

Water and Eco-Spirituality

"God's spirit hovered over the water." (Genesis 1:2) Many of us grew up with a sense of water and spirit (and fire) being closely associated. Human beings know we cannot live without water, and we can not imagine a lifeless spirit. Thus an "eco-spirituality" must include spirit and water. Our "spirituality" involves water in at least its wellsprings and its utility - for drinking, cleansing, growing food, traveling to some degree, and recreating. Moving or living water stirs us, enhances our well being, broadens our perspective, and energizes our lives. From our evolutionary roots we are attracted to water. Furthermore, we are attracted to fire-starting and keeping -- our greatest human achievement; and nearby water acts as fire's controlling agent. Water and fire: promises in life and comfort; perils through drowning and heat-related burns.

A. Basic Eco-Spirituality Insights and Concerns

As knowledgeable people we share common concerns:

* **Our Earth is marvelous and fragile**, but the uniqueness of Earth's microcosm is often overlooked. People express a sense of mystery in various ways including personal communication to the Almighty through praise and thanksgiving. We can move from the natural beauty of rippling, roaring, crashing, gurgling water to its astounding scientific qualities in structure, expansion as a solid, boiling point, and ability to modify climate. Yet we know that if we do not protect water sources, they can become contaminated and unfit to utilize.

* **Our Earth is in trouble**, because human beings, instead of being responsible agents, miss the mark through ignorance, arrogance, greed and forms of exploitation. Environmental damage occurs, and many resources that were meant for all to use are sequestered, polluted, and misused. Wells are contaminated, aquifers cracked by blasting, glaciers melt by climate change, oceans rise, salination infects fertile land, oil-covered rivers catch fire, sewage runs free, and water conflicts arise. We seek forgiveness for wrongdoing to humans, plants, animals and Earth herself, but we are slow at reforming.

* **Our Earth needs care**, which includes mobilizing all resources for the awesome and daunting task ahead. Those of us concerned with water in same way cannot let matters slip away from our control. We cannot **deny** the calling, **excuse** ourselves to allow others to act, or **escape** to unrelated activities. The problem is more one of will power, rather than lack of knowledge, and this is in part due to a gross insensitivity caused by material affluence. Earthhealing can only occur by removing the division between haves and have nots, and by working together with an enlightened spirit.

B. Some Eco-spirituality Elements

Being willing to act makes us appreciate the basic elements of change: our place, our time and our team. Thus our spirituality is conditioned by where we are, when we live, and those with whom we associate. Due to my time, place, and association, my spirituality is unique to me and yet able to be shared. Authenticity involves knowing where we are, the prime time to act, and those who are best as agents of change. Eco-spiritualities can be cosmologically focused: the **THERE** (in the universe), the **THEN** (distant beginnings), and the **THEY** (intellectual elites). Those spiritualities can distract from the healing role requiring presence, urgency and cooperative endeavor. Amazingly our connection with water keeps us down-to-Earth in spirituality.

HERE. We are rooted in our places of origins, current residences, future homes. Our focus is on being "at home" in a given place in which we have our bearings, direction of wind, topography and flow of the water. In active years, I helped perform two hundred environmental resource assessments, and I attempted only one by not being present, but using photography collected by an assistant. Amazing, the uneasiness in viewing the material resulted from not visualizing how water flowed on the property -- and this required extra data before answering. The "Here" involves humans being in proximity to land and water, a balance sought whether one lives in desert or swamp, in highlands or coastlands. Thus waterfalls, fountains, pools and fish tanks play roles in being "here" in ways we often overlook.

NOW. We need a sense of time: a reverence for past ways of conserving and preserving resources; a sensitivity to current needs of others through distributive justice;, and a hopeful vision of supplying future generations. Spiritualities that deny past achievements are befuddled; those that seek to excuse from problems are unrealistic; and those that try to escape are filled with despair. An authentic eco-spirituality must be timely, changing with morning and evening, day and night, spring and fall. Yes, we know seasons, wind direction, local weather patterns, when fruit ripens, today's daylight span, when seasons start and finish. Temporal awareness impels us to act with urgency, because time is short, and opportunities short-lived. We even pray and meditate differently in darkness and in light, at winter and summer.

WE. To work in a troubled world we need to reach out to our companions (relatives, friends and others). Rapid communications expand "neighbor" to those across the seas, for water bodies are no longer barriers, but convenient modes of modern transportation of needed goods. "We" means an expanded ecological solidarity that includes all flora and fauna. If Earth is to be saved, it needs all people, especially the poor and marginalized. The poor must rise and take responsibility for what is rightly theirs (and

water belongs to all and should not be privatized or monopolized), and do this within bounds of justice. The rich must let go without seeking exclusive control of their belongings. Globalizing means sharing.

C. Authentic Eco-Spirituality Involving Water

A recent report told about a shrinking water hole in the drought-stricken Horn of Africa where thirsty wildlife, livestock and human beings were vying for one water supply. Is this what is to come? Not if an authentic eco-spirituality is involved.

1. **All earthly creatures are interdependent** and this involves sharing high quality water. The most elementary aspect of a water-related eco-spirituality is to distribute these water resources fairly. With water covering four-fifths of the Earth's surface, where is the problem? We all know that accessible potable water is becoming more scarce, and we must know where shortages exist or will soon do so. Water protection from contamination and water-borne diseases is a major global concern.

At least one-tenth of the human race is not drinking safe water today, and perhaps half do not have high quality water for improving human welfare. All must know what they are drinking. Those who work with, protect, analyze and purify water must be in love with their work, and with those who need it, and with all who will benefit through sharing. Water-related work is human work.

2. **Conservation of resources** involves everything from energy to natural resources to food and to water. Nothing ought to be wasted, for all is precious gift. When we recognize our misdeeds with respect to resources, we must also accept the willingness to make changes. In affluent societies, we know how quickly people can adjust to strict water conservation measures. We need to expect that more troubles are on the way, especially for lands that depend on glaciers to feed their river systems needed for irrigation. Water conflicts in the Middle East and parts of Africa are in the offing. A proper and just distribution of water is an eco-spiritual necessity, an imperative conservation ethic, something that needs to be popularized everywhere -- by us.

3. **New and diverse technical water-related solutions** are forthcoming. An authentic eco-spirituality does not just profess the need to share and alert to existing problems; it must foster creative solutions. A host of water-saving methods are worth encouraging: better low-priced water purification and distribution equipment; less cooling water in electricity generation and proper hydropower utilization; lined irrigation conduits and drip irrigation methods; desalination of ocean water, tight controls on ocean and bilge water dumping; artificial wetland utilization, encouraging the use of dry compost toilets; promotion of water-saving devices at home, business and industry; -- and others.

Acknowledgment, acceptance of responsibility, and participation in healing are the triad of duties that require a deep spiritual base -- one involving our fragile Earth, proper conservation and protection of resources, and one demanding the proper redistribution of these limited resources.

Every Easter weekend we bless "Easter Water," which is used for baptism of adults, and we recall the rich symbolism of our Judeo-Christian tradition: Noah and the flood, exodus through the Red Sea, water in the desert, baptism of Jesus, "living water" at the Samaritan well, and others. As youth, the most memorable ceremony for me was outside church, namely taking Easter water back to our farm and sprinkling our cropland; in doing so we begged God for sufficient moisture for a bountiful harvest. A viable eco-spirituality must see water as sufficiently protected and purified (made holy) so as enliven Earth through distributing water to those in need. Let us sprinkle our spirituality throughout the globe.

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