

## Overcoming Hardship Leads to Indestructible Happiness

THIS summer in the United States is being compared to the worst season of sizzling hot weather and drought on record—worse even than the 1930s Oklahoma Dust Bowl chronicled by John Steinbeck in his classic novel *The Grapes of Wrath*. By last August 4, those living in the state of Texas had experienced twenty-nine straight days of triple-digit temperatures, contributing to the death of more than 120 people.

Such extremes in climate and temperature are being experienced not only in America, but in many other countries around the world. Thousands have lost their lives in China due to some of the worst flooding in years. I've heard that Paris, having had the wettest and coldest spring on record, is now suffering 100-degree temperatures, putting the lives of the old and the poor at risk. I, in fact, recently returned from Japan where the heat and humidity were unbearable. It's difficult to do anything on days like that.

My thoughts can't help but turn to the extreme conditions Nichiren Daishonin endured during the sixty-one years of his life. Observing the horrible conditions of a frozen, snow-bound Sado Island, he wrote: "The snow fell and piled up, never melting away At night it hailed and snowed and there were occasional flashes of lightning. Even in the daytime, the sun hardly shone. It was a wretched place to live" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 184). At the other extreme was the stifling heat and miserable humidity of summer in the forests of Mount Minobu where he spent his last days.

It is human nature to romanticize these anecdotes about his life and admire his dedication to establishing the correct philosophy of life. But how do we, as practitioners of the Daishonin's Buddhism, react to extreme conditions in our own environment? For that matter, even if we live in a comfortable climate we will not be happy if our life-condition is low. How do we stay encouraged, as well as encourage our friends and neighbors? This month I would like to share some thoughts on this subject.

Seven hundred years ago, the Daishonin faced and overcame a very hostile environment. He survived terrible conditions and left a legacy that encourages us to this day. How can we capture that same spirit? We all share the same sufferings, and the root cause of suffering in society, according to the Daishonin, is erroneous beliefs. In our age, in our society, we can take "erroneous beliefs" to mean hopelessness and doubt—the belief that despite our best efforts, our lives and the world will never change for the better. It is our tendency to be influenced by our environment, to become confused and not able to see the correct way to overcome our difficulties. But once we reveal the Mystic Law at the center of our lives, we can instantly dispel the darkness of suffering and embrace hope.

Everything in our environment, the weather, the nation, the planet—everything is subject to the inevitability of birth, old age, illness and death. We

will always be disappointed if we base our happiness on our ever-changing surroundings. Nichiren Daishonin strongly admonished us against seeking happiness from external sources that, like the weather, are subject to change. The only absolute is the Law that exists in our lives, as the Daishonin said, “The Gohonzon exists only within the mortal flesh of us ordinary people who embrace the Lotus Sutra and chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” (MW-1, 213). This is why chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo to the Gohonzon is so amazing—that, through our own efforts, we can establish absolute happiness within us. In this regard, let’s renew our conviction in the Daishonin’s declaration, “There is no greater happiness for human beings than chanting Nam-myoho-renge-kyo” (MW-1, 161). Through our practice of Buddhism, we can establish indestructible happiness in our lives.

Speaking on the difficulties inherent in life, SGI President Ikeda recently said: “Life is a series of sufferings and problems. Struggling with problems is the essence of life. This never changes, no matter how much good fortune we accumulate or how amazing the benefits we receive. It may seem that a life without problems or conflicts would be ideal, but it would actually be empty. We wouldn’t be fully alive” (August 14, 1998, *World Tribune*, p. 9).

I sincerely admire the members and friends around the country and around the world who are persevering in their practice and joyful activities despite harsh weather. When we are determined to carry out kosen-rufu regardless of the conditions, sacrificing our own comfort to help others, we have truly captured the spirit of Nichiren Daishonin.

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