



blue horizons

Water is the eco-issue of our time.

Let's dive in and learn how to ensure a healthy supply for generations to come.

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When filmmaker Fabien Cousteau arrived at the scene of BP's *Deepwater Horizon* explosion in the Gulf of Mexico last year—a disaster that within months would spew 200 million gallons of oil into the ocean; contaminate 600 miles of coastline; and kill thousands of birds, turtles, and sea mammals—he was surprised to find a silver lining. The third-generation sea explorer, who has a degree in environmental economics, saw that the horrific spill had one positive impact: “It brought the public’s attention back to the oceans—where it belongs.”

We are dependent on water, both physically and spiritually. The oceans are the primary source of the oxygen we breathe. They are the provenance of the fresh water that falls from the sky and flows from our taps.

Ancient yogis held water to be sacred (and their modern counterparts do, too); some religions consider water powerful enough to purify the soul. Even the least spiritual among us commonly regard riverbanks and beaches as prime places for reflection and rejuvenation. And yet, we take water for granted.

The pervasive belief has been that because the planet holds a fixed amount of water, we could never run out, says the environmental activist Maude Barlow, a former senior adviser on water to the president of the United Nations General Assembly. “Therefore, you could do whatever you wanted with it: take it out of the ground, dump it in the ocean, grow crops in the desert, massively pollute it. We cannot imagine that we’re going to come to the bottom of it. And we have to get that out of our heads. It’s not true.”

dry planet

The truth is this: The world’s supply of drinkable fresh water is dwindling; once-mighty rivers like the Rio Grande, the Colorado, and the Euphrates are struggling to reach the sea; Central Asia’s Aral Sea, once the world’s fourth-largest lake, has nearly dried up; desert is expanding in more than 100 countries; and the oceans are choked with plastic debris, fishing nets, spilled oil, mercury, pesticides, and other pollutants. We’re releasing so much carbon dioxide into the atmosphere that we’re altering the very chemistry of the oceans.

“For the first time in literally millions of years, the pH of the ocean, the nature of it, is

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*by Anna Dubrovsky*  
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changing,” says the renowned marine scientist Sylvia Earle. “To realize we have the power to disrupt the nature of the systems that keep us alive—it’s a staggering thought.” What’s even more staggering is that we could be nearing the point of no return, according to Earle and other ocean activists. The failing health of our water resources is, quite simply, the defining issue of our time.

turn the tide

Fortunately, we have the power to reverse the tide—but we have to move quickly. “We all need to pitch in,” says Cousteau, whose grandfather Jacques pioneered marine conservation. (*Read about another Cousteau descendant’s conservation efforts on page 25.*) “This is about us as a species, as a global community, rolling up our sleeves and saying ‘OK, we dirtied this. We broke this. We’ve got to fix it.’”

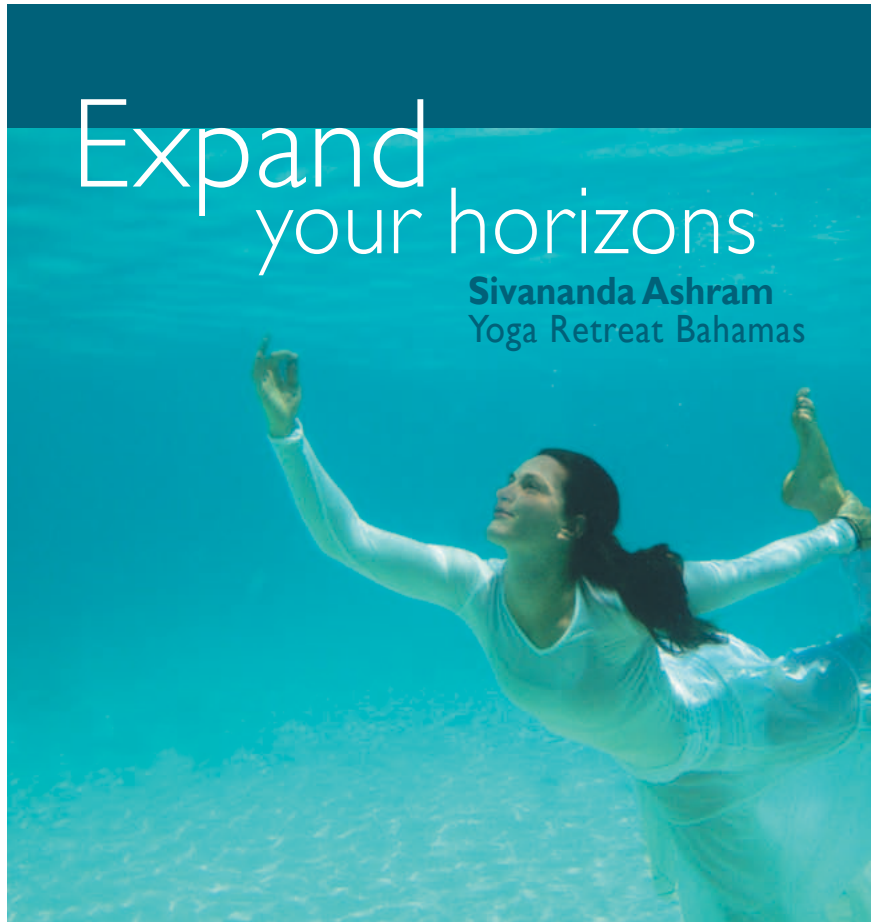
But what’s the biggest threat to the Earth’s waters? Despondency. When you hear the magnitude of the problems, it’s easy to assume that your personal actions don’t amount to much and to “kind of throw in the towel,” says yoga teacher and water baby Shiva Rea, who earlier this year launched an environmental campaign, Yoga Energy Activism, in part to illustrate the cumulative effects of small lifestyle changes. “I think the yoga community is a natural for taking on *tapas* [discipline] and saying, ‘Wait a minute; my actions count.’”

Yoga teaches that everything is connected. Movement influences breath; breath influences the mind. What we eat affects our bodies and our moods. Our thoughts, words, and deeds shape those around us. Life, in essence, is a series of ripple effects.

Advances in technology are proving, on a grand scale, what yogis have known all along, says Earle, who won a TED Prize (a prestigious award that gives one visionary \$100,000 for a world-changing idea) in 2009 for her proposal to establish marine preserves around the world. “We know things now that we didn’t know 50 years ago or even 10 years ago,” she says. “They give us a better grip on how we are

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all connected and what we as individuals can do to make a difference.”

a drop of reverence

Starting on page 90, you'll find dozens of ways to make a difference, from yoga fundraisers to political activism, that could lead to sweeping societal changes. To start, pay a visit to a seashore, lakefront, or riverbank, suggests Eoin Finn, a yoga teacher based on Vancouver Island, Canada, who's also a surfer and self-described ocean worshiper.

“The ocean is so healing,” says Finn. “Whenever you go to the beach, no matter what problems you have, your sense of awe, joy, and wonder is restored. It gives you the energy to want to heal the water.”

It's one thing to approach water stewardship in a cerebral way, armed with environmental data and dos and don'ts, he says. It's another to act from the deep reverence that experiences in or beside water give rise to. “The most powerful changes come from reverence. You protect what you revere.”

Reinforce that reverence by simply placing your awareness on water once a day, perhaps making an offering of gratitude to it for sustaining life on earth. Vinyasa flow teacher and activist Seane Corn's daily exercise of gratitude connects her to her ideals each day, she says. “I have to remind myself to be conscientious about Mother Earth and all her gifts and then be proactive about the choices I make so that I'm not wasteful.”

As yoga students, we're constantly reminded that we can't control life or stop change from happening, but that skillful action can have a powerful influence on the shape that changes take. Our relationship to water is changing: What we once viewed as an abundant commodity is now an endangered resource. With growing awareness of the situation, perhaps we can influence the next wave of change and move toward greater health for the world's water systems, and us all. ❖

Freelancer writer Anna Dubrovsky's first book, Moon Pennsylvania, hit the shelves in April.



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