some rabbis objected to the ceremony. They were afraid that instead of being introspective and repentant, people would simply throw bread into the water to rid themselves of their sins.

What do all of the resources and oral histories tell you about who won that argument?