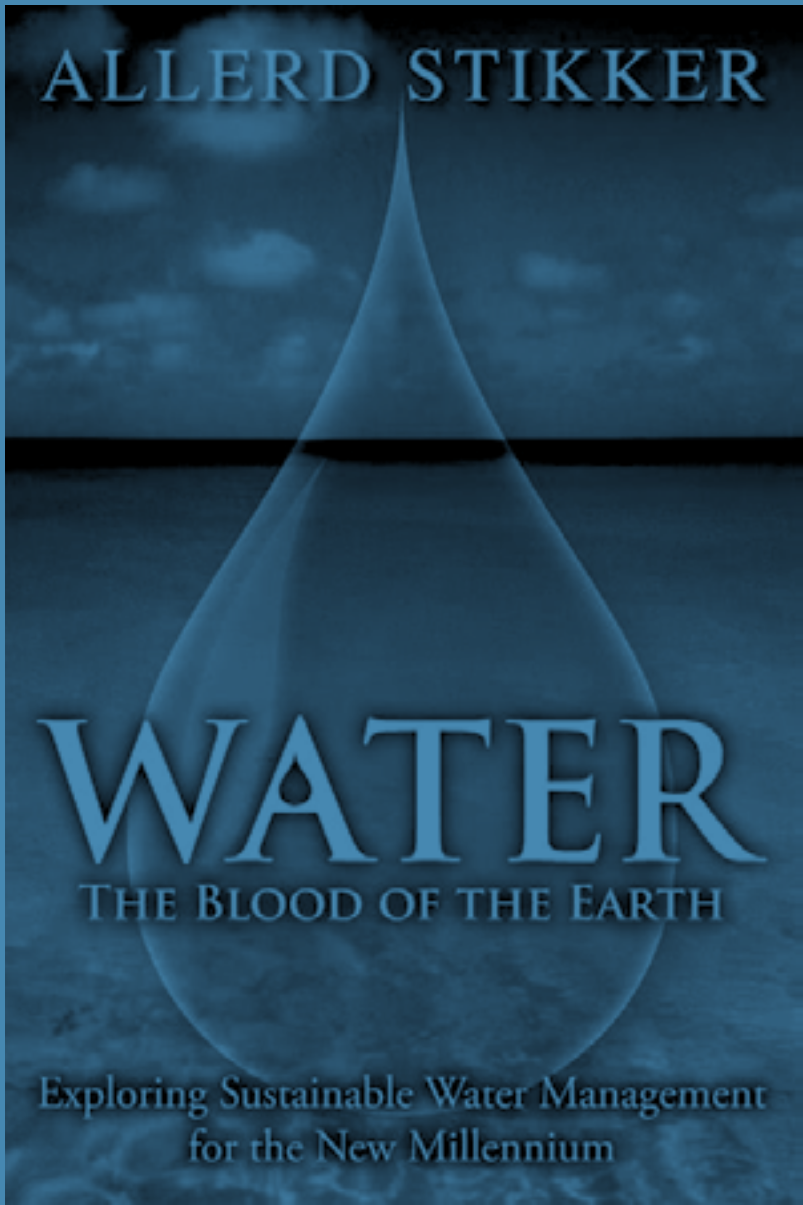


Water, the blood of the earth

Exploring sustainable water management for the new millenium

2007, uitgeverij Cosimo

Allerd Stikker is a retired industrialist with an engineering degree from Delft Technical University and a post-graduate degree in theology from Leeds University. He is chairman and founder of the Ecological Management Foundation (www.emf.nl), a nonprofit organization focusing on the ecological dimension in business strategy.



Information about the book

“Allerd Stikker has always reminded me of Alexis de Tocqueville, who would have chosen to study the problem surrounding water rather than the American democracy. He has the same insatiable curiosity, the same energy, same passion, same ease in mixing analysis with intuition, the capacity to draw together different cultures, the same capacity to listen and to dialogue with those who reason from different starting blocks. Water: The Blood of the Earth is the outcome of reflection and action of a cosmopolitan who has remained loyal to his native land, mixing some European thinking of the Age of Enlightenment with some futuristic viewpoints.”

— Charles Louis de Maudhuy, advisor to the chairman, Veolia Water

“Lack of access to clean and sufficient water in many parts of the world, especially in Asia and Africa, will be a major issue in the coming decades. This book presents an overall view on the diversity of problems and solutions, based on the author’s involvement in water-related projects. Over the course of the years I have followed some of these projects with interest; they inspire us to take concrete actions.”

—Antony Burgmans, former chairman, Unilever

“In this book Allerd describes his convincing views on desalination solutions for local and urban clean water shortages as well as his deeply felt findings on the spiritual meanings of water; all assembled on a 20 years’ journey on which I was lucky to travel along.”

—Leonor Lindner, corporate lawyer and the author’s life companion

Uitgever: Cosimo, New York

ISBN: 978-1-60206-719-6

Datum: 2007

Introduction

Every human being has a connection with water. If you bring up the subject of water in a conversation, you are nearly always assured of immediate and keen attention. We feel that water has a special place in our lives. Seventy percent of our body is water; seventy percent of the surface of the planet is water; the blue planet, that is what the astronauts see. Drinking, washing, swimming, baptizing, sailing, raining, watering vegetables and flowers, all these aspects of water create feelings and emotions. And rivers, creeks, lakes, and oceans are appealing forms and images of water in nature.

Water, a substance that emerged around twelve billion years ago in the universe; all water molecules presently existing on earth, including the water in your body, date from that time.

Goddesses were born from water according to many of the worlds mythological creation stories.

The Sumerian Nammu emerges from the primordial sea and the Egyptian Nun is described as “the flowing unity of celestial primordial water.” The Babylonian Tiamat represents the primeval sea, whereas the Cretan Ariadne and the Greek Aphrodite are linked with water at the origin of creation.

Water was viewed by Thales from Milete as the original stuff of the universe; the Koran refers to it as the source of life. For the Taoists water is a symbol of female essence. In the past, as a citizen of the Western world, water used to be for me merely a commodity supplied by the municipal water works for washing and drinking. As a chemical engineer I was trained to visualize water as H₂O, an abstract perception of reality, useful for equations in understanding and designing chemical reactions – which I still find very exciting. Since my involvement with water starting in 1995, I look at water in a different light and hope to inspire others to think in a similar vein. I have learned that water is not just a molecule or a commodity. It is much more than that with a respectful and robust age of twelve billion years, full of history, information, and indispensable for our living ecosystems. It is indeed the blood of the earth.

When I started research on the world water situation in 1995 I became aware for the first time of water scarcity problems in many regions. From United Nations and World Water Council publications I learned that due to seasons, geography, climate, and population density, billions of people, specifically in the developing countries in Africa and Asia, are affected. Lack of access to sufficient clean drinking water and to water for sanitation leads to suffering and illnesses. An estimated three and a half million people die every year as a result, most of them children. That is ten thousand deaths per day, a frightening thought! I was more than alarmed. My research revealed that in the previous decades a great many important international initiatives were developed to improve this situation, but substantial population growth in developing countries kept running ahead of marginal improvements.

We are presently entering a period of crucial decision-making on the management of water in the world. In the coming decades we have to prevent a collapse scenario that will lead to increasingly severe regional water scarcities affecting everybody on our planet. When one discusses the scarcity of clean water in the world with a Westerner, his or her response is often one of disbelief. To many people in our society the problem of water scarcity seems complex and distant. Most of us don't even know what they pay for the water they use. Do you realize you pay four hundred times as much for bottled still water as for clean tap water? Bottled still water costs US\$4 per liter, tap water less then a U.S. penny per liter.

All in all I came to the conclusion that from now on I should devote my energy and time to promoting awareness of the world water issue and work on new solutions for overcoming water scarcity. Hopefully I may continue this mission until at least 2015, the target year of the United Nations Millennium Development Goals for Water, aimed at halving the number of people lacking access. That year will also mark the twenty-fifth anniversary year of Ecological Management Foundation (EMF), the vehicle for many initiatives on water to date.

By narrating highlights of my work and perceptions on water in this booklet, I also hope to convince the reader that as an individual, you can make a difference. Even marginal micro actions can have macro effects. For more than twenty years, this is what I experienced with surprise and gratitude.

The stories presented result from a mixture of idealism, philosophy, Taoism, ecology, technology, and business, seemingly a strange combination. The added value of this combination is that it offers a broader, wider, and integral perception for sustainable solutions for a better water world. In the stories you will notice that the phenomenon of serendipity frequently comes up. Repeatedly I ran into situations where I found something I was not looking for. I have now recognized that being alert to these coincidences and surprises widens the scope of creative work. That is, as long as your mind is prepared to be alert on a deviation from your original enquiry. The French scientist Louis Pasteur commented on this kind of chance: *“Dans le domaine des observations, la chance favorise settlement les esprits préparés,”* or *“In the field of observations, chance favors only the prepared mind.”*

And perhaps there is more to it than that. I think my dedication to the insights of ancient Taoism and the French Jesuit Pierre Teilhard de Chardin have preconditioned serendipity, as you will notice in the following chapters.

