



MENTAL HEALTH AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Water is an essential part of our lives, and on the holiday of Shemini Atzeret, we celebrate and pray for that water in the form of rain.

Our God and God of our ancestors: Remember Abraham who flowed to You like water. You blessed him like a tree planted by streams of water. You rescued him from fire and water. He passed Your test by planting good deeds by every source of water. For Abraham's sake, do not keep back water...For Isaac's sake, do not keep back water...For Jacob's sake do not keep back water. Remember Moses, who was drawn in a reed basket out of the Nile's water. Who helped Jethro's daughters: He drew water and gave the sheep water. He struck the rock and out came water. For Moses' sake do not hold back water!..Turn to us, God, who are surrounded by troubles like water. For the Jewish people's sake, do not hold back water. You are Adonai, our God Who causes the wind to blow and the rain to fall. For blessing and not for curse. Amen. For life and not for death. Amen. For plenty and not for lack. Amen. (Prayer for Rain)

While originally a prayer for rain in association with the yearly harvest, [climate change](#) and its accompanying consequences on our [collective mental health](#) has given it a renewed significance.

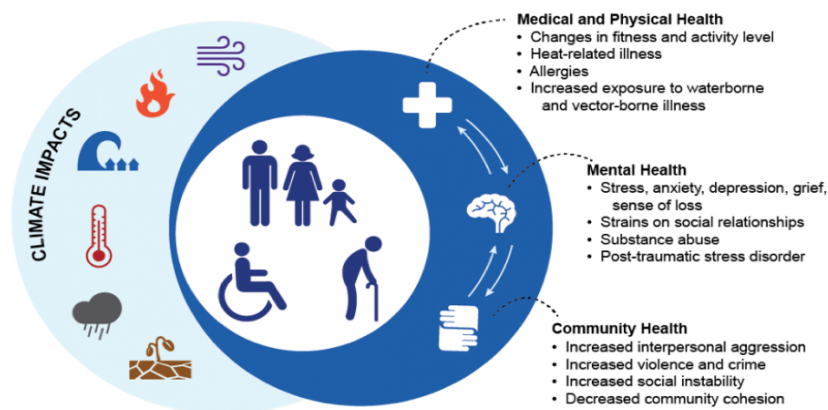




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Climate change has become an increasingly significant cause of mental illness. In recent years, studies have shown that a growing number of people experiencing mental health challenges have been those vulnerable to the potential impacts of climate change. In particular, the discomfort caused by abnormally extreme heat and lack of rain has led to increased use of alcohol to cope with stress, increases in hospital and emergency room admissions for people with mental health or psychiatric conditions and an increase in suicide.

An Illustration on How Climate Change Impacts Physical, Mental, and Community Health



At the center of the diagram are human figures representing adults, children, older adults, and people with disabilities. The left circle depicts climate impacts including air quality, wildfire, sea level rise and storm surge, heat storms, and drought. The right circle shows the three interconnected health domains that will be affected by climate impacts--Medical and Physical Health, Mental Health, and Community Health.

Image source: U.S. Global Change Research Program. 2016. The impacts of Climate Change on Human Health in the United States: A Scientific Assessment.



A study by the American Psychiatric Association also warned of the disastrous effects climate change can have on the mental health of children. “Children are more impacted by disasters than adults and are more likely to have continued trauma-related symptoms after a disaster. Disruptions in routine, separation from caregivers as a result of evacuations or displacement, and parental stress after a disaster all contribute to children’s distress. Children are often very resilient, and reactions to disasters may resolve over time, but they should be monitored for long-term effects of chronic stress related to extreme weather events.”



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We need a natural climate for our mental and physical health, and Shemini Atzeret provides a ritual to honor and commemorate this need in the form of a prayer for rain. But we must remember we are tasked with doing our part in keeping the world we were given safe and healthy. At the beginning of the Torah, when humankind was created, God told us:

וַיִּקַּח יְהוָה אֱלֹהִים אֶת-הָאָדָם בְּגֶן-עֵדֶן לְעַבְדָּהּ וּלְשָׁמְרָהּ

The LORD God took humankind and placed them in the garden of Eden, to till it and tend it. (Genesis 2:15)

When we do our part to make our world healthier, we quite literally embody “tikkun olam” and, simultaneously, the mental health middah of פִּיקּוּחַ נֶפֶשׁ (pikuach nefesh – saving a life). On Shemini Atzeret, ask yourself what you can do to lessen the impact of climate change on your communities. Here are some suggestions:

Reduce your burning of fossil fuels by carpooling or biking to work or school.

Reduce your carbon footprint.

Reach out to your local representatives to support legislation lessening the impact of climate change.



What is a carbon footprint? It is the total amount of greenhouse gases (including carbon dioxide and methane) generated by our actions. You can calculate your carbon footprint on [Nature.org](https://www.nature.org/en/your-footprint)

With Rosh Hashanah only a few weeks behind us, the new year has just begun. What are some ways you can promote climate action in your community and [make 5782 a year of health, peace and happiness for you, your community and the planet?](#)





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Activity - Appreciating the World You're Saving

Think about the things in nature for which you are grateful, and write them down on the clouds below. In reflecting on everything the world gives us, we will feel more empowered to do our part to save it.

