

**SIGNIFICANT DATE: FEB. 16: THE BIRTH OF NICHIREN DAISHONIN
HONORING AN ORDINARY PERSON'S EXTRAORDINARY WISDOM
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The efforts of great people must never go unnoticed — be they great rulers, thinkers, artists or peacemakers. History testifies to this fact, as we have lauded the achievements of individuals like Winston Churchill, Gandhi, Marie Curie, Josephine Baker, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Mozart. In memory of these human icons, we feel compelled to erect statues and busts of them, adorn our currency with their faces, honor our streets and buildings with their names, make national holidays of their birthdays — we even name our children after them.

Those with keen insight recognize the accomplishments of these legends and see to it that they are remembered. We immortalize their greatness so that future generations will remember them too as heroes, never forgetting how they've changed our lives for the better. This is how we've grown accustomed to showing our appreciation for their accomplishments.

As Feb. 16 comes around, we who have learned of the greatness of Nichiren Daishonin will have reason to celebrate. It's a day we can honor him — on his date of birth — as the great proclaimer of the Mystic Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. We honor him because he was an ordinary person; however, his wisdom and compassion for humanity were extraordinary. This is what inspires us.

Zennichi-marō (Splendid Sun) was born in the village of Kominato on Feb. 16, 1222, the son of a poor fisherman. At the age of 12, he began studying at the local Buddhist temple where he prayed to become the wisest man in Japan. He later became a priest, and began his quest for the truth of Buddhism, of life itself.

After years of tenacious study of the body of Buddhist teachings, he was convinced that the Lotus Sutra was superior to all. At age 32, on April 28, 1253, from a hilltop overlooking the Pacific, he first chanted Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, revealing the correct path to happiness.

Having changed his name to Nichiren (Sun Lotus), he courageously challenged the onslaught of persecutions brought about through upholding his belief. He endured exile, escaped death and was exposed to public ridicule: "Because I have expounded this teaching, I have been exiled and almost killed. As the saying goes: 'Good advice is harsh to the ear.' But still I am not discouraged" (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 166).

In spite of the persecutions, in all his wisdom he understood his mission clearly and paved the way for the future, enabling us to practice the Mystic Law.

In the letter "Persecutions by Sword and Staff," the Daishonin states: "Bodhisattva Jogyo and his followers will appear in the Latter Day of the Law to propagate the five characters of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. I, Nichiren, have appeared earlier than anyone else. How reassuring to think that I will surely be praised by bodhisattvas equal in number to the sands of sixty thousand Ganges Rivers!" (MW-2 [2nd ed.], 256–57).

As ordinary people — the Daishonin's disciples — it is only natural that we would reflect on how our lives have changed through faith in Buddhism; how we have benefited from the Daishonin's efforts. We are "the bodhisattvas equal in number to the sands of sixty thousand Ganges Rivers," and Feb. 16 signifies not only his birthday, but our opportunity to praise him in our prayers and renew his spirit in our hearts. **WT**

Title: Honoring an Ordinary Person's Extraordinary Wisdom
Subject: World Tribune 02/05/99 n.3228 p.10 WT990205p10
Author: Stephanie Celano
Keywords: Celano Daishonin Dates Extraordinary Honoring Nichiren Ordinary People Person Significant
Stephanie Tribune Wisdom World