



My Name Is Water

Patrick Courtney

Requests for use or re-publication of this article should be made (via Shap if necessary) to the writer, who retains copyright. If re-published in part or full elsewhere, the article's publication in World Religions in Education 2008-9 should be acknowledged.

The transliteration of specialist terms and the opinions expressed in this article are those of the writer, not of the Shap Working Party.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Patrick Courtney was a science teacher and missionary priest in Nigeria for 14 years. He then taught in a number of UK schools, and is now retired and living in his native country. He is married with a son and a daughter.

Before time as you know it, yet in time unknown, I was born. In that cosmic soup, two nameless creatures moved side by side, competing for existence. They moved at random to and fro. Each had potential to change and be changed. This courtship dance continued amidst the darkness of a growing universe. For reasons in the mind of a God we dare not challenge, a spark of love suffused these beings into a newness that is me. My name is Water.

With brother Wind and sister Sun, I shaped your world. I had a hand in creating everything that you see on your beloved Earth.

I am gentle in nature yet angry when disturbed above and below. I am as transparent as the air, yet more complex than you think. In liquid stillness, I lack beauty, form or shape. In this state, you need and love me. Two thirds of you are me that lie within your frame. You thirst and I can quench it. I nurture the unborn and give balm to children as they play with me in sea or pool and my softness cools an aching brow. When in the right place and the right time, I create with sister Sun the beauty of a rainbow. You walk in wonder through caverns and caves, watch me meander through meadowland and dale. I make a home for living creatures great and small. I am the blue planet. You know my sister Moon and yet do not know what lies beneath my oceans. I precipitate to Earth in softness, torrents and monsoons, but none was meant for you. You happened to be there. My brother Wind and sister Sun play havoc with my stillness. I flood your house, your plains and wreak death and devastation on that which seems so safe. When I am calm again, you bathe in me and are nurtured by my soft lapping. I treat you all as equal yet I am not equal to you all. My brother Wind and sister Sun create a world of sand and dust. I rarely visit these. This was not meant for you; you happened to be there. My uniqueness allows you to skate and ski. In the stillness of a summer evening, the dragonfly and friends can walk upon my surface. Put a pin on my gentle side and it will not sink. Do not take me for granted, for I may not always be around.

Change my status and I change the world. Slow down my vibrating spirit and my form becomes a brilliant white. In this state of stillness, I am awesome. In recent times, for time with me is not time for you, I covered swathes of your planet. In retreat to my Arctic home, my slow crunching movements gave the hills and valleys so much admired by those who have



eyes to see. In my brilliant whiteness, I fall silently and gently to Earth. Loved by children, the symbol of winters gone by, I have caused chaos as you come and go. You love me when I fall but not when I fall in abundance. Look closely at me when I fall. Look deeply into my crystal shapes and you will find a geometric beauty unsurpassed, for no two of my crystal friends are the same. You watch in awe my Angel and Victoria. Niagara is my gem. You call my Canyon Grand, for so it is. I was but a trickle there in time unknown where now you look down in dizziness at what I have achieved.

You knew and feared my power. You harnessed me in wheels and lakes and dams. When excited to my parents' state, I became unseen and yet you found a power there. I steamed my way through hills and valleys carved by my ancestors. And yet, you wanted more from me. You discovered electricity. This was now your god. You used and harnessed me to make this power in dams. And yet you wanted more from me. You sucked the earth of cousins' oil and coal and felled great trees and small to burn and heat me to boiling point. In this unnatural state, I angered to return to nature's way. You pushed me to drive turbines to make this great new power. In doing so you belched pollution to the wind and wonder why my natural cycle is upset. Do not blame me if I am angry.

There was a time in rustic rivulets when men fought for my right of way. Yet no erring cattle died because of that.

There is so much of me, yet you will go to war because of me. You can predict my coming and my going. You sense a change in my ways. It is your doing, not mine. Desert I will desert to make more desert. For those who wait for my annual fall, I will no longer come. For those who are tired of seeing me, I will visit even more. Do not take my gentle ways for granted. You cannot live without me and that is why you will go to war.

There once was a man who in the throes of agony cried out for me, yet I was not given the honour to quench His thirst. Many will die for want of me and many will die for having too much of me.

For those who want to understand me deeper, I have not only three states, but also a trinity. Locked within me is a power greater than you can imagine. Sister Sun knows well what I mean. Find it quick, find it soon before too many die. I have given my all. Imagine an earth without me and you will see your brother planet Mars. They too went to war but never found the secret of the trinity. I am your uisce beatha (1).

Editors' note

(1)'uisce beatha' (pronounced 'ishka ba-ha') is the name given by Irish monks of the sixth century to the drink they had concocted. It is an Irish translation of the Latin 'aqua vitae' (water of life), and is more commonly known today in its anglicised form, whiskey.