EXPLORING WATER CULTURE

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 Tsawaing 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/water.

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

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 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