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

Episode 6: In the Midst of Tribulation

An enlightened being named Jesus was in Jerusalem around 30 A.D. He cured people of their illnesses without charge and spread the truth about heaven. More and more people began to believe him and follow him.

Thousands of years later, we can only understand this legend through limited historical records and artistic works.

In 1999, a film about Jesus’ life quietly spread among Falun Gong practitioners in China. Shortly after practitioners gathered outside the Zhongnanhai State Council Letters and Visits Office on April 25 to clarify the truth, whispers about a looming crackdown were ever present.

Practitioners in many regions were harassed during their normal group exercises. Police put some coordinators of local assistance centers under surveillance, even searched and raided their residences.

Overseas media reported that the CCP Central Committee’s intention to forfeit 500 million dollars of surplus in exchange for the extradition of Mr. Li Hongzhi. History rhymed unexpectedly.

(MR. GONG, Falun Dafa Practitioner from Beijing) “The situation was very tense at that time. What perspective should disciples take under the circumstances?

A scene in the movie ‘Jesus Christ’ deeply touched me. Once, Jesus took his disciples across the sea. There were many disciples on the boat. Jesus fell asleep. When disciples were rowing the boat, a big storm came. Those disciples anxiously waited for Jesus to wake up, but Jesus remained asleep. They became so scared that they had to wake up Jesus. Jesus went up to the bow and rebuked the wind and the sea and made the wind stop. Immediately everything returned to normal.

At that point, the disciples were very excited. Then Jesus turned around, he appeared very serious. He asked the disciples: ‘Where was your faith?’

Jesus' question really touched me. It occurred to me that when disciples of every righteous way or righteous religion encounter such tribulations, the same question arises: do you have faith?

In fact, nothing matters if you do not have faith. You don’t really have to do anything. You can go home and do anything you like. However, if you do have faith, you could face life-threatening situations.”

During this period, Jiang Zemin frequently issued instructions about Falun Gong. On the evening of April 25, in the name of General Secretary of the CCP Central Committee, he sent a letter to the members of the Politburo Standing Committee and other officials. He characterized the “4.25” event as a political incident covertly masterminded.

On May 8th Jiang wrote again to the Central Politburo, the Dept. of Secretariat and Central Military Commission condemning Falun Gong.

(MING RUAN, Former CPC Central Committee Think-tank member) “Jiang Zemin’s mindset warrants scrutiny. The “4.25” event had already been resolved. Premier Zhu had met with the practitioners and clearly stated that it was a civil dispute.

Jiang Zemin's behavior was strange. On a whim, he wrote a letter to the Politburo, later published in the People's Daily. It's about the theories of Mao, Deng and Jiang himself on idealism vs. materialism.

In fact, Jiang pretty much copied Mao’s work. Mao’s 1954 letter on the novel, *A Dream of Red Mansions*, set off a movement condemning Hu Shi. That was an ideological movement as materialism vs. idealism has always been an issue of ideological doctrines.

Now, Jiang claimed that Falun Gong represented idealism, and that fighting Falun Gong represents the struggle between materialism and idealism. "

On June 7, Jiang Zemin delivered a speech at the Politburo meeting accusing Falun Gong of having a deep political background and a complicated international background, and as the most serious incident since the political turmoil of 1989.

This speech was made into a secret document and communicated within the communist party. The CCP Central Committee decided to persecute Falun Gong based on this secret document.

Three days later, on June 10, under the direct control of the Jiang Zemin, the “Central Command Office on the Issue of Falun Gong” was set up, with Li Lanqing as its head and Luo Gan and Ding Guangen as deputy heads. It was later known as the notorious "610 Office".

Four days later, Xinhua News Agency and CCTV simultaneously broadcasted the following message.

(MR. GONG, Engineer) "On June 14, Xinhua News Agency published the speeches made by the heads of two Appeal Offices, the CCP Central Committee Appeal Office and the State Council Appeal Office, when they met with Falun Gong petitioners.

The first one said that there were recent rumors some people was spreading rumors, that the Ministry of Public Security was about to crackdown on Falun Gong, and that Party members and civil servants were not allowed to practice Falun Gong.

He said that these were only rumors made by a small number of people with ulterior motives trying to provoke an incident. We thought that these official remarks were serious acknowledgement of the freedom to practice Falun Gong and to practice one’s faith. One has the freedom to choose.

However, after June 14, the freedom to practice Falun Gong was suppressed further. When we gathered for group exercises on Saturdays, police videotaped all practitioner.”

While Falun Gong practitioners have been suffering much harassment and unfair treatment in silence, preparations for a full-scale crackdown were underway.

On June 22, a production team from the Wuhan TV show "Light of Science", commissioned by the Ministry of Public Security, came to the hometown of Mr. Li Hongzhi in Changchun City, Jilin Province, in an effort to collect and fabricate materials to slander Mr. Li.

However, it turned out that the so-called materials were the same false accusations by a few individuals in Changchun. These accusations had been clarified by the Qigong Research Committee four years ago.

Mr. Ye, who was interviewed, told us:

(Mr. Ye, Falun Gong practitioner from Beijing) “One count alleged that Mr. Li had stolen other people's qigong system. What does it mean? It claimed that Mr. Li knew nothing about qigong, and that he compiled other’s work after having attended some qigong workshop and passed it off as his own.

Where is the evidence? We found out that the person who gave the workshop had stopped teaching qigong and started practicing Falun Gong a long time ago.

This person in fact attended Mr. Li’s workshop and realized Falun Gong was a superior practice. When we told him about this accusation, he said: ‘It's easy, let's go and see the director of the Qigong Association’. He told the director: ‘I was the head of Gong Li Gong. Do you know why I have disappeared from public view for two years? I started practicing Falun Gong which is much better. I am confident that Falun Gong absolutely has no problem. It's good, very good.’

There is nothing better than his own words to prove the case! It was a case that had been resolved a long time ago. It was meaningless.”

Since mid-June, all levels of government departments and state-owned enterprises had been internally instructed by communist party not to provide exercise space to FLG practitioners, and to require communist party members, youth league members and government officials to quit practicing FLG.

In July, CCTV, at the behest of the 610 Office, began to produce a so-called "Truth About the 4.25 Zhongnanhai incident" TV show. People's Daily also began to publish a series of so-called editorials titled "Advocate Science and Dispel Superstition." At this point, the persecution movement launched by Jiang Zemin to completely eradicate Falun Gong had been put into action, starting in the military.

(PROF. ZHOU, Computer Sci. Dept. NJ State Univ.) “My father was one of the five Falun Gong practitioners who entered Zhongnanhai on April 25 to talk to the central leadership. He was also a senior officer in the army.

On the night of this peaceful petition, when he got home, his army superiors were there waiting for him. And that night, they put him under house arrest.

Later, on the evening of July 1, my father was taken away by the army. I haven't heard from him ever since.”

At this time, Mr. Li Hongzhi was invited to visit Chicago for the Midwestern U.S.A Falun Dafa Cultivation Experience Sharing Conference. About practitioners' cultivation and improvement are always a matter of concern for Mr. Li.

On June 25, inside the Thompson Building in downtown Chicago, the Illinois state government honored Mr. Li with the Distinguished Service Award in recognition of his selfless dedication to the people and Falun Dafa's success in improving people’s health. They dedicated this day as Li Hongzhi Day in Chicago.

At the moment, practitioners who had attended the awards ceremony had already felt the pending crackdown in China.

(MR. YANG, Senior Optics Engineer) “At the time, we often received emails that threatened to cause trouble at the Experience Sharing Conference. We were nervous at the conference.”

The cultivation experience sharing conference was held the day after the Award Ceremony. Mr. Li Hongzhi took questions from practitioners at the end of the conference as usual.

There is one question that goes, Question: “Master, please tell us, when Jesus was about to be crucified, what were all of his disciples doing? Master, please relay this to people around the world and in the heavens: We Dafa disciples will absolutely not allow such a thing to happen.” Teacher: (Warm applause) “Thank you! Cultivators should not be affected by human thoughts, as you are cultivators. I thank you all for your heartfelt feelings about Dafa and Master. I know them all.” (Teaching the Fa at the Conference in the Midwest-U.S.)

This simple exchange between Master and disciples inadvertently conveyed the following message. Dafa disciples would not turn a blind eye to the persecution of Dafa and Master.

Master Li asked his disciples to behave according to the standards of a Dafa practitioner. History and reality diverged at this point.

At the end of the Conference, the students stood up and bade farewell to Mr. Li Hongzhi. Mr. Li Hongzhi: “Under trying circumstances of any type, you must all keep steady in thought. Just by staying unaffected you will be able to handle all situations.” (Teaching the Fa at the Conference in the Midwest-U.S.) These were the last words Mr. Li told his disciples before the full scale crackdown took place.

Mr. Li was present at practitioners' group exercise at Olive Park in downtown Chicago the next day. Disciples and Master would not have a chance to meet until more than a year later.

It had been only 7 years since Dafa teaching went public. Could these disciples withstand the upcoming brutal test? What force behind the crackdown were Master and disciples facing?

A former Chinese Communist official made the following observation: “The Chinese Communist Party has developed a strict system since its inception about 80 years ago. Through its 50 years of dictatorship, that system has turned into a handy tool under the justification of the rule of law. No other regime in the world can utilize the state apparatus to control and repress its own people without any constraint like the CCP."

China has the world's largest army, armed police, public security force, detention center and prison system, as well as more than 2,000 state controlled newspapers, magazines, radio and television networks, and other propaganda organizations.

CCTV alone has 12 TV channels, covers 90% of the nation's population with over 1.1 billion viewers. It has global coverage through satellite transmissions in Chinese, English, French, and Spanish, as well as in Cantonese, the Minnan dialect and other dialects.

People who experienced that storm may still remember that summer in Beijing. The sun was burning in the sky, and it was unusually hot.

In the early morning of July 20, coordinated arrests of Falun Gong coordinators were carried out more than 30 provinces and cities. Suddenly, an overwhelming full-scale crackdown had begun.

Jiang Zemin attempted a crackdown and claimed that he could eliminate Falun Gong in three months. Newspapers, magazines, and radio and TV stations began publishing and broadcasting so-called condemning articles and programs around the clock.

From cities to remote rural areas, the police forced the practicing masses away from practice sites and arrested those who would not give in. Local police led by neighborhood committees searched practitioners' homes one by one, and ordered them to renounce their faith and turn over or destroy Falun Gong books and audio video materials. Jiang Zemin declared: "I don't believe I cannot get rid of Falun Gong." Many sociologists predicted: "With the prowess of the Chinese government, Falun Gong won't last one week."

In the face of this horrific storm, many cultivators disregarded the so-called and went to Beijing to petition for Falun Gong. And went to Beijing to petition for Falun Gong. They all knew the possible consequences, but they would not turn back.

(MS. ZHAO, Falun Dafa practitioner from Hainan) “We were at home watching the news when my husband called. He asked: ‘Did you see the news?’ I said: ‘I'm watching it’. He said: ‘You know, in this country there is no justice. When they label you as an illegal organization, the crackdown is likely imminent. You’d better be careful and not don't do anything foolish. The Communist Party always plays hard ball!’ I said: ‘I know, I know what I should do. Don't worry.’

After I put down the phone, five of us left. None of us brought keys or money. We were in our exercise clothes and took a cab and left. At the time we never expected to be able to come back. "

Fengtai Sports Center, located in the southwest of Beijing, was a modern sports complex built to host the 11th Asian Games. The buildings in the sports center occupied an area the size of 220,000 square meters. For the next few days after July 20, 1999, it became the de facto detention center of petitioning Falun Gong practitioners. This was what happened there.

(MR. WANG, Beijing practitioner) **“**The Fengtai Stadium was packed with practitioners, including the stands. We did not have any food from morning until the afternoon.

While people could freely enter or exit as the gates were open, no one left. We felt that our voices had not been heard and that the government had not provided an explanation for its actions. That was not acceptable. As a result, nobody left.”

Around 8 o'clock in the evening, at nightfall, the police began to disperse practitioner with force.

(MS. LIU, Falun Dafa practitioner from Beijing) “Ah! I saw a policeman dragging a woman by her clothes, exposing her body. Others dragged people by their hair.”

(MR. WANG, Falun Dafa practitioner from Beijing) “I remember when police were throwing people onto the bus, we stood arm in arm and encouraged each other not to let them separate us. We kept repeating: ‘No hitting back when attacked, no talking back when insulted’. I was very touched. I wondered how the police felt.”

These were the Falun Gong practitioners who cultivates according to Truthfulness, Compassion and Forbearance. They had never resorted to violence in this very tense situation.

Four years later, at a rally in Washington DC to commemorate "7.20" and to call for an end to the persecution, we met many practitioners who had petitioned in Beijing. Recalling their extraordinary experience, they said:

(MS. GUO, Beijing practitioner) “We practitioners were not afraid. We exercised and meditated in the hot weather and we were calm. We told them our stories. We were there for three days in a row (July 20, 21, 22). Many practitioners from all over the country came. I was thinking that since our coordinators were arrested, we were all coordinators. Disciples as a whole stood their ground when push came to shove. They left a good reputation whenever they went. One cannot help but be full of admiration. ”

There had been hundreds of thousands of Falun Gong practitioners trying to reach Beijing to petition since July 20. The 610 Office demanded the local governments to stop people from petitioning at all costs. The army entered a state of combat readiness.

Since all major roads into Beijing were under a tight blockade, many practitioners went by foot or bicycle, over hills and mountains. There was this story of nine pairs of shoes.

(MS. ZHANG, Pianist) "In order to petition in Beijing, it took an old gentleman two months and nine pairs of shoes walking from Zichuan to Beijing. All they wanted was to say a word for justice, to say: ‘Falun Dafa is good’.

The story that a practitioner, who traveled by foot, wore out nine pairs of shoes and finally reached Beijing to petition touched my heart very deeply. I couldn't hold my tears when I read those lyrics. So for me, the melodies came out naturally.”

(Practitioners in Tiananmen Square)

“We come to Tiananmen with sincerity.”

"Mr. Li Hongzhi asked us to be good people. We want to be good people. "

"We follow the principles of Truthfulness, Compassion and Forbearance speak the truth, do good deeds. "

To these ordinary practitioners, their journey to Beijing was an unforgettable one. Through their journey, they had personally practiced and experienced the universal principles of "Truthfulness, Compassion and Forbearance."

The media was filled with insults and slanders. However, one entity tenaciously broadcasted the voice of Falun Gong practitioners. It was a website launched one month earlier. It relied on a 486-PC and telephone lines to transmit information. It broke through layers upon layers of the blockade and helped Falun Gong practitioners around the world come together to meet the challenge.

(MS. MENG, Falun Dafa practitioner from USA) “ ‘Minghui Net’ was officially launched in June 1999. At the beginning, there were at least 500 incoming emails every day, on top of fax and phone calls. The website had caught people’s attention from the beginning as this information channel was very important to people.

The crackdown went public in late July. The nationwide manhunt began in the evening of the 19th and went on till the 22nd. Then there was the by information and internet blockade.

All domestic emails were stopped, including services at 163.com and 263.com, behind the pretense of maintenance. At that time, it was difficult to exchange information. It not only blocked you from sending information, but also blocked you from seeing it.

In order to launch and maintain the crackdown, it was important to them that people did not know the truth and were not able to get information. "

(MS. SUN, Computer Engineer) “Many people printed out articles on the ‘Minghui Net’ and sent them to the countryside and small towns.  As you know, a lot of practitioners were arrested at the beginning of the persecution.

Every day, many practitioners were arrested and brutally beaten in broad daylight, in public, in the Appeal Offices or in Tiananmen Square.

At that time, a lot of practitioners were unsure about how to handle this situation.

Later, some practitioners brought in ‘Minghui Net’ articles, which shared the experiences of practitioners who were detained and beaten in detention center, but went to appeal again after leaving the detention center.

They did a lot of thinking. While many ordinary people couldn’t take that kind of suffering and ill treatment, practitioners overcame it peacefully.

When they were able to do this, they understood that they didn’t go to Beijing for their own sake. Many disciples understood what they should do after reading this article.”

During this period, Mr. Li Hongzhi frequently received international media interviews and constantly explained that Falun Gong does not constitute threat to any regime; on the contrary, Falun Gong offers many benefits to all governments, peoples and nations and is totally harmless.

On July 22, the “Minghui Net” published Mr. Li's letter to the Chinese government officials and CCP leaders. In the letter, Mr. Li urged the Chinese government not to implement policies to suppress innocent Falun Gong people, but to solve problems through peaceful dialogues.

He had already foreseen that cruel, reckless persecution of cultivators would eventually be a disaster to the country and its people. Kind-hearted people could have none of it.

There was a small street garden, known as the "Little Tiananmen Square", in front of the Chinese Embassy at 2300 Connecticut Avenue, Washington DC.

On July 20, 1999, when Falun Gong practitioners in China were headed for Beijing, overseas practitioners gathered across the world at the "Little Tiananmen Square".

(MR. XIANG, Computer Engineer) “We had an idea that we should open a dialogue with the Chinese government. We wanted to tell our congressmen the truth so that they could help us establish a dialogue with the Chinese government.”

The United States Capitol is about three miles to the southeast of the Chinese Embassy. On the two sides of this landmark building were Constitution Avenue and Independence Avenue, each hosting three office buildings. These are the offices of the 100 U.S. senators and the 437 members of the House of Representatives. Most Falun Gong practitioners had never visited this place before.

(MR. LIU Ph.D., Washington University, USA) “It was summer. When we heard about the crackdown, we drove overnight to Washington DC. But we were still in shorts and T-shirts.

Since the U.S. Congress is a formal place, I borrowed a shirt from a practitioner and purchased a pair of pants.

To be honest, I had no idea where the U.S. government was, where the Congress was. I had no idea. I didn't know the difference between the Senate and the House. When we got there, we told them about Falun Gong and how people benefited physically and mentally from practicing Falun Gong. We told them how widespread this crackdown was and that many people had been arrested.”

While practitioners around world were actively seeking to dialogue with the Chinese government and to reach a peaceful solution to the crisis, the darkest moment in the history of mankind took place on July 29, 1999.

(MS. XIA, Artist) “At that time many disciples from all over the country came. We stayed at a hotel. When we were preparing materials to bring to the Congress, a disciple rushed inside and told us that the Chinese government had named Master as a wanted person. We were shocked and the entire room suddenly went silent.”

The news was undoubtedly a severe test to Falun Gong practitioners facing tribulations. The escalating situation had made many to choose their paths seriously.

(MR. YANG, M.D.) "Why do you want to practice Falun Gong? Do you continue to practice in the face of tremendous pressure and persecution? These are important questions for every practitioner.

We were preparing to hold a press conference. I had to ask myself: What should I say at the press conference? What should I tell people? Why did I come here? I had to answer these questions myself.

Later I realized that my actions must meet the standards set by Falun Dafa and the Master. I am here to practice Truthfulness, Compassion and Forbearance, and to speak the truth, to let people know that Falun Gong is good. “

For two weeks, hundreds of practitioners from around the world were busy on the streets in Washington. They visited many United States government offices, media and more than 170 countries' embassies.

In order to let more people understand this persecution, practitioners held a number of events at the Washington National Mall under the scorching heat of summer.

Many of them were immigrants who had worked hard to take a firm foothold in this newly adopted country. This sudden persecution had also forced them to make major decisions in life.

(MR. XIANG, Computer Engineer) “I was very busy back then. When I left for D.C. in a rush that day, I didn't have a chance to inform my boss.

My boss emailed me to let me know that I couldn’t do this. I saw the email on the afternoon I returned to the office. After some thinking, I wrote him a long letter. I said that freedom of religion and faith are regarded as basic human rights in the U.S.. But people are paying with their lives to enjoy these rights that came naturally to Americans. What I did was for my fellow Chinese, helping them fight for the same rights.

The next day, my boss called me into his office and told me that he understood. He asked me to let him know beforehand if similar situations would come up in the future.”

Practitioners' selfless endeavors had won the world's respect and support, and had completely squashed Jiang Zemin’s attempt to eliminate Falun Gong in three months.

July 23, 1999, the government of Canada condemns the CCP persecution of Falun Gong.

August 4, 1999, the Association of World Citizens condemns the CCP violation of human rights.

August 6, 1999, 25 U.S. senators signed a joint letter asking Jiang Zemin to immediately stop persecuting Falun Gong practitioners.

September 10, 1999, 40 U.S. congressmen signed a joint letter opposing the persecution of Falun Gong.

August 9, 1999, Washington, D.C., the capital of the United States, declares Falun Dafa Week.

August 18, 1999, Australia raised the issue of Falun Gong during its human rights dialogue (with China).

August 25, 1999, the government of the United States urges the communist government of China to respect the relevant international human rights treaties and protect people’s freedom of faith and religion.

It was just like what Mr. Li Hongzhi had said: "Never in history has someone who persecuted those with upright faiths ever succeeded."

After the first few months of the crackdown have passed, practitioners began to seriously think about the following questions: What's the nature of this suppression? How should they cultivate themselves in this environment?

Please watch episode 7 - In Times of Hardship.