As we study Buddhist history, we learn of the dedicated disciples who risked their lives to support Nichiren Daishonin’s life and efforts to spread the Lotus Sutra. Furthermore, their contributions directly opened a great path for the happiness and peace of the world, by enabling Nichiren to establish and propagate the great Law of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. Likewise, the causes we make today to contribute financially to the SGI-USA carry the same weight as the great disciples of the past. Through our efforts, we are surely creating a beautiful history of the oneness of mentor and disciple and an even brighter future for humankind.

In this section, we will learn the history of the couple Abutsu-bo and Sennichi and Nanjo Tokimitsu, and their efforts to support and sustain Nichiren Daishonin with offerings.

Who were Abutsu-bo and Sennichi?

Nichiren Daishonin was exiled by the authorities to Sado Island, which was tantamount to a death sentence. He was demonized as a traitorous priest. Visiting or speaking with him would put one at risk of persecution from the local authorities. Abutsu-bo, a staunch believer in the Pure Land teaching, attempted to convert Nichiren by debating him. In the end, however, because Nichiren clearly pointed out the errors of the Pure Land Teachings and clarified the Lotus Sutra’s superiority, Abutsu-bo, together with his wife, Sennichi, became disciples of the Daishonin. Throughout Nichiren’s two-and-a-half years on Sado, Abutsu-bo and Sennichi frequently visited him, offering him clothing and food to ensure his survival. Even after Nichiren left Sado in March 1274, Abutsu-bo continued to pay him visits to Mount Minobu at least three times in his advanced age, traversing the Japan Sea and several mountain ranges, totaling over 300 miles one way. In the following excerpts, we feel Nichiren’s profound appreciation for the elderly couple.
Abutsu-bo is therefore the treasure tower itself, and the treasure tower is Abutsu-bo himself. No other knowledge is purposeful. It is the treasure tower adorned with the seven kinds of treasures—hearing the correct teaching, believing it, keeping the precepts, engaging in meditation, practicing assiduously, renouncing one’s attachments, and reflecting on oneself. You may think you offered gifts to the treasure tower of the Thus Come One Many Treasures, but that is not so. You offered them to yourself. (“On the Treasure Tower,” The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 299)

Now you should make a great vow and pray for your next life. If you are disbelieving or slander the correct teaching even in the slightest, you will certainly fall into the great citadel of the hell of incessant suffering. Suppose there is a ship that sails on the open sea. Though the ship is stoutly built, if it is flooded by a leak, those on the ship are sure to drown together. Though the embankment between rice fields is firm, if there is an ant hole in it, then surely, in the long run, it will not remain full of water. Bail the seawater of slander and disbelief out of the ship of your life, and solidify the embankments of your faith. ("The Embankments of Faith," WND-1, 626)

I have offered prayers to the Gohonzon of Myoho-rence-kyo. Though this mandala has but five or seven characters, it is the teacher of all Buddhas throughout the three existences and the seal that guarantees the enlightenment of all women. It will be a lamp in the darkness of the road to the next world and a fine horse to carry you over the mountains of death. It is like the sun and moon in the heavens or Mount Sumeru on earth. It is a ship to ferry people over the sea of the sufferings of birth and death. It is the teacher who leads all people to Buddhahood and enlightenment. This great mandala has never yet been propagated anywhere in Jambudvipa in the more than 2,220 years since the Buddha’s passing. ("On Offering Prayers to the Mandala of the Mystic Law," WND-1, 414)

For example, though the moon is forty thousand yojanas high in the heavens, its reflection appears instantly in a pond on earth; and the sound of the drum at the Gate of Thunder is immediately heard a thousand, ten thousand ri in the distance. Though you remain in Sado, your heart has come to this province. ("The Drum at the Gate of Thunder," WND-1, 949)
Who was Nanjo Tokimitsu?

Nanjo Tokimitsu was one of the youngest of Nichiren Daishonin’s disciples. His family became disciples of Nichiren when he was 5 years old in 1263. His family faced painful adversities such as the passing of his young father, Nanjo Hyoe Shichiro, and his older brother Nanjo Shichiro Taro. Despite these hardships, Tokimitsu and his mother persevered in faith and continued to support Nichiren’s efforts to propagate the Lotus Sutra. Tokimitsu also united with Nikko Shonin to widely propagate Nichiren’s teachings in Suruga Province, which includes the farming village Atsuara. One of his most noted achievements is sheltering the Atsuara practitioners during the storm of persecution from authorities in 1279. Below, we can read excerpts from some of the letters Nichiren sent to Tokimitsu.

Words From Nichiren to
NANJO
TOKIMITSU

Those who offer even a flower or a stick of incense to such a sutra have offered alms to a hundred thousand million Buddhas in their previous existences. Moreover, in the Latter Day of the Law of Shakyamuni Thus Come One, when the world is in chaos, and the ruler, his ministers, and the common people all alike hate the votary of the Lotus Sutra; when this votary is like a fish living in a puddle during a drought, or like a deer surrounded by all sorts of people, those who visit this votary on their own will obtain far greater blessings than they would by making offerings with their mind, mouth, and body for the space of an entire kalpa to the living Shakyamuni Buddha, the lord of teachings. The golden words of the Thus Come One are clear. (“Good Fortune in This Life,” WND-1, 654)

From the time that I was born until today, I have never known a moment’s ease; I have thought only of propagating the daimoku of the Lotus Sutra. I do not know how long I or anyone else may live, but without fail, I will be with you at the time of your death and guide you from this life to the next. (“Persecution by Sword and Staff,” WND-1, 965)
My wish is that all my disciples make a great vow. ("The Dragon Gate," WND-1, 1003)

Today there are people who have faith in the Lotus Sutra. The belief of some is like fire while that of others is like water. When the former listen to the teachings, their passion flares up like fire, but as time goes on, they tend to discard their faith. To have faith like water means to believe continuously without ever regressing. Since you visit me constantly, regardless of the difficulties, your belief is comparable to flowing water. It is worthy of great respect! ("The Two Kinds of Faith," WND-1, 899)

I will teach you how to become a Buddha easily. Teaching another something is the same as oiling the wheels of a cart so that they turn even though it is heavy, or as floating a boat on water so that it moves ahead easily. The way to become a Buddha easily is nothing special. It is the same as giving water to a thirsty person in a time of drought, or as providing fire for a person freezing in the cold. Or again, it is the same as giving another something that is one of a kind, or as offering something as alms to another even at the risk of one’s life. ("The Wealthy Man Sudatta," WND-1, 1086)