

SIGNIFICANT DATES
FEB. 16: THE BIRTH OF NICHIREN DAISHONIN
HONORING NICHIREN DAISHONIN AND HIS LEGACY
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“I, Nichiren, am the richest man in all of present-day Japan. I have dedicated my life to the Lotus Sutra, and my name will be handed down in ages to come” (*The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, p. 268).

This was the confidence that Nichiren Daishonin displayed while in exile on Sado Island.

From the expression of this vast state of life, it’s hard to imagine that the Daishonin was an exile and viewed a heretic for the majority of his life as a priest, receiving no endorsement from the government—in fact he was persecuted by it. And in his final years, he was ill, and most likely died suffering from dysentery on the top of a mountain called Minobu.

He documented his frail condition in a letter to a believer: “For the past eight years I have become weaker and weaker year by year because of emaciating sickness and old age, and my mental powers have waned” (*Gosho Zenshu*, p. 1583). Based on all these externals, some might even consider him a failure.

But looking at his life from a broader perspective, in the face of all these adverse circumstances, we know Nichiren Daishonin devoted his entire life to the cause of human happiness evidenced by the many letters that he sent to his treasured disciples of that time. It was through continually challenging these seemingly impossible situations that he was able to manifest the state of Buddhahood moment to moment.

He did not live his life superficially or for personal gain. Rather, his sole intent was to secure the happiness of every person: “Since childhood, I, Nichiren, have never prayed for the secular things of this life but have single-mindedly sought to become a Buddha. Of late, however, I have been ceaselessly praying for your sake” (*Ibid.*, p. 839).

Living true to his convictions, exerting himself based on a deep sense of compassion, the causes the Daishonin made are eternal. The revelation of the truth of Nam-myoho-enge-kyo, the inscription of the Dai-Gohonzon and the numerous extant letters written to the disciples of his day—these represent the essence of his life’s purpose. These three aspects are his legacy to us, his modern-day disciples. They comprise the fundamental elements of our faith as believers today, and are the basis for the establishment of a lasting peace.

“If Nichiren’s compassion is truly great and encompassing, Nam-myoho-enge-kyo will spread for ten thousand years and more, for all eternity” (*Ibid.*, p. 736).

The Daishonin’s conviction and greatest source of strength lay in his concern for people, which is unparalleled.

Examining my own life, if I consider all the profound joy that I’ve gained from this practice and add to that the joy of all the people whom I’ve influenced; in addition to the joy of the more than 12 million people who are currently benefiting from the Daishonin’s Buddhism; plus that of all the people who’ve ever practiced throughout the centuries—the unbelievable magnitude of the number of people touched by the Daishonin’s compassion is astounding.

Today we are transforming our lives daily based on his teachings, revealing our inherent Buddhahood just as he did. Certainly, there are recognizable moments that we each have

faced or will face during the course of our Buddhist practice when things don't seem to be changing or working out in our favor. It is at these times that we can remember the Daishonin's example. If he was able to challenge himself, even as an exile on Sado, we can have hope knowing that, among the 12 million fellow SGI members, we will find the support and encouragement we need to pull us through.

Our continuing to take action for the sake of others based on faith will insure that the Daishonin's efforts were not in vain, that he was not a failure. This, I believe, he understood from the profound standpoint of cause and effect, and is why he could devote his life selflessly to others' happiness, manifesting a state of absolute happiness, no matter the circumstances.

Since Nichiren Daishonin is the founder, and we each have chosen to follow his teachings, it is only natural that we would commemorate the date of his birth—Feb. 16, 1222. This Feb. 16, it is Nichiren Daishonin's spirit that we will celebrate—the spirit to live for others. We use this day to commemorate his compassion and courage to persevere in spite of adversity. The only way to eternalize this spirit is to use his life as an example of how to live our own.