

The Marseille Water Ethic toward a cultural and spiritual approach to water

Introduction

I. Foundational Worldview- where are we coming from?

- water is life, individually and collectively; all life, economy and society utterly depends upon it
- water is sacred to many cultures, religions and beliefs, its protection is a moral and ethical imperative
- water is fragile and powerful
- individuals, private corporations and states each have common but differentiated responsibilities to protect this life-source
- we have reach the limits of this technical approach, materialistic and anthropocentric in nature
- water is also a symbol: a symbol of life, symbol of death, symbol of rebirth, fertility and purification; it cannot be reduced to the satisfaction of the socio-economic and environmental features beyond it, there is a powerful metaphysical dimension recognized and affirmed in all cultures, all religions, of all time, anywhere

“We make from water every living thing.” (Q 21:30)

حَقَقْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيٍّ

II. Aims – what do we hope to achieve?

- *Liberty* = promote peace, protect public access to water and access to courts, keep water and those that depend upon it free from harm
- *Equality* = water justice and water equity: promote just governance, just economies, just development, just consumption, promote environmental education
- *Fraternity* = water unites us, promote local governance and grassroots citizenship, promote diversity in culture, promote solidarity with past and future generations, promote the four loves: biophilia, sociophilia, locophilia, egophilia, protect the vulnerable people and places

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II. Ethical Principles – what principles should guide our behavior?

- It is important to celebrate water, and the leaders and achievements that ensure its protection.
- The interests of the community, of the common good, should be promoted over self-interest; we respect the entire community of life, and so take into consideration all of nature that relies on water.
- Local governance and grassroots activism is key to water management.
- Water conservation, protection and management can only be achieved alongside social upliftment.
- Both animals and humans have sacred spaces in nature that are vital to their lives and healthy development.
- People from all backgrounds and ages carry wisdom that is important for our common future, and we must build trust among generations, cultures and professions.
- Play in and around water is vital to the healthy development of children and adults.
- The media has a particular ethical role in environmental education, impact and empowerment because of their purpose and reach; their responsibilities are directly linked to a citizen's right to know.
- It is dangerous for the future of life to commodify life, which includes placing a price on nature, appropriating life processes, and synthetically creating new life forms and introducing them into the biosphere.
- Scientific research, and the application of scientific knowledge, is not value-neutral.
- Water scarcity provides an opportunity for local, regional and international cooperation; it is an opportunity for peace and cooperation, and not a validation for war and competition.
- We should look for models of sustainable living in history and in other countries, such as ancient water harvesting techniques.
- All affected parties – women, minorities, refugees – must have a voice in decision-making.
- We can learn from those cultures and religions that view water as sacred, as spiritual.
- We must create spaces for ethical engagement, democratic engagement and dialogue.

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IV. Ethical Engagement (questions) – what questions should be asked?

- Who, if anyone, owns water? Can water be owned? Should water be owned?
- Is there a human right to water? If so, how can a state or international body guarantee this right?
- What is your (individual, government, industry) fair share of water that does not compromise the existence of other life?
- What obligations should societies and individuals assume in recognition of the pressures that our growing population place on one another and the biosphere?
- How can we sustain the integrity of the biosphere, with water its very bloodline, without much greater equality in economic opportunities and incomes?
- How do we support the common good alongside individual ambition, within a society dominated by privatization and those seeking excessive power?
- What kind of domestic and international law systems do we need to empower institutions to respect, support, and implement the Biosphere Ethics Initiative?
- How do we counter short-term economic arguments against biodiversity conservation with the long-term thinking required in ethical inquiry?

*"Everyone who drinks this water will thirst again but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst: on the contrary the water I give will become in him a **spring of life which will spring eternal.** ""
Give me this water so that I have never thirst! "(John 4: 13-15)*

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V. Solutions – what do we recommend?

- We support this living ethic as guidance for a right relationship with water.
- Ethical engagement can provide a common ground to bring partners of different backgrounds together: local and global, private and public, individual and community.
- In its duty to protect the general welfare, governments must promote an environmental awareness campaign so that citizens are aware of water pollution and scarcity issues and they can act more responsibly as individuals and as decision-makers.
- Priority of state and global resource allocation should be given to the most immediately vulnerable people: the poor, refugees, victims of drought and desertification, small island nations.
- Water scarce countries should create water-focused climate change action plans.
- Countries should develop a water management plan for future allocation that involves all stakeholders and determines a fair water allocation, with guidance from customary international law and the practice of other states.
- For water disputes, principles of fair distributive justice should guide future allocation. Note that distributive justice does not mean equal allocation, but rather determines why some get more water than others.

Our Invitation – who will create and continue this living document?