

Tashlikh Guide

Hadar's Children & Families



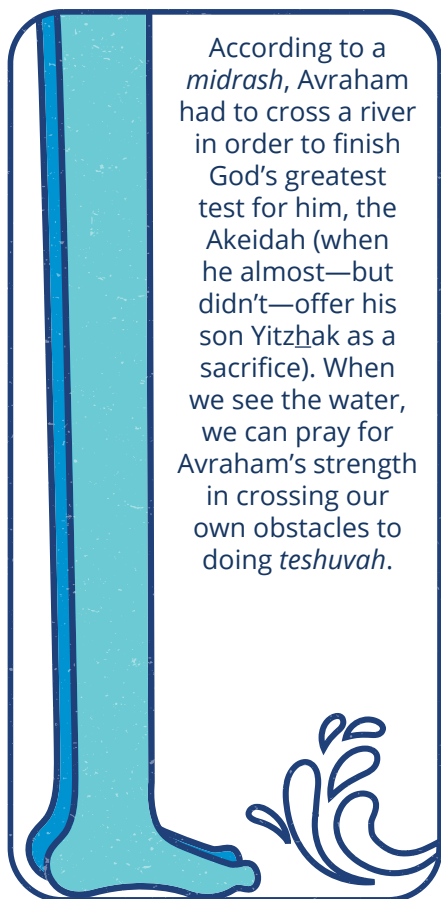
GOING TO THE WATER

The custom of Tashlikh goes back to Germany, about 600 years ago. The Maharil wrote that, after lunch on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, his community would go to the sea or a river. This became a popular custom, especially among Ashkenazim, and the Rema (200 years later) mentions it in his comments to the Shulhan Arukh (Orach Hayyim 583:2).

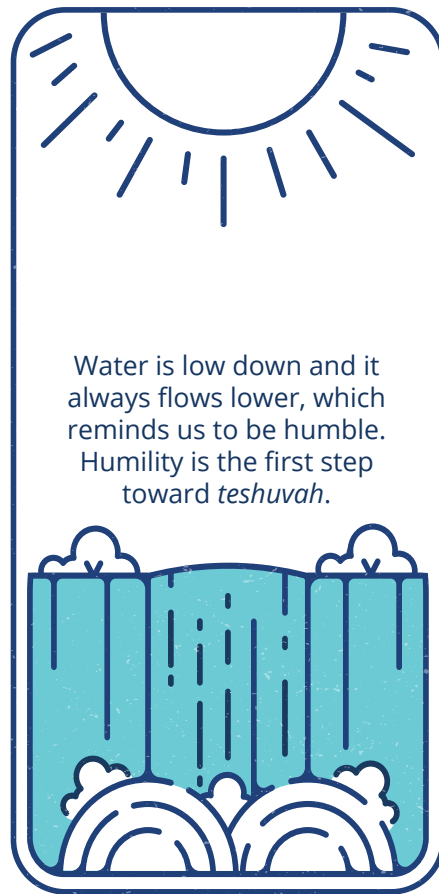




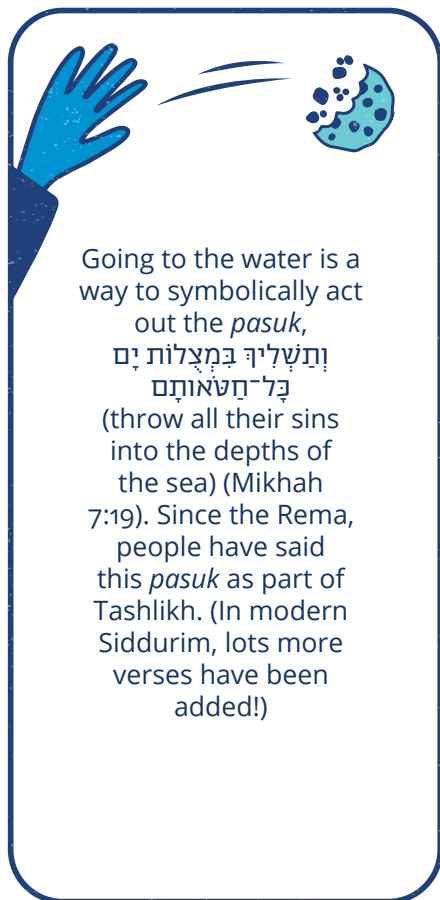
TASHLIKH IS
SUPPOSED TO
HELP US FOCUS
OUR MINDS ON
TESHUVAH FOR
THE COMING YEAR.
THERE ARE LOTS
OF WAYS IT MIGHT
DO THIS, ALL
CONNECTED TO
WATER:



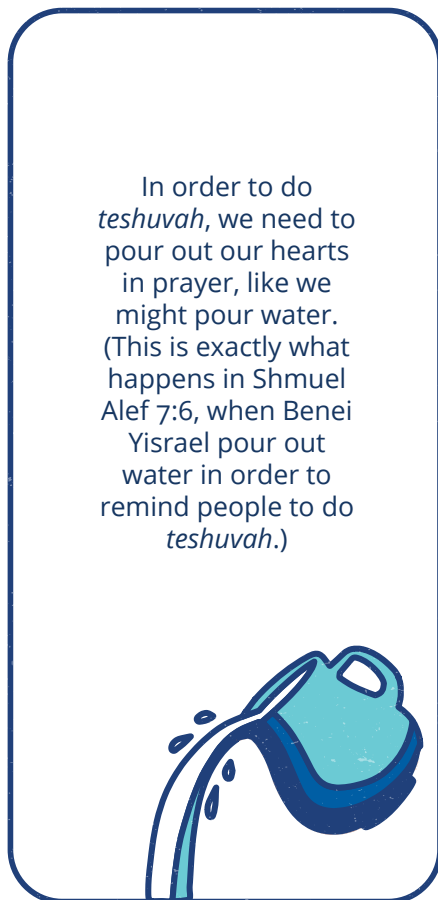
According to a *midrash*, Avraham had to cross a river in order to finish God's greatest test for him, the Akeidah (when he almost—but didn't—offer his son Yitzhak as a sacrifice). When we see the water, we can pray for Avraham's strength in crossing our own obstacles to doing *teshuvah*.



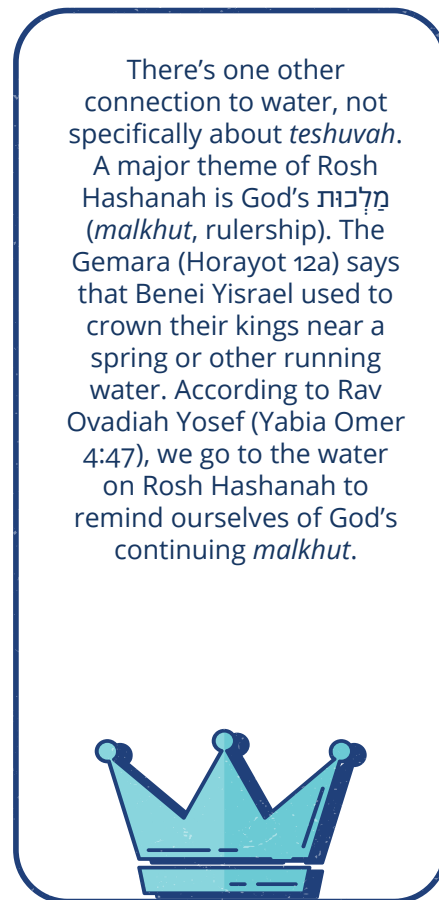
Water is low down and it always flows lower, which reminds us to be humble. Humility is the first step toward *teshuvah*.



Going to the water is a way to symbolically act out the *pasuk*,
וְתִשְׁלִיךְ בְּמַצְלוֹת יָם
כָּל-חַטֹּאוֹתֶם
(throw all their sins into the depths of the sea) (Mikha 7:19). Since the Rema, people have said this *pasuk* as part of Tashlikh. (In modern Siddurim, lots more verses have been added!)



In order to do *teshuvah*, we need to pour out our hearts in prayer, like we might pour water. (This is exactly what happens in Shmuel Alef 7:6, when Benei Yisrael pour out water in order to remind people to do *teshuvah*.)



There's one other connection to water, not specifically about *teshuvah*. A major theme of Rosh Hashanah is God's מְלִכוּת (*malkhut*, rulership). The Gemara (Horayot 12a) says that Benei Yisrael used to crown their kings near a spring or other running water. According to Rav Ovadiah Yosef (Yabia Omer 4:47), we go to the water on Rosh Hashanah to remind ourselves of God's continuing *malkhut*.

FEEDING THE FISH?!

It seems that the Maharil's community was already throwing food into the water during Tashlikh in order to really experience the *pasuk* from Mikhah ("throw all their sins into the depths of the sea"). The Maharil thought this was a conflict with the laws of Yom Tov. This is because the only food preparation we are allowed to do on Yom Tov is for ourselves and any animals that depend on us, like pets, but not for wild animals that get their food from elsewhere.

Instead, the Kitzur Shulhan Arukh says that we should just shake the bottoms of our clothes, as a way of saying, "Let's search ourselves for our sins and get rid of them." For us, the equivalent is probably to shake out our pockets.

FAMILY TEXT STUDY FOR TASHLIKH

Here's a text with guiding questions to bring along to Tashlikh. Down by the water, you can learn as a family.

After Benei Yisrael left מצרים (Mitzrayim, Egypt), they came to a place where the water was too bitter to drink. The people were thirsty. God showed Moshe a piece of wood, Moshe threw it into the water, and the water became sweet (Shemot 15:22-25).

In a *midrash*, some of our Rabbis wondered about the miraculous piece of wood that sweetened the water for Benei Yisrael.

תנחומא בשלח • MIDRASH TANHUMA

ומה היה העץ?

רבי יהושע אומר: של ערבה היה.
רבי נתן אומר: הרדופני מר היה.
רבי אלעזר המודעי אומר: של זית היה.
רבי יהושע בן קורח אומר: קרדניו.
ויש אומרים: עקרי תאנה ועקרי רמון.

מכל מקום, מר היה.

רבן שמעון בן גמליאל אומר: בא וראה כמה מפלאין דרכיו של הקדוש ברוך הוא יותר מדרכי בשר ודם. בשר ודם, במתוק מרפא את המר. אבל הקדוש ברוך הוא, במר מרפא את המר. הא כיצד? נותן דבר המחבל בתוך דבר המחבל, לעשות נס בתוך נס...

וכן הצדיקים במה שהם מקנתרין, בו הם מתקנין.

What kind of wood was it?

Rabbi Yehoshua says: It was willow.
Rabbi Natan says: It was bitter ivy.
Rabbi Eliezer Hamoda'i says: It was olive.
Rabbi Yehoshua ben Korhah says: It was cedar.
Some say: Roots of fig and pomegranate trees.

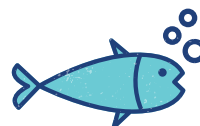
According to all these opinions, it was bitter.

Rabban Shimon ben Gamliel says: This shows how amazing the ways of God are, so much more than human beings! Human beings use sweet things to heal bitterness. But God is even able to use bitter things to get rid of bitterness. How does this work? By placing something destructive into something else destructive, creating a miracle within a miracle...

This is how righteous people are, also. When they say negative things, they fix them in the same spirit.



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תִּדַּע לָךְ, שֶׁבַּשָּׂעָה שֶׁקִּנֵּיתָ מִשָּׂה, בְּ"אֵז" קִנֵּיתָ,
שֶׁנֶּאֱמַר: "וַיֵּאָז בְּאֵתִי אֶל פַּרְעֹה לִדְבֹר בְּשִׁמְךָ..."
(שמות ה:כג)

Moshe is a good example. When he complained, he did it with the word "az," saying "since (az) I came to Pharaoh to speak in Your name, You still have not delivered Your people."

אָמַר מֹשֶׁה: בְּ"אֵז" סָרַחְתִּי. בְּ"אֵז" אֲנִי קִמְנָה
וְאָמַר שִׁירָה. לִכְךָ נֶאֱמַר "אֵז יִשִּׁיר מֹשֶׁה."

Then Moshe realized: I sinned with the word "az." Now I will repair things with this same word, by singing (at the splitting of the sea), "az yashir - Then Moshe sang."



The story in the Torah and this *midrash* highlight how even bad, undrinkable water can be made into something good. Bitter things can become sweet.

- Think of something from this past year that, like the water here, was "bitter" to you when it happened, but could perhaps be made "sweet" in the future. Maybe there was something you did that you're not proud of, or perhaps you had an experience that wasn't so great. As you look at the water, can you think of ways to turn those things around and make them sweeter?
- Sometimes, there are feelings or experiences we carry around with us even when we don't have to anymore—like feelings of anger or shame from a long time ago. This is a good time of year to let go of behaviors we want to change, but it can also be a good time to "let go" of some of those hurt feelings. Can you think of a situation where it would be helpful for you to let go of these negative feelings and let the water carry them away?
- The *midrash* makes it clear that the wood that was used to sweeten the bitter water was bitter itself. What is surprising or miraculous about that? What do you think it could be telling us about how God acts in the world?
- What do you think is the difference between using sweet to get rid of bitter and using bitter to get rid of bitter?

