Encountering great obstacles is inevitable when spreading the teachings of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day of the Law.¹

This is what the sutra itself clearly teaches. Nichiren Daishonin dedicated his life to spreading the sutra’s core teaching, the Law of Nam-myoho-rengyo, which guarantees a way for all people to attain Buddhahood. In so doing, he faced and overcame intense persecutions. Because of this, he is said to have practiced the Lotus Sutra with his very life and is identified as the votary, or genuine practitioner, of the Lotus Sutra.

Nichiren Proves the Lotus Sutra’s Validity

The following three points sum up the sutra’s descriptions of the major challenges those who believe in, practice and propagate the sutra after the Buddha’s passing will face.

1) Hatred and Jealousy

In “Teacher of the Law,” the 10th chapter of the Lotus Sutra, it is said that “since hatred and jealousy toward this sutra abound even when the Thus Come One is in the world, how much more will this be so after his passing?” (The Lotus Sutra and Its Opening and Closing Sutras, p. 203). Prior to citing this and other passages from the Lotus Sutra describing the persecutions that will assail a votary of the sutra, Nichiren Daishonin states in “The Opening of the Eyes”:

It is already over twenty years since I began proclaiming my doctrines. Day after day, month after month, year after year I have been subjected to repeated persecutions. Minor persecutions and annoyances are too numerous even to be counted, but the major persecutions number four. Among the four, twice I have been subjected to persecutions by the rulers of the country. The most recent one has come near to costing me my life. (The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin, vol. 1, p. 240)

In the Latter Day, Nichiren was the person who, in the course of his efforts for the sake of the Mystic Law, encountered the most intense persecutions, which arose from hatred and jealousy. The difficulties he faced possibly surpassed what those who spread the Law during Shakyamuni’s time had experienced.

2) The Six Difficult and Nine Easy Acts

In “Treasure Tower,” the 11th chapter of the sutra, the concept of the “six difficult and nine easy acts” describes the difficulty of embracing

Nichiren Daishonin and the Lotus Sutra
and propagating the sutra in the evil age after the Buddha’s death.

The six difficult acts are 1) to propagate the Lotus Sutra widely, 2) to copy it or cause someone else to copy it, 3) to recite it even for a short while, 4) to teach it even to one person, 5) to hear of and accept it and inquire about its meaning and 6) to maintain faith in it.

The nine easy acts are 1) to teach innumerable sutras other than the Lotus Sutra, 2) to take up Mount Sumeru and hurl it across countless Buddha lands, 3) to kick a major world system into a different quarter with one’s toe, 4) to stand in the Summit of Being Heaven and preach innumerable sutras other than the Lotus Sutra, 5) to grasp the sky with one’s hand and travel around with it, 6) to place the earth on one’s toenail and ascend to the Brahma Heaven, 7) to carry dry grass on one’s back into the great fires occurring at the end of the kalpa without being burned, 8) to preach eighty-four thousand teachings and enable one’s listeners to obtain the six transcendental powers and 9) to enable innumerable people to reach the stage of arhat and acquire the six transcendental powers. These nine tasks are clearly impossible; but compared to the six difficult acts, they are described as “easy.”

Through the example of the six difficult and nine easy acts, Shakyamuni emphasizes how hard it will be to embrace the Lotus Sutra and teach it to others in the evil age after his death. And he therefore urges that bodhisattvas, who are determined to take on this task, make a great vow.

3) The Three Powerful Enemies

“Encouraging Devotion,” the 13th chapter of the Lotus Sutra, says that those who propagate the sutra in the Latter Day of the Law will face persecutions from three types of enemies: arrogant lay people, arrogant priests and arrogant false sages who collude with those in positions of power and authority.
Arrogant lay people are those ignorant of Buddhism who curse and speak ill of the practitioners of the Lotus Sutra and attack them “with swords and staves” (see LSOC, 232).

Arrogant priests refer to members of the clergy whom the sutra describes as having “perverse wisdom and hearts that are fawning and crooked” (LSOC, 232). Though failing to understand Buddhism and attached to their own distorted views, they boast of their mastery of the Buddhist teachings while slandering the Lotus Sutra’s true practitioners.

Arrogant false sages are those who pretend to be sages and are revered as such, usually living in remote places. Though highly regarded as saintly and wise, in their heart of hearts they are concerned only with their own gains. When they encounter practitioners of the Lotus Sutra, fearful of losing their fame and profits, they slander and label those practitioners as “evil” and conspire with secular authorities to persecute them.

Nichiren Daishonin was persecuted by these three powerful enemies, exactly as the sutra describes. In “The Selection of the Time,” based on his conviction that what he has experienced matches the sutra’s text, he declares: “There can be no room to doubt that I, Nichiren, am the foremost votary of the Lotus Sutra in all of Japan” (WND-1, 575).

From this perspective, it could be said that the Lotus Sutra predicted the appearance and actions of Nichiren Daishonin in the Latter Day. On the other hand, because he lived in exact accord with its teachings, he was able to prove that the Lotus Sutra and the words of Shakyamuni were in fact valid and true.

**Bodhisattva Superior Practices**

Nichiren Daishonin read the Lotus Sutra with his entire being, and in accord with what is written in the sutra he faced numerous persecutions while propagating and protecting its teaching. Through his actions, he not only proved himself the votary of the Lotus Sutra, but he also fulfilled the role of Bodhisattva Superior Practices, whom the sutra entrusts with its propagation in the latter age after Shakyamuni’s passing.

In “Letter to Jakunichi-bo,” Nichiren writes:

> My giving myself the name Nichiren (Sun Lotus) derives from my own enlightenment regarding the Buddha vehicle. This may sound as though I think I am wise, but there are specific reasons for what I say. The sutra reads, “As the light of the sun and moon can banish all obscurity and gloom, so this person as he advances through the world can wipe out the darkness of living beings.” Consider carefully what this passage signifies. “This person as he advances through the world” means that the first five hundred years of the Latter Day of the Law will witness the advent of Bodhisattva Superior Practices, who will illuminate the darkness of ignorance and earthly desires with the light of the five characters of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo. (WND-1, 993)

The sutra describes Superior Practices as the sun that will illuminate the darkness of the age. It also likens the Bodhisattvas of the Earth to lotus flowers unsoiled by worldly matters. In choosing the name Nichiren, which consists of two Chinese characters meaning “sun” and “lotus,” the Daishonin clarifies the meaning of his appearance in the world in terms of Buddhism. He signifies that he is fulfilling the role of Superior Practices, that he has initiated the propagation of the Lotus Sutra in the Latter Day, just as Superior Practices has been charged with doing.

In terms of his outward behavior, Nichiren acted as Superior Practices, while in terms of his inner enlightenment, he achieved the life state of the Buddha of beginningless time.
Beginningless time means time without beginning or end and is a term used to describe when the Buddha originally attained enlightenment. In The Record of the Orally Transmitted Teaching, Nichiren explains: “Because we are speaking here of the Buddha eternally endowed with the three bodies, it is not a question of something attained for the first time at a certain time, or of something that was worked for” (p. 141). In other words, beginningless time points to the fact that Buddhahood has always existed in life. The Buddha of beginningless time thus represents a person who has fully awakened to the Buddhahood that is eternally present as an inherent condition of life. The Buddha of beginningless time is also known as the Buddha of limitless joy, indicating the Buddha who freely derives boundless joy from the Law and who, from a state of absolute freedom, directly expounds the Law that he has actualized within his own life.

As the votary of the Lotus Sutra, Nichiren overcame four major persecutions and two exiles, as well as many other obstacles.

On September 12, 1271, at Tatsunokuchi, he was nearly beheaded because of his efforts to spread his teaching. It was there that he is said to have discarded his transient identity as an ordinary person and revealed his true identity as a Buddha. In other words, while remaining an ordinary person, he manifested the life condition of the Buddha of limitless joy, or the Buddha of beginningless time.

Following this pivotal event, Nichiren inscribed the Gohonzon—expressing his enlightened state of life in graphic form with Nam-myoho-renge-kyo written down the center—as a means for all people to awaken and reveal the Buddhahood innate within them. In this light, Nichiren's persecution at Tatsunokuchi is an extremely important event.

Nichiren says: “Now, in the Latter Day of the Law, neither the Lotus Sutra nor the other sutras lead to enlightenment. Only Nam-myoho-renge-kyo can do so” (“The Teaching for the Latter Day,” WND-1, 903).

Essentially, it was because Nichiren faced numerous persecutions and challenges in propagating his teaching that he could prove the truth of the Lotus Sutra and fulfill the predictions of Shakyamuni Buddha. And in establishing his teaching of Nam-myoho-renge-kyo, he created the means for all people to reveal their full potential and richest humanity by accessing and bringing forth their inherent Buddha nature.

This is based on an article that appeared in the October 2009 Daihyakurenge, the Soka Gakkai’s monthly study magazine.

1. Latter Day of the Law: The last of the three periods following the Buddha's death, when his teachings fall into confusion and lose the power to lead people to enlightenment. The Latter Day of the Law of Shakyamuni is said to last for ten thousand years or more. In Japan, it was believed that the Latter Day had begun in 1052.
2. Nichiren writes: “In Japan there are many who read and study the Lotus Sutra. . . . Not one person has ever suffered injury on account of the Lotus Sutra. Therefore, the upholders of the sutra in Japan are not yet worthy of these sutra passages. I alone have read the sutra with my entire being. This is the meaning of the passage that says, ‘We care nothing for our bodies or lives but are anxious only for the unsurpassed way.’ I am therefore the foremost votary of the Lotus Sutra in Japan” (“Encouragement to a Sick Person,” WND-1, 81–82).
3. In “Supernatural Powers of the Thus Come One,” the 21st chapter of the sutra, it is stated, “As the light of the sun and moon can banish all obscurity and gloom, so this person as he advances through the world can wipe out the darkness of living beings, causing immeasurable numbers of bodhisattvas in the end to dwell in the single vehicle” (LSOC, 318).
4. The Lotus Sutra, in Emerging from the Earth,” the 15th chapter, describes Bodhisattvas of the Earth as follows: “Already for a long time they have practiced the Buddha way, dwelling in transcendent powers and the power of wisdom, skilfully learning the bodhisattva way, unsoiled by worldly things like the lotus flower in the water” (LSOC, 263).
5. Three bodies: The three kinds of body that a Buddha possesses, namely: (1) the Dharma body or body of the Law, which indicates the fundamental truth to which the Buddha is enlightened; (2) the reward body, which enables the Buddha to perceive the truth; and (3) the manifested body, or the compassionate actions of the Buddha to save people and the physical form that the Buddha assumes in this world for that purpose.