



Auckland Unitarian Church  
Love beyond belief

## Water within, between and beyond us

Clay Nelson © 6 February 2022

I find water to be not only a miraculous source of life, but also a rich metaphor for who we are.

I recently bought a new scale because the mirror says my health would benefit by losing a few kilograms. OK, maybe more than a few. The scale I bought is high-tech. You know me. What other kind would I buy. It reminds me of cell phones. Remember when a phone's sole purpose was to call someone. How 2005. Well, my new scale does tell me my weight, but it also tells me my BMI, muscle and bone mass, and what percentage of my body weight is water. For those who are curious, it was 48.6% this morning. Wow! I had no idea. It also tells me a few other things like what the weather will be and records it all on my phone. No, I can't call anyone with it.

What I have been musing about this week is how water is within, between and beyond us, much like the sacred.

Ever since humans became self-aware, there was the assumption that the sacred or divine was "out there" somewhere, separated from who we are. Religion made that assumption a cottage industry. The business model was promising to unite us to an external interventionist God through prayer, meditation, sacraments and the forgiveness of sin. Thanks to Unitarian transcendentalists we came to understand that the divine resides within us. And not just us, but within all of creation.

The sacred is also found in our relationships, quite literally in our body's water content. Water that was once in a river, the clouds, your water bottle, your dog and your neighbour or someone from the ancient past are a sacred stream constantly flowing through us to the world of which we are a part. A few molecules once residing in Jesus, the Buddha, Socrates, Mother Theresa, Cleopatra and Genghis Khan, a silver fern or the Tasman Sea may flow through me from time to time.

We rarely think of there being water beyond earth's atmosphere, but astrophysicists have determined that water existed in the cosmos from the moment of the Big Bang. Water has been found throughout solar system: the moon, Mercury's poles, Mars, two of Jupiter's moons and one of Saturn's, Uranus and Neptune have vast oceans, and even Pluto has subsurface water.

All the water discovered so far in the solar system is dwarfed by an enormous cloud of water vapor floating in space. Located 30 billion miles away in a quasar — a massively powerful cosmic body surrounding a black hole — the water cloud is estimated to contain at least 140 trillion times the amount of water in all the seas and oceans here on Earth.

Scientists have puzzled over how the earth obtained its water. It's a mystery how the world became awash in it. But one prevailing theory says that water originated on our planet from ice specks floating in a cosmic cloud before our sun was set ablaze, more than 4.6 billion years ago.

As much as half of all the water on Earth may have come from that interstellar gas. That means the same liquid we drink and that fills the oceans may be millions of years older than the solar system itself. In fact it may connect us to the very moment of creation.

It does not take a brilliant theologian to see how water that is within, between and beyond us is a perfect metaphor for spirituality. I should note that spirituality is not the same as religion.

By definition, religion is a personal set or institutionalised system of religious attitudes, beliefs, and practices; dedicated to the service and worship of God or the supernatural.

Spirituality, on the other hand, connotes an experience of connection to something larger than you; living everyday life in a reverent and sacred manner. Or as Dr Christina Puchalski (a leader in trying to incorporate spirituality into healthcare) puts it, "Spirituality is the aspect of humanity that refers to the way individuals seek and express meaning and purpose and the way they experience their connectedness to the moment, to self, to others, to nature, and to the significant or sacred." Sounds a lot like water.

Furthermore, a formal religion is often an objective experience. In other words, there is usually a greater focus on the externals: houses of worship

(eg, a church), books of scripture, eternal rituals and observances. Your attention is placed upon the objects in your experience.

Spirituality, however, is an inward journey that involves a shift in awareness rather than some form of external activity. As such, spirituality is much more about inner understanding than outer worship.

Like the percentage of water contained in our bodies, our spiritual capacities and abilities vary. There are times we thirst and times we know peace and contentment. There is a body of research that measures our spirituality capacity as our Spirituality Quotient or SQ. Our SQ answers what I am. It is like the bottom layer of a wedding cake. The next layer is our EQ that measures our emotional intelligence, answering what I feel. The top layer is our IQ or rational intelligence answering what I think.

Spirituality is a set of capacities and abilities that enable people to solve problems and attain goals in their everyday lives. We can identify five components of spiritual intelligence: the capacity for transcendence; the ability to enter into heightened spiritual states of consciousness; the ability to invest everyday activities, events, and relationships with a sense of the sacred; the ability to utilise spiritual resources to solve problems in living; and the capacity to engage in virtuous behaviour (to show forgiveness, to express gratitude, to be humble, to display compassion).

Spirituality is the foundation required to know who we fundamentally are. Again, it sounds a lot like water, without which we do not exist. Our annual water ceremony is an opportunity to reflect on what is sacred and where to find it. Doing so will quench our thirst to be all we can be.