

Tashlikh - Where and When

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Please note that this is not an official responsum of the CJLS.

The custom of Tashlikh, which is often observed on the afternoon of the first day of Rosh Hashanah (or day two if day one is Shabbat, can be treated with flexibility primarily because it isn't an obligation that must be fulfilled. Therefore there are no specific time parameters that constrain it, and no definitive prohibitions on what kind of water may be used. In fact, this custom does not appear in Jewish literature until the late 14th century. The custom appears to have three features, either performed together, or independently: 1) performed at a natural body of water, 2) fish are present in the water, and 3) tossing of bread (or the like) symbolizing our sins into the water. The ceremony of Tashlikh is based on the words attributed to the prophet Micah (7:19):

וְתִשְׁלִיךְ בַּמַּצְלוֹת יָם כָּל-חַטָּאוֹתֶם

You will hurl all our sins into the depths of the sea.

The Levush (Rabbi Mordechai Jaffe, 1530 - 1612) mentions the custom of walking to natural water, but doesn't mention the tossing of pieces of bread. (O.H. 596)

ורגילין לילך על הנהר זכר לעקידה, משום דאיתא במדרש [ילקוט שמעוני וירא רמז צט] כשהלך אברהם אבינו ע"ה לעקוד את יצחק בנו, הוליכו השטן עד שבא עד צוארו במים, ואמר אברהם הושיעה יי' כי באו מים עד נפש וניצול.

ורגילין לילך למקום שרואין שם דגים, לזכור שאנו משולים כדגים חיים הללו שנאחזים במצודה, כך אנו נאחזים במצודת המות והדין, ומתוך כך נהרהר יותר בתשובה:

It's normal to walk to a river as a remembrance of the *Akeidah*, for it is found in a midrash (Yalkut Shimoni, VeYeira, 99): That when Abraham went to sacrifice his son, Satan became a deep stream (to prevent the sacrifice) and Avraham was up to his neck in the water. Avraham prayed: "Save me, God, for the waters have reached my neck." And he was saved.

It was normal to go to a place that has live fish. To remember that we are like these live fish, who are ensnared suddenly in a net. So are we ensnared in the abyss of death and

judgement. And in doing so, we will contemplate repentance more.

When thinking about the custom of Tashlikh this year, the “idea” behind it, and its potential for meaning, will likely provide the answer as to when, where and how a community might make their decision.

In fact, it has already become custom in many communities over the past several years to hold their tashlikh ceremony after Rosh Hashanah, but before Yom Kippur -- not on yom tov. So in planning when a synagogue/community will hold their ceremony, know that the appropriate timing is driven by the overall function of Tashlikh and part of the teshuvah/atonement process embedded in the Aseret Yemei Teshuvah. Here are a few options for how this may be done:

1. Synagogues/communities may provide a do-it-yourself manual for individuals/households who have access to a body of water. (A ceremony is included in the Lev Shalem Mahzor)
2. For some communities, a physically-distanced meet-up at a natural body of water may work just fine, following the strict protocols of the local guidelines.
3. Some may wish to create a home ritual, whereby using the principle of the halakhic definition of natural body of water (*mayyim hayyim*), which includes melting ice--a household may fill a container with ice, let it melt, and then drop their object symbolizing sin into that vessel. One potential idea for communities offering online services for the High Holidays would be to ask each participant to prepare their “*mayyim hayyim*” at the close of the service, and have everyone throw their piece of bread into a bowl together, at the same moment, led by clergy on screen.
4. Some folks may have water features in their home yard, or access to fish ponds, etc. These would certainly qualify to meet the overall function and intent of the ritual.