

Time To Celebrate INTER-DEPENDENCE Day

Christopher Uhl

Water had always been just “water” for me—a noun, a category—that is, until one afternoon a while back when I went into a trance of sorts while resting by a waterfall along a mountain trail. As I sat looking—not so much at, but—into the rushing water, there came a moment when it was no longer water that I was looking at. No word comes close to capturing what water became for me in that moment. I realized that the label “water” had kept me from truly seeing this mysterious substance. Today, in part because of that experience, I have a reverential stance toward water.

This morning as I watered my vegetables, it occurred to me that just like the vegetables I eat, I, too, am mostly water. Indeed, when we humans are born we are 90% water and as adults we are approximately 70% water. In other words, without our skeletons to hold us upright, we’d be watery bags sloshing around on the ground.

After watering the plants, I went inside and poured myself some water. Before taking a sip, I swirled the water around the glass, looking at it carefully. In high school I learned that water is two atoms of hydrogen combined with one atom of oxygen, but this answer was hardly awe-inspiring. It was only later that it occurred to me to ask, What is the origin of all the hydrogen and oxygen that make up the water of my body?

Many people graduate from college not knowing the answer to this question. They have no idea where the two elements comprising water, the most abundant substance of their body, comes from! In this not-knowing, they are denied the most basic knowledge of who they are as living beings, for in the story of hydrogen and oxygen is the story of the origins of life.

When our great grandparents were in school there was no chance that they could learn about the origins of hydrogen and oxygen because this knowledge didn’t exist at that time. Now we have some answers. Consider: Essentially, all the hydrogen now on Earth—all the hydrogen comprising your body—was formed 13 billion-plus years ago when the Universe exploded into being. Now get this: Hydrogen was *only* created is that primordial flaring forth—the Big Bang—never again since that time. And it was hydrogen that gave rise to the galaxies and first stars.

Consider the implications of this the next time you prepare to drink a glass of water. Given that all the hydrogen in your glass of water is some 13 billion years old and that hydrogen is the most abundant atom in your body, then how old are you? Your human age might be 20 or 50 or 80 but the stuff of you is more than 13 billion years old!

And what about the atom of oxygen that completes the water molecule? During the first several billion years of the Universe’s existence, there was no oxygen. This and all the other elements of our bodies were created in supernova—the stupendous fireworks of dying stars. Translation: We are stardust, not in a metaphorical sense, but in a real sense. The stars are our ancestors. We are ancient; we have come forth through the generative creativity of the Universe. When we see and come to understand ourselves through this larger lens, our sense of ourselves can’t help but be deepened.

In sum, the more we humans learn, the more we see that everything is interconnected. Thus, rather than fixating on INDEPENDENCE on the Fourth of July, perhaps the time has come to raise our eyes up to the heavens and to look beyond our differences, and in so doing to celebrate our fundamental INTERDEPENDENCE with all that is?

