

TEACHING *TASHLICH* THROUGH NEW GAMES AND AN ENVIRONMENTAL LENS

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SESSION SUMMARY

Participants experienced a selection of historical, arts, theater, and environmentally-based approaches to understanding, teaching, and doing *Taschlich* that students will love.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Tashlich is designed to assist us in cultivating and elevating our capacity to act for the good, for healing transformations of self and world, out of awe and respect for nature—both human nature and the divine nature of the natural world that human behaviors have so profoundly imperiled. Those who attended the session this article stems from at NewCAJE 2016 described themselves as seeking ways to “refresh,” “shake up,” “deepen and enliven the Tashlich experience,” “reach more diverse age and family groups,” and otherwise renew their understanding of, and approaches to teaching and guiding Tashlich experiences. The need for a dynamic environmental lens to be added, given global warming and related issues, was a clearly shared value and aspiration. Indeed, even Secretary General of the UN Ban Ki-moon and envoys to the world body from the US, Britain, Canada, Australia, Ukraine, Brazil and elsewhere, including Israel have undertaken on this practice.¹

This article takes the original NewCAJE session handout and updates it to become a more comprehensive resource. Included are teaching stories, relevant texts, twelve new-games-like and art activities, approaches to teaching the primary metaphors, examples from around the world, as well as links to appropriate music, prayers and dance.

*Yad Elohim Elohim bakol, Yad Elohim bakol.
Elohim bakol, Elohim bakol. Yad Elohim bakol*

“The hand of God is in everything.”² We wove this chant throughout the session along with its Tashlich³-appropriate theology.⁴ The chant was also chosen because *Elohim* has the same *gematria*, numeric value, as *ha-teva*, “the nature,”-- the planet, the environment. And *Elohim*, one of the at least 105 Hebrew names for God, glimpses or fractals of our Godsense, if you will, Judaism, is used exclusively in the first chapter of the first chapter of *Bereishit*, Genesis, regarding the creation of the natural world.

The Tetragrammaton, *Yud Hey Vav Hey*, pronounced by tradition as *Adonai*, first appears in the second chapter of *Bereishit*, Genesis: “No shrub of the field was yet on earth, and no grasses of the field had yet sprung up, because *Adonai Elohim* had not sent rain upon the earth, and there was no human being to till the soil.” Rabbi Harold Shulweiss explains “*Elohim* is the ground of the universe that is given, and *Adonai* is the energy that transforms. Both are indispensable to sustain the earth and make it flourish. *Adonai Elohim* marks the cooperation, the transaction, between the human and the divine. *Elohim* is one part of divinity. *Elohim* is not the whole of divinity. With *Elohim* alone, we live in the world of “is” and ignore the world of “ought.”⁵

Opening Story

Our opening Tashlich story came via the professional Jewish storyteller, Susan Stone. Her as-yet-unpublished approach to the tale weaves together four different versions⁶, as it is a time-honored tradition to create new versions. Some attribute the original to the Baal Shem

Tov. A new version, which follows, is based upon the version by Eric Kimmel, and among the many changes I've made are those that demonstrate how to create a third *tikkun*, repair, by introducing gender roles that are more fluid than those in the earlier versions.

Ashley lived in Sarasota, Florida, with her beloved, Randy. Sarasota is located in Florida, along baby powder-white quartz sands by the gentle cerulean waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

Now Ashley was not always such a considerate person when it came to little things. Little things, like pointing out to her elderly father when he lost things that didn't really need to be mentioned, or using up the toilet paper and not putting out a new roll for others, or leaving her dishes in the sink for Randy to wash, or – especially – blaming others for her own mistakes.

While she certainly knew better, Ashley never regretted these things. She never apologized or did *teshuvah*. Every Friday, she just wrote down her sins and errors and shoved them, like so much dirty laundry, into a bag. One by one, in they went--each *aveirah*⁷⁸, *chata*⁹ (thump your chest), *avone*¹⁰, and *pasha*¹¹ into a spare laundry bag that wasn't otherwise used because it was sooooo huge.

For Ashley, Tashlich was just a habit, a rote rite, something everyone just did, and that she did because her parents had always taken her to do it. And so, every year, come the second day of Rosh HaShannah, she would drag the year's bulging bag down to the river for Tashlich.

Now even little *aveirot* tend to be remembered by at least someone, somewhere. Such things can catch up with a person; this Ashley was about to discover.

It happens that, more than anything in the world, Ashley and Randy wanted to have children. They had tried every means for this to be so. Until, one day, Randy heard about a *tzadeket*, a holy woman, called Tzadeket Tzurah, who lived in a nearby town, and told Ashley about her¹² discovery.

“Randy,” Ashley said, “That’s wonderful! Next week, I will go to see if the *tzadeket* can help me have children. Maybe she can work a miracle for us!”

When Ashley arrived at the house of the *tzadeket*, she barged right in without knocking and found the family in the kitchen. “Tzadeket Tzurah! I need your help for us to have children. No matter the cost, be assured, we will pay.”

Tzadeket Tzurah looked at Ashley, then down at the floor, up at the ceiling and out through the window in silence. And then she replied, “Having children isn't like bargaining over a contractor's bid for a new sun room on your house. Please sit down. I am going to have to pray about this.”

As her family left the kitchen to give them space, Tzadeket Tzurah went to the stove and soon brought over a pot of tea and plate of cookies for her guest.

Ashley began wolfing down the cookies, without so much as a thank you. (*If you wish, mime gobbling some cookies.*)

Seeing her do this, Tzadeket Tzurah looked down at the floor, up at the ceiling, and out through the window. (*Do these movements as you tell.*) She then closed her eyes and began to rock, chanting a *niggun* (*offer a piece of a soulful niggun*) and then prayed aloud: “Holy Shechinah! Show me what I must know, what Ashley must do, tell us what can be? Children are needed, babies for a yearning couple! Please help us!”

After a very long time, a large tear ran down the face of Tzadeket Tzurah. She opened her eyes, looked down at the floor, up to the ceiling, and out through the window, (*turn your head as indicated*) and began chanting the *niggun* again. (*Chant again.*) Soon Ashley shouted: “Stop the singing! Why the huge tear? Tell me my answer!”

Tzadeket Tzurah finished chanting, sat silently with her eyes closed for what seemed like forever. (*Do so and perhaps stay in this state for awhile.*) Then she opened her eyes (*open your eyes*) and said: “Be grateful for what you have and do not ask for more.”

“What a ridiculous answer!” Ashley cried out. “You unskilled fool! Do you even know what you are doing? Why would you say such a bizarre thing to me?!”

Tzadeket Tzurah sat silently, holding Ashley’s eyes, looking into the depths of her soul. Only when she felt *rachamim*, compassion, rising within herself for how Ashley was raised and why she had become as she was, did she elect to speak: “Did you think you could get away with it forever? With treating people so inconsiderately?” After sighing deeply, with her voice rising she added: “Ashley, you have polluted the sea with your huge bags of *aveirot* and more. Children of yours will suffer terribly. “And,” her voice softened, “don’t ask me what will happen to them; I can’t bear to tell you.”

Ashley responded without hesitation: “Having children is a risk I’m willing to take. You must let it be so! You have no right to interfere with my happiness!”

Tzadeket Tzurah gave a huge *krekhtz*, a great sigh, and answered: “You are still uncaring for others, but I will do what you ask.”

(*Use movements to reflect the actions, if you wish.*) Tzadeket Tzurah took a piece of rice paper and a fountain pen from a shelf on the wall beside the table. Selecting a sewing needle from a small bowl on the table, she went over to the gas stove, and using thin tongs, held the needle over the flame of one burner. She returned to the table, sat down, and pricked her finger fiercely. She dipped the nib into the blood flow, drawing it up into the pen, and using the pen, wrote across the page in Aramaic.¹³ The blood dried quickly on the page, which she then folded into a small square.

Next, from a carved wooden box on the table, Tzadeket Tzurah withdrew a tiny muslin bag on a string, and placed the paper into it, saying: “Randy must wear this *segulah*, this amulet, constantly, while you continue trying by all possible means to conceive. If you do so, in ten months, you will birth twins who will be with you for five years.”

“What have you written? Woe, no!” cried Ashley, “If there is to be danger to the twins, you must let me know how to save them!”

“Given your ways, I’m sorry to say, there is no way to do that,” replied Tzadeket Tzurah.

“What terrible prophesy is this?!” cried Ashley. She then fell silent, thinking, thinking, thinking, and then she had an Aha! And added: “Tzadeket Tzurah, as the bearer of such terrible tidings, surely you owe me a clue as to how to save the twins. You must give me something, something helpful to go on! And then her voiced dropped coyly, “At least for the sake of the children.”

While Ashley’s style was no pleasure to the *tzadeket*, her plea for the sake of the children was true enough. So Tzadeket Tzurah prayed to the great Tzadeket Hannah Rochel of Ludomir¹⁴ for guidance¹⁵, and after some time, Tzadeket Tzurah nodded yes, she had received permission to share one clue; just one clue.

She told Ashley: “If you mend your ways, reducing your bag of *aveirot*, *avonot*, *chataot*, and *p’sha’im* to the level of a considerate, mitzvah-centered person for the rest of your life, then the day you put two socks on one foot, you will be able to save the twins. But my sense is that you won’t, for it is likely that you will forget everything I’ve had to say.”

Mumbling “Thanks,” Ashley snatched up the *segulah*, and ran out of the house, holding the precious amulet aloft. Tzadeket Tzurah watched her go, shaking her head in sadness.

Ten months later Ashley and Randy rejoiced to become the parents of two healthy twins. By the time they were toddlers, the children loved to frolic on the soft baby powder-like quart sands by the serene cerulean waters of the Gulf of Mexico.

Unfortunately, sometimes Ashley thoughtlessly left them there unattended, for she had never changed her ways. Indeed, she had forgotten everything that Tzadeket Tzurah had said once the twins were born, and so was still dragging the huge laundry bag full of *aveirot* and more to the Gulf each year for Tashlich.

And, so it was, that the last day of the fifth year of the twins’ lives passed. The next morning, on a hot, muggy day, after returning from a swim, Ashley’s clothes stuck to her as she tried to get dressed. And when it came time to put on her socks, it was very hard to get even one on, and the other seemed to be nowhere in sight.

Ashley stormed around the house looking for her sock. In the kitchen she blamed Randy for it having gone missing. Now Randy had never been fully informed of the prophesy. Ashley

had left out the sock part of the story when she'd come home that auspicious day five years earlier. So Randy laughed, and pointing down at Ashley's feet declared: "Look at your left foot—you have put two socks onto one foot, silly Ashley!"

Ashley paled. Two socks on one foot...oh no, where had she heard that before? It was something bad... the terrible prophesy! The prophesy, it was happening! Aloud Ashley cried: "Oh why, oh no, oh I must run...two socks on one foot...Randy! Where are the children?! Nooooo...Of course you don't know, because I left them unattended, playing by the water at the beach!"

Ashley fled the kitchen, running toward the beach and a rapidly darkening sky—a storm was coming!

Ashley ran harder and faster than at any time in her life. The wind had picked up, so the twins didn't hear her calling them to come to her, as they were about to re-enter the water. She could see them curiously turning their heads, observing the unusually large wave. "No, no! Come back, come back!" screamed Ashley.

And then, taking in the whole scene, while looking for someone to help her, she noticed that a monstrous shark was gliding down on the crest of a vast wave toward the twins...She leapt into the air, throwing herself the last few steps forward, successfully thrusting the twins aside to safety upon the soft sand.

Falling upon her face before the monstrous shark, Ashley shouted into the roaring wind: "Punish them not for my faults. Take me instead! Take me!! Let this be my *teshuvah*, which I should have always done, and yet never followed through on my promise. Take me!! Take my life in place of theirs! They are but children, let them live!"

Ashley lay weeping in submission upon the seabed; awaiting her death. The twins were frozen in terror behind her upon the sand.

Ashley waited and waited. When her death did not come, she slowly looked upwards. The monstrous shark shape was becoming as transparent as a cloud of vapor. It seemed to be ascending, and sunlight soon began streaming through the moisture in its path.

Inhaling sharply, Ashley gasped, as a rainbow began to appear. Deep in her soul something shifted as she realized she was seeing God's light – God's light shining through God's tears! Her *teshuvah* had been accepted!

Once back home safely with the twins, Ashley began to sincerely change her ways. And when Ashley, Randy and the twins went to do Tashlich that year, and every year thereafter, there were hardly any *chataot*, *aveirot*, *avonot* and not even one *pesha* to place in the bag. So much so that they were able to substitute the small fabric *segulah* bag, that once contained the now framed document, the *shtar* written in blood by the twins' favorite adopted aunt, the holy woman, Tzadeket Tzurah.

Questions for open discussion:

1. What feelings, thoughts, connections came up for you during the story?
2. Why is Tzurah called a *tzadeket*?
3. Is there a Tzadeket Tzurah in your life? How did, or does, this person guide you?
4. What kinds of pollution are in your Tashlich bag?
5. Why was Ashley given an amulet for Randy to wear? How is this helpful?
6. What is the first example of *teshuvah* given in the Torah?

Theory

Appreciation of the value of *conscious*, rather than *rote* ritual, was restored for many in the teaching, guidance and works of Dr. Fritz Perls, founder of Gestalt psychology. Also, from cultural anthropology comes the term *apatropaic*, from the Greek “*apo*—off, away” and “*trepein*—turn, avert.” Biblical rites intended to avert evil, purify from wrongdoing, and to restore mitzvah-centered living often involved admission of behavior, and purification through transmitting the memory via placing one’s hands onto an animal, bird or for the very poor, flour, which would either be freed, “sent away” or donated to the Temple through the sacrificial system.¹⁶ Some rites included drinking, dashing, or sprinkling with blood or water. Addressing the individual and collective human need for expiation, purification, and re-integration into the goodness of a mitzvah-centered individual life and community, *without taking animal life or shedding even a drop of blood*, is the essence of how, and why, both “*Tashlich*—sending out” and *Teshuvah*—returning” continue to function powerfully in Jewish religious life; whereas the sacrificial system was discontinued without apparent ill effect in the second century C.E.

From the same conceptual place, Hebrew also has a root tree used in antiquity for archery: *horah*—instruction, *Torah*—(divine) instructions, *morah/eh*—instructor/teacher, *arah*—aim, or pour. And, the Hebrew term “חטא, *chata*, as in the *al cheyt* prayer” (too-often translated as “sin”) actually comes from the Hebrew archery term for “a mark that has been missed.”

When these associated words function as **metaphors**, they help us to appreciate that:

Torah is the guidance (**horah**) that the [divine] Instructor (**morah**) gives so that we can realign our aim (**arah**) regarding our missed mark(s) (**heyt**) toward the **mitzvah**-centered intention of our lives as Jews.

Judaism wisely developed and retains many embodied, Gestalt-like practices that lead to mitzvah-centered, rather than self-centered, living:

- recalling individual and collective bitterness through tasting the *marror*
- mourners deepening and defining their tender status and reflective inner space by sitting low for *shiva*

--receiving the lineage and mantle of our teachers during the laying on of hands for *smichah*—ordination, as will be the case with the upcoming Maggid-Educator ordinations next year in conjunction with NewCAJE
 --experiencing the beauty, resilience, fragility and blessing of life while sitting contemplatively in a *sukkah*
 --Tashlich--contemplating what needs purification and transformation in our lives, then symbolically casting “all of this” upon living waters. We do so aware of *teshuvah* accomplished, and that we yet intend to do with others. We experience “*taheir libeinu*” divine acceptance and purification of the intentions of our hearts “*l’ovdecha b’emet*” so that we can “serve through the name of God that is “*emet*—truth” —the goodness of mitzvah-centered rather than self-centered living, which includes the *mitzvot* of self care.
 --And much, much more.

Traditions evolve and change within Jewish culture. For example, many readers may have had (great)grandparents who twirled a chicken over their heads for bringing in the Jewish New Year with good intent. This was called, “*shlugging kapores*.” “*Kaparah*” is the term for divine forgiveness—“*kaper lanu*” we chant on Yom Kippur. An origin story may be this one, from Rashi:

The Geonim used to plant a seed fourteen to twenty days before Rosh HaShanah and then on *erev* Rosh HaShanah, after it sprouted, they would wave it over their heads and recite that the action is being done “*zeh tachat zeh*—this in place of that” and would then throw it into the river.¹⁷

Today most Jews wouldn’t do such a thing with a chicken or a seedling. And, many traditional sources disdain the custom of throwing bread upon the waters during Tashlich, because Judaism¹⁸ wisely stipulates that one is not to feed creatures that are not already dependent upon humans to eat, lest they lose their natural drive to feed themselves. Additionally, bread products seed the destruction of entire eco-systems when cast into our living water sources. If using one’s imagination isn’t going to fly where you work, sprinkling fish food is done by some, and to avoid hurting the area birds, most often described as safe are birdseed, grapes (cut in half), earthworms, mealworms, chopped lettuce or other greens or salad mixes, chopped vegetable trimmings or peels, or duck pellets. Unsafe for the birds are such things as bread, chips, crackers and biscuits, popcorn and sugar food—sweets, chocolate.¹⁹ Wisely, our sages report the practice of symbolically turning out one’s pockets in clothing or the corner of a *tallit kattan*²⁰, which The Siddur HaAriZal calls “the garment of the Shechinah.” So nothing actually touches the water.

Before consciously moving further into the environmental component, let’s dip into the river of infinite possible powerful ways to shape and experience Tashlich.

Tales of Tashlich

1. About eighteen years ago, during High Holidays in Amsterdam, the time for Tashlich was approaching. Being unfamiliar with the area, and expecting a canal would be close by, as service leader I asked a local teen attending the service to guide us to the nearest canal. Many of us were still wearing our *kippot* and *tallitot* as we walked along, softly chanting a local chant for “*Taheyr Libeynu—Purify Our Hearts*.” Incredibly, no matter which turn he took, we did not come upon water. How could this happen in Amsterdam? A city of canals?! It was becoming dark when we finally found ground water.

Upon apologizing for not having secured directions to water in advance, the response of those who participated was surprising. It seems some of those we passed along the way had asked congregants about what we were doing, and where we were going. When walkers explained, some of the witnessing pedestrians began to weep in gladness to see columns of Jews in the street for such a reason (in contrast to being marched to the trains to death camps during the *Shoah*, Holocaust).

We were later informed that since the *Shoah*, it was not customary to go about so publicly for this ritual. Indeed, some of the community's leaders' indicated they would have resisted such a walk, had they been asked. Even so, they added, the very act of being publically received with kindness, curiosity and honesty, was quite healing. Sadly, in 2016, wearing religious garments in public is not always so well received.

2. It was a mega-rainy day in Philadelphia. As a few large ceramic basins of water were placed before us at the P'nai Or community, we were advised these were for Tashlich. Scraps of thin paper and watercolor pens were then passed around with the invitation to write down an "*al cheyt*—upon the missed mark" in our lives where we had hurt another. We each took turns contemplating, writing, reflecting once again, and then immersing our paper into the ritual basins.

Soon, upon immersing the scrap of paper in one of the bowls of water, the written words began to run, much like the tears down our faces. The water gradually turned a hopeful pastel green from the dissipating marker. In my spiritual imagination, or perhaps it was her soul speaking to mine directly, my mother's voice became ever-so-audible: "All you have to do is want to make it different next time. Do you want to try? To make it a promise?" And I whispered back, "Yes, I promise."

3. Ten year-old Jan runs forward from her place in the circle and, having reached the descending beach ball first, she calls out her personal Tashlich issue: "Angry outbursts."

Among those witnessing, those with a response stepped forward, each with a word or short phrase for how that tendency might be transformed: "Call a friend, share your feelings"; "Dance it out"; "Count to ten before speaking".

Jan touched her heart with her hands in gratitude for each idea and sprinted to the waterside, where fish food awaited to be sprinkled to complete her Tashlich. But first, Jan threw the ball into the air for the next person to catch it.

Ben catches the ball and calls out: "Telling little lies!" And the responses come: "Truth!" "Ask for what you need!" "Trust being real."...and so the group continued until everyone had a turn.

--Adapted from the approach of the Locher Family of Ameland, see Goldie Milgram, *Reclaiming Judaism as a Spiritual Practice: Shabbat and Holy Days*

4. At the experimental couples' Tashlich each partner, as an individual, was encouraged to walk into the exquisite forest, no further than the river that can be heard from where we are. On the way, each poured out loud from their hearts, as though to a listening God, everything that needs to be emptied out from "the Kiddush cup of their lives,"—one item at a time.

Then, each person sat in a private place, on a log or stone, and quietly noticed in the body where something pre-verbal is twinging, tightening, or in some other way asking for our attention. (Not somewhere that usually hurts due to an illness or injury.) Any image or sensation that came, we were to stay with in a curious and friendly manner, even bringing it out onto our hands to visit like a best friend willing to listen from a divine place of deep love and caring without offering fixes or otherwise trying to be helpful.

When the *teshuvah* that was needed emerged into consciousness, we committed to it as best we could, to our

Godsense that was speaking within us. Most then experienced a shift—the physical sensation had gone and in its place was the “knowing”—“*v’yadat et Yah*”—knowing Godliness, as the prayer for *tefillin* that is sometimes used during Jewish wedding ceremonies that comes from Hosea so beautifully describes.²¹

Next each saw on their guidance sheet that they were to independently select two of the beautiful moss-covered twigs from those that abound in that area. One twig to cast afloat upon the river to power one’s Tashlich *teshuvah* intention. The other twig to gift to one’s partner back at the circle, as a token of *teshuvah* to come, and Love divine awakened within. —This is an application of Focusing developed by Rabbi Goldie Milgram with Barry Bub, MD, based upon a method discovered and developed by Dr. Eugene Gendlin.

Questions for Open Discussion:

In these examples, what touched or surprised you?
 What aspects might be helpful additions where you serve?
 Where, when, and how do you “know God”?

Tashlich Traditions

While some of the vignettes may have been surprising adaptations of the best known tradition of prayer and recalling what needs transformation in our behavior and symbolically casting it into living waters, it is all the more empowering for us as educators to see our sages’ range of opinions about where and when²² to do Tashlich. For example, some might think living waters are essential for Tashlich. Indeed, Chaim Vital and the *Kitzur Shulchan Aruch*: 129:21 says so, and adds that these living waters must be outside of a city. The *Maaseh Rav* reports that the Gra taught that Tashlich can be done “even without running water” and *he* “did not go to a river or a well for Tashlich.”

EVEN SO:

--The *Chatam Sofer* did Tashlich by “walking up a hill to see the ‘face of the river’ (the Danube) from a distance.”²³

--The *Kaf Chayyim* (a *halachic* compilation): “When there is no flowing water, for Tashlich use an outdoor pit, even if it is empty, or [done] in a city.”²⁴

--*Levush Orach Chaim*, 596; “It was normal to go to a place that had fish.”

-- Ovadia Yosef, who served as Israel’s Chief Sephardi Rabbi, did Tashlich over water in a bucket.²⁵

--The Ari, according to Magen Avraham 583:5, said it is permitted to do Tashlich over a well. One of the Hebrew names for God is “*Be’er Mayim Chayim*, the Well of Living Waters.”²⁶

Note: A participant in this session at NewCAJE reported using inflatable children’s swimming pools for their Tashlich water basins. Because stones are absent life, representing the divine nature of the structure of creation, and judgment rather than the flow of life within creation and loving-kindness, and whereas they clobber life forms large and small when thrown in the water, stones are not typically used for Tashlich.

Metaphors Be with You

The Tashlich ritual and liturgy rely upon metaphors drawn from the natural world, for example, water, hand, and fish. When we make the metaphors evident to our students, the power of Tashlich will be able to go far deeper. In other words, they will benefit from emotional and intellectual preparation before engaging in the physicality of any approach to Tashlich and other Jewish practices. Then the spiritual impact will be possible and often memorably heightened. Some activities using these three metaphors—water, hand and fish—follow.

Mayyim*—Water as Metaphor*Activity #1**

“Gazing--*Ereh*” Have your students gaze upon any living body of water—river, sea, ocean, stream, pond, or lake serve best. Ask them to do so privately and quietly, depending upon their learning patterns you will see that some sit, others walk, some stand. Ask them to make a point of looking upon the water’s surface, through its depths, at the reflections, ripples and patterns, how its flow relates to the rocks and life forms that may live in or upon it. Depending upon the age group, have them do so from five minutes to, say, thirty minutes of observing in this way.

When you want your group to reconvene, do not shout “time,” or otherwise interfere with their process. Instead begin chanting *Yad Elohim BaKol* again, until they have all returned to be with you. When you cease chanting, ask them to sit quietly and decide one or two things to share from their experience of *mayyim* gazing. Be sure to accurately reflect back a few key words or phrases of what each person shares. Consider providing some paper and colored pencil or pen, as their response might come out better drawn rather than spoken. For others a few physical movements or small spontaneous dance of their own will speak volumes. In our Maggid-Educator Ordination Program²⁷ our students learn a series of movements from a modality called InterPlay²⁸ that facilitates safe emoting during class. Viewing our students engaging in this and other forms of expression, we learn to better appreciate, receive and support them for who they are, and are becoming. The *sh'mei rabbah*, Great Name, is made out of all of the forms of Is, Was, and Will be, and another of the many names for God might be The Infinite Potential for Change (YHVH) that is within our students, and All That Is.

Water, essential for life, is also widely used ritually in Torah and in our Jewish lives today as a symbol for God, and by association, for purification and transformation.

Activity #2

Invite your students to mime and guess examples of how water is used in Jewish ritual and appears in Torah, or give them one of the following and invite skits or miming. (As you know we do so with *mikveh* for conversion, marriage, reproductive readiness, Holy Days and Shabbat, healing, when we bless over Miriam’s cup, for *netila yadaim*, and for Tashlich. Biblically, in addition to water gazing [Ezekiel 1:1] and immersing, [Leviticus 11:36] we also find fascinating water rituals that involve:

Drawing and pouring: (*sho'ev*) in many passages including Genesis 24:13-19, 43; 1Samuel 9:11, Isaiah 12:3 and Talmud Sukkot 41a-53a.

Washing: (*rachatz*) Numbers 8:7, Exodus 19:10, Exodus 30:19-21

Drinking and Testing: (*sotah*) Numbers 5:2

Sprinkling: (*z'reekah*) Number 8:7 and Ezekiel 36:25)

Water is so central to Jewish spirituality,²⁹ to the ability to connect to our sense of the divine, that:

“...there are those who say even though [God] would speak with them outside the Land [of Israel], [God] would not speak with them except upon a pure place upon the water.” —*Yalkut Shimoni on Ezekiel 8:3*

So it eventually comes to be that Chaim Vital in *Sha'ar Hakavanot*, as quoted in *Kaf Hachayim* 583:30 tells us of the medieval “...custom practiced by the Ashkenazim, which they call Tashlich, is to go on the first day of Rosh Hashanah after *Mincha*—afternoon prayer, slightly before sunset, to the Mediterranean Sea or to a spring, as a proper custom. It is preferable to do this outside the city, to stand on the seashore, or alongside a spring...

Questions for Open or *Chevruta* Discussion:

- What are some of the qualities of water?
- How can these qualities be used as a metaphor? (e.g., Her stare was as cold as ice. His love came pouring through. Lulled by a gentle path on the river of life, suddenly we were navigating white water.)
- When is the presence or absence of water an important part of one or more of the following verses from Torah?
- What are the water metaphors in the following verses? (If those involved have strong enough Hebrew skills, include the original texts as the Hebrew is far more key than English can ever truly render.) See Appendix 2 for some of the many possible answers.

1. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the *Ruach Elohim* fluttered upon the water's surface. —*Genesis 1:2*

Question: What does this remind you of in the human life cycle?

2. Abraham awoke early in the morning, and took bread and a skin of water. He gave it to Hagar, putting it on her shoulder, along with the child, and sent her away. She went and wandered in the wilderness of Be'er Sheva. When the water in the skin was gone, she sent the child off to under one of the bushes. She went and sat opposite him, at a distance, about that of a bowshot (*keshet*). She said: "Let me not see the child's death." So she sat opposite, lifted up her voice, and wept.

Questions for Open or *Chevruta* Discussion:

- How many forms of water appear in this text?
- What might an empty water sack stand for besides thirst for water?
- Consider all that Hagar has lost that she once had. What does she thirst for?
- Look up the word *keshet* in a Hebrew dictionary. What do those familiar with the other major appearance of this word in the Torah know about how this story will turn out based on the other possible meaning of this word?

3. I will sprinkle pure water upon you and you will be pure from all your errors and all your idols will I purify you. I will give you a new heart, and I will give within you a new spirit, and I will turn the heart of stone from out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." —*Ezekiel 36:27*

Questions:

- Have you ever had a "heart of stone"?
- What might be the causes for this in humans?
- How does water affect stone?
- How might pure water help purify a heart of stone?
- What is possible with a heart of flesh, that is impossible with a heart of stone.

In Judaism water and water-related terms like a well, a spring, a river, a sea (as in the Sea of Reeds, the breaking waters of a newly born free people), and more also serve as a symbol and metaphor for places and experiences that can be divinely transformative, spiritually purifying. And, in the spiritual imagination of the traditional Kabbalists, water correlates with a *sephirah*—node or branch on the *Etz Chayyim*, Tree of Life, that of *Chessed*—divinely overflowing loving-kindness. Rabbi Moses Isserles taught that:

The natural order demands that water should cover the entire planet and it is only through the chesed of God that He allowed us to have portions of land on which to live. Therefore, we go to the water to see that idea first hand and through that we coronate God as King of the World and it causes us to repent.

We don't throw our iniquities into the water- they are figuratively thrown in the river when we are inspired to repent.³⁰

Another way of expressing this comes through Kabbalah: "In the service of the soul...the higher water is water of joy, the experience of being close to God, while the lower water is water of bitterness, the experience of being far from God."³¹ Tzadket Tsurah's huge tear of awareness for the human condition in the case of Ashley symbolizes "the upper waters." (*Binah*) Ashley's alienation from knowing and manifesting through Lovingkindness, would then be "the lower waters."

Mashpi'ah Carola de Vries Robles teaches:

"The 'Higher Water' is only active when my small I, ego willful personality offers, surrenders to the Mystery of Life, the Greater Good...Tashlich is pointing, is evocative towards our deep cleaning, purification, becoming a container to hold Unconditional Love. Tachlich involves receiving God's active flow of compassion and love. This involves letting go of grasping, opening our "bag" and our "hands". Opening into radical receptivity to receive truthful insights, divine guidance. Doing Tashlich redirects our sense of self will and expands awareness. The core shift is surrendering in the depth of the Mystery inside of oneself. We then need to integrate the new insights into our self-image and learn to make new choices and decisions. Our perspective shifts. Our sense of self and control shifts.

Joyfulness is also associated with the "upper waters" that Tzadket Tsurah helped to bring into Ashley and Randy's experience, as symbolized by the children in the story. Accordingly, connecting ourselves to "the upper waters" is the reason the Ari gives to do Tashlich by a river.³²

Activity #3

Imagine a time of experiencing loving-kindness so powerful it felt divine, or if you have not, bring all of your ability to imagine so, and that you can radiate it to others. Allow yourself to fill with this sense. Imagine someone it is difficult for you to receive, or give or accept *teshuvah*. How might placing yourself in a sense of *Chesed* flowing over and through you help you to be present to such a person? Can you bless him/hir/her with this gift in *your* spiritual imagination? How might this affect their place in your Tashlich practice?

Activity #4

After sharing the examples with your students, in groups of four, using memory and/or a concordance, have your students find four more important, transformational references to *mayyim*—water in the Torah. Among your students' findings will be key verses where *mayyim* can readily read as a metaphor—help them find and enter into the metaphors so that their dances (e.g., *u'shavtem mayyim mi-meinei ha'y'shua*—what does it mean to “draw water in joy from the waters of salvation?”), psalms, prayers and sacred texts will never seem the same to them again because the metaphors will begin to leap out at them.

We are told in Torah to “*asu li mikdash v'shochanti b'tocham*—make a sanctuary for me so that I can dwell within you.” Through the study of metaphor your students will have begun to evolve an internal sense of *mikdash*—an expanded sacred space within themselves where the divine voice comes through the text, to reside more fully within them. What we are doing to prepare them for Tashlich is teaching how spirit flows through form—how to turn on the lights within the letters and practices within our tradition, to know “One.” As beautifully taught by Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach:

Rabbi Nachman and all of our holy masters taught us, that water existed since before the creation of the world. We all are aware that the world was created with the utterance of the letter bet, and bet has the numerical value of two! In the world, everything seems to come in pairs of two. Summer and winter,

day and night, me and you, us and Hashem, everything except for water! Water is always one. There is no word in Hebrew for just one drop of water; water in Hebrew is always in the language of plural-mayim. Certainly if one contemplates that if we placed one drop of water right next to a second drop of water, that drop of water would become absorbed, and fully merge with the second drop of water! We can learn and appreciate the great oneness of Hashem as demonstrated by the unique quality of water! On Rosh Hashana afternoon we go down to the banks of a body of water, in order to connect ourselves to the water, to connect ourselves to the great oneness of God, which is so evident in the perplexing properties of the water.³³

Tashlich stories from Jewish folklore amplify and sometimes animate. The following midrash is traditionally part of Tashlich learning. It is derived from *The Yalkut Shemoni (Vayera 99)*, and found as also discussed by the Maharil:

1. Satan tried to prevent Abraham and Isaac from getting to the site of the “*Akeidah*—the Binding of Isaac,” by turning into a raging river which blocked their path. None-the-less Abraham entered the river, intent upon his destination. When the waters reached his neck, he cried out, “Save me, God, for **the waters have reached my soul** [*ad nafesh*]” [Psalm 69:2], whereupon the waters miraculously disappear.

Isaiah 43:2 is also traditionally associated with Tashlich, as it reads:

2. “When you pass through the waters, I am with you, I am, and in the rivers you won’t be overwhelmed.”

Satan. While there is no Satan in the Biblical story of the *Akeidah*, the term, so central to the midrash above is found in the Torah in a number of verses³⁴, as *ha-satan*—“the accuser” or “the adversary” and fits into what folklorist term the role of the “trickster.” Dualism – the concept of a divine being that is a force for good and another that is a force for evil, did not get traction in Judaism. As Judaism has developed, *satan*, pronounced, *sah-tahn* is a fallen angel that causes trouble, a “trickster”. There are other tricksters in our tradition, too. Accordingly, preparation for Tashlich might include exploration of what is the “trickster,” or stumbling block.

Questions for Open Discussion:

Who will share a story from your life where you felt one or both of these citations apply?

How does our study of metaphor help open these sacred texts up for our souls?

Hands as Metaphor

Jewish practices typically have a verse from Torah upon which they, too, hang—are “*talui*—dependent.” In this regard the earliest Tashlich documentation, which is medieval, connects Tashlich to a precept of the Prophet Micah that is part of the Tashlich prayers:

Micah 7:18-19: Who, God, is like You?³⁵ [*mi El ka'mocha*] Forgiving our toxic behaviors and passing over transgressions of your remaining inheritors [of Torah]! [You, God] do not remain eternally angry, for there is divine delight in kindness. There is a divine return to compassion, this subdues our misaligned behaviors, and [You, God] **cast all of our errors into the sea.** Give truth to the Jacob [qualities] within us, and [show] loving-kindness for our Abrahamic [nature], as you swore to do for our ancestors of old.³⁶

How can it be that Micah says “and [You, God] **cast all of our errors into the sea**,” when it is our own hand that seems to be doing so in this ritual? Perhaps the answer lies in the following story.

In those days it was the custom at our congregation to pass the *yad* after Torah reading so that anyone with a take on the *parsha* could add something to amplify our understanding. That day, during a portion concerning the sacrificial system, to my surprise my son took the *yad*, he was but perhaps seven years old. And he told us: “For thousands of years the Jewish people killed and cooked “animals” because they read that G*d loves the smell of barbecue and would stop war, disease and bad storms and earthquakes out of gratitude. From this we learn that God does not have...(he paused dramatically) a nose!” And everyone laughed.

The surprise continued as he added: “After that we decided that God loves words and so the prayer book became longer and longer in hopes our prayers would be heard and the wars, diseases, bad storms and earthquakes would come to an end in gratitude to our praise and requests. From this we learn that God does not have...(pause)...ears!” What an age appropriate theology, I thought, concrete, *peshat* thinking. But there was more to come.

The lad concluded by taking the hands of the people sitting on either side of him and saying: “My Mommy’s generation has a new theory and that is that God has hands. And these (he lifted their hands up), are the hands of God.”

So perhaps it is that our hands symbolize the “hands of God,” doing the casting out from within us, as well as the cleaning up after a lake or river has been damaged.

The teaching above affords a great place to renew the opening chant—*Yad Elohim BaKol*, as when we thread our teaching with music, especially contemplative chant there is a major impact upon the wellbeing of our students. The *Yad Elohim* chant (see endnote 1) seems to be connected to *Kohelet*, Ecclesiastes 9:1 and works well with drumming on a dumbek, large plastic can, tapping rocks together at the beach, or table top, drumming.

“In every action,” said the Berditschever, “a person must regard his body as the Holy of Holies, a part of the supreme power on earth which is part of the manifestation of the Deity . . . Whenever a person lifts his hands to do a deed, let him consider his hands the messengers of God.”³⁷

Activity #5

1. Read the first article in Endnote 38³⁸ about Honi the Circle-Drawer, and adapt the article's opening story for telling in your context.
2. Review the ideas about exile in the article. How much of themselves does society virtually require your students to exile rather than love and appreciate for when then God-given aspect of self is their gift.
3. Invite them to journal about this.
4. Have them put a towel or tarp on the floor and make a circle out of yarn on it, one for each person.
5. Give them two colors of sand, one pile in each hand. Ask them to reflect on when an aspect of themselves is an obstacle for them and not helpful and invite them to drizzle words or images about their feelings in one color in regard to that quality.
6. Now invite them to reflect on how that quality is helpful and important at times in their lives. And invite them to use the other color to drizzle words or images to that regard.
7. Ask them to stand in that circle and pray for balance, to know when and how much to engage in and when to refrain from applying that quality in their lives.
8. If you do this outdoors or at the beach, have them in bathing suits
9. Now invite them to dance *u'shavtem mayyim b'sasson* (draw water in joy from the Wells of Salvation) on top

of all of the circles with a reminder of the meanings of water in our tradition and spray them with a hose to allow the *b'sasson* element to emerge in the sense of release and play.

OR

Activity #6

1. On sand beside living waters, or, or on large pieces of piece of paper taped to the floor in a classroom.
2. Have your students draw a large circle, like *Honi HaMaagal*—Honi the Circle-Drawer did to create a private prayer space.
3. Have them trace their hands and write at the top: My prayer and inside the circle around the hands to what mitzvah-related behaviors they wish their hands to refrain from, and to engage in going forward.
4. No names should appear to identify who wrote what.
5. Then have students one-by-one witness each other's circles and whisper prayers for this to be so.
6. If at the beach, students can collect water with pails for washing away their own circle drawing/prayer prior to, or as a form of Tashlich.

Fish as Metaphor

Understanding water as a metaphor for the manifestation of God within creation, *as is Torah itself*, is grounded in a famous midrash about Rabbi Akiva's persistence in a life of Torah, to the point of his death at the hands of the Romans. He is said to have explained why to them in this parable that also helps us appreciate why some sages say the presence of living fish in the waters of Tashlich is important:

“During Rabbi Akiva's lifetime, the Romans passed harsh laws forbidding the Jews to study and practice Torah. Even though the penalty for doing so was death, Rabbi Akiva continued to gather people together and teach the ways of Torah.

One day Pappus ben Judah saw Rabbi Akiva teaching and asked him, “Aren't you afraid of Romans, Akiva?”

“I can answer you with a story,” said the rabbi.

“Once a hungry, sly fox was walking by a river. He saw swarms of fish swimming frantically from one place to another. The fox called out to one of the fish: ‘What are you running away from fish?’

“‘From the nets the fishermen are casting,’ answered the fish.

“‘Why don't you and your friends come up on the land and be near me and be safe?’ said the fox who knew what a tasty dinner the fish would be.

“‘What a foolish fox you are,’ said the fish, ‘if you think we would be safer on land where we would die, than here in the water which is our home and keeps us alive.’

“‘We are like the fish, Pappus,’ said Rabbi Akiva. “‘And our Torah is like their rivers and streams. It keeps us alive. How much more in danger would we and all the people of Israel be without it.’”

With these words Rabbi Akiva returned to his pupils and resumed his teaching of Torah.³⁹

While some sages have offered creative explanations for why fish are part of their Tashlich experience—their eyes are open in awareness, they live in the water and are not consciously affected by the issues in our societies, etc.—the midrash above focuses on how Tashlich returns us to the waters of Torah, of mitzvah-centered living. In Tashlich we have the opportunity to symbolically decompose our wrongs in waters symbolizing divine loving-kindness. For we must be able to visit our own shadow sides in the spirit of *Shechinah*, with the kind of divine love that elicits desire for needed change, embracing us until we can't imagine going another way.

Activity #7

Have your students draw a fish on a 12" tile with a marker (minimal cost at discount centers), and in its center symbols or pictures for the actions and feelings the students each want to acknowledge within themselves as

part of their Tashlich process. You might show them the fish storytelling images⁴⁰ and masks from the Northwest Pacific American First Peoples, for inspiration. If they paint them on a tile, these can be set at the bottom of Tashlich basins as an art inspiration about Tashlich (if the marker smudges, use a clear basin or glass to protect above the water).

Activity #8

1. Consider having your students go on-line and having them print out information for class about bodies of water nearby where the fish can no longer be eaten, or the waters are otherwise in need of a cleanup. Similarly, have them find information about the closest water sources that environmental activism has led to being restored to health. Have your students share their findings and then print indelibly onto T-shirts the name of a nearby cleaned up or polluted body of water. Collect the shirts for another day, saying their use is going to be a surprise. Or, if fiscal savings are vital, do one shirt with several bodies of water on each for every four to six students.

2. Rinse the shirts in water, fold them and put them out separately in a freezer until they are frozen in the folded shape, or per this video⁴¹ from which this idea has been adapted, freeze them in a ball. Separate with sheets of wax paper after freezing, and stack. You can bring them to class in a freezer chest.

3. When the time is right, after chanting, give each student, or a group of four to six students a frozen shirt to unbundle and put on. It's fine if they come up with the idea of helping each other, that's caring.

4. Hold a debriefing once they are all wearing their shirts. Help them to find metaphors and puns about their experience, e.g., "What freezes you from taking on more environmental action?" "What did you see someone do recently and yet you felt frozen at the thought of asking the person to stop?" ...things like that... and your own questions like: "When did someone hand you a flyer about the environment, and instead of folding it up without reading it and tossing it in the nearest can, were you were surprised by the facts and?" "How is forgetting to put your ice-pop stick into re-cycling a slippery slope?" Let them riff on this and have fun getting into ideas, challenges and metaphors.

Activity #9

Or, hold a summer Tashlich study pool or beach party. Have the entry ticket be information about clean water advocacy or success at this time—locally, Israel and beyond. Bring the metaphor information that is in the article to teach with you too, they will never view where water appears in Jewish sources and on this earth the same way again. And where possible, hold your Tashlich at a site of clean water success so that playful time in the water is possible. Bring out a ball and have people bat it to each other to spell out in Hebrew terms from this unit, or to call out one of the metaphors they've studied in connection to water in this unit for each tap.

Activity #10

Tashlich preparation can also include consideration of the text of the Rainbow Covenant. This affords an early Tashlich possibility of focusing on nature as a blessing and as being in need of *teshuvah* from all of us. It also pairs well with the opening story of this article. Consider having your students create rainbow kites to welcome those arriving for Tashlich, or to fly as a show of connection to this covenant, after the ritual concludes.⁴²

Activity #11

During a discussion with youth about the mitzvah of *baal tash-hit*, no destruction of nature in the weeks before Tashlich, you might invite each student to pick an aspect of nature to represent through costuming and a poster to wear or hold aloft. Then everyone lines up to create a small environmental consciousness parade towards your community when they are already beside the water.

Your students might also create and hand out action cards for the aspect of caring for nature s/he is wearing to each of those present.

Each student, or the ritual leader, can then invite words of commitment and blessing for nature from those present.

If feasible, after gazing, and voicing either a silent, focused individual commitment, or a shared group environmental commitment, those participating might also be invited to dip their fingers in the selected Tashlich body of water and then anoint their own, or each other's, eyelids, ears lobes and lips.

Helping our students appreciate that we are made in this image of the divine and have the ability to destroy and yet to wake up and turn towards goodness, is core to Jewish spiritual education. Through reflection, acknowledgment, intentional release, and prayer, Tashlich helps us turn from anger towards clarity and loving kindness. Often anger comes from a missed appointment with an expectation towards oneself or others. Realizing this, we can sometimes more readily "hang up our (spurs) weapons" and seek the changes in ourselves that make it possible to co-create peace.

Activity #12

A good fit here is the well-known story *Ilan, Ilan, Ma Avarech'cha?* blessing a tree's shade, fruit and adjacent flowing waters as recorded in *Taanait* 5b, which is also an Israeli song <http://www.hebrewsongs.com/?song=ilan> and its associated dance https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1lO2ZqrO_uQ.

Note: See Appendix V for additional contemporary prayers to consider incorporating.

In Conclusion

Educational and religious practices become authentically holistic and enlivening by attending to the physical, emotional, intellectual and spiritual dimensions⁴³ of our students' experience. A damaging, and ultimately alienating flattening out of this life-giving dimensionality transpired when our people's souls fled into intellect and away from physicality, emotions, and matters of spirit during the *Shoah*—perhaps because to feel, fully feel, would have been too excruciating.

This article steps away from the trauma-driven models of Jewish education that are often still in place, and focuses on Tashlich as a way of building a supportive community of shared stories, values, metaphors and practices. This is vital because, in our times, families often live at great distances from each other, social media devices are reducing interpersonal skills to social-sanctioned sound bites, and many people across most age groups and economic strata report feeling lonely and often depressed. Our students are not immune from this.⁴⁴ Soulful, loving, supported reconnection to self and others makes all the difference to surviving and thriving. Not only through Tashlich—this article models teaching methods appropriate to virtually all of Judaism. Jewish practices can be very good for the human spirit!

In the ancient world both blessings and actions were understood to have real power to effect change in the human realm. Tashlich makes the case that this is still so for us, when we know how to enter into practices fully and guide others in doing so. Enough material has been provided here to facilitate the creation of several years of innovative and deep Tashlich learning and experiences.

National Public Radio ran a story explaining how even something as basic as personality can be transformed through awareness and sustained focused effort.⁴⁵ Finding release and transformation while "immersed" in the Tashlich ritual, leads to a heightened potential for self-love, self-acceptance, heightened awareness of what may

yet be transformed, and work toward desired change. This is a sacred sequence that can renew hope and add joy for living.

As the Rambam, Maimonides, teaches in *Hilchot Teshuvah* 3:4, “Even though blasting the shofar is an unexplained Biblical decree, it seems to bear a message: Wake up you sleepers! Examine your deeds. Return to your Selves! Remember you are creatures.”

In conclusion, let’s consider the words of the Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson, z”tl:

The mess of fragments the Creator gave us, those are the pieces He broke apart for us to create our own, better world. But the mess of fragments we have torn apart ourselves by our own poor choice—who is to say that these, too, have any redeeming value? Because this is the way the world was designed: Any descent always results, eventually, in an ascent. The more broken is the world, the more it can be improved. Yes, a more difficult job, a longer path home—but eventually it will be achieved. Wherever you are, in whatever situation you have gotten yourself, only one purpose: To go higher.⁴⁶

APPENDIX I: Music for Tashlich

There are many musical options for effective transitions with teaching and experiencing Tashlich. For a wide variety of well-presented *niggunim* see <http://neohasid.org> and for Tashlich, I've been lately including:

1. *Yad Elohim, Elohim baKol, Yad Elohim baKol*, as *Tashlich* in not only within our own hands, as you will see in the source discussion below. <https://borderbend.bandcamp.com/track/yad-elohim-bakol-ki-imcha>
2. One of the many settings of “*Taheir Libeynu—Purify Our Hearts.*”
3. *The River Knows Your Name*, by John Hyatt, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bp7iz2RZ80o> is powerful to include.
4. While I don't know whether the Rebbe would have approved, this chanting of Psalm 63 also seems quite appropriate if “sanctuary” is interpreted as being possible within us and/or nature.

http://www.chabad.org/therebbe/livingtorah/player_cdo/aid/1900562/jewish/Nigun-Tzomah-Lcha-Nafshi.htm

Or hear and enter the yearning without visual distraction in the MP3 form:

http://www.chabad.org/multimedia/media_cdo/aid/140785/jewish/Tzomo-Lecho-Nafshi.htm#comments

5. Or, consider the two-word Hebrew Kirtan *Havayah* chant developed by Andrew Hahn that can be found on his album titled “Nondual”: <http://kirtanrabbi.spinshop.com/Home/details/235234>.

APPENDIX II: Text Study on Water, Some Possible Responses

1. This is a text where God is the midwife of creation. Her breath hovers above the primordial waters—Her earthly womb that soon births earth's heavens, the “waters up there—*sham mayyim*, and below, the “*mikveh mayim chayyim*—gathering of living waters [Gen. 1:10] necessary for human, plant and animal life.

2. Is a text where Hagar's empty water sack could represent her loss of faith. *Keshet* also means rainbow, symbol of God's covenant after the flood—not just with Israelites, with all that lives. Accordingly, while Hagar could not feel her connection to the covenant God made for her son Ishmael's destiny, Hebrew readers and ancient Israelites would likely have sensed the presence of God and known things would work out for the abandoned mother and child. Also, note that a few verses after leaving Hagar and Ishmael with only a sack of water, that Abraham digs a well in Be'er Sheva and secures an oath that the title is his from King Avimelech. Could the well have also been for them? Symbolizing, perhaps, his enduring love for her?

To appreciate that our sages saw this connection, there is a midrash in *Pirkei d'Rabbi Eliezer* 30 that imagines that Abraham tied a barrel[s worth] of wood to Hagar's waist, that would drag on the ground behind her. That text interprets this as when Abraham would want to see Ishmael his son he would find him by seeing [by the track] the road they took. And *Bereishit Rabba* 61:4 deduces that by Divine edit Abraham would marry Hagar after Sarah dies, based upon Genesis 25:1 “Then again, Abraham took a wife, and her name was Keturah.”

3. Offers a text where it is possible to realize that lest our hearts harden to stone from life's challenges, the sprinkling of water keeps our hearts fertile for new green shoots of love to begin again. With this divine *Chessed* love can grow anew in our hearts of flesh.

APPENDIX III: Thirteen Attributes Activity

1. Print them out on a separate strip of paper, or using fabric paint on a piece of torn used linen or sheets, multiple copies of the Thirteen Attributes Moses spoke to draw out God's best qualities, which we are meant to cultivate within ourselves, too. One attribute per torn sheet. Fold each one in half and place in a fabric bag.
2. As students arrive, have them draw one piece from the bag.
3. Pass around safety pins, and have them pin their slip to the back of someone else.
4. Have them roam among each other, with each person asking qualifying questions to try to guess the attribute that is on his/hir/her back.
5. Once everyone is done, invite spontaneous personal stories that relate to any of the qualities.
6. Suggest that when the students go home, at bedtime they each pray for a person who shared to be able to

cultivate the quality that mattered to them.

7. Be sure to debrief about this the next time your class or group is together; it is a powerful, community-building practice. Consider staying with these attributes, or the eighteen *mussar middot*⁴⁷, attributes, in creative ways throughout your students' education.

Activity #13

Stand with a partner. One person shares a quality s/he wants to improve: "I am becoming a better listener," for example. And then turn around slowly until perhaps after 20 seconds your partner taps you lightly to stop your rotation. Then you say "but..." and fill in one of the reasons you have for not becoming a better listener, e.g., "But my mind tells me I'm right, that I know better than the person speaking." Or "But I want what I want, I don't really care where the other person is on this, I don't want to listen." Continue turning and completing several more "buts" until a deeper sense of the blockages to your goal for personal development emerges. This will help you and your students to shape personal Tashlich *kavannot*, intentions.

APPENDIX IV: Convening a Deep Silence and Fullness of Group Presence

For some it is challenging to ritually, rather than aggressively, hold the attention and focused silence of a group. If your Tashlich participants are not entrained to do this for you after a *niggun* or other call to worship, or gentle presencing, here is a helpful teaching story that came in a dream:

Somehow Elana had turned into a brick in the side of a *mikveh hamayyim*—a gathering of the waters [Gen. 1:10]. All of her teachers, friends and students were also there, each a rock making up the shape of the space. Inside were clear waters—the sound of them was crystalline, causing visions within each rock—well, thought many, this *mikveh mayyim* must surely receive water from the Four Rivers of Eden!

Gazing upon the holy waters, Elana was entranced, filling with a delicious experience of unending love when...what was that?! Oh? A voice coming from the rock beside her was trying to say something. When Elana turned to that rock to listen and responded, "Yes, it's indeed lovely," the visions ceased, the crystalline sound became scattered; the experience was somehow broken. Their whispering had drawn many other rocks to turn toward the two whispering rocks, each curious to listen and learn what the two were up to.

Quickly, the music of the waters lost its awesome quality, and became just normal waves streaming towards and then past the two sad rocks, and from there, out onto the ground, sinking into the land, and eventually a flood came to pass.

So it is that after offering an opening chant, it may be helpful where you serve to sometimes explain the importance of holding the silence and *become* as stones around the *mikveh hamayyim*, a holy vessel of community. The capacity to self-monitor during rituals is something we need to teach early and often, and support when it occurs, just as much as chanting, singing, dancing in prayer, bowing and much more of embodied Jewishing.

Participants in effective ritual will gradually begin to appreciate and even take pride in how their individual importance in "holding the energy" matters. Sometimes we are the voice, the action, or the container of community (which is why it was long traditional for those not in morning or with a *yartzeit*, annual commemoration of the death of a loved one, to stay seated during *Kaddish*, to be the container of supportive community). The actions of "refraining from" are also wonderfully empowering when understood and experienced.

APPENDIX V: Additional Prayers re the Environment and Tashlich

1. Pope Francis' Prayer for the Earth, which Rabbi David Seidenberg has translated into Hebrew: http://neohasid.org/resources/prayerforourearth_Francis/
2. Neo Hassid's Stop the Flood Prayer: <http://www.neohasid.org/stoptheflood/earthprayer/>
3. Or, you can begin with a *peticha*—blessing opening, such as “May the Earth be blessed with....” and each person adds a word.

ENDNOTES

¹ <http://www.timesofisrael.com/un-tosses-sins-into-river-in-first-ever-tashlich-ceremony/>

² I learned this chant from Eli Lester. A downloadable recording by it is not precisely clear whom is here:

<https://borderbend.bandcamp.com/track/yad-elohim-bakol-ki-imcha>

³ Most scholars say Tashlich is first attested in *Minhagei Rosh Hashana* #9, by the Maharil. Others point to Nechemiah 8:1: "On the first day of the seventh month [which is Rosh Hashanah], all the people gathered together, as one, to the street that was before the gate of the water."

⁴ It is important to realize that the "Yad Elohim" theology is simply a perspective, one that feels true and helpful at times, and at times, not. It is important for educators to read this article on how guiding souls in pain ideally does not involve offering this theology: <http://www.timjlawrence.com/blog/2015/10/19/everything-doesnt-happen-for-a-reason>

⁵ Harold Shulweiss, "Adonai-Elohim: The Two Faces of God": <http://www.jewishrecon.org/resource/adonai-elohim-two-faces-god>

⁶ Ellen Frankel, Ed., "#230: Two Socks on One Foot" in *The Classic Tales: 4,000 Years of Jewish Lore*, Aaronson, Northvale, NJ, 1989.

Retold by Eric A. Kimmel, *Gershon's Monster: A Story for the Jewish New Year*, Illustrated by Jon J Muth, Scholastic Press, NY, 2000.

Howard Schwartz, "A Combat in Magic", in *Lilith's Cave: Jewish Tales of the Supernatural*, Harper & Row, NY., NY. 1988. pp 199-203

Beatrice Silverman Weinreich, translated by Leonard Wolf, "#123: The Boy Who Put Two Socks on One Foot," *Yiddish Folktales*, YIVO, NY., 1988.

⁷ *Aveirah* means an intentional transgression of any mitzvah—towards nature, humanity, God... From the root meaning to cross over, as in a boundary; also the root of *ivri*.

⁸ "Waste" is one of the common senses of the word [*aveyre*] in Yiddish: sin, transgression; waste (of). 's'iz an *aveyre dos gelt*: it's a waste of money'; 'an *aveyre di tsayt*': a waste of time. *Comprehensive Yiddish-English Dictionary*. Yiddish, like Ladino, is a treasure of Jewish culture, including this understanding within an environmental preservation context, as attention to an *aveyre* of natural resources helps to support both language and mitzvah acquisition.

⁹ חטא *Chata*, is an unintentional error, a missed ethical mark, or mistake.

¹⁰ אונען *Avone* refers to the toxic practice of blasting someone emotionally, and also, fulfilling a twisted, unhealthy, or excess appetite for something in life.

¹¹ פשע *Pesha* refers to an unhealthy instance of rebellious behavior, including actively defying God, a breach of covenant.

¹² [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hir_\(disambiguation\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hir_(disambiguation)); https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/style/gender-neutral-pronouns-when-they-doesnt-identify-as-either-male-or-female/2014/10/27/41965f5e-5ac0-11e4-b812-38518ae74c67_story.html ; <https://genderneutralpronoun.wordpress.com/tag/ze-and-hir/>

¹³ Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion*, reprinted by Martino Fine Books, 2013.

¹⁴ Gershon Winkler, *They Called Her Rebbe: The Maiden of Ludomir*, Israel Book Shop, 1991.

¹⁵ Rabbi Ruth Gan Kagan provides a source book on the traditional Jewish form of intercessory prayer known as *Melitz Yosher* in her regular, and it would seem in her online classes, too. <http://www.navatehila.org/Online-Classes.html>

¹⁶ <http://www.mechon-mamre.org/jewfaq/qorbanot.htm>

¹⁷ Rashi, *Talmud Shabbat* 81

¹⁸ Rashi *Beitzah* 23b, *Mateh Efrayim* 598:5, *Sefer Maharil*, *Machatzit Hashekel* 583:5.

¹⁹ <http://www.bbc.com/news/blogs-magazine-monitor-31903778>

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/mar/16/dont-feed-the-ducks-bread-say-conservationists>

<http://www.onegreenplanet.org/animalsandnature/feeding-white-bread-to-wild-birds-is-killing-them/>

<https://reefwatch.wordpress.com/2011/06/22/why-cant-i-feed-wild-fish/>

²⁰ *Pri Etz Chayim, Shaar HaShofar*, ch. 5, "The edge of one's clothes should be shaken when one says vesashlich bemtzulos yam...." The *Siddur HaAriZal* edited by R. Shabsai states that "this refers specifically to the tallis katan..." Others do so at the end of Tashlich according to <http://www.sichos-in-english.org/books/sefer-haminhagim/52.htm>, go down to footnote 432.

Also see: <http://www.yeshiva.co/midrash/shiur.asp?cat=492&id=22445&q=>

²¹ For a related story, and interpretations of the Hosea 2:19-20 by Rabbi Shefa Gold and Goldie Milgram please see: <http://reclaimingjudaism.org/teachings/tefillin-meditation-tool-relationships>

²² Most authorities say it is permissible to do Tashlich until Hoshanna Rabba. Weather-permitting, most customarily do Tashlich on the first day of Rosh Hashannah, after *mincha*, with many arguing to do so on the second day, if the first day is *Shabbat*. The Maharich says that there are those who do Tashlich on the Thursday before Yom Kippur, since that is the day that the Thirteen Attributes appear in *Selichot*.

²³ <http://www.torahzone.com/tashlich.htm>

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ <http://halachayomit.co.il/print.aspx?HalachaID=3718>

²⁶ <http://www.torahzone.com/tashlich.htm>

²⁷ <http://www.reclaimingjudaism.org/node/27>

²⁸ <http://www.holyrascals.com/?q=node/2795>

²⁹ <http://www.reclaimingjudaism.org/teachings/mikveh-water-and-higher-consciousness>

³⁰ *Toras HaOlah* 356

³¹ <http://www.inner.org/hebleter/alef.htm>

³² <http://www.torahzone.com/tashlich.htm>

³³ Rabbi Shlomo Carlebach, as cited by https://www.isralight.org/assets/Text/RSS_rh07.html. Note: I could not find the publication as cited in this link.

³⁴ <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/132219-satan>

³⁵ The Micah citation begins by addressing God in the same manner as the *Thirteen Attributes* Moses called out in the hope of connecting to the ever-present divine benevolence. It is customary to chant the *Thirteen Attributes* at the beginning of Tashlich. To this end, I recommend Rabbi David Wolfe-Blank's magnificent translation <http://www.reclaimingjudaism.org/teachings/emet-jewish-meditation-exodus-3210>.

While chanting, it is important to contemplate the attributes and find which of these you need to focus most upon cultivating, and then include that within one's Tashlich *kavannah*.

³⁶ The Tashlich liturgy continues with many metaphors: And Tashlich continues: "Holy One, I call out from such a narrow place, respond to me from largesse divine! You are [here] for me, so there is no cause to fear what a human will do to me. Holy One help me so that I see into my enemies. It is better to take refuge in You than to trust in an earthling. It is better to take refuge in You than to trust in nobles. No one shall be injured, and no one will be slaughtered on My holy mountain, for the earth is filled with the knowledge of You, like water covers the sea." (Trans. Rabbi Goldie Milgram)

³⁷ Cited by Louis I. Newman, in *Hasidic Anthology*, New York, Schocken Books, 1963, pp 254–55 from "Teaching Judaism as a Spiritual Tradition," by Seymour Rossel, in the *CCAR Journal: The Reform Quarterly*, Spring 2014

³⁸ <http://kerem.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/01/Kerem-12-Hyim-Shafner-...-The-Dream-of-Exile.pdf> and also, http://goisrael.com/tourism_eng/tourist_information/jewish_themes/jewish_sites/Pages/the_tomb_of_honi_hame'agel_jew.aspx

³⁹ Talmud Berachot 61b, as presented by Barbara Goldin in *The Family Book of Midrash: 52 Jewish Stories from the Sages*, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2006.

⁴⁰ <http://davidjoel.deviantart.com/art/Ink-Fish-143127450>

⁴¹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RQUcJgjsK-E>

⁴² The material at this link can be applied to many dates in the calendar: http://jewcology.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/RainbowDay-curriculum_5.0.pdf

⁴³ The Four Worlds in Hebrew: *Atzilut, Beriah, Yetzirah, Asiyah*; known by the acronym ABiYA

⁴⁴ "In general, people of Jewish descent, Pentecostals, and those with no affiliation experience higher rates of depression than other religious groups. Higher rates of depression in people of Jewish descent, particularly

those who are not actively religious, have been documented in both cross-sectional and longitudinal studies [19–21].” <http://www.hindawi.com/journals/drt/2012/962860/#B20>

⁴⁵ <http://www.npr.org/sections/health-shots/2016/06/24/481859662/invisibilia-is-your-personality-fixed-or-can-you-change-who-you-are>

⁴⁶ *Maamar Bati Legani* 5731

⁴⁷ <http://www.reclaimingjudaism.org/teachings/what-mussar>