

Valley Power Plant Water Permit Hearing Testimony

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I am a member of the Interfaith Earth Network Southeast Wisconsin.

My message today can be summed up as follows:

The permit as proposed is not strong enough to protect water quality and prevent damage to the living system of the whole world that our rivers represent.

Major religions of the world value water as sacred.

Part of building a better world is to respect religions of the world and their fundamental tenets.

By damaging water and its life, We Energies is acting immorally and violating the principles of world religions.

The permit for the Valley Power Plant, as proposed, is a big improvement over the 1987 permit; however, it does not go far enough to protect water quality and aquatic life. The plant's discharge contributes to degradation of both water quality and wildlife habitat, as numerous others have spelled out – or will do, either in their oral or written testimony.

My message has not so much to do with WHAT should be done, or HOW it should be done, or not done, but WHY.

I will talk about another aspect of this matter that you won't hear about from many others. It's this: In virtually every faith tradition, water plays a central role. It cleanses, purifies, sustains, heals and nurtures. It inspires with its beauty and poetry, and it conveys the mystery of life. In interfaith rituals, a shared focus on water can provide a common bond. Water has a special potential: to build on common ground that all can stand on, in its simplicity and in its complexities. For water truly is life.

Water has a central place in the practices and beliefs of many religions for two main reasons. Firstly, water cleanses. Water washes away impurities and pollutants, it can make an object look new and wipe away any signs of previous defilement. Water not only purifies objects for ritual use, but can make a person clean, externally or spiritually, ready to come into the presence of his/her focus of worship.

Secondly, water is a primary building block of life. Without water there is no life, yet water has the power to destroy as well as to create. We are at the mercy of water just as we are at the mercy of our God or gods. The significance of water manifests itself differently in different religions and beliefs but it is these two qualities of water that underlie its place in all our cultures and faiths.

Here are some examples / I have a number of examples in my written testimony.

For Buddhists, water features in their funerals.

In Christianity, almost all denominations or sects have an initiation ritual involving the use of water.

Think *Baptism*. Today, baptism might be by immersion, affusion, that is, pouring water over the head, or aspersion, sprinkling water on the head.

Another important significance of water for Christianity is the *living water*"

that Jesus described himself as. There's a Biblical story of Jesus and a Samaritan



woman to whom he offers living water so that she will never thirst again, in other words eternal life through him.

Holy water is water which is blessed for use in certain rites.

Water has a special place in **Hinduism** because it is believed to have spiritually cleansing powers. To Hindus all water is sacred, especially rivers, and there are seven sacred rivers; most well known is the Ganges. Although Hinduism encompasses so many different beliefs, among those that most Hindus do share is the importance of striving to attain purity and avoiding pollution. This relates to both physical cleanliness and spiritual well-being. In **Islam** water is important for cleansing and purifying. Muslims must be ritually pure before approaching God in prayer.

In **Judaism**,

Ritual washing is intended to restore or maintain a state of ritual purity and its origins can be found in the Torah.

The story of the Great Flood told by the Israelites is different than other flood stories because it emphasizes the ethical demands of God. The flood is a divine punishment from which Noah survives because of his moral worthiness. The Flood washed away all the sins of the world so that we could start afresh.

The parting of the Red Sea by Moses is significant in Jewish history because it was a miraculous event at the beginning of the Exodus which enabled the Israelites to escape from the Egyptian army that was chasing them. Water here is powerful, as an instrument of God for punishment (for the Egyptians) and blessing (for the Israelites).

Native American religions attributed spiritual qualities and mental powers to all aspects of nature, from the earth and waters to the sky and winds and to all creatures dwelling therein.

Shinto is Japan's indigenous religion and is based on the veneration of the *kami* - the innumerable deities believed to inhabit mountains, springs and other natural phenomenon. Worship always begins with the all-important act of purification with water. Inside the many sacred shrines troughs for ritual washing are placed. Waterfalls are held sacred & standing under them is believed to purify.

I am a **Unitarian Universalist**, and I will reference one of our principles, which is: Respect for the interdependent web of all existence, of which we are a part. This of course includes the water that is both within us and outside of us, ever changing, and which hosts strands of the web of life.

The significance of water in **Zoroastrianism** is a combination of its purifying properties and its importance as a fundamental life element. Therefore, while water is used in purification rites and rituals it is sacred itself and so must be kept from being polluted. Zoroastrianism also has a Great Flood story.

Remember, everyone lives downstream. All water is connected.

To put it in a more secular way, access to water is a human right, as recognized by the United Nations.

It is a moral imperative that We Energies must not operate without a permit, and this permit as drafted is not appropriate.