

**Appreciating Life and Friendship**  
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**It is rare to be born a human being. The number of those endowed with human life is as small as the amount of earth one can place on a fingernail. Life as a human being is hard to sustain — as hard as it is for the dew to remain on the grass. (*The Major Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 2 [2nd ed.], p. 238)**

Every time I read this Goshō passage, my vision of Nichiren Daishonin becomes more clear.

He was a man of humility and strength. He was a man desperately seeking a way to save people and keenly aware that those who supported him would be in danger. He understood the importance and transience of life.

I think it is very easy with our 20th-century view of the world to see our lives as givens, to see life and everything in it as luxuries bestowed upon us. Yet everything Nichiren Daishonin teaches challenges this.

Life as a human being is a unique experience, which relatively few beings in the universe encounter. And if we truly value it, we must treat it with the utmost dignity, respect and humility.

Also, throughout this letter, Nichiren Daishonin strictly encourages Shijō Kingo not to slacken in his faith and to be mindful of his behavior. Yet underlying this is the two men's friendship, which no one person, no one event, nothing, could ever destroy.

It is very easy to talk about friendships and theorize about "being close" and "creating a bond." Yet the reality is often very different. Nichiren Daishonin, though very learned in theory and doctrine, was more importantly a man of his word and his heart. He was a man of compassion and of friendship.

Nichiren Daishonin crystallizes in this passage not only the profundity of human life but the power of friendship. And it makes me wonder if I've yet learned to appreciate either of them.

**WT**