
K(no)w Water, K(no)w Life: What Water Means to Me

By: Nasreen Husain

Reflections on Water, Climate and Humanity | Part 3

A Collaboration Hosted by The Rainmaker Enterprise for World Water Day 2020



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1. What does water mean to you? How do you look at water through your own work?

My name is Nasreen Husain. As a researcher and artist, my goal is to evoke the mystery of water and how we as humans can conceptualize it with greater interest and respect. Throughout my life, water has been more than a liquid consumption. It has been a teacher of lessons, a source of necessity and enigma, and a conduit for thought and storytelling. In 2017, I completed my Masters Degree in Environmental Studies at York University. I focused my research on the significance of water through Anishinabek and holistic worldview. In 2018, I completed a diploma in Documentary Filmmaking at Seneca College. As a research associate and content producer for the Indigenous Environmental Justice Project (Osgoode Hall, York University) and event coordinator for Water Allies (New College, University of Toronto), I seek to build dialogue and form alliances with researchers, artists, academics and activists who are interested in building more sustainable relationships with water by incorporating more storytelling and sample based/lived history analysis into consultation and educational settings.

My research does not focus primarily on the scientific components of water, but rather looks at it from a place of connection, reciprocity and justice through interdisciplinary approaches and multimedia. As a part of my Masters project, I created my very first film entitled 'The Significance of Water'. It was an [official selection of the Downstream Film Festival](#) in Northfield, Minnesota in 2018. Through my work, I aim to broaden perspectives and provide people with opportunities to reflect upon the philosophies and worldviews underpinning and informing our solutions to climate change.

2. What is the state of the world's water today? What is the relationship between water and climate change?

Ensuring an adequate water supply for humanity is rapidly emerging as one of the major global environmental concerns of the 21st century. Many people see it as the most important issue we will face in the coming years. By 2030, the world is projected to face a 40% global water deficit under the business-as-usual (BAU) scenario (Water for a Sustainable Future, 2015). Fresh water sources may become more valuable than gold under these circumstances. Water is a necessity for the continuation of life, and plays a central role in the survival of all life forms, including the air, the soil, plant and animal life, and the broader environment. It is important to understand the duality of water – it has the power to nourish and purify or poison and destroy. Climate change is occurring rapidly with serious impacts on our global water supply. This will only accelerate if people, governments and corporations do not shift their attitudes and actions towards a more sustainable and reciprocal approach to water; one that goes beyond the material view of it.

3. How does this relationship impact human security? In what ways is water scarcity impacting humans and ecosystems (today and in the near future)?

The Western view of water emerges from a material view, one based on commodification. This shapes the human relationship with it quite significantly through ideals of wealth, consumption and power. The commodification of water limits the potential to sustain life and threatens people's access and relationship to it over time. Bottled water drains the environment and negatively affects human health. If one has the option, stick to tap! I have personally always been skeptical of bottled water, not just because I found it to be un-quenching, but also because it epitomises the destructive and wasteful nature of modern society. Another aspect of commodifying water is bottling it in plastic. The properties in plastic bottles have been linked to health-harming compounds that undermine water's beneficial properties. Further, the bottle manufacturing process itself is thoroughly destructive to the environment, as the process "releases toxic compounds like nickel, ethylbenzene, ethylene oxide and benzene, and the amount of oil used to make plastic water bottles could fuel a million cars annually" (Mercola, 2016, p.6). One must take into consideration all of these factors associated with how water is currently being treated, or mistreated. Knowledge and awareness of these issues can influence a positive change in what people decide to consume and where they choose to invest their money. When people become informed and are in a more direct relationship with water, a shift can occur within the social conscience of where water comes from, its purpose within the bigger picture, and the roles it has to fulfill in order to sustain life. This shift can ultimately lead to more sustainable cultural, environmental and economic solutions.

4. What should be done to fight climate change and restore water security? How can we address these challenges in integrated ways? What are our pathways to a more sustainable and just future?

Water is relative. It takes many forms and can have many meanings across different cultures and experiences. When I lost my father a few years ago, I turned to water for solace and began to realize how water enters human lives in a myriad of ways. Water has a compelling effect on the senses, and can help one to understand complex ideas about change. By engaging with water more directly, I welcomed a sense of freedom to project thoughts onto it and see them reflected back clearly. For example: ripples reminded me of the consequences of choice and how far-reaching they can be; ice reminded me of treading consciously or risking cracks and damages; snow reminded me of mystery, purity and potential of the unknown; dew drops reminded me of peace, sweetness and the unborn; and tears reminded me of pain and how they symbolize a renewed desire of life after a storm. Human beings A deeper understanding of water in all its dimensions is necessary for humans to develop in order to survive. (Cont'd on next page)

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As humans rely on water to live, water also relies on humans in ensuring it can fulfill its responsibilities. When we begin to understand water as our relative or as a gift, it becomes worthy of our respect, protection, gratitude and generosity. This understanding begins by recognizing the water living within ourselves, since we too are comprised of water, and can ultimately enable people to defend and love water. Water supports the functioning of all life, and when one component as integral as water is out of balance, the entire system of creation will suffer. While we still have time, we must learn how to respect water once again and respect each other once again. We can do this by bringing ideas and worldviews together – by turning to the traditions that have not failed Indigenous peoples for thousands of years and are still viable and adaptable to modern systems today. Water is more than a right and more than a commodity. Water justice begins with a renewed relationship with water – by understanding that all life shares this need, and by relating to it through love, respect and a commitment to ensure the well-being of future generations.

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Nasreen completed her M.E.S from York University's Environmental Studies program, where she focused on the significance of water through Indigenous and holistic worldview. In 2018, she completed a diploma in documentary film-making from Seneca College.

Presently, she is a researcher and video editor for the Indigenous Environmental Justice Project at Osgoode Hall, York University and the event coordinator for Water Allies, a research hub for water issues based at New College, University of Toronto. Her work addresses the differences between water in the Western worldview and in Indigenous law. As an artist and researcher, her goal is to evoke the mystery of water and to explore how humans can connect to it with greater interest and respect by incorporating multi-media and critical reflection.

