Jewish Spiritual Care After Extreme Weather: Handwashing Ritual

In the immediate wake of climate disasters, we tend to basic physical needs. But long after the news cameras have left, many survivors also face a long road to emotional and spiritual recovery. We may move through waves of exhaustion, generosity, disillusionment, anger, or fear, as we also juggle the logistical demands of displacement and rebuilding. **We hope that this handwashing ritual, and the full Extreme Weather Spiritual Care guides available at dayenu.org/extreme-weather-resources, provide opportunities to slow down, grieve, heal, cultivate resilience, and remember that you are not alone.**

This handwashing ritual ceremony was adapted by Rabbi Sarah Rovin and Yael Marans, through a Mayyim Hayyim and Dayenu partnership, from the "Toward Healing" immersion ceremony and the "Being Present in the Moment" handwashing ceremony, which were created by Matia Rania Angelou, Deborah Issokson, and Judith D. Kummer, and draws inspiration from the Birkat HaGomel liturgy.

How to use this ritual

This ritual uses water as a source of healing, presence, and renewal in the wake of fires or floods, inspired by the ancient Jewish rituals of mikveh immersion and handwashing. Consider using it individually or with a group when returning to the site of a disaster or to mark key anniversaries.

Preparing for the Ceremony

Remove anything which may separate your bare hands from the water – rings, bracelets, nail polish (if you wish), and wash your hands with soap and water. Place a pitcher (or thermos) of water, a large receiving bowl, and a handwashing cup in the center of the space.

INTENTIONS

In the aftermath of a fire

I come here today in hopes of finding healing for body, heart, and soul.
As I prepare my hands for washing, I also prepare my mind and spirit to mark this moment.
I invite water to hold and ease some of the pain.
May I take from my pain only what I need to grow wise.
May I part with that which hardens my heart.
As this scorched earth heals and renews
May I, too, find full and complete healing of body and spirit
And, in turn, help to heal and protect this earth and all of its living communities.
May my strength increase,
May my fear be eased,
May water's nourishing life force be with me and my community as a blessing, for healing and not for harm, in joy and not in scarcity.
Amen.

In the aftermath of a flood or water-based disaster

I come here today in hopes of finding healing for body, heart, and soul.
As I prepare my hands for washing, I also prepare my mind and spirit to mark this moment.
I invite water — a source of terrifying power and lifesource — to help hold the pain.
May I take from my pain only what I need to grow wise.
May I part with that which hardens my heart.
May I take from my pain only what I need to grow.
May I part with that which hardens my heart.
As this scorched earth heals and renews
May I, too, find full and complete healing of body and spirit
And help, in turn, to heal and protect this earth and all of its living communities.
May my strength increase,
May my fears be eased,
May water's nourishing life force be with me and my community as a blessing,
for healing and not for harm, in joy and not in scarcity.
Amen.

Mayyim Hayyim
LIVING WATERS COMMUNITY MIKVEH
PAULA BRODY & FAMILY EDUCATION CENTER

DAYENU
A Jewish Call to Climate Action

HANDWASHING

In a group: Take turns washing the hands of the next person in the group, so that each person has the chance to have their hands washed and to wash someone's hands. Pour water over your neighbor's hands three times – first with their palms up, then with palms facing down, and a third time with palms up. Each person is then invited to recite the following prayer.

Individually: Pour water from the washing cup over each of your hands – once with palms up, then with palms down, and a third time with palms up. Then recite the following prayer.

> **I stand here today to acknowledge and affirm this moment in my life.**
>
> For water tragedies:
> **I wash my hands using our ancient ritual and move toward healing, presence, and a renewed relationship with water and this place.**
>
> For fire tragedies:
> **I wash my hands using our ancient ritual and move toward healing, presence, and the gift of water, renewing life in this place.**

BLESSING

Birkat HaGomel is a blessing of thanksgiving recited after having survived a dangerous ordeal. Traditionally, it is said by an individual in the presence of community (a minyan) and affirms the goodness of our / their survival. If you are with a group of survivors, consider having one half of the group recite the blessing first while the other half responds, then switch.

Said by those who have survived harm:

Baruch ata Adonai, Eloheinu melech ha-olam, ha-gomel l'chayavim tovot she-g'malani kol tov.	בָּרוּךְ אַתָּה ה' אֱלֹהֵינוּ מֶלֶךְ הָעוֹלָם הַגּוֹמֵל לְחַיָּבִים טוֹבוֹת שֶׁגְּמָלַנִי כָּל טוֹב

Blessed are You, Adonai our God, Ruling Spirit of the Universe, who bestows goodness on the undeserving, for You have bestowed goodness on me.

Response and affirmation:

Amen. Mi she-g'malcha kol tov, hu yi-g'malcha kol tov selah.	אמן. מִי שֶׁגְּמָלְךָ כֹּל טוֹב הוּא יִגְמָלְךָ כֹּל טוֹב סֶלָה.

Amen. May the One who bestows goodness on you, bestow all of the goodness on you forever.