

An Eco-Sensitive Alternative Tashlich Ritual for Those Unable to Access Flowing Water

by Rabbi Janet Madden

This ritual is intended for those whose health or mobility makes it difficult/unsafe to physically go to ocean or river.

Because it is known that bread has no nutritional value for and can cause harm to birds, fish and animals, this ritual substitutes birdseed formulated for wild birds for bread.

Casting Away: תשליך

Ritual Elements:

a small amount of birdseed
a view of the sky
access to an open window, patio, balcony

Select one of more of the following short readings as preparation:

1: Tractate Menahot (43b) of the Babylonian Talmud (the tractate that discusses grain offerings and tzitzit as the reminder of the Divine Presence) asks “Why is blue different from all other colors?” and answers “Because blue resembles the sea, and the sea resembles sky.”

2: There is more than a resemblance between sea and sky. In Jewish tradition, water symbolizes of the creation of the world and of all life; the heavens and the seas were once united as one entity. We are taught in Genesis 1:6 that in the process of creation, there was a separation of “the waters from the waters” so that **מַיִם**/Mayim (waters) **שָׁמַיִם**/Shamayim (heavens), though now apart are forever linked.

3: The prophets Ezekiel and Daniel received revelation near a body of water, and Jewish tradition understands water as a place to find God’s presence. As a medium of transformation, water also represents the opportunity for change, for taking a new course in our lives.

4. The prophet Ezekiel instructs us: ”Cast away from yourselves all your transgressions, and create within yourselves a new heart and new spirit” (18:31)

5. In Jewish and other traditions, birds symbolize peace, transformation, freedom and power and are considered messengers from the spiritual realms.

6. Some day that tashlich must be performed in a watery place where there are fish to consume the breadcrumbs. Today, tashlich is being carried out in a place where birds can come to consume seed. What is the relationship between fish and birds? They share a streamlined shape that enables them to move easily in in water or air that allows a minimum of resistance. So may my resistance to acknowledging my failings be minimized.

I. Look to the heavens and say:

מִן הַמְצַר

min ha-may-tzahr

from the narrow place

קָרָאתִי יְהוָה

kah-rah-tee yah

I called to Yah/ the Living Presence:

I am here, present to all the ways in which I know that I've missed the mark. I am here because I want to begin again.

As I cast this seed heavenward and watch it fall to earth, may all the mistakes I've made, the unkind things I've said and thought, the wrongs I've done be cast away. May my misdeeds of the last year be food for thought, reminding me of my mistakes as I commit to do better and to be better in this new year.

II. Toss the birdseed into the air.

III. Spend a few moments in quiet reflection of what you are casting away and the changes that you want to make. As birds come to eat, say:

שְׁתַּמְלֵא כָּל מִשְׁאֲלוֹת לִבֵּנוּ

sheh-tih-mah-lay kole mish-ah-lote lee-bay-noo

You will fulfill the wishes of our hearts

לְטוֹבָה

lih-toe-vah

for goodness

As these symbols of my transgressions are transformed to nourishment, so may my heart and spirit be nourished through the opportunities for goodness that this new year brings.

May my good deeds pour forth like water, like a handful of birdseed.
May I do good and seek goodness.