**NOW AND FOR THE FUTURE --- The Story of Falun Dafa**

Episode 5: Before the Storm

Falun Gong practitioners celebrated the arrival of 1999 with a joyful gathering, as witnessed by these pictures. More than 10 western practitioners from Sweden, Denmark, Finland and the U.S. came to DaLian City to share their cultivation experiences with Chinese practitioners during their Christmas holidays. This has been a routine practice for many. They called it “Homecoming”.

On New Year’s Day, which marked the beginning of the seventh year since Dafa was spread, practitioners gathered at dawn to do group exercise. Those from the free world are unlikely to fully appreciate the fact that Falun Dafa was able to widely spread in a nation like China for 7 years.

Since 1992 when Mr. Li Hongzhi went public, Falun Gong operations had been under the supervision of the Science Association of Chinese Qigong. Practitioners established the Falun Dafa Research Association in Beijing and assistant centers across the nation according to rules and regulations. They have effectively assisted Mr. Li to offer timely guidance on cultivation matters.

Mr. Li had set strict guidelines on the operation of the assistant centers.

(Mr. Li’s Fa Teaching in Dalian, 1994) “Our assistant centers are dedicated to facilitate true cultivation and are forbidden to touch money, do business, and treat illnesses. So are our students. They are forbidden to seek monetary gain from Falun Gong. As I just said, why did I give you so much? It’s not for you to pursue fame and fortune, but for your cultivation.”

The solemn and unadulterated Dafa cultivation naturally confronts people’s stubborn beliefs and unhealthy mentality. At the same time, not everyone who practices is motivated by the desire to truly understand Dafa.

A number of people had studied Falun Gong with Mr. Li in Changchun. Because they couldn’t relinquish their desire to pursue money and wealth, they tried to profit by treating illnesses. Mr. Li severely criticized their behavior. Because of these events, they decided to make an enemy of Falun Gong.

In November 1994, they put together a formal complaint citing 12 alleged violations and submitted it to 13 offices of the central government.

(Mr. Ye, Falun Gong practitioner from Beijing) “It was the fourth day of the Chinese New Year when the government took action. On the fourth day, which was the first business day after a three-day holiday, the government announced a nationwide ban on practicing Falun Gong.

We sought the help from the State Sports Commission. When they learned about what had happened, they suggested, ‘Why don’t you get organized? You should hurry.’

We mentioned that Master Li did not allow us to form organizations as it was not relevant to our cultivation and people might get concerned if we got organized.

They said, ‘You should have set up an organization such as a science association a long time ago. You have our support. We can solve your problem.’”

On the tenth day of the Chinese New Year, China Falun Gong Research Association submitted three detailed reports to China Qigong Science Research Association.

These reports clarified the truth about Falun Dafa being responsible to society and practitioners. It also clarified the truth in response to each allegation. The reports also responded to the false allegations made by those people in Changchun.

Zhuan Falun was published in the spring of 1995. Later, Mr. Li was invited to teach Falun Gong overseas. Although he was not in China then, the number of Chinese practitioners kept increasing.

During that period, the market economy got increasingly popular in China and started to boom. The relentless pursuit of self-interest caused a dramatic deterioration of the society’s moral standard. In such an environment, practitioners of “Truth, Compassion, Forbearance” found Dafa extraordinarily precious.

(MR. SHI, Architect) “Dramatic changes take place in mind and body. Words fail to describe the feeling. It’s like someone who has long been pestered by many illnesses experiencing a swift and full recovery.

By following 'Truthfulness, Compassion, Forbearance,’ I become considerate of others, and want to think of others first. It is different from how things were before I practiced Falun Gong. Then, it was all about me and what benefited me.

We learned from practicing Falun Gong to be considerate of others and to share good things with others. Thus, I was motivated to tell other people about Falun Gong.

I recommended it to all my friends. I believed that the country ought to encourage people to practice Falun Gong. Then, the whole country would be in harmony. There would be no need for the police.

I hoped that government officials study Falun Gong and help promote it."

However, the rapid increase of Falun Gong practitioners soon caught the attention of the Chinese Communist Party. On June 17, 1996, *Guangming Daily* published an editorial titled *"The Alarm Bell for Opposing Pseudoscience is Tolling."* It labeled Zhuan Falun, a top ten best seller at the time in Beijing, as superstition and criticized it as pseudoscience.

One month later, the Bureau of Press and Publication under the Ministry of Central Publicity issued an internal order to state and gubernatorial publishers banning the publication and distribution of Falun Dafa books, on the grounds of “promoting superstition.”

Luo Gan, the secretary of the Central Political and Legal Committee, then authorized the Ministry of Public Security to secretly investigate Falun Gong in order to ban it.

Those who have suffered the vicissitudes of life and those who once felt hopeless out of cowardice and numbness, once again demonstrated their sincerity and kindness.

Through letters and visits, thousands of Dafa disciples told news organizations and central government offices the tremendous changes in their body and mind through Falun Gong cultivation. Their words were plain and direct, but their messages were sincere and without complaints.

(Professor’s testimony in a Forum in General Administration of Sport, 1998.) “Falun Gong practitioners, whether they are students, teachers, or neighbors, share a harmonious relationship with others. For example, an old lady neighbor of mine was a Falun Gong practitioner. She always sweeps the stairs from the first floor to the third floor for the benefit of other residents.”

(Amateur Boxer) “I saw big changes in myself and my relationship with my family. I am totally changed. I was very different before. I used to be an alcoholic, a smoker, and a belligerent person. All I cared for was eating, drinking and entertaining.”

(Doctor) “Falun Gong has been practiced by millions of Chinese over these years. The number of practitioners is still growing. We should recognize its merit.”

Falun Gong practitioners experience sharing from the bottom of their heart deeply touched many officials and media staff.

(Police) “My job is a policeman … ”

Even some policemen, who were sent to secretly investigate Falun Gong, became practitioners. The secret investigation of Falun Gong by the Ministry of Public Security failed to find any evidence of illegal activities.

Critics, led by Zuoxiu He from the Chinese Academy of Sciences, began to publish anti-Falun Gong articles in 1997. He once again attached Falun Gong on Beijing TV in May 1998.

(MS. CHEN, Central Orchestra flutist) “One student from the science academy, who would try any Qigong, has followed many kinds of practices.

One day he also came to try the movements of Falun Gong exercises. He gave up practicing Falun Gong after just a few days and began practicing *Bigu* (abstinence from food and water).

Zuoxiu He took him as a typical example of Falun Gong practioners, claimed that Falun Gong practitioners do not eat or drink. He totally distorted the facts. Back then, we thought that we ought to tell the editors of the Beijing TV station about the truth of Falun Gong and about our own cultivation experience.

Our only thought then was to clarify Falun Gong to people with compassion. ”

On the 29th of that month, many Falun Gong practitioners gathered outside the Beijing TV station. The group was surprisingly calm and peaceful.

(MS. CHEN, Central Orchestra flutist; MR. CHEN, Central Orchestra cellist) “People sat on the patio forming several concentric circles. Many people shared their own experiences and how they began to cultivate. Reporters from Beijing TV filmed practitioners one by one. They also interviewed practitioners who answered their questions."

Later, the journalist interviewed people at the exercise site Yu Yuan Tan Park. The program was aired on TV several days later. During that time, the State Council has twice instructed the State Administration of Sports to oversee Qigong activities and human science research. At the same time, it ordered local sports authorities to investigate Falun Gong.

While the investigations revealed that Falun Gong improved people’s health and there were no illegal religious activities, the Ministry of Public Security insisted that strict surveillance of Falun Gong was necessary.

On July 21, 1998, the Ministry of Public Security issued an internal document, “A Notice to Investigate Falun Gong”, which classified Falun Gong as an “evil cult”. Some assistant center coordinators put under surveillance with their movements followed and phone calls monitored.

The progression of events has negatively impacted Falun Gong. Practitioners were also under various degrees of pressure.

In October 1998, the State Administration of Sports sent investigation teams to Jilin and Heilongjiang provinces to audit and evaluate Falun Gong. They visited more than 10 local practice sites and held a forum with practitioners in Changchun and Harbin. Practitioners openly shared their cultivation experiences and expressed their bewilderment over recent events. In spite of the unjust treatment and unreasonable accusations, Falun Gong practitioners kept clarifying the truth with compassion.

During this process, practitioners came to a better understanding of righteous cultivation practices. At the same time, the number of practitioners continued to grow steadily.

(News on Shanghai TV. Nov. 24, 1998) “Early this morning, more than ten thousand practitioners crowed in the Shanghai Sports Center to give a group exercise demonstration.

Ever since it was introduced by Master Li Hongzhi in 1992, Falun Gong has been welcomed by the public. For six years, Falun Gong has impressed people with its unique features. For example, the exercises require no special location, nor time, nor so-called mind activities (the guidance by the mind).

There are practice sites across China, including Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan. Falun Gong has also spread over Europe, America, Australia and Asia. There are 100 million practitioners studying Falun Dafa globally. From our station, this is the report.”

(Noon Sports News on Guangdong Satellite TV, 1998) “China Falun Gong has been increasingly recognized by the public in Guangzhou. Many people used the time in the morning, evening and holidays going to the Guangzhou parks and large public places to do the exercises. Falun Gong exercises not only can heal illnesses and keep fit, it is also good for the mind and body. Practitioners become the people who are beneficial to the society. In promoting nation wide fitness and societal spiritual civilization, Falun Gong will play a positive role.

Guangdong Provincial Sports Bureau paid great attention to Falun Gong and has sent its personnel to go to the martyrs' cemetery to the municipal government’s front gate and Tianhe Sports Center to watch the large-scale exercises there. The Bureau showed the strong support for Falun Gong.

With the increase of the exercises team, Falun Gong will play a driving role in launching the nationwide fitness campaign. Reporting in Guangdong Station.”

(1998 Shenyang Asia Sports Festival, Shenyang TV) “The opening ceremony will begin…”

(Shenyang TV, August 1998) “If not seen with your own eyes it will be very difficult to believe that so many people spontaneously gathered together doing exercise.

At 5:30 on August 20, when a reporter came to the newly completed Shenyang Municipal Square and saw from the distance near a thousand people lined up neatly. They are very involved in doing the traditional Chinese Qigong namely China Falun Gong.

It is understood that they came here voluntarily to do exercises. From their focused facial expression they already have abandoned any mental distractions and threw themselves into a realm of tranquility.”

(China Youth Daily, August 28, 1998)

(Yangcheng Evening News, November 10, 1998)

(China Economic Times, December 4, 1997)

(China Economic Times, July 10, 1998)

As winter snows covered the northern lands, a more stringent test loomed.

(MS. WANG, Falun Dafa practitioner from Anhui) “Many retired party officials suddenly gave up practicing in early 1999. First, we wondered about their health. We found out later that the communist party banned party members and military personnel from practicing Falun Gong. We also heard some rumors that Falun Gong was going to be classified as an illegal organization.”

On April 11, 1999, He Zuoxiu once again published in the Science and Technology magazine of Tianjing Education Institute. He claimed that practicing Falun Gong could cause psychological problems and implied that Falun Gong could overthrow the government like the Boxer Rebellion did.

His article deeply hurt the feelings of those who benefited greatly from Falun Gong practice. Some practitioners voluntarily went to clarify the truth to the magazine editors. The reaction of the editors was unexpected.

(MS. ZHANG, Falun Dafa practitioner from Beijing) “Their leader met with us straight away. We told them about the matter with compassion. The leader immediately apologized and promised to make corrections. However, he denied of any wrongdoing when he met with us the next day. ‘We have done nothing wrong.’”

The strange response from the editors made people aware of the pressure from the ruling communist party. More Falun Gong practitioners came to the editorial office to peacefully express their concern.

On April 23, more than 300 policemen dispersed the practitioner by excessive force. 45 practitioners were arrested.

The news of Tianjin police brutality and illegal arrests spread rapidly to exercise sites across the country. Practitioners wanted to appeal to the Beijing authorities. They felt that it might be the only way to truly solve the problem.

Practitioners from neighboring cities and provinces began traveling to Beijing since 4am on April 25. Eventually, they gathered outside the Zhongnanhai State Council Letters and Visits Office.

(MS. LIU, Falun Dafa practitioner from Beijing) “It was very tense. There was police everywhere. Police cars lined up along the road across the street. But we had no fear because our actions were justified and we hadn’t done anything wrong.

Since the government had never responded to our appeal letters, we simply came to explain the facts face-to-face. We only hoped for the release of those practitioners who were arrested in Tianjin. We wanted to discuss the matter with the government. Because we felt that the press might not have the authority.”

That day, Prime Minister Zhu Rongji met with our representatives and ordered the release of the practitioners from Tianjin police station. He reiterated the government’s policy towards Qigong. At 10 pm, practitioners left quietly. The whole process was peaceful and orderly. There was not even a trace of trash left on the ground after thousands of practitioners left.

The “4·25” event shook the world. People began to notice how special this group of practitioners from all walks of life was. The media came to interview local Falun Gong practitioners to get a better understanding. Radio Free Asia, headquartered in Washington D.C., still has this audio recording:

“‘After practicing Falun Dafa, I felt that everything about it was good. I also saw the bright side of society. For the first time, I feel that I love this nation. It is like what Teacher told us, that one should live for the others and not for oneself or one’s relatives. For all to live a better life.’

Dear audience, although I haven’t conducted a statistical survey of Falun Gong disciples, I think that the impact of Falun Gong is moral rather than political if most disciples have a similar sentiment.”

The “4.25” event set a precedent for peacefully resolving conflicts between ordinary people and the Chinese communist government. The public opinion around world regarded the event as a milestone that the leadership in China was gradually maturing. It gave overseas Chinese renewed hope for China.

(MR. XIA, President, Biological research company ) “I’m very familiar with Chinese history, ancient and modern. I think that Chinese people tend to act as either an obedient group or a mob.

The problems in Chinese history were seldom resolved peacefully. There was seldom a solution without violence. This event proved that Chinese people were willing to seek a nonviolent solution.

In fact, Falun Gong has changed the nature of Chinese people. I used to be very disappointed at the nature of Chinese people. This practice can help change it, help people get rid of many negative things and make them become good people. I think this is great. It is extraordinary.”

However, things didn’t turn out as expected.

(MS. LIU, Falun Dafa practitioner from Beijing) “After the “4·25”event, whenever we practiced exercises outside, we were monitored by the police. Later on, Falun Gong banners were no longer allowed. We did it no more then Hung the flag of Falun.”

At the same time, Toronto, the biggest city in Canada on the other side of the globe, was immersed in joy.

On May 22, Falun Gong practitioners from all over the world gathered in front of Toronto City Hall to celebrate the 7th anniversary of the spreading of Falun Dafa.

The next day, they held a cultivation experience sharing conference at Toronto University, Mr. Li Hongzhi gave a lecture in person. There were also many unfamiliar Chinese faces among the attendees, in addition to practitioners and reporters.

At the end of the conference, to everyone’s surprise, Mr Li stood up and made a statement.

“Many reporters and others are puzzled, wondering: Why are there so many people studying this Fa? The people sitting here today may have seen the answer. And what is it? Here we ask people to walk a righteous path and to be truly good persons. There is nothing filthy or dirty involved, like out in society. We will purify anything not righteous and become, right up until we meet the standard for Consummation, people who benefit others and society. We don’t charge fees, we don’t lead you to do bad things, and we aren’t involved in politics. That is why there are so many people learning. Those who don’t believe that there are still good people around have underestimated us!!!” (Teaching the Fa at the Conference in Canada)

Although practitioners did not have enough time to fully understand these words of Mr. Li Hongzhi, those who had been through China’s many political campaigns sensed an upcoming crackdown.

While signs were already present, no one could imagine the tribulations ahead.

Please watch episode 6 - In the Midst of Tribulation.