



And among all the sins we hurled into the ocean, the sin of self-hate and the sin of failing to feel compassion for others mingled, as indeed they should, for they are the same sin.

–Melanie Kaye/Kantrowitz, “To be a Radical Jew in the Late 20th Century”

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1. Intro to Jewish Voice for Peace-Seattle

Thank you for joining us today. We want to begin this ceremony by offering our gratitude to the Duwamish people, whose land we are on right now. Like the rest of the indigenous people of the Americas, they have suffered genocide and colonialism, but they are still here, still fighting for respect and recognition. We honor their struggle.

We are the Seattle chapter of a national group, Jewish Voice for Peace, headquartered in Oakland, California. JVP is a diverse and democratic community of activists inspired by Jewish tradition to work together for peace, social justice, and human rights. We support the aspirations of Palestinians and Israelis for safety and self-determination.

We seek:

- A U.S. foreign policy based on promoting peace, human rights, and respect for international law
- An end to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem
- An end to all violence against civilians.
- Peace among the peoples of the Middle East

We are among the many American Jews who say to the U.S. and Israeli governments: "Not in our names!"

We cannot tolerate racism and economic injustice, whether in the U.S. or abroad.

Are you a Jew interested in joining JVP? An ally interested in hearing about our events? Please drop us a line at: seattle@jewishvoiceforpeace.org.

Song: Henei Mah Tov

הִנֵּה מַה־טוֹב וַיְמַה־נָּעִים
שָׁבַת אַחִים גַּם־יַחַד.

Hi-nei mah tov u-mah-na-im
She-vet a-chim gam ya-chad

How good it is, and how pleasant when we dwell together in unity (Psalm 133:1)

2. History of *Tashlich*

Since the late medieval period, Jews have observed the custom of *Tashlich*, often on the first day of Rosh Hashanah. The *Tashlich* (from the root word, which means "to cast away") ceremony is based on several passages in the bible, most notably Book of Micah (7:9): "You will hurl all of our sins into the depths of the sea."

The practice is to go to a nearby body of water, preferably free-flowing, and symbolically cast away our sins by either throwing bread crumbs or pebbles into the water while reciting biblical verses. Water has continually served as a significant symbol in Jewish life and practice. Wherever possible, Jews prayed and built synagogues near bodies of water.

In Jerusalem and in Egypt, *Tashlich* was always observed on the first day of Rosh Hashanah, even when it fell on Shabbat. In Jerusalem, where there are no lakes or rivers, *Tashlich* was performed at

cisterns. In Safed, Jews would go up to the roofs on their homes and look down upon the Sea of Galilee. The Jews of Yemen observed *Tashlich* in a *mikvah*, a ritual bath. Kurdish Jews actually leapt into the water and swam to cleanse themselves of sin. Chassidim in Galicia sent little floats of straw out on the water, set them afire with candles, and rejoiced as their sins were either burned or washed away.

The idea today is not that we suddenly get rid of our sins, but that we set our intention to transform them. What we "cast" into the water are our own prejudices, which we can think of as a husk around our best selves. We want the water to soak off the husks, revive the holy part of ourselves, which we can think of as a seed, and help us recommit to something bigger than ourselves.

Indeed, we are not throwing "away" our sins. We are transforming their energy in order to renew our commitment to the struggle for justice.

3. Update on Israel/Palestine

4. Our commitment to taking responsibility for and casting away the sins of not acting when injustice occurs

Today we have come here *not* to cast off our personal sins, but to cast off our inactions in opposing the Israeli occupation of Palestine and injustice within our local communities. We are recommitting ourselves to end the occupation of Palestine, to support self-determination for Israelis and Palestinians and to fight for racial and economic justice.

While it is false to claim that all Jews are guilty of the sins committed by the Israeli government, as Jews we acknowledge that these acts are being

done in our name and we must take ownership of these sins.

Jewish tradition teaches us to pursue justice, and we face this obligation openly, freely, and sincerely.

As Jews, we choose to be responsible for all of these transgressions. We choose to carry them as a burden.

And today, in this hour, we choose to cast them into the water.

The casting off comes at the New Year, when we reflect upon the year gone by and dedicate ourselves to the new one before us. So, as we symbolically cast off these transgressions, we prepare ourselves for the coming year in which we will take them up again.

We take up a renewed commitment to pursue justice. If we are not prepared to embrace this commitment, then our act of casting off is but an empty gesture.

So be forewarned: Let us not unburden ourselves of these sins—and of our responsibility for these injustices—today, unless we are prepared to burden ourselves again tomorrow.

We invite everyone who identifies as Jewish and/or has Jewish heritage to step forward.

**5. Recitation of transgressions/throwing pebbles
(Read responsively the items in bold)**

1. Allowing violence against Palestinians to be committed in our name

We take responsibility and will work to make it stop

2. Stealing Palestinian land and destroying Palestinian homes

We take responsibility and will work to make it stop

3. Starving and strangling Gaza while claiming it is no longer occupied

We take responsibility and will work to make it stop

4. Not acknowledging that the creation of safe space for Jews has meant the displacement of another people

We take responsibility and will work to make it stop

5. Forgetting that being a Diasporic people means that we come from multiple cultural traditions

We take responsibility and will work to make it stop

6. Invisibilizing and marginalizing Jews of color around the world, including Israel where they are the majority of the population

We take responsibility and will work to make it stop

7. Not being visible as Jews in social justice movements

We take responsibility and will work to make it stop

8. Allowing fear, instead of compassion, to dictate our actions

We take responsibility and will work to make it stop

9. Turning those different than us into the "Other"

We take responsibility and will work to make it stop

10. Hardening our hearts instead of remembering what it means to be oppressed and dispossessed

We take responsibility and will work to make it stop

6. Moment of Reflection

We have cast these transgressions into the water. Yet the suffering continues. Let us remember our commitment.

7. BRIDGE

This past year our chapter of Jewish Voice for Peace has continued to work against the Israeli occupation. In January we kicked off the Trees of Reconciliation campaign with our Tu B'shevat Seder. As a national organization, we have reached our goal of raising enough money to plant 3,000 olive trees in Palestine. The saplings will contribute to the livelihood of Palestinian farmers and their families who have suffered as a result of the Israeli Occupation.

Working with a coalition of groups, we helped commemorate 60 years since the founding of the state of Israel in 1948, an event known as *al-Nakba* -- the catastrophe -- to the 700,000 Palestinian Muslim and Christian Arabs who were dispossessed from their homes, lands, and livelihoods as a result. While many Jews were celebrating 60 years of Israeli independence and existence, we, and many others, were also remembering 60 years of Palestinian expulsion and loss.

As we acknowledge this catastrophe, we also recognize how complicated the establishment of the state of Israel is for many Jews. Because of a long history of anti-Jewish oppression in Europe culminating in the Nazi Holocaust, we are glad our fellow Jews found refuge in Israel. Yet for some Jews already living in the Middle East, the establishment of the state of Israel often contributed to increasing persecution and exile from their Arab homelands. Like the establishment of all nation states, the establishment of Israel created conflict and displacement. What makes this story poignant is that it is our story and it is being carried out in our names.

As anti-occupation Jews, we hold this complexity as we engage with our Jewish families and communities who often have differing perspectives on Israel/Palestine. We have been working on how to remain open, loving, and connected to other Jews as we discuss Israel/Palestine. How do we move past our own fear of talking about these issues to remember that within all of us, there is always the potential for change and transformation?

Connecting with other Jews reminds us that we are part of the larger Jewish community, allows us to be our full selves and also strengthens our movement. When we can talk critically about Israel and Palestine openly and freely in Jewish circles, support for the occupation will weaken. When the majority of Jews no longer allow injustice to be carried out in our names, the occupation will begin to crumble.

To do this work it is important for us to feel rooted in our Jewish identities, especially in Seattle where we have a very small Jewish population. In mainstream Jewish circles, when we make our voices heard, we are sometimes pushed to the margins. In non-Jewish activist circles, we are encouraged to keep quiet about our religious/ethnic/cultural backgrounds, even as we step forward to challenge other oppressions. We really need our friends to encourage us to bring our whole Jewish selves--and thus our strongest selves--to the fight for social justice. This gives us the strength to learn to be better allies to other groups and carry out anti-occupation work in Jewish and non-Jewish spaces.

That is why we are especially thankful to have our friends and allies here to help lead the next portion of our ceremony.

Song: Od Yavo Shalom Aleinu

עוֹד יָבֵא שְׁלוֹם עָלֵינוּ
וְעַל כָּלֵם.

סְאֵלָאִם! עָלֵינוּ וְעַל כָּל הָעוֹלָם.
סְאֵלָאִם: שְׁלוֹם:

Od Ya-vo sha-lom aleinu (3x)
Ve al ku-lam

Sa-lam! Al-lei-nu ve-al Kol ha-o-lam
Sa-lam, Sha-lom (2X)

May peace find its way to us- to us and to the whole
world. Peace (in Arabic and Hebrew)

Portion led by Friends of Jews**8. Friends of Jews Commentary****9. Commitment to taking responsibility for and casting away the sins of anti-Jewish oppression.**

As friends of Jews, we are not responsible for each and every sin personally, but we take responsibility for these acts. We heed the call to pursue justice and face this obligation openly, freely, and sincerely. Striving to be conscious allies of Jews, we choose to be responsible for all of these transgressions. We choose to carry them as a burden.

And today, in this hour, we choose to cast them into the water.

This casting off comes at the Jewish New Year, when we can reflect upon the year gone by and dedicate ourselves to the new one before us. So, as we symbolically cast off these transgressions, we prepare ourselves for the coming year in which we will take them up again.

We take a renewed commitment to pursue justice. If we are not prepared to embrace this commitment, then our act of casting off is but an empty gesture.

So be forewarned: Let us not unburden ourselves of these sins—and of our responsibility for these injustices—today, unless we are prepared to burden ourselves again tomorrow.

**10. Recitation of Transgressions/throwing pebbles
(Read responsively the items in bold)**

1. Not interrupting anti-Jewish oppression when we see or hear it happening

We take responsibility and will work to make it stop

2. Assuming all Jews are Ashkenazi (of European descent) and assuming every person of color is not a Jew

We take responsibility and will work to make it stop

3. Lacking knowledge of Jewish history and historical trauma

We take responsibility and will work to make it stop

4. Assuming all Jews are wealthy and powerful

We take responsibility and will work to make it stop

5. Perpetuating the idea of Christians as "pure" and "good"

We take responsibility and will work to make it stop

6. Responding to a discussion of Jewish identity with a rejection of organized religion, thus not recognizing the links among Jewish culture, ethnicity, and religion

We take responsibility and will work to make it stop

7. Treating Jews who support Palestinian liberation like the "Good Jews" - and related, not recognizing the emotional toll that the conflict between Israel and Palestine has on the entire Jewish community

We take responsibility and will work to make it stop

8. Not providing space and support for Jews to deal with internalized oppression and to process anti-Semitism

We take responsibility and will work to make it stop

9. Not encouraging Jews to proudly bring their whole selves to our social justice movements

We take responsibility and will work to make it stop

10. Leaving the work of education about anti-Jewish oppression for Jews to do alone

We take responsibility and will work to make it stop

11. Moment of Reflection

We cast these transgressions to the water. But the struggle continues. Let us remember our commitment to fighting anti-Jewish oppression as part of our commitment to social justice.

12. All:

Instead of a transgression, we throw this final stone together to symbolize our commitment to building our relationships and working with each other for social justice in the New Year.

13. ENDING

To end our ceremony, we'd like us all to reflect on what we will take with us from today's ceremony into the New Year. We'd like everyone to find a small group to discuss a commitment you'd like to make for the New Year. You and your group should take ten minutes to talk about what you'd like to work on. You can then share your commitment if you'd like.

Thanks to all for participating. May your year be filled with love and justice.

Shana Tova (Happy New Year)
L'shalom (in peace)

Ending Song: Lo Yisa Goi

Lo Yisa Goi

לא־יִשָּׂא גּוֹי אֶל־גּוֹי חֶרֶב	<i>Lo yi-sa goi el goi che-rev,</i>
וְלֹא־יִלְמְדוּ עוֹד מִלְחָמָה	<i>V'-lo yil-me-du od mil-cha-mah.</i>

And everyone beneath their vine and fig tree shall live in peace and unafraid. And into plow shares turn their swords. Nations shall learn war no more.