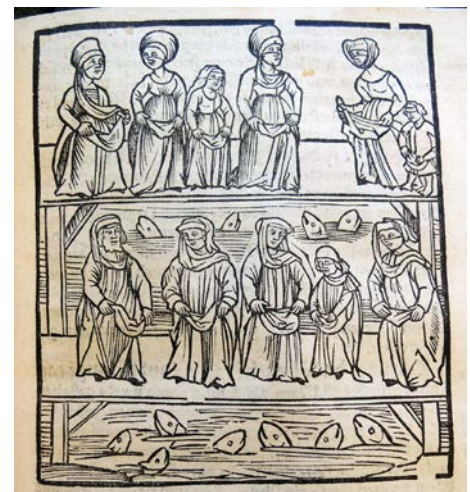


## THINKING ABOUT THE TASHLICH RITUAL

Dear Friends,

With the Jewish new year upon us, I've been thinking about *tashlich* - the odd holiday ritual of walking to a stream, tossing in breadcrumbs, and reciting verses of supplication. This very old folk practice is illustrated in an arresting woodcut made in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. The image - which you can see here - shows men and boys, girls and women grasping their garments. Below, a group of fish peek up from the river, gazing up at them in anticipation. If there were a second illustration to follow this one, we would see the people shaking their garments, crumbs tumbling forth from the folds, and the fish gathering together to gobble them up.



As long as this ritual has been around, there have been rabbis who have chastised those who practice it. After all, there is something magic-like about it; as though you can transmute your sins into crumbs, and simply rid yourself of them by shaking the morsels into a river.

Regardless, *tashlich* is a beloved custom that spread across much of the Jewish world. Scholars\* have documented its appearance in Italy, Algeria, Morocco, Daghestan, Kurdistan and Eastern Europe. Immigrants carried the practice to the United States, as you can see in this beautiful early-twentieth-century depiction of the ritual conducted near New York's Brooklyn Bridge (for the original postcard on which it appeared see [here](#))



Personally, I look forward each year to taking my children to a small stream not far from our shul, meeting up with friends, sharing a snack and turning attention to my prayers, and to the crumbs I have carried with me. When I throw them into the water, I do not imagine a magical washing-away of this year's mistakes and misdeeds.

Instead, the crumbs provide a helpful avenue for directing difficult thoughts. Just as we use concrete language like, “letting go of our baggage,” and “unburdening ourselves,” tangible forms (crumbs, in this case) can serve as vehicles for imagining ourselves letting go of habits, grudges, missteps and regrets that drag us down.

Sending good wishes for fresh beginnings and a happy new year,  
Alanna E. Cooper  
Director, CWRU Jewish Lifelong Learning

*\*For documentation of the origins, development and rabbinic critique of the ritual, see JZ Lauterbach’s authoritative 140-page article, [“Tashlik.”](#)*