

The first Water Ritual, held in 1980 in Michigan, began as a service to empower women and celebrate their connectedness. Women are connected to one another as they are to the moon and the tides. Throughout history and across cultures, women have been the drawers of water.

(Personal recollections about drawing water.)

This is from a sermon by the Rev. Morris Hudgins, of the Northwest UU Congregation.

The ritual speaks to a deepening awareness of our solidarity with brothers and sisters globally who lack the most basic and precious resources. It also speaks eloquently of our interdependence. Water carries memories—of special trips, of former homes, of places that have become holy to us.

I remember summer days in West Virginia, where I had a summer home, when I would get up early in the morning and walk down to the river to fish. The river taught me many things in those days. As I talk of these things, think of the river as life itself. The river is life. The river is Shiva God as described in Hinduism. The river is creator, sustainer, and destroyer. The river is in each of us. We are part of the river.

First, I learned that the river is creator. It brings new life into being. In religion, the river is a symbol of the creative power of nature and time. It is a symbol of fertility. And it is a symbol of the irreversible passage of time. All life comes from the sea. In the end all life returns to the sea. Lau-Tsu wrote that “Water never rests, neither by day nor by night.” It is always flowing. So it is with life. Water never stops. If it does, it becomes stagnant. The river of life is every flowing, around us, and in us, and through us.

The river like life is ever changing. The Greek philosopher Heraclitus said, “You cannot step twice into the same river.” I learned that each time I would walk to the river in the early morning. It was different each time.

I would look for the birds or for the deer that would enter my world. Yes, the river was always creating, putting out energy for me to witness and feel and take into my being. My goal when I would go to the river would be to capture part of the energy of the river and use it to write. My best sermons were written after I had been to the river. Creativity, energy, beauty, peace, entered my life through the flowing waters. The river, life is creator.

Second, the river can be a destroyer. What was once a quiet stream can be a roaring river, taking everything in its path, no matter how sturdy it seems, and moving it out of the way. The river and life can be dangerous. We must be cautious as we move down the river of life. We must look for the possible destruction. It can come from others or from ourselves.

Third, the river, and life is preserver. It not only creates. It also preserves what has been created. We can go to the river for peace and solace. We go to the water for healing, for peace, and for new life. Yes, the river can bring us peace. But, peace can only be found when we stop to let it come over us. We can't find peace. It finds us. The river of life can preserve us and heal us.

The most important teaching of the river is that the river and life are all connected. Marshall writes:

“Even as the river’s origin and its mouth are present at every point along its banks, so also do each of us imply each other, all over the world and from the deepest recesses of history unto the farthest reaches of the future. All of humankind is but a larger river.”

This is the way we must look at life. We are all connected. We are from the same river of life and we must return to the river. We are humbled and we are proud of our connection to the river.

Life brings us blessings, it brings us destruction, and it gives us the possibility of moving on from where we are, in peace and harmony or in continued brokenness. May we flow like the river, ever changing, ever creating, finding peace and wholeness.