

Just Add Water

Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda

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Tlaloc Water Vessel © 2022 Rod E.S.Q.

In the 1960s, a great basalt monolith was excavated in *Coatlinchan*, a small town near Mexico City. In the popular imagination, it is considered to be a representation of *Tlaloc*, the Mesoamerican god of rain, and by extension, of water – although some authorities propose that it is actually a representation of Tlaloc’s consort *Chalchiutlicue*, the goddess of lakes and water currents. In either case, it looks like it was an

object of worship relating to water for many Mesoamerican indigenous peoples, perhaps most notably by the *Mexica* (pronounced “*meh-SHEE-ka*”) people, whom you might better know as the Aztecs.

That monolith is now easily accessible to the public, as it is propped up in the open air, near the entrance to the Nacional Museum of Anthropology in Mexico City. But it didn’t get there easily...

Firstly, the people of the town weren’t about ready to let the monolith go – it had been part of the town’s lore and identity for centuries, and they weren’t pleased that it was being taken away... the army was called in.

Also, the sheer logistics of hauling such a large and heavy object required a tailor-made platform with strong steel beams, as well as a small fleet of flatbed trucks slowly rolling down broad boulevards.

It didn’t escape those with knowledge of Mexica theology, that as the monolith was being transported, a torrential downpour unexpectedly flooded the streets in parts of the city, including the historic downtown

section, where it passed – it was *not* the rainy season, and folks quickly considered what the implications of this might be.

Visiting the Anthropology Museum this past summer was at the top of our to-do list. We spent a whole two days there, and still have a good chunk of the museum left to view in some future visit (I strongly recommend it, if you're ever in Mexico City).

While there, I remembered that Tlaloc was my favourite god when I was a kid. As the children were taught about the Mexica pantheon, I quickly took an affinity to the Tlaloc story and attributes.

Part of this may have been simply practical. Tlaloc has one of the easiest names to remember (most of the other ones had longer names that can be tricky to learn and pronounce if you're unfamiliar with the Mexica's *Nahuatl* language). Also, he was often represented with distinctive features that were easy to spot, such as large round eyes, that look a bit like goggles, as well as a twisting spiral nose which resembles a conch shell, and fangs.

With this knowledge I could easily fancy myself an expert archeologist, being able to take a quick glance at a figure and easily declare with casual confidence: "Oh yeah, that one right there – that's Tlaloc."

But I also had a primal understanding that water was special, and an image that recognized its importance just seemed to make sense. A character that said "just add water!"

Of course, I wasn't alone in favouring Tlaloc. Indigenous people before the Mexica had given top ranking to him (or preliminary conceptualizations of him) for centuries. The ancient civilizations of Teotihuacan, as well as the Toltecs were big fans of Tlaloc or his lineage.

From an anthropological perspective, this makes sense, of course. For a long time, people have understood that, in order for the ground to offer sustenance, and therefore survival, you need that one special ingredient – just add water.

Now, the Mexica themselves actually gave a slight edge to the god of war, whom they credited with the great political and economic power that they had accrued as they built their great empire in central Mexico... before the Spaniards arrived.

But even *they* knew that the god of war, whom they favoured, would have to share the spotlight with Tlaloc, and when they built their Great Temple in their capital, which is nowadays Mexico City, they had twin shrines at the top, honouring both gods.

(The remains of that Temple, by the way, are right downtown, next door to the great Metropolitan Cathedral. That's another place worth setting aside a day for, if you're ever in that neighbourhood.)

Of course, in our community, many of you will be all too familiar with the value of water in supporting your way of life. Those of you who live just down the street from our church building can appreciate the delicate balance that hangs upon the rhythms of the water cycle.

You know that it is not a frill – it is essential.

Not only have our ancestors known this, and therefore respected the power of water for a long time, but newer knowledge and understanding about what water can do, and where it comes from, reinforces the primordial status of water in our lives – indeed, as the source of life.

Most of the water that we find in an ordinary glass like this has been around for billions of years. The slow formation of earth was nothing short of miraculous, but even then, there was something missing before

this earth could even possibly conceive life. Eventually, time and space, through the power of gravity, offered that next primary step – to just add water, from the depths of space and time.

It was only then, that so much possibility became imaginable in our world.

Today, we are resuming our practice of gathering together as a spiritual community. For the next several months, we will be striving to keep this a regular practice – usually weekly, sometimes more, and sometimes less.

One of the main reasons we make this a generally-regular practice is our drive to foster a stronger connection between one another, as well as to remember the sacred connections we already have with our surroundings, our environment, our past and our futures. Whether or not we are aware of these connections at different moments, we set these times and these spaces, to intentionally nurture our greater relationship with the *greater* scope of deep time and deep space.

We can do this with deep thought and deep speech. And sometimes, we can also do this with simpler, basic, elemental, practices.

Every once in a while, we remember to keep a bit of space to simply breathe in stillness – that is one way to connect with the spirit of life that surrounds all of us.

And other times, we remember that we can also just add water, to commune with the ancient and powerful substance that has been around for so long, and which represents our very beginnings.

My friends, sometimes, to transform a casual corner into a sacred shrine, all we need to do is just add water. And, my friends, having a mystical experience with our genesis, and with our ongoing sustenance

can really be that simple, if we make an intentional and mindful act to just add water.

My friends,
 So may it be,
 In the spirit of life, that sprouts from water
 Amen

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Suggested Hymns:

Opening Hymn #1 May Nothing Evil Cross This Door

Words: Louis Untermeyer, 1885-1977, © 1923 Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company, renewed 1951 by Louis Untermeyer, reprinted by perm. of Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Publishing Company

Music: Robert N. Quaille, b. 1867

OLDBRIDGE

Hymn #145 As Tranquil Streams

~)-| Words: Marion Franklin Ham, 1867-1956

Music: *Musicalisches Hand-buch*, Hamburg, 1690, adapt.

WINCHESTER NEW

Closing Hymn #209 O Come, You Longing Thirsty Souls

Words: Isaiah 55, metrical version

Music: English melody, harmony by Ralph Vaughan Williams, 1872-1958, used by perm. of Oxford University Press

FOREST GREEN