

An Embodied Tashlikh Meditation

By Rebekka Helford, from www.ritualwell.org

It is the new year, as celebrated by some of our ancestors. One more journey around the sun. Time to take stock.

Feeling the auspiciousness of this time, starting in the European Dark Ages, some of our ancestors took to bodies of water to “cast off their sins” by emptying their pockets of dust, fuzz, and crumbs. It is known as Tashlikh, a casting off.

Without knowing it, our ancestors tapped into an incredible power. Not the magical ability of water to wash away moral stains. But rather, the power of gesture. The body speaks to the brain in ways it cannot hear otherwise. And so today, let us also feel the auspiciousness of another year gone by, and invoke the power of these ancient gestures. While their meanings may have changed, their power has not.

Close your eyes, if you wish. Stand, if you wish.

Place your hands in your pockets. Reach deep down into the corners – let your fingers find the stray pieces that have remained buried and adhered to these many spin cycles. As you do this, let your mind wander. Find something that has been buried and adhered inside you, asking to be let go. Anything, small or large. The first thing that comes to mind. What would it take to begin the process of actually releasing that burden? Self-compassion? Offering a sincere apology? Asking another’s forgiveness? Heeding the call and stepping up where you are needed in your family, your community, your world? Visualize the first step you would need to take.

As you do this, slowly, slowly take your hands out of your pockets. Feel your wrists breaking free, then your palms, then the base of your fingers, then slowly, slowly, your fingertips. Let your hands feel the cool freedom of the air once more, and begin to make that universal gesture, letting go. Feel each finger moving. Sense the backs of your hands pushing through the air. Notice how the gesture lives uniquely in your body. Study it. Sense it deeply – let your brain learn from your body that you understand how to begin to let go.

Our ancestors knew that emphasis mattered, and there was power in repetition. So, please bring your hands back to your pockets. Recall the burdens begging for your action in order to be released. Picture once again the first step to releasing them. And slowly, remove your hands. Feel each movement once again. Extend the motion, exaggerate it, find the pleasure in the movement. Notice whether your body responds to this powerful gesture.

Once again, please bring your hands to your pockets. One final time, we will make the universal gesture of release and unburdening, of casting off. This time, see yourself in your mind’s eye taking that step, that first small step, to releasing the smallest of the burdens you located within yourself. As you slowly pull your hands out of your pockets, you begin that step. As you slowly make this final gesture, picture the step as complete. Sense the power of this intention, sealed by gesture, deeply in your body and mind. Sense the collective unburdening of our community as we set our intentions to lighten ourselves and our world in the coming year. Sense the power of an ancient tradition made new, on this new year.