

## EXPLORING WATER CULTURE

*Amanzi. Metsi. Water. Whatever you call it, water is the symbol of life and healing. On 22 March we celebrate World Water Day, and internationally the theme is 'Water and Culture'. This offers us the chance to look at what important role water plays in our societies.*

As South Africans we are blessed to have people of many cultures and religions living together. In each of these cultures and religions, water, in its many forms, including rivers, lakes, rain and snow, plays a part in how people live and what they believe.

For the San, water is the ancient symbol of life. In ancient San culture, people acquired good or bad rain-bringing abilities at birth. This ability was reactivated when the person died.

In Limpopo, in the Lobedu Mountains, surrounded by the sacred

Modjadji cycads, lives the legendary Queen Modjadji or Rain Queen. Her history can be traced back 400 years to Zimbabwe. Legendary leaders, from King Shaka of the Zulus to former president Nelson Mandela, have paid homage to this leader of the Balobedu, who is said to have power over drought and rain.

In other parts of the country there are lakes and rivers that are legend to be home to water nymphs, mythical serpents and spirits, and people often make pilgrimages to offer sacrifices to appease the gods. Lake Fundudzi, in former Venda, is one such a sacred lake. Believed to be the resting place of the god of fertility, symbolised by a serpent, the lake is so revered that strangers are not allowed to touch the water. Offerings of sorghum beer are made to the lake often.

Some 22 000 thousand years ago, a meteorite hit the earth at a place 40 km north of Pretoria. The result was the Tswaing crater, or 'place of salt'. A giant serpent known to the locals as Kokwana, 'the old woman', is said to inhabit the waters of this lake.

### NEW WATER GAME ON THE NET

UNICEF'S Voices of Youth programme has launched *Water Alert!*, a new interactive game that young people can play online, or through a CD version. This educational tool on water, environment and sanitation is intended to engage young people in an adventure of strategy and survival that explores real-life situations.

The object of the game is to ensure that the people in a drought-challenged village, who are facing the threat of a flood, have water that is safe to drink and a clean and healthy school environment. To play the game, your computer needs to have the Flash program installed.

To access the game, go to [www.unicef.org/voy/explore/wes/explore\\_1818.html](http://www.unicef.org/voy/explore/wes/explore_1818.html)

Every year, hundreds of faithful worshippers flock to Ngome, a village in KwaZulu-Natal where the waters of seven streams meet to form the Isikhwebezi River. The waters of this

### WATER ON THE WEB

Don't forget to check out the Water Research Commission's Education link on the web, [www.wrc.org.za](http://www.wrc.org.za), where you will find lots of information on water to help you with school projects.



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river is said to have healing powers, and the area itself is known to be a haven for medicinal plants used by sangomas or traditional healers.

Water is also central to many religions practiced in South Africa. Almost all Christian churches or sects have an initiation ritual involving the use of water. Baptism has its origins in the symbolism of the Israelites being led by Moses out of slavery in Egypt through the Red Sea and from the baptism of Jesus by John the Baptist in Jordan.

Islam ascribes the most sacred qualities of water as a life-giving, sustaining and purifying source. It is the origin of all life on earth, the substance from which Allah created man. Water is important for cleansing and purifying, and Muslims must be ritually pure before approaching Allah in prayer.

Water is imbued with powers of spiritual purification for Hindus, for whom morning cleansing with water is a traditional every day obligation. All temples have historically been located near a water source, and followers must bathe before entering

The San believed some people were born with rain-making abilities



## WATER IN A WORD

Did you know that there are over 6 000 different languages in the world? This means that there are more than 6 000 ways to say **WATER**? Can you find these words in the block by searching horizontally (sideways) and vertically (down)?

M	A	K	L	W	B	M	A	X	S
U	G	N	E	R	O	A	M	R	H
L	U	P	A	A	N	I	A	I	O
Q	A	U	U	O	F	M	N	M	U
S	M	J	B	G	W	D	Z	E	E
W	A	I	I	M	A	D	I	E	I
B	T	C	J	V	X	L	E	T	C
S	I	R	O	E	L	F	X	S	E
P	S	W	A	S	S	E	R	E	K
M	E	T	S	I	Z	V	T	A	N

- |                       |                         |                        |                         |
|-----------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| <b>Nero</b> (Greek)   | <b>Metsi</b> (Setswana) | <b>Meetse</b> (Sepedi) | <b>Amanzi</b> (Zulu)    |
| <b>Maim</b> (Hebrew)  | <b>Madi</b> (Venda)     | <b>Mati</b> (Tsonga)   | <b>Mul</b> (Korean)     |
| <b>Agua</b> (Spanish) | <b>Vesi</b> (Finnish)   | <b>Uji</b> (Albanian)  | <b>L'eau</b> (France)   |
| <b>Vtan</b> (Iceland) | <b>Wasser</b> (German)  | <b>Wai</b> (Maori)     | <b>Shouei</b> (Chinese) |
| <b>Paani</b> (Hindi)  | <b>Biyo</b> (Somali)    |                        |                         |

## WATER PROVERBS

Cultures all over the world have proverbs where water is the central theme. Can you think of water proverbs in your culture? Here are some to get you started:

- ◆ Any water in the desert will do. (Saudi Arabia)
- ◆ Heaven is dark and yet out of it streams clear water. (Afghanistan)
- ◆ Words are mere bubbles of water; deeds are drops of gold. (Tibet)
- ◆ You cannot separate water by beating it with a fork. (India)
- ◆ We do not know the worth of water until the well runs dry. (France)
- ◆ The heart of a wise man lies quiet like limpid water. (Cameroon)
- ◆ The horse that arrives early gets good drinking water. (Zulu)
- ◆ Dirty water cannot be washed. (Togo)

the temple. Many pilgrimage sites are found on river banks.

In Judaism, ritual washing is intended to restore or maintain a state of ritual purity and its origins can be found in the Torah. These ablutions can be

washing the hands, the hands and the feet, or total immersion which must done in 'living water', i.e. the sea, a river, a spring or in a mikveh.

So let us make water the tie that binds us all. 



The sacred Lake Fundudzi is said to be home to a fertility god.

All photographs courtesy of SA Tourism