

## RITUAL OF LETTING GO

LIVE OAK FELLOWSHIP  
ALAMEDA, CALIFORNIA

As is our tradition, one of the ways we at Live Oak observe the Jewish High Holy Days is in our annual Ritual of Letting Go. Like the age-old Jewish custom on which it is based, our ritual also encourages us to self-reflection, hope, and renewal, at this season of the year.

Like the theme of universal salvation that is core to our faith as Unitarian Universalists, the Jewish tradition teaches that each of our souls -- that spiritual essence that dwells within each of us -- is already perfect and in alignment with the sacred oneness of the universe. Judaism also teaches us that as human beings we tend to stray from that perfection through fear, selfishness, and simple forgetfulness. A key theme of the Jewish High Holy Days is the idea of *teshuvah*, a word that means “return” in Hebrew, and signifies an opportunity to turn away from whatever separates us from each other and the oneness of all things. As we turn away from what separates us, we return to what is highest and best in us. This idea of Teshuvah is central to the process of atonement – or AT- ONE- MENT -- that I spoke about in the Lesson for All Ages at the start of today's service.

Our Ritual of Letting Go draws its inspiration from this idea of *teshuvah* as embodied in the Jewish ritual of Tashlich. Tashlich gets its name from the Hebrew word meaning “to cast away.” When Jews perform this ritual, they visit a stream or lake and cast bread crumbs into the water, symbolically “casting away” whatever they need to let go of in the interest of becoming more whole as human beings and of living more righteous lives.

In the spirit of both Tashlich and Teshuvah, our Ritual of Letting Go starts with the acknowledgement that everyone makes mistakes. It recognizes that we all sometime rationalize our failings, bend the truth, avoid the effort, or ignore what is really important and meaningful in our lives. Our Ritual of Letting Go also honors the idea that we are all capable of learning and growing as a result of our failings and shortcomings. In enacting this ritual, we are reminded that learning and growth require that we let go of the past and allow ourselves to begin again in love.

In this ritual, we use salt as the symbol of that which we are casting away. For thousands of years salt has been treasured as both a preservative and a seasoning. Its consumption is necessary for the maintenance of life. Salt is abundantly present in the oceans from which life arose, the blood that flows in our veins, and the tears that we shed. A symbol of spiritual rebirth, resurrection, and reincarnation, it's also a substance that purifies and dissolves away as it mingles with water.

To prepare ourselves for partaking in this ritual, I invite you to move into a meditative state by placing both feet on the floor and beginning to pay attention to your breath. As you gently breath in an out, allow yourself to reflect on your life at this time. With a

sense of deep compassion for yourself, consider what habit or trait, what ingrained way of being, you most wish to let go of. Think of the ritual act you are about to perform not as some magical way of ridding ourselves of that which keeps us from more fully approaching life from a place of love. Instead, I invite you to approach this ritual act as a tangible symbol of a genuine commitment to doing the necessary work of personal transformation.

We will now spend some time in silence after which a bell will sound. Then, when you are ready, please come to the table and take a pinch of salt. In the spirit of beginning again in love, drop the salt into the cleansing water of the bowl, thereby symbolically dissolving away what you've chosen to let go of. Then please return to your seats in silence. If you are unable to come to the front, please raise your hand and the salt and water will be brought to you.

*[Ritual is performed.]*

As is our tradition, we will close this ritual with the beautiful "We Begin Again in Love" litany, # 1037 in the teal hymnal. As we sing the phrase "We forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love," I invite to turn someone seated near you and reverently look into this person's eyes for a moment. As you do so, bear in mind the teaching that the eyes are the windows of the soul and that, in the act of truly seeing each other, we are being offered the awesome privilege of sharing the holiest part of ourselves.