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”!
Order of the service

Jewish participation portion:

1. Intro to JVP-Seattle
2. History of Tashlich
3. Explanation of commitment
4. Recitation of transgressions/throwing pebbles
5. Moment of reflection/song

6. BRIDGE

Non-Jewish participation portion:

7. Non-Jewish commentary
8. Explanation of commitment
9. Recitation of transgressions/throwing pebbles
10. Moment of reflection

11. ENDING (all)
1. Intro to Jewish Voice for Peace-Seattle

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 security and self-determination.

We seek:

- A U.S. foreign policy based on promoting peace, democracy, human rights, and respect for international law
- An end to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem.
- A resolution of the Palestinian refugee problem consistent with international law and equity.
- 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!"

Racism and bigotry cannot be tolerated, whether in the U.S. or abroad, whether against Arabs or against Jews.

Are you a Jew interested in joining JVP? An ally interested in hearing about our events? Please drop us a line at jvp@riseup.net
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.

The custom of Tashlich is mentioned in the Code of Jewish Law beginning only in the 15th Century, but it was most likely observed even before that: Water has continually served as a significant symbol in Jewish life and practice.

Wherever possible, Jews prayed and built synagogues near bodies of water. This practice persisted throughout the centuries, often to the dismay of rabbinic authorities. By the 14th century, many Jews were going to the riverbanks on all major holidays. During this period, the custom of watching fish in the river and throwing them food became prevalent. Tashlich as we know it today (may have) evolved from this practice.

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. Our commitment to taking responsibility for and casting away the sins of the occupation of Palestine.
As for our alternative *Tashlich*, today we will throw pebbles into the water, but our *Tashlich* will be different. Today we have come here *not* to cast off our personal sins, but to cast off our inactions in opposing Israel’s military aggression and to recommit ourselves as a community to pursue an end to the occupation of Palestine.

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.

As responsible members of the Jewish community, who heed the call to pursue justice, we face this obligation openly, freely, and sincerely.

As conscious 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.

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

1. Allowing violence against Palestinian and Lebanese people to be committed in our name
I take responsibility and will work to make it stop
2. Bombing innocent civilians
I take responsibility and will work to make it stop
3. Enacting racist policies
I take responsibility and will work to make it stop
4. Reinforcing the wall
I take responsibility and will work to make it stop
5. Stealing land and destroying homes
I take responsibility and will work to make it stop
6. Justifying and being indifferent to the suffering of Palestinians
I take responsibility and will work to make it stop
7. Abusing and harassing Palestinians at checkpoints.
I take responsibility and will work to make it stop
  8. Allowing fear, instead of compassion, to dictate our actions.
I take responsibility and will work to make it stop
  9. Abusing the power we possess.
I take responsibility and will work to make it stop
  10. Forgetting what it means to be oppressed and dispossessed.
I take responsibility and will work to make it stop

5. Moment of Reflection/Song
We have cast these transgressions into the water. Yet the suffering continues. Let us remember our commitment with this song:
Min Hametzar

From a narrow place (a place of distress), I called out to Ya-h (G-d/nature/breath), Ya-h answered me with expansiveness.

Min Hametzar karati Ya-ah, anani bamерchav Ya-h

6. BRIDGE

This past year has been difficult for many Jews. We’ve seen escalating aggression by the Israeli government against Gaza and Lebanon carried out in our name as well as rising anti-Semitism. Both things came to a head for many of us this summer in Seattle.

On Sunday July 23rd, many Jewish folks gathered at a “Stand with Israel” rally on Mercer Island. Jewish Voice for Peace attended to bring an alternative voice to the unconditional support for Israeli military aggression. Holding signs that said “As a Jew, I cannot support bombing civilians,” and “As a Jew, I was taught to question the justification of war for peace,” we were called “Hezbollah supporters” and “Nazis” by other Jews and had to argue with the police to even “let” us into the rally. Being yelled at and rejected by fellow Jews was especially painful to many of us. It was also painful to see so many Jews supporting violence in the name of “peace” for Israel.
Just five days later, on Friday, July 28th, an armed man entered the Jewish Federation in downtown Seattle and shot six women working there, killing one and wounding five, saying that he was “angry at Israel.”

How are these two events connected? The “Stand with Israel” rally demonstrates the attempts of mainstream Jewish communities to provide one unified outlook on Israel--one that is sadly based on fear. Many of us grew up hearing about our Jewish history of trauma and persecution and believing our personal safety and right to exist in the world depends solely on the safety of the state of Israel. Afraid for the safety of our people, some Jews hear any questioning of the Israeli government’s actions as anti-Semitic. Many Jews believe that they need the state of Israel as a safe space when anti-Semitism rears its ugly head. An incident such as the shootings simply reaffirms this need for many Jews.

This response to protect Jews at any cost without so much as a nod to justice or fairness should not be our Jewish response. It not only hurts others and defies our commitment to tikkun olam (repairing the world) and tsedakah (charity and justice), but it also hurts Jews. When we make our alliance as Jews more important than human rights and dignity, we are practicing a narrow rather than an expansive form of Jewishness and thereby diminishing what it means to be Jewish. Facing anti-Semitism is part of what it means to be a Jew, and so is passing on a commitment to the Jewish value of social justice. To fully invest
in our survival—the survival of our Jewish values—we must be willing to move through our fear and insist on healing the world for everyone. When demonstrating our strength translates only into aggression, *tikkun olam and tsedakah* begin to lose their meaning.

Many non-Jews, who are angry at Israel’s brutal occupation of Palestine and military aggression, blame all Jews for the actions of the Israeli government, and do not recognize the Jewish history of persecution that led to the formation of the state of Israel. Nor do they understand why Israel feels so important to many Jews.

Many of us in Jewish Voice for Peace were left feeling like we have no steady ground on which to stand. How do we mourn the anti-Semitism that led to the shootings and simultaneously condemn the actions of the Israeli government? How do we move back and forth between the notion that Jews can be both aggressors and victims of oppression?

As we struggled to find a place to mourn this hate crime, as well as the escalating military aggression of the Israeli government, many of us took refuge in each other’s company, afraid of talking to other Jews who might not share our political leanings and afraid of talking to non-Jewish activists who might not support or understand our grief and pain.

We are asking today that we all think about the connection between these two events and how the struggle to end the occupation of Palestine
and the struggle to end anti-Semitism are linked. Supporters of the Israeli government use any insensitivity toward Jews to discredit the movement to end the occupation and instead use it to justify the continued oppression of Palestinians. If we start taking anti-Semitism seriously, we can help support anti-occupation work by refusing to give Right wing Jews and Christians ammunition against our movement. When Jews see folks taking anti-Semitism seriously within the Palestinian solidarity movement, more Jews will feel encouraged to join this movement.

Given the need to simultaneously fight anti-Semitism and the occupation of Palestine, we are especially excited to have non-Jewish folks as part of our ceremony today. They will lead casting off the sins of anti-Semitism for non-Jewish participants.

**Non-Jewish portion**

7. Non Jewish Commentary

8. Commitment to taking responsibility for and casting away the sins of anti-Semitism

As non-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 calling out anti-Semitism.
I take responsibility and will work to make it stop

2. Scapegoating Jews
I take responsibility and will work to make it stop
3. Lacking knowledge of Jewish history and historical trauma
I take responsibility and will work to make it stop

4. Invisibilizing or marginalizing Jewish culture
I take responsibility and will work to make it stop

5. Perpetuating Christian dominance in subtle and obvious ways
I 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
I take responsibility and will work to make it stop

7. Assuming all Jews are wealthy and powerful
I take responsibility and will work to make it stop

8. Normalizing Nazi regime lingo by using the word “Nazi” to describe controlling behavior
I take responsibility and will work to make it stop

9. Equating all Jewish folks with the politics of the Israeli government
I take responsibility and will work to make it stop
10. Lacking awareness of and respect for Jewish holidays and rituals

I 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-Semitism and supporting the struggle against Palestinian oppression.

12. 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. At various times in our lives, we all feel alienated and separated, which leads to inaction and silence. To remain connected with the folks who have gathered here today and support each other in coming together to do this work, we’d like everyone to find a partner (Jews should find a Jewish partner, and allies should find a non-Jewish partner) to come up with a question about anti-occupation work or anti-Semitism that you want to work on in the new year.

You and your partner should take ten minutes to brainstorm and come up with your question, and make a commitment to getting together in the next couple weeks to connect and discuss how you’d like to work on your question.
After we’ve had a chance to discuss our question with our partners, we will go around, and everybody will share their commitments.

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**

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.