

Doing Something About the Weather

Everybody talks about the weather, but nobody does anything about it.

— Mark Twain

El Niño's not El No-show after all. From mudslides in California to twisters in Florida, this cyclical weather pattern is causing problems of historic proportions. And not just in the United States. It may be wetter than normal in our country, but in Asia, El Niño is causing massive drought.

The loss of life and property is tragic. We pray for those who have been affected by the disaster with the hope that, as Nichiren Daishonin teaches, great good will follow great evil.

Also, this is a good time to ask if our Buddhist faith can affect the weather. Isn't it a little unscientific to believe that chanting can keep the rain at bay or prevent hillsides from turning into mudslides?

Buddhism teaches a powerful concept: the oneness of life and its environment. This concept illustrates that a change in the inner life of a human being is mirrored in his or her environment; we and our environment are essentially two manifestations of the same ultimate reality. When we move in harmony with nature, nature moves in harmony with us. From another point of view, severe weather can be seen as a reflection of distress or disharmony in the inner lives of people.

Weather has played an important role in Buddhist history. Rampant famine and flooding in 13th-century Japan caused Nichiren Daishonin to question the Buddhist traditions of his day. He concluded that it was people's attachment to mistaken beliefs, as taught by the popular sects of the day, that allowed widespread tragedies to occur. "That is the reason that the benevolent deities have abandoned the nation and departed together, that sages leave and do not return," he wrote. "And in their stead come devils and demons, disasters and calamities..." (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], p. 5).

Conversely, when the true spirit of Buddhism is practiced widely, the world will be a safer place. "In that time because all people chant Nam-myoho-enge-kyo together, the wind will not beleague the branches or boughs, nor will the rain fall hard enough to break a clod..." the Daishonin writes. "Disasters will be driven from the land, and the people will be rid of misfortune" (MW-1, 101).

On the one hand, in these passages the Daishonin was striving to give his disciples confidence in the power of chanting Nam-myoho-enge-kyo by painting a poetic picture of human-nature harmony.

On the other hand, our inner reformation can and will affect our natural environment. But Buddhism is not so simplistic as to say that all we have to do is chant and then inclement weather will altogether cease. Rain nurtures life. Earthquakes and hurricanes are seen by some scientists as the way the Earth releases seismic and atmospheric pressure. Even floods play an important role in the renewal of many ecosystems. Buddhism says that there is a reason for everything.

As we tap our Buddha nature — and become the "sages" the Daishonin talks about — we come to see how we are interconnected with the world around us and all its natural functions.

We no longer see ourselves in opposition to nature or arrogantly believe we can conquer or dominate it — attitudes that have led to unhappy lives and unsound practices, and have

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created untold environmental problems.

Rather, we come to view nature as our equal, something we must care for. People in the state of Bodhisattva “react in a moral and sympathetic way not merely with human beings but also with the whole natural ecology,” SGI President Ikeda says.

“Controlling egoism and delusion for the sake of all living beings, they consider creating value for the lives of others and for the global biosphere their own reason for living and indeed the supreme way of life” (September 1992 *Seikyo Times*, p. 47).

Some aspects of nature — like El Niño — may seem beyond our control, and sometimes nature may seem humankind’s enemy. But through our Buddhist practice, we can, as Mark Twain suggests, really do something about the weather by, in a sense, working together with it: changing the weather by changing our lives and environment.

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