

Water You Doing?

On a family road trip two years ago, we stopped at Merced to pick strawberries, where I met Roy, who dejectedly showed us his wilted farm, his persimmon trees “crying” for water. The recent California drought had left reservoirs empty, making it hard for Roy’s farm to flourish. On a study trip to rural India this past winter break, I observed Radha, a young mother of three, walk multiple times to the village pond everyday, totaling more than ten miles, to collect water for her family – water which is not always safe for drinking. Roy and Radha don’t know each other, they live on opposite sides of the planet; yet, they face a similar challenge – getting enough usable water.

Today, more than 400 million people across the globe battle severe droughts, causing many cases of starvation and death. The World Health Organization estimates that approximately 780 million people worldwide lack access to safe water, instead using polluted water that transmits deadly diseases such as cholera and diarrhea. It’s ironic that even though 71% of our planet consists of water, we face a global shortage of usable water.

Water is vital to life. If I had a billion dollars, I would donate it to fund research to build the perfect water purification system that would solve this fundamental life-threatening problem. The purification system would have two purposes. First, to purify current water sources to make it potable, and second, to purify ocean water to the extent that it could be used safely. Imagine if we could harness the power of the vast oceans to solve the global water crisis, water shortages would be a thing of the past! Even if ocean water cannot be made potable, it can definitely be processed, filtered, recycled, and reused for irrigation, flushing and other activities, which comprise more than 99% of all human water usage.

There are several ambitious projects currently underway that aim at developing or improving our current water filtration systems. Around the world, techniques such as water harvesting and storm water engineering are popular. However, pouring an additional billion dollars to boost funding for a collaborative, coordinated and coherent effort aimed at permanently solving the water crisis would be cost effective, expedite the process, and help make the technology affordable for all. The ideal solution is a low-cost, practical and user-friendly system that can not only be easily implemented at the local rural community level, but also scaled up for large urban settings.

I have seen my grandparents in India painstakingly purify their drinking water every morning. If I had a billion dollars, donating it to a cause that would ease their lives, along with the lives of billions of others, would be a no-brainer. Usable water is a necessity for all Roys and Radhas, and this water purifying innovation would empower individuals worldwide, regardless of geographical barriers and cultural beliefs, to have an unending supply of usable and clean water.

