

WATER: OUR BUSINESS

CHAPTER 9



One spring afternoon, Tota Ma was walking along the road by the marsh. The sun shone warmly on her face and the sky was bright blue. The bugs were not biting yet, so it was a good day for a walk.

Tota Ma was happy to find A'no:wara basking on a large, moss covered log. It was the first time Tota Ma had seen her since she went to sleep at the bottom of the marsh for the winter. The old turtle seemed to be enjoying the beautiful spring day.

She had been thinking a lot about A'no:wara, ever since the women of the community met and planned their Water Walk. Tota Ma was certain that A'no:wara would approve of the turtle posters and the walk around the marsh.

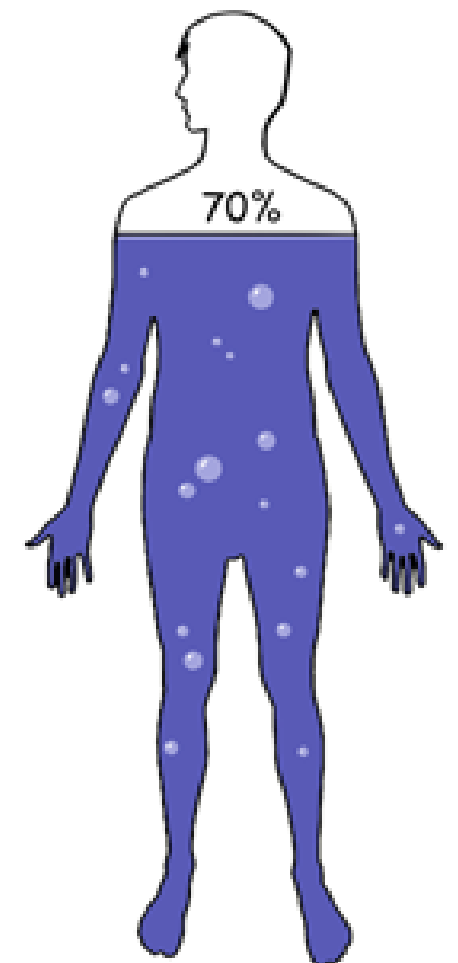
"She:kon A'no:wara. It is so good to see you today," said Tota Ma.

"Hao! She:kon Tota Ma. I have just woken from my winter sleep. It is a nice afternoon to sit by the water and soak up some sun to warm my body after a long, cold winter." The old turtle's quiet voice seemed stronger than before.

Tota Ma sat down beside A'no:wara. She told the old turtle what they were doing to learn about the different turtle species. Tota Ma spoke about Josephine Mandamin, the Water Walkers, and how the women in the community organized a Water Walk for the youth. All the children took turns carrying buckets of water around the wetland and sang songs for the water.

A'no:wara blinked slowly. Tota Ma noticed a few tears forming at the corners of the old turtle's eyes. She seemed to nod her head in approval of the community's good work.

"Water is so important to our families," said A'now:ara. "I spend almost all of my days and nights in the wetland. Everything I need for a good life is connected to the water. The elements of water, sun, air, and earth are all a part of my life. I sleep under the ice for six moons of the year. I am surrounded by water when I am swimming and when I am looking for dinner. I need fresh and clean water every day for my life."



The water looked so inviting to Tota Ma on this beautiful spring afternoon. The little bugs swam around, a few minnows dashed between water plants, while some tiny tadpoles wiggled in the shallow water.

Tota Ma thought about the turtle's dependence on water. It was as important as air for breathing!

Tota Ma started to realize that she was dependent on water in many ways, and that turtles were a good example of how everything is connected. She thought about how much water her Akoso'tha used when she lived in the bush without running water. She remembered fondly her childhood summers at her Tota's little house.

She explained to the turtle, "I remember spending a lot of time with my Akoso'tha when I was small. We used to carry water from the creek to use in the house. She taught me to fill my bucket by scooping downstream, so the water was not disturbed. She always had a little bit of Oyen'kwa'on:we with her when she went down to the water and she would place an offering just at the water's edge. My Akoso'tha said that the Oyen'kwa'on:we was to say Tekonhnonhweratons to the water and to honour it. She told me we need to take care of the water because it is important. We did not waste any water in those times. I remember that she gave me a little cup of water for my toothbrush.

She had an outhouse that was behind the house, away from the water. When it was time to bathe, we would use a basin to scrub our hands and face, and a round, metal tub for a bath in the winter time. She was always respectful of the water and reminded me to look after the creek and to be grateful for the good, cold water that came to us. My Akoso'tha understood that water is alive and that it has a spirit. She was a good keeper of the water!

She had a very small water footprint on the earth. Mine is much bigger than hers was." Tota Ma was uncomfortable with this thought as she continued speaking to A'nó:wara, "I must be careful with my use because my water comes from a well and I do not want it to run dry. It is so tasty, cold, and clean!"

The old turtle reminded Tota Ma to place her Oyen'kwa'on:we as an offering every day to show her personal thanks. "Remember, your ancestors have lived in the watersheds of Turtle Island and said the words of thankfulness for thousands of years," said A'nó:wara. "They were very careful to keep the water clean. Traditionally, women were caretakers of the water and this responsibility was taken very seriously. Ceremonies and actions taught the children how important the water was." A'nów:ara continued, "Too much water is wasted and polluted and it cannot clean itself quickly enough. Every drop of this sacred resource saved provides life for plants and animals. Can you help the water Tota?" asked A'nów:ara. "Come back down to the water. Look at the little creatures in and around the water. The tenth challenge is to listen to the frogs, then record what you see."

A'nów:ara snapped at a buzzing fly and suddenly plopped into the water of the wetland. The minnows and tadpoles swam for cover as the ripples spread out around her shell. As she swam away, the ripples reminded Tota Ma that everything humans do causes a ripple on Yethinihstenha Ohwentsya, affecting everything else in Creation. Tota Ma completed the ninth challenge, and was excited for the next!

