

THE WATER CYCLE

WATER IS ALWAYS ON THE MOVE: IT GOES UP INTO THE AIR AND RAINS BACK DOWN.

Water is one of the most precious things on our planet. Water is what allows life to exist. Without it, nothing would be alive on our planet.

Fresh water comes to us in the form of rain. Year after year, water rains down from the sky. It never runs out. We see it coming down as rain, but we do not see it going up into the sky. This is because water moves up into the sky in the form of gas that we do not notice. If you leave a glass of water in a sunny place you will note that after a while the water has disappeared, even though you did not see it go anywhere. The liquid water we see turned into a gas form that we do not see. The gas form is called **water vapor** and it went up into the air. The water vapor stays in the air

for a few days to a few weeks before it turns back to liquid and falls down on the land or the ocean surface. Thus, the rain we see is simply the return of the water that had previously become water vapor and went up into the air.

This never-ending movement of water up and down is called the **water cycle**. Water in nature is continually recycled in this way. The cycle has no beginning or end. The drop of water that falls today as rain contains water that has, in the past, been inside the ocean and rivers and lakes all over the world and has gone up into the air and rained down many times over. It may have been in the belly of a person some years ago or the belly of a dinosaur a hundred million years ago!

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The water cycle is driven by the Sun's energy and has three basic steps:

E **EVAPORATION** is the change from liquid to gas. Liquid water is heated by the Sun's energy and caused to evaporate up into the air.

C **CONDENSATION** is the change from gas to liquid. Water vapor in the air is cooled off and caused to condense. This creates clouds, which are groups of tiny droplets of water in the air.

P **PRECIPITATION** is the falling of liquid water from the sky back down in the form of rain.

