

## Water and Monotheism

by John Paulin, Ph.D.

Our forefathers said that in the age before time, when creation lay dormant in the sleep between the yugas, Vishnu rested upon the waters and was the water. This water, the life we have in common, is no less sacred today than it was in the beginning. The water from which our mothers brought us forth to light, the waters of our holy Mother Ganges, and the waters that constitute the chemical matrices of all life on this planet are the very waters that were back then. The waters remain and God remains. Like God, the waters were here before us, they are part of us, they constitute the possibility of our existence, and we cannot live without them. In the age after time, when the possibilities of life and consciousness have returned to quiescence, Ananta Shesha, the god that remains, will once again sleep upon the water, and he will be the water. And whenever the divine essence is traced to the limits of human awareness, we can pursue its mystery no further than the dark silence of its unending waters. When time is ended, when the world is no more, and when illusions have ceased, all that will remain is God. God is forever, and God is love.

*Dedicated to Dr. Charles H. Townes*

*For his support of the Ram Mohan Roy Monotheistic Temple,  
for his kind service as an advisor to the IIBB, for his  
contribution to the peoples of India, Bangladesh, and beyond  
and for his inspiration to the IIBB and its volunteers.*

## *Religions*

Water is the material prerequisite of life, and the understanding of water promotes the understanding of god

The sacred traditions of many peoples hold that in the beginning there was only one god, and that god was water. Out of that living water creation emerged and with it the life and consciousness of mortal beings. Mother Ganges opens the Mahabharata, and the scriptures of ancient Egypt, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam begin with both the waters of the deep and the ineffable presence of a voice that can move them. Creation is said to have begun with a word or a command, but when such enunciations were proclaimed all that existed, all that obeyed, and all that responded were the waters.

In the ages before monotheism, and today in indigenous religions, water itself was and is divine. Water, the source of all things, was and is personified in springs, rivers, and oceans. In the Dionysian religions of the ancient Mediterranean, the divinity of water reached towards monotheism. These religions found the fundamental realization of the divine in the living processes of nature conceived in terms of the seasonal increase and decrease of the fluid principle of life. This waxing and waning of the life force belonged once again to water. The blood of the god, the water that rose in the vine, ripened in the grape; the grapes were crushed, broken, and became wine; and wine was the communion sacrament. As such, the blood of the god, the sacred water reborn as the blood of Dionysus, redeemed humanity from its profane division into self-centered individuals and reestablished within the fluid force of life's process the sacred community and unity of all living beings. Lesser gods created us, taught us, and gave us culture, but in the end, as in the

beginning, there was life, there was water, and there was god.

This motif of the living water is found in the religions, myths, and folktales of the peoples of all inhabited continents. In contemporary Christian belief the sacred fluid has become the blood of Christ, and in Christ, the word or *logos*, the voicing of the primordial plan through which in the beginning all things emerged, *panta di autou egeneto*, is now one with the *prima materia* of his body and blood. The flesh and the spirit, the water and the breath, the fluid and the sentient, the human and the divine are brought together in Christ, and the Christian Bible ends with the river of the water of life. When the 20<sup>th</sup> century relocated the divine to the depths of the psyche and reduced it to the nominal unity of a cognitive process, god was reborn as the unconscious. Even so, the prophets of the new belief held that the epiphanies of their god, now found in the products of human consciousness—language, dreams, rituals, and the arts—were often to be found in the species of water.

## *Nature*

The life of the cosmos begins when the hydrogen and helium of the big bang are reborn as oxygen, carbon, and the other chemicals of life. When these first elements are distributed throughout creation by supernovae, oxygen the third most common substance in the universe combines with hydrogen, and the immense chemical diversity of our universe follows from the creation of water. The limitless subtleties and possibilities of carbon chemistry do not emerge until they are realized as compounds within the aqueous substrates of living organisms. Now that the chemistry of water, carbon, and sunlight has evolved human consciousness, new elements are once again being added to the cosmos by modern physics.

Our ancestors sought life's beginnings in water, and today those on the forefront of

evolutionary theory, biophysicists and molecular biologists, also begin with water. Once again, water is believed to constitute the unformed medium in which the primordial constituents of life took shape and in which they were nurtured. Divested of life and consciousness, water is even now regarded as the primordial womb or matrix, and is understood to be the condition of life's possibility, if no longer life itself. Today we understand water to be the material medium that makes possible the infinitely complicated forms, processes, and molecular interactions that constitute the potentials and the existence of all organisms.

Since its creation in the early universe, water has been awaiting the evolution of life, the birth of molecular sentience, and the arrival of human thought. Water is the substrate of brain chemistry and consciousness, but it may be more than this. Water constituted us, we are primarily water, the electrical processes of human cognition move their ions through water, and everything that can be known can be known only through of water. As with life itself, human consciousness begins with water. Herman Melville stated, "meditation and water are wedded forever." Can we really claim to know where water ends and our awareness starts? We remain who we are; we retain our identities only to the extent that our brain chemistry retains its water. When that water leaves, our life and consciousness go with it. Aristotle defined the human being as the "*noetikos dipous*," the two-legged animal that thinks. A definition more suited to our age might involve the recognition that we are, in fact, *sentient water*. Perhaps the ancient divinity of water has reconstituted itself as the subtlety of human thought, and water now thinks through us. This would be in line with our awareness of our existence on this water planet and our understanding of the chemistry of life and its origins.

There is no final distinction between the profundity of water and the depth of thought.

Consequently, if you look closely at water, its composition, as well as its chemical, biological, evolutionary, religious and historical aspects, there is nothing you cannot find in it. Water constitutes the primordial unity, community, and continuity of life. It is common to all life and the medium in which the chemicals of life constitute the living organism. As such it is shared among us, and though the water cycle, we cannot avoid sharing it with each other and with everything else that lives. Thus water is a molecule common to the chemistry of all life and the fluid that nature cycles and recycles through the metabolisms of all its creatures. But in a very real way it is the life we have in common. *Homo Sapiens Sapiens* can no longer be said to be wise without an understanding of its implication within the fragile ecology of a water cycle threatened by global warming and environmental collapse.

### *People*

As conscious and ethical beings, we must seek actively to share water with each other in ways that guarantee the health, vitality, livelihood, and prosperity of all people. Our civilizations have grown around great rivers; communities grow and assemble themselves around water sources; and the distribution of water and our relationship to it determines the quality of our relationships to each other. Our respect for the happiness, wellbeing, and dignity of other humans depends on ensuring their access to water for hydration, food production, and sanitation. Pure water allows us to eliminate toxins and to remove pathogens from our bodies, homes, and communities. We cannot respect one another unless we respect, protect, conserve, and fairly distribute the water that we have in common. In many parts of the world, the poor are forced to drink water that has been contaminated by metals and organics from industrial and agricultural processes or water that has not been freed from parasites, and their health declines. When they are denied

abundant clean water, sanitation suffers, and their children die from dysentery.

The human organism is primarily water and its fundamental need for hydration, nourishment, and sanitation is reflected in the symbols, rituals, and sacred traditions of all religions. We came from water, and water purifies, nourishes, and quenches our thirst in body and in spirit. We are ritually reborn through water, water is life, and many religions speak of water when they speak of god, eternity, and eternal life. Water is present in the rituals and scriptures of all religions, and there is no way for us to be clean, physically, morally, or otherwise, unless we respect, ensure, and do not restrict or limit the common claim that all life has on water.

In modern democracies human beings have a choice in affirming or denying the existence of a god, a spiritual discipline, or any path to enlightenment. People can accept or reject modern science. But they have no choice as to water. No one doubts or denies its existence. Even if we do not admit to belief in a god, as, we cannot love or respect human life, creation, or any life if we do not seek to guarantee the rights of all people to adequate pure water. If anything is certain, it is the fact that throughout history, god, water, life, and consciousness have been inseparable in human thinking; and we must certainly serve as the advocates and representatives of clean water and the health of its ecology.

### *Our Mission*

the International Institute of the Bengal Basin seeks to develop and implement real, large-scale solutions for the preservation of pure ground and surface waters as well as the remediation of the damage that has already been done. Over the past several centuries, unwise agricultural and industrial practices have seriously depleted the world's aquifers and these processes are being expanded and

their damage is increasing. The IIBB seeks to develop practical long-term, cost-effective, affordable solutions that will remediate this damage and preserve the health of the water system for ourselves and our descendants. If we are to benefit all people, an equitable distribution of water will not succeed without addressing the special social and economic needs of the disadvantaged, including women, minorities, and the poor.

Likewise, our mission cannot succeed unless we provide education concerning the responsibilities of human beings to water and to each other on the equitable distribution of this resource. Thus the mission of the IIBB is also to teach about the subtlety, complexity, history, and necessity of water along with the overwhelming urgency of protecting it. Water knows no social distinctions or national boundaries; its only limits concern its ability to sustain life and the limitations we impose upon our own humanity by denying it to others. Water is our communion with all life.

Thus the IIBB seeks to sustain dialogs between peoples and nations, between religions, and between science and religion. Understandings between the sciences and religions of the world allow for a careful and thorough inquiry into human values as well as the generation of comprehensive understandings and respect between people. When the representatives of all peoples, beliefs, and disciplines come together to learn and to teach one another, such cooperation will preserve our ecosystem and preserve humanity.