

The Wisdom
of Water

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The Treasure House of Innumerable Secrets

'Because water has such great powers of absorption and conservation it is a treasure house of innumerable secrets. The whole of the history of mankind is recorded in the rivers, lakes and oceans of the world, for everything leaves traces of its existence, and the traces of all beings, all objects and all events live on in the water...

It is the supreme magic medium which permeates and impregnates the universe. If you know how to listen to a drop of water it will speak to you...'

Omraam Mikhaël Aïvanhov
The Mysteries of Fire and Water

Water—we turn on our taps and there it is—reliable and abundant. No wonder we take it for granted. Water is an essential part of our daily life. We drink it, cook with it, wash our bodies and our possessions in it. We use water to nourish our gardens, to quench fires and cool buildings by humidifying air. Then we swim in it for relaxation.

Water is an essential solvent and coolant in industrial and chemical processes, flowing and dripping through manufacturing plants to mould, blend, rinse and cleanse. It takes around 200,000 litres of water to produce a modern car and 8000 to put a kilo of mince on your table—and so on.

You've heard it all before.

Over and over again we are told how much our future well-being and prosperity depend on this 'our most precious resource'. Environmental scientists, hydrologists and economists refer to water and the natural world as resources whose sole function is to provide 'environmental services' to humans.

This mechanistic view of nature has been responsible for a great deal of thoughtless destruction.

To me the word 'resource' is as emotionally laden as 'ethnic cleansing'. When we refer to water or forests or animals or humans as resources, we deny them their identity, individuality and spirituality. Resources are passive. They need 'sustainable management' so that we

can continue to extract the maximum 'yield' from them.

But when we love someone or something they cease to be a resource. Would you describe your mother as a resource? Your lover, your children, the family pet—are they resources?

The words we use to describe things determine our attitude to them. If we want to change that we have to expand our vocabulary, and our consciousness.

I, too, used to think of water as a resource until I came to know it more intimately.

That was twenty years ago.

Now water is my principal source of spiritual nourishment and the focus of my daily religious practice. Water is my teacher, my inspiration, consolation, lover and friend.

How does that work in practice you might ask? I'll give you an example:

Many of my early books were conceived and written in a tiny three-roomed goldminer's cabin overlooking Mallacoota Lake in Victoria's Gippsland. Each time I arrived I'd set up the same old wooden worktable at the same corner window which gave an expansive view of the water, and here I'd write for twelve or fourteen hours a day. There was a small dinghy moored at the jetty. If I needed to think I'd row out into the lake and just sit. Sometimes I'd row

for miles until I was tired, come back, sleep for a while, then wake up refreshed and ready to return to writing.

One night when the waning moon hung low in the sky, I rowed out into the middle of the silent lake, shipped the oars and drifted, bathed in golden light. The boat gently rose and fell as if it rested on the breast of a living breathing entity. I stood because I could no longer sit in the presence of such beauty. Tears of joy or bliss ran down my cheeks. The sound of some night bird floated across the water and into my open heart. I sat down, wrapping my shawl around me. Hours passed unnoticed, until the sun rose and I rowed slowly home, filled with a renewed sense of connection and purpose.

This is how water speaks to us, not in words, but directly to the spirit, and somehow we feel uplifted without knowing why, without even wanting to know why. Listening to the rhythm of the ocean waves or the gurgle of a mountain stream or the sound of falling water, we can hear the voice of the Divine Intelligence. In its presence we need do nothing but *be* in the fullest sense of the word and, in its own time, water will communicate with us.

In 1922 D.H. Lawrence wrote: ‘Water is H₂O, hydrogen two parts, oxygen one, but there is a third

thing that makes it water, and nobody knows what it is'. What is this mysterious third thing Lawrence speaks of?

Could it be spirit?

The Cogui people live in the high forests of the snow-capped Andes Mountains in Columbia. Remote from civilisation they have kept their religion and way of life intact for uncounted millennia. The Cogui scriptures begin with the question, 'What is water?' The answer is that water is a living conscious entity that thinks and feels. A stream is a baby, a river an adult, the ocean is the Great All-powerful One. In the language of the Cogui the word 'creation' translates as 'water-thinking'.

What if, as the Cogui believe, this earth we inhabit is water's intentional creation, a process which began when the planet was just a spinning molten core? Could water really have created the universe and shaped the planet we inhabit? Could water be Chi, Prana, the Great Tao—the spirit that animates and manifests itself in all things? Is that possible?

When I was a child I was told that God made the world. Now scientists tell me that the world made itself, which begs the question, how exactly?

How did the Earth bring itself into being? The short answer is that the Earth is water's creation.

The water within and around us came from

somewhere out there in the universe and, for some reason known only to itself, it chose this spinning molten ball to enclose in its cooling mist. For uncounted millions of years water was the only living thing on earth. And this same water has been circulating through the earth ever since—through every bird, animal, tree and rock. It has been everywhere, seen everything.

‘The same stream of life that runs through my veins night and day runs through the world and dances in rhythmic measures’, writes the Indian mystic Rabindrath Tagore. Within us too the moonstruck tides ebb and flow, the sea inside moves in concert with the ocean beyond, affecting our senses and emotions, our reactions and responses. These ‘rushing sea tides of the soul’ open our hearts like oysters to the moon.

Through the medium of water we are connected, not only to the moon and the cosmos, but to all living things past and present. If water retains within its structure the memory of its history, then it is indeed a consciousness beyond our imagining.

Because of this cosmic connection some esoteric philosophers assert that every drop of water contains the recollection of everything that ever was and ever has been, the collective memory of the universe known as the *Chronicles of the Akasha*. It is not by

chance that the word 'memory' has its origins in *mem*, the ancient Hebrew designation for water.

The desire of humans to communicate with the divinity of water led to the evolution of water gods and goddesses who surface in the myths, legends, parables and scriptures of all cultures. Ceremonies and rituals evolved around these powerful deities who could bestow life and abundance by their presence or by their absence, death and famine.

As we become increasingly aware of our dependence on fresh water for our survival, there is a resurgence of interest in the spiritual aspect of our relationship. That is as it should be. But our prayers for rain are meaningless unless they are accompanied by a recognition that nature is conscious; that because animals, plants, earth and water respond to love and respect, our thoughts and intentions have a significant impact on the environment around us. In this context love is the unconditional acceptance of the natural world as a spiritually alive and conscious entity; it is through that love that we experience the unity that connects us to the Divine.

The first step then, if we wish to enter the Treasure House of Innumerable Secrets, is to acknowledge that water is alive. This means laying aside some preconditioned 'scientific' ideas about the world, and going direct to the Source.

‘Go to the pine if you want to learn about the pine or the bamboo if you want to learn about the bamboo,’ the Zen master Basho instructed his pupils. ‘And in doing so you must leave behind your subjective preoccupation with yourself. Otherwise you impose yourself on the subject and do not learn.’ This is how we allow nature to reveal itself to us, by emptying ourselves and allowing the spirit of the water and the forest to fill that space.

But first you must empty your cup in order to be able to listen like a child hearing the stories that follow for the very first time.

A famous Zen teaching parable tells how a learned professor of religious studies came to visit an old Zen master, eager to hear what gems of wisdom the great man might have to offer.

‘Sit down’ said the master, graciously bowing to his guest, ‘and let us have some tea.’ Setting a small porcelain cup in front of the professor, the master leant across and began to pour fragrant green *sencha* from an exquisite pot. Both watched the cup slowly fill, then overflow, gradually spreading across the top of the lacquered table. The master didn’t register any emotion. He just kept pouring.

‘Stop’ shouted the astonished professor as a trickle of hot tea flowed off the table and into his lap. ‘Stop—the cup is overflowing!’

‘Exactly,’ said the master, ‘and you are like this cup, full of your own ideas and preconceptions, feelings and emotions. Unless you empty yourself of these, how can new knowledge ever be gained?’

With my empty cup I kept company with streams and rivers, sat beneath cascades of crystal, made pilgrimages to holy springs and healing waters, slept in houseboats rocked by gentle waves. I revelled in the beauty of the rainbow and the majesty of cloud-filled sunsets. I made love in the early morning dew and was mesmerised by the reflection of the moon on the rippling waves of the ocean. On my lifelong journey back to the Source I’ve fallen under the influence of Stoics and Sufis, Taoists, Zen poet monks and Lamas, whose teachings illuminated my path and showed me the Way.

Now my cup overflows with the stories, poems, parables, myths and legends that have spread themselves over the pages of this book. I’ve arranged them under headings like Snow, Dew, Ice, Rainbows, etc. These are just some of the many manifestations of water that merit closer attention.

This is not a book to hurry through. Relax, take your time. Put it down when you’ve finished a chapter and think about it.

The Wisdom of Water offers you an opportunity to immerse yourself in water’s mysteries, to explore its

hidden depths and expand your experience, so that you can look up at the clouds with new eyes and hear the voice of waterfalls and ocean waves, so that next time it rains, you can walk out and feel the touch of angels' wings.