

One warm morning in April 1999, a scene unfolded that not only took China by surprise, but also captured headlines around the world--a group of people quietly gathered around Beijing's Office of Appeals, which happens to be located on the west side of Zhongnanhai, China's political headquarters.

Those that gathered were from different geographic regions and walks of life. Some were entire families, some came individually or with friends. They arrived on foot and by bicycle, taxi, train, and even plane.

Most of them had never met each other prior to this day. They automatically formed a long line along the street. At around 9 p.m., the 10,000-some practitioners quietly dispersed on their own without leaving so much as a scrap of paper behind.

Why did they gather? Who are Falun Gong practitioners? What is the truth behind the Communist regime's claim, "Falun Gong surrounded and attacked Zhongnanhai?" Let's hear from two practitioners who participated in the historic event.

## **"Social Morale Was Highest When Falun Gong Was Spreading in China"**

Ms. Wang Xiqin, 59, was originally from Beijing but now lives in Philadelphia. She had lived near Zhongshan Park and worked for a government agency. She retired in 1999.

By then, she and her daughter had practiced Falun Gong for more than five years. Ms. Wang recalls there were Falun Gong practice sites in nearly every park and neighborhood, and people could be seen practicing Falun Gong everywhere.

Ms. Wang also benefited from the practice, stating, "I began Falun Gong practice in 1994. At first, I wanted to get healthy, and I did--I felt so much lighter. I had more energy than in my 20s. Many people were practicing, and everyone conducted themselves according to the principles of cultivation.

They became more considerate and examined themselves whenever there was a conflict. Interpersonal relationships improved greatly, and social morale was more robust than it had been for a long time. I really miss that time.

Morale was the best in my lifetime when Falun Gong was spreading in China."

The practice's quick rise in popularity--especially among intellectuals and military personnel--alarmed the ruling elite. Ms. Wang remembers a few incidents before 1999, when the regime knowingly tried to fabricate vicious lies about Falun Gong.

For example, one day, reporters from the Beijing TV Station went to a Falun Gong practice site and shot video footage for a program, and TV station representatives interviewed a few practitioners who explained their wonderful experiences with the practice.

When the program was aired, however, it was the opposite of what the practitioners had said; it was full of lies.

Several practitioners went to the TV station and explained that the video was not telling the truth.

## **"The place became safer when Falun Gong practitioners were doing exercises"**

Ms. Wang's incident with Beijing TV Station gave her a premonition--that there was an undercurrent of imminent, well-planned political attack on the horizon. Secret agents appeared near the Zhongshan Park practice site.

There were a few hundred people doing exercises in the park, a wonderful sight to behold. People who lived in the area said it had become safer since the practitioners had started exercising there.

There were fewer thefts and other crimes. People thought it was strange for the police to investigate Falun Gong. Ms. Wang recalls her surprise one day when the volunteer assistant at her practice site said she was going to report to the police station.

Ms. Wang asked, "Why?" The woman said, "Well, the police insist that I do, so I have to go."

The assistant told everyone at the practice site on April 24, 1999 that He Zuoxiu attacked Falun Gong in a magazine article published by the Tianjin Education Institute. Several practitioners who had gone to the Tianjin government to speak with them; police beat and arrested them.

Tianjin police told them, "We cannot take care of this; you must go to Beijing, that's the only way your voice will be heard." The assistant added, "Tomorrow, whoever has the time can go [to Office of Appeals] if you want. We can support Tianjin practitioners."

## **Gradual but continuous positive changes**

"I was retired and went the next day because I didn't have to apply for a leave of absence to be gone. I arrived a little after 7:00 a.m. Many practitioners arrived by 8:00 am. We formed a long line and filled the alley.

I had not expected to see all those people. The police looked shocked, too. Actually, only a proportionately small number of Falun Gong practitioners had come, because there were many who could not take the day off from work.

It could have easily been one million people or more that showed up to appeal.

"Some of us stood in the front and some in the back; several did the sitting meditation, read books, or talked to each other. We kept it quiet and orderly. We waited for government officials to come out and talk to us.

We left quietly on our own in the evening as soon as we heard that the government had agreed to release the arrested practitioners. We didn't leave a scrap of paper behind.

"Moral standards recovered because of the spread of Falun Gong; people became honest and kind, and Falun Gong brought blessing to China, like spring rain.

Wherever there were Falun Gong practitioners, people changed for the better; the environment became more peaceful; everything prospered."

## **If the persecution did not happen...**

"Once the persecution of Falun Gong began in 1999, China experienced the most drastic moral decline. Social conflicts came to a boiling point, massive group protests broke out almost daily, and natural [and man-made] disasters befell China, one after another.

The major events of 2008 included the infamous snowstorm, the Sichuan earthquake, the rape-murder in Wengan, the poisonous milk powder scandal, and Yang Jia's police-killing spree, among other things.

Many people are thinking: if the onset of the 1999 persecution had not happened, how would China be different today?"

Ms. Wang came to the US in 2004 because of the persecution in China. On top of holding a job, she devotes much time to explaining Falun Gong to people.

Her greatest wish is for Falun Gong to regain its legal status in China, so that Falun Gong can bring more people health and joy.

## **With a Pure and Good Heart**

Ms. Gong is 65 years old and lives in south New Jersey. Prior to the persecution she resided in the Fengtai District in Beijing.

Her husband is an engineer, her son is a very good student, her daughter is a Chinese medicine doctor, and her entire family practices Falun Gong.

She learned about the arrest of Tianjin practitioners when she went to the practice site in the Wangyuan District neighborhood near her home on April 24, 1999.

She called her son, daughter, and daughter-in-law, who all decided to go to the Office of Appeals. She prepared lots of food, including canned goods, fruit, and bread, prior to leaving.

Her husband joked and said, "Are you going on a picnic?"

Almost all of the 30 people at her practice site went. Everyone felt relaxed and free of pressure.

They went out of good intentions and trust for the government and were not "purposely attacking Zhongnanhai" or "attacking the government," as the Communist regime later claimed.

When she arrived Ms. Gong saw people she knew, including a few professors living in the Haidian District and practitioners who had flown in from other provinces. There were also young mothers pushing strollers.

## **Passers-by support Falun Gong; residents provide food and water**

Ms. Gong remembers the practitioners standing in an orderly line. A few practitioners maintained order to make sure the sidewalk was clear for the passersby. Most of them were reading, doing the exercises, or talking in a low voice.

People living nearby did not feel bothered at all. A few people who walked past waved and smiled at the practitioners.

Seeing how kind and peaceful the practitioners were, the police relaxed and began chatting with them, asking why the practitioners had come to appeal. The police listened attentively as the practitioners explained.

At noon local residents sold hard-boiled eggs, water, and bread to the practitioners for a very low price, to show their support. After lunch, some practitioners picked up trash. When people lined up for the public restroom, the practitioners let the local residents go first.

Ms. Gong said Beijing residents already had a certain understanding of Falun Gong. Many of them had had prior contact with practitioners and knew they were good people; they liked the practitioners.

They could not understand why the Communist Party regarded these good people as their enemies and felt threatened by them. They asked, "Don't we need more good people in this world?"

Ms. Gong and her family stood across from Zhongnanhai's front gate. Premier Zhu Rongji emerged and spoke with a few practitioners.

Ms. Gong added, "Later I heard that Zhu Rongji reached an understanding with the practitioners, so we left. When we left I only heard quiet footsteps; soon the streets were empty again.

It was so clean; you could not find a single cigarette butt or any other trash. It was as if nothing had ever happened."

**Fengtai Sports Stadium filled with military vehicles waiting for deployment at a moment's notice**

Some people say the Communist Party persecuted Falun Gong because the practitioners "surrounded and attacked Zhongnanhai."

Ms. Gong recalls that the Party had actually planned to persecute Falun Gong a long time before the Zhongnanhai appeal event. "The police had frequently 'visited' our practice site long before April 25, 1999.

One day after I finished the meditation exercise and opened my eyes, I saw a group of police officers videotaping us. They taped the entire process when we were doing the exercises. One weekend, when we went to Changxindian to introduce Falun Gong to the people there, the police followed us all the way and videotaped us throughout."

Ms. Gong continued, "A relative of one of the practitioners at our practice site worked for the Fengtai Police Department. When we went to appeal on April 25, everyone but her was relaxed.

She told us, 'I'm worried because the Communist Party is not nice; it's capable of any brutality.' She knew of the system's capability for ruthlessness from her relative.

When we arrived, I saw lots of police officers who watched us closely, but they could not find fault with us. We did everything right because we told the officials, 'If you agree to release the arrested practitioners we'll leave right away.'

When the regime officials did agree to release the practitioners, we left right away, without a minute's delay. We kept our word.

I eventually learned that Fengtai Sports Stadium had been full of military vehicles, waiting for deployment at a moment's notice. But we were so kind and peaceful, they had no reason to launch a bloody attack.

The Party persecutes Falun Gong by accusing Falun Gong of false things.

"If the Party would have found any little thing to pin on Falun Gong on April 25, it would

undoubtedly have escalated into a bloody event.

Since Falun Gong practitioners were so orderly, peaceful, open, and kind, the Party had no excuse to launch an attack.

There were so many of us, but we never bothered the local residents or disturbed the social order. We only had a positive impact.

Wherever we were, we were quiet and considerate. Falun Gong's purity, righteousness, and great compassion dissolved the Party's intention to create social chaos at that event."