

Tishrei

New Beginnings

Materials Needed

- Paper for note-taking or journal
- Writing utensils
- Optional background music for journaling time
- Comfortable space for meditation
- **For Tashlich:** either host your program near a body of water, or fill a bowl with water to dissolve paper into (rice paper is great for this). You can also burn the paper with a match, or simply tear it up into shreds.

Framing

Spiritual Energy of Tishrei

Happy New Year! We've made it to Tishrei — the holiest month of the Hebrew year. The Jewish New Year has some rejoicing to it, yes, but at a deeper level this time of arrival is about really doing our internal work to make way for a healthier year ahead.

This holy time truly sets the tone for the year. We spend most of Tishrei seeking perspective on our past actions, touching in with our moral compass, and dedicating ourselves to being the best possible versions of ourselves moving forward.

During this month, we also set ourselves the task of leaving behind old patterns. Tishrei is here to teach us that we can change — and that change is easiest when we are honest and loving about exactly who we are today. We humans are fallible beings. We make mistakes. This is why Jews start the New Year with purification and forgiveness that flows into letting go. From this spiritually "clean" place, we move on.

If we stay open to newness, we can move toward our dreams.

Essential Questions

What does the "new year" mean to you? What new beginnings are you hopeful for this year?

Objectives

In this session, we want learners to:

- **Feel:** Open to change.
- **Know:** Connecting with yourself is connecting with Source. Honor Tishrei's call for introspection.
- **Do:** Support the hard work of new beginnings with *chesed* (loving-kindness), both for yourself and for those you love.

Score

0:00 - 0:05	Grounding Question
0:05-0:10	Opening the Space
0:10-0:25	Part I: Growth and New Beginnings Journal prompts and discussion
0:25-0:40	Part II: A Natural Ritual for Letting Go Tashlich
0:40-0:50	Part III: Embodied Experience Compassionate Body Scan Meditation
0:50-0:55	Part IV: The Personal Download
0:55-1:00	Closing the Space & Learner Takeaways

Texts and Activities

Grounding Question - 5 minutes

Go around the circle:

Invite everyone to share their name, pronouns, and how they are feeling 1) physically, 2) emotionally, and 3) spiritually (one word for each, for example: "I'm Sarah, I go by

she/her. Physically I feel energized, emotionally I feel sentimental, and spiritually I feel curious"). You, as the facilitator, can go first in order to model this to the group.

Then, in pairs or in a group:

What is one point of good you easily find in yourself? What is one you are reaching for?

Opening the Space — 5 minutes

Welcome learners

Then, introduce this week's session and share the Essential Questions. Here's an example:

In the Jewish creation story, nobody is ever perfect. The world was created knowing it had to have space for mistakes, failure, and disappointments — and for repentance.

The Hebrew Calendar (like life itself) is designed to guide us through this cycle of learning and growth. When Elul, the month before Rosh Hashanah, arrives each fall, it's time to start turning toward ourselves. This means being honest, vulnerable and brave, and then stepping into forgiveness.

Over the centuries, the Rabbis have asked, Why would we celebrate the birthday of the world, and then do Yom Kippur, our day of apologies and atonement? Would it not make more sense to do the forgiveness first, and then have the New Year?

The answer, they say, is that Jewish wisdom sees that messing up is part of life. So we start new, we acknowledge that we are humans, we promise to do better, and then we go forward in love and joy.

At the end of Yom Kippur, if you've done the work with intention, you can feel yourself starting again with a clean slate. The journey is one of noticing, apologizing, and getting closer — not just closer to the Eternal, but to the others in your life.

Who do I want to forgive this year? What is holding me back from forgiveness?

Part I: Growth and New Beginnings — 15 minutes

Introduce Activity 1

Rosh Hashanah celebrates the creation of the world — a world that is whole, but not complete. A world that allows humans enough space to make mistakes. The High

Holidays are a time to create a clean slate and cultivate forgiveness, so we can start the new year with self-awareness and meaningful intentions.

Activity 1: Journal Prompts & Discussion – Growth and New Beginnings

Set aside 8 minutes for journaling.

- What new beginnings would you like to invite into your life?
- What would you like to let go of? What is no longer serving you?
- What emotions come up for you as you reflect on the past year and your future? How do you feel in your mind/body/heart?
- Do you have any fears? How might they be holding you back, and how can you let them go?

Discussion Questions (in pairs or as a group): 7 minutes

Open up discussion for the questions that resonated the most with you.

Part II: A Natural Ritual for Letting Go: Tashlich - 15 minutes

Transition to Activity 2

Tashlich ("casting away, letting go") is a beautiful ritual practiced on the second day of Rosh Hashanah. It's a moment to let go of some of the things you were hurt by this year and to let go of some of the things you missed the mark on, too.

As it says in the Book of Micah, the Divine *"will cast all their sins into the depths of the sea."*

Traditionally, we stand on the banks of a river, on the shore of a sea, or at the edge of that little pond in the park, and toss small objects such as bread or small rocks into the water in preparation for Yom Kippur. We offer two options to practice this ritual, knowing that not everyone will be able to participate outside.

Activity 2: Tashlich

If your group is near a body of water:

1. Find a body of water, preferably from a natural source.

2. Bring some small sticks or rocks* to symbolize those things you're ready to be rid of. Name any of the ways in which you have fallen short of your intentions, hopes, and dreams during this past year.
3. As you drop each item into the water, imagine your disappointment and hurt and heartbreak tumbling, flying, or jumping from your open palms. Let your disappointments and sorrows return to the source; let it cleanse you for the New Year so that you may start fresh.

**For some, it is customary to throw bread or breadcrumbs into natural water sources. We now know this can be harmful to wildlife including birds and fish, so instead we have replaced bread with natural alternatives. Learn about other alternatives [here](#).*

If your group is not near a body of water:

1. Write on small pieces of paper the things you're ready to be rid of. Name any of the ways in which you have fallen short of your intentions, hopes, and dreams during this past year.
2. Dissolve the pieces of paper (rice paper is great for this) in water, burn with a match, or tear the paper into shreds.
3. Imagine your disappointment and hurt and heartbreak leave you as you ritually let go. Let your disappointments and sorrows dissipate; let it cleanse you for the New Year so that you may start fresh.

The Tashlich ritual is a tangible reminder that, in order to grow, we first must release.

Discussion Questions (in pairs or as a group)

- If you feel comfortable sharing, name out loud one thing you are letting go of.

Transition to Embodied Practice: Compassionate Body Scan Meditation

Throughout the month of Tishrei, keep reminding yourself of the ultimate Divine Oneness of the world. Why? To do Tishrei well, we must enter this month from a place of compassion — for self and for all those in our communities. Moments of “missing the mark” are normal, as are the shadow parts of our souls. It's all an opportunity to grow and to strengthen ourselves. Make an honest effort to talk with people you've hurt and who have hurt you this past year. Then, repeat this process for yourself. Remember, the difficult parts of ourselves are also divine. We are invited now to see them as part of us, and see ourselves as whole.

Part III: Embodied Experience— 10 minutes

Activity 3: Compassionate Body Scan Meditation

By Dammara Kovnats Hall and Patricia Kovnats

Guide your group through the steps below:

1. **Get comfortable.** Lying down is preferable, or if that's not possible or comfortable, sitting comfortably is also an option.
2. **Take a few deep breaths.** Let your breathing slow down, and start breathing from your belly instead of from your chest. Let your abdomen expand and contract with each breath. If you find your shoulders rising and falling, focus more on breathing from your belly, as though a balloon is inflating and deflating in your abdomen.
3. **Look inward at yourself over the past year.** Uncovering where you may have missed the mark *and* where you have excelled isn't easy work!
4. **Reflect on the relationships** in your life and how you are showing up to them. What have you done well in these relationships? What can you do better?
5. **Bring awareness to your feet.** Begin observing sensations in your feet. If you notice pain, acknowledge it and any thoughts or emotions that accompany it, and gently breathe through it.
6. **Breathe into the tension.** If you notice any uncomfortable sensations, focus your attention on them. Breathe into them, and see what happens. Visualize the tension leaving your body through your breath and evaporating into the air. Move on when you feel ready.
7. **Scan your entire body.** Continue this practice with each area of your body, gradually moving up through your feet until you reach the top of your head. At each point, notice how you feel and where you're holding your stress. If there's any tightness, pain, or pressure, continue to breathe into it. This can help you release tension in your body now, and be more aware of it in the future so you can release it then, too.
8. **Support this hard work with *chesed* (loving-kindness),** both for yourself and for those you love. Imagine a ray of light, like the warm kiss of the sun, embracing you in a hug. Feel this love as it helps us embrace both the easy and difficult parts of ourselves, to fully accept our wholeness, and to grow forward together.

Closing the Space — 5 minutes

*This is your opportunity to share YOUR Torah (i.e. your personal sense of mission/instruction/wisdom) on this topic. You've just led the learners on a journey to develop their own understanding on this topic - now they get to hear your perspective.

Learner Takeaways — 2 minutes

*This is your opportunity to “check for understanding” and hear what has landed with the learners.

Ask learners to share something they are taking away from this session: something new they learned, something they hadn't previously considered, or something someone said that really resonated with them.

**Want to dig deeper into the themes of the month?
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