

*Avery Lin - based on the account of a monk
cultivating according to the principles of
"Truthfulness, Compassion, Forbearance"*

ENTERING THE WORLD



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A LIFETIME OF WANDERING, A LIFELONG
HOMECOMING

ENTERING THE WORLD

**A Lifetime of Wandering, A Lifelong
Homecoming**

Author: Avery Lin

Based on the account of a Chinese monk who has devoted his life to spiritual cultivation rooted in an ancient Chinese principle: *Truthfulness – Compassion – Forbearance.*

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EDITOR'S NOTE

This book is based on real stories, events, and historical contexts. However, in order to respect privacy and avoid any undue impact on certain individuals, names and identifying details have been altered, simplified, or restructured into a literary form.

Some passages are told from the personal perspective of those involved and reflect their individual experiences and understanding at the time. These viewpoints do not necessarily represent the editorial stance of THE LIVES MEDIA.

While necessary edits have been made to ensure clarity, the editorial team has taken care to preserve the simplicity and authenticity of the original storytelling, honoring both the spirit and voice of the narrator.

The Editorial Team



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PROLOGUE

The stories in this book were recorded during quiet, late afternoons in a small house nestled on the hillside outside New York City. Across from me, next to a teapot gradually cooling in the fading light of dusk, sat Ma Changsheng — a spiritual cultivator well into his seventies.

His words were not the solemn teachings of a high-ranking monk, but the gentle confessions of someone who had weathered a lifetime of worldly upheaval.

In those conversations, my role was perhaps no more than that of a listener. I wasn't there to seek drama or revelations, but rather to quietly document the journey of a life — like a junior sitting humbly before a revered elder.

It is a journey that spans more than half a century: beginning amidst the ideological storms of modern Chinese history, passing through thirty years of relentless wandering across Asia in search of the Way, and ultimately arriving at a quiet harbor for the soul — in a place no one, not even he, could have predicted. Some tales carry the air of the mystical, some are soaked

in hardship, but above all, they radiate an unusual tranquility.

Ma Changsheng's account is not simply a memoir. To me, it is a living testament to perseverance, to the price of seeking truth, and to the invisible power of belief — one that can carry a person through trials that would seem otherwise unbearable.

Now, with deep respect and quiet intention, I offer these fragments of memory, carefully arranged, to share with you — in the hope that the gentle current of his story will speak for itself.

Avery Lin

* * *

DAY ONE

Avery Lin:

Hello, Uncle Ma. I'm really happy to see you again today! As we talked about last time, I'm here today to listen to your story — your life journey, your search for the Way, what it's like to practice cultivation in everyday life, and maybe... some of your personal reflections or understandings.

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma looks at Avery with a warm smile and gentle eyes.)

Hello, Avery. I'm happy to see you too. Alright then, just as we said — have a seat, let's chat.

My story's nothing grand, really. It's just the things I've been through... the things I've seen and thought about along this long road. If you want to hear, I'm happy to tell.

(He takes a small sip of tea and gently sets the cup down. The sound of porcelain tapping the saucer is soft, barely audible in the stillness of the little house.)

If we're talking about roots, we've got to go back quite a bit, Avery.

I was born in 1949, in Guangdong. Back then, the country was still in turmoil. My parents were devoted Communist Party members — very passionate, very firm believers in the revolution. They took part in all sorts of political activities, and naturally, they raised me with that same idealism.

From a young age, all those songs and slogans about a bright future under Party leadership were just part of my life — they soaked into my thinking.

But even in that very household, there was another stream running quietly.

My grandfather... he was completely different. He lived almost in seclusion, loving a quiet, peaceful life. He was obsessed with the *Dao De Jing* and Confucian classics.

My name — Ma Changsheng — he gave it to me himself. There must've been some hope behind it, though I was too young to understand what that was.

He never openly challenged my parents or argued about current events. But his way of life, his quiet wisdom... it was like a slow, steady rain soaking into the soil — it left a mark on me over time.

Then the years rolled by. In 1966, I was seventeen when the Cultural Revolution broke out in full force.

And when you're young... it's easy to get swept up by all that grand talk, all that fiery chanting. I was no exception. I eagerly joined the Communist Youth League and took part in all those "Destroy the Four Olds" campaigns — tearing down anything deemed old, outdated, or superstitious.

Back then, I truly believed I was helping to build a better world.

Ah... youth. So impulsive, so shallow in thought.

(He sighs softly, his gaze drifting to the window, where the golden light of dusk begins to tint the tree branches.)

Avery Lin:

Yes... I've read about that time in history — the Cultural Revolution. It really was... horrifying.

Did you... as a Youth League member, ever do anything that later made you feel regret?

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma falls silent for a while, his eyes distant — clearly wandering through some painful memories. The lines on his face seem to carry the weight of time.)

Yes, I did. There are things that — even now — when I think back, I still feel a heavy weight inside.

It was that blind passion, that innocent belief in all the flashy slogans that pushed me — and really, a whole generation — into making mistakes.

(He pauses; his voice drops a little.)

Back then, the “Destroy the Four Olds” movement had a huge momentum.

Temples, shrines, cultural relics from our ancestors — people saw them as trash. Superstition. They had to be torn down to make way for the new.

And I... I got pulled into that current.

There was one time — a group of us from the Youth League were sent to “handle” an old temple at the base of a mountain not far from our village.

It was ancient. You could tell just by the architecture — moss-covered, weathered by time. But in my head back

then, all I could think was: this is feudal garbage — destroy it!

We shouted, smashed Buddha statues, knocked over altars.

The sound of breaking wood, of incense burners shattering — I still remember how fired up I felt, like I was doing something so “revolutionary,” so “progressive.”

(His voice catches a little. He closes his eyes for a moment, as if trying to drive away the images.)

And then... something happened.

I was climbing up the roof to pull down the last tiles, still full of adrenaline — when a large, rotted wooden beam broke off and came crashing down.

It hit me right on the head. All I felt was a sudden, sharp pain — then everything went black.

Looking back... maybe that was instant retribution, Avery.

You do something wrong, eventually, the consequences come.

That moment — destroying that temple — it left a scar on me. Not just on the body... but inside. A scar on the soul, really. A reminder of a time when I was so... lost.

Avery Lin:

Those scenes... they must have been heartbreaking — not just for your generation, but for all the ones that came after. When traditional values are torn away like that, the impact runs deep.

And the way you passed out from that falling beam — if we look at it from a cultivation perspective, from a spiritual lens... that really does sound like immediate karmic retribution.

Did you realize something right away after that? Did it make you stop?

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma nods slowly, his face thoughtful.)

You're right. That fall... that wooden beam... it wasn't just some random accident.

Looking back, I came to understand — that moment was a turning point. A kind of intervention from a world I had never believed in, never even imagined.

I was unconscious for three days, Avery. My family and friends must've been very worried. I had no idea what was going on in the outside world. But during that coma... I had the strangest experience. A dream, or

something beyond a dream. It was vivid, long, and so real that even now, I can still recall every detail.

(He looks toward the distance, his eyes seeming to pierce through the walls of the small house, as if staring into another realm.)

In that state, I found myself in a dark, cold place.

Then, out of nowhere, a soft light appeared. And in that light... stood a high monk. He wore a deep golden robe.

His face was gentle, yet commanding.

He looked at me — and somehow, that gaze went straight into the depths of my soul.

He didn't say much. But every word was like a bell striking through my delusions.

He pointed out clearly what I'd done — the destruction of temples, the desecration of sacred places — it was a grave sin. He said it was heavy karma.

Temples, he said, are sacred grounds where divine beings dwell. To destroy them was to offend the divine.

And if I didn't sincerely repent, I'd suffer in hell — the pain would be unimaginable.

Hearing those words... I was terrified, Avery.

Utterly terrified. My whole being was consumed by fear.

Not just of hell itself, but of the punishments he described.

But even more than fear... I felt deep remorse.

I realized just how wrong I'd been — how foolish I was to believe those radical slogans, to take part in such destruction.

I cried. I cried a lot in that dream. I kept bowing and begging the high monk — asking for mercy, asking for a way to atone.

(His voice trembles a bit as he recalls that moment.)

Seeing how sincere my repentance was, the high monk finally softened.

He told me — because I still had a bit of goodness left in me, because I knew to regret — he would show me a path.

He gave very clear instructions:

“You must immediately abandon the wrong path — the path you've been walking under the Communist Party. You must leave the secular world and seek the Way — find the True Law to dissolve your karma.

But listen carefully: you cannot settle down in one temple.

You must travel far and wide, search for the Law across all lands.

This journey will be long and filled with hardship. It will help you repay your karma and test your sincerity and perseverance on the path of cultivation.”

Once he said that, his image faded away and disappeared.

I woke up slowly — after three full days in a coma.

I opened my eyes, found myself lying on a hospital bed, surrounded by family.

And I knew... that dream wasn't just a dream.

It was a warning. A message.

And I knew... my life could never go back to what it was.

Avery Lin:

Wow... from a cultivator's point of view, that sounds like an unmistakable sign — a divine awakening.

Did you act on it right away? How did your family react?

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma nods again, his gaze steady, firm.)

Yes, absolutely. That wasn't just a dream — it was a calling I couldn't ignore.

After I came to, those words from the high monk kept echoing in my head — clear and powerful.

All the pain from my injury faded away, replaced by a single, unshakable resolve.

I knew what I had to do.

As soon as I was strong enough, I told my parents: I was going to leave that path — I would become a monk.

(He sighs, a shadow of sorrow crossing his face.)

Their reaction... was intense.

They couldn't accept it.

To them — people who had devoted their lives to the Communist ideal — hearing their only son say he wanted to renounce it all and believe in what they saw as “superstition”...

It felt like betrayal. An insult.

They thought the injury had messed up my mind. Or that someone had brainwashed me.

They scolded me, threatened me, even beat me — hoping I'd change my mind.

They said if I insisted on going down that path, then I should no longer consider them my parents. I should leave, and never come back.

Deep down, I knew they still loved me.

But their belief in that ideology... it had become larger than love itself. It blinded them.

It was painful.

But my resolve didn't waver.

The monk's words... the image of that shattered temple... the karma I'd brought on myself...

They all pushed me forward.

During that whole ordeal, only my grandfather stood quietly by my side.

He looked at me with understanding — gentle, wise.

He didn't say much.

He just went into his room, came back with an old, worn copy of the *Dao De Jing*, and placed it in my hands.

He said,

"This is all I have to give you. Keep it well."

That book — I've kept it ever since. It's a keepsake. A silent blessing from him.

And so...

One early morning in 1967, before the sun had even risen, I left home.

I had nothing but the *Dao De Jing* and a few old clothes.

I found a small, remote temple.

I told the abbot everything — my mistakes, the dream, my decision to leave it all behind.

He looked at me with eyes full of compassion.

Seeing my sincerity, he agreed to perform the head-shaving ceremony.

Because I'd vowed to travel far and wide, never settling, he gave me a Dharma name: Shi Changxing (釋長行) — *the One Who Journeys Long*.

They gave me an old brown robe. And from that day on,
I became a wandering monk, bound by a vow to seek the
Way.

That old identity — Ma Changsheng — he was gone.

In his place was a drifter with a vow.

A path lay ahead, uncertain and endless.

I never dared face my parents again. I didn't want to
hurt them further... and I didn't want my resolve to
falter.

Avery Lin:

That was such a decisive and bold move... Honestly, I'm
not sure I would've had the courage to do the same if I
were in your shoes — especially back then, not even
knowing what cultivation really meant.

So after shaving your head and becoming a monk... did
you face a lot of difficulties in those early days? I
imagine some people might have mocked you — maybe
even the authorities gave you a hard time?

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma gently shakes his head, a faint, wistful smile
crossing his lips.)

The decision was firm, Avery, but the road ahead... it was so dark, so uncertain.

At that time, I only had this vague sense — this inner urge that I had to go, that I had to seek out the True Law the high monk had pointed me toward.

But as for what cultivation actually was, or how to go about it... I didn't really know.

All I had was a promise, and a strong feeling deep inside.

Those first days after leaving home — wearing that simple brown robe — they were tough.

The first hurdle was loneliness.

I'd gone from being a young man with family, friends, and a purpose that was cheered on by many... to being completely alone.

No one to rely on.

No place to call home.

At night, curled up under a temple eave or in a corner of some unfamiliar marketplace, the homesickness would come rushing in.

I missed my parents, missed the comfort of routine — even missed the misguided days when I still had friends around me.

And then there were the stares.

That was still the height of the Cultural Revolution.

A young man like me — instead of working the fields or joining the “revolutionary cause” — suddenly shaving

his head and begging for food?

People looked at me with suspicion. Some sneered.

Others looked at me like I was insane.

They whispered, they pointed. Some flat-out called me lazy — a slacker trying to dodge labor. A “reactionary” in monk’s robes.

Old friends — the ones I used to march and chant slogans with — avoided me like the plague.

Some even mocked me to my face. Said I’d lost my mind, gone “demonic” or “possessed.”

At first, those words hurt. I won’t lie — they stung.

But then I’d remember the monk’s warning.

Remember the karma I had to pay.

So I learned to swallow it.

I treated it like another test of my resolve.

As for the authorities... luckily, in those first days, I didn’t face any direct trouble.

Maybe because I was just one person, drifting through quiet rural places — not stirring up attention.

Or maybe they just saw me as some lunatic — not worth bothering with.

Still, the whole atmosphere back then was tense.

Anyone who didn’t follow the “revolutionary path” was viewed with suspicion.

So I had to be careful — watch my words, avoid crowds,

steer clear of any gatherings that could cause misunderstandings.

But you know...

The hardest thing wasn't any of that.

The hardest part... was facing myself.

Doubt creeps in.

Questions start to gnaw at you.

Am I on the right path?

Do I have what it takes to walk it to the end?

Those questions — they came at me strongest during the cold, hungry nights.

Or when I was sick.

But every time, the image of that monk would come back.

His voice. His warning.

And that old *Dao De Jing* from my grandfather — it became my companion.

The words in it... they calmed me.

They reminded me why I was doing this.

And so — step by step, one foot in front of the other — I began my journey in search of the Way.

A journey I had no idea how long it would last... or where it would lead.

All I had was faith — and the will to see it through.

Avery Lin:

So... did you have any sort of plan back then?

Like — did you aim for certain big temples, or dream of going to Tibet, or even India, like Tang Sanzang from *Journey to the West*?

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma smiles gently — a smile full of quiet memories.)

A clear plan? Not really, no.

All I had in my mind was what the high monk told me:

“Wander the world. Seek the Law everywhere.”

He didn’t say *where* to go. He didn’t name any temples or mountains.

In fact, he said very clearly — “You must not settle in any one temple.”

As for Tang Sanzang heading west to get the scriptures...

That was a grand pilgrimage, with a clear destination from the start.

Me? I was nothing like that.

I was just a man — a sinner — carrying the weight of regret and a vow to find the True Law.

At first, I just thought: go.

Wherever there's a temple or a Taoist sanctuary — stop by.

Listen. Learn.

If I heard of sacred mountains, or places known for spiritual masters — I'd try to find my way there.

Ask around. See if any monks or Taoists were known for their virtue — maybe they could teach me something.

The only compass I had... was this vague inner knowing. This urge that said: "Keep going — you'll find it. Keep seeking — you'll see."

My only luggage was the *Dao De Jing* and a sincere heart.

So I walked.

I asked questions.

I observed.

I listened.

Sometimes... I'd just follow a hunch.

A path would catch my eye — feel like it was calling to me — and I'd follow it.

But a mapped-out plan? A clear goal like "go to Tibet" or "go to India"?

No.

Not from the start.

I did end up visiting those places later on — but that was much further down the road.

It wasn't part of the beginning.

My journey... it was more like a stream, Avery.

Winding, weaving.

Flowing around rocks.

Slipping through crevices.

But always... always heading for the great ocean — the True Law I longed for.

(Uncle Ma pauses, taking another sip of tea.

Outside the window, dusk has begun to settle.

Everything is bathed in a warm orange hue.

The room falls into a deeper, peaceful stillness.)

Avery Lin:

So... did your grandfather give you any guidance beyond that? I mean, when he handed you the *Dao De Jing*, did you actually understand it much at the time?

I imagine, for a young man without any spiritual background or life experience, trying to grasp a book like the *Dao De Jing* must've been quite a challenge!

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma nods gently, gazing as if at the invisible book in the air, then turning his eyes back to Avery.)

My grandfather... like I said, he wasn't one to talk much, or give direct instructions.

His way was more... living it. Letting silence be the teacher.

When he handed me that copy of the *Dao De Jing*, he didn't explain a single line, didn't lecture me about its meaning.

He just said, "This is all I have to give you. Keep it well."

And you know, at that moment... his action, his gaze — it spoke more than a thousand words.

It felt like he was entrusting me with something — silently believing that this book would be my companion, my compass for the road ahead.

That, I think, was the greatest guidance he could've given me.

As for understanding the *Dao De Jing*... you're absolutely right.

I was just seventeen or eighteen then — full of revolutionary fire, fresh out of a life-altering crisis, with zero grounding in Buddhism or Taoism.

Trying to read Laozi's words... it was overwhelming.

(Uncle Ma chuckles softly — a hint of self-deprecation in his smile.)

At first? Honestly, it was like water off a duck's back.
I could read the characters, sure, but the deeper meaning?
Totally lost on me.

"Dao ke dao, fei chang Dao; ming ke ming, fei chang ming..."
I read it over and over, and it still felt like fog.
A lot of the time, I just wanted to give up. It was too
obscure. Too hard.

But the book... it had this strange pull.
Even when I didn't understand, I kept reading it.
I read it while resting by the roadside.
Read it under a hazy moonlight when I couldn't find
shelter.
Read it on an empty stomach.

It became a quiet companion.
Something that helped me forget the cold, the loneliness.

Eventually, I stopped trying to "understand" it with
logic.
I just... read.
Let the words sink into me, naturally.

And then... years later, across the long road of hardship,
after meeting so many kinds of people, seeing so many

sides of life...

those teachings from the *Dao De Jing* slowly began to reveal themselves.

Stuff I didn't get before — suddenly, after some experience, some hardship — it would just *click*.

I'd go "Ahh... so that's what it means!"

And it would hit so deep.

Like, when I faced rejection and scorn from others... I'd think of those lines about the humility and softness of water.

When I saw the impermanence of worldly affairs... I'd reflect on the "unnaturalness" of the Dao.

Little by little... the *Dao De Jing* became not just a book I read — but a mirror I used to reflect on life.

It wasn't a roadmap with clear turns and signs.

But it was a lantern — lighting up dark corners in my heart.

Helping me see things with more calm, more depth.

Maybe... maybe it was destiny.

Maybe that book was meant to walk with me — from the very start, when the road was hardest.

(Uncle Ma falls quiet again.
Outside, the rustle of leaves continues softly.
The sky has deepened in color — the day nearing its end.)

Avery Lin:

Listening to you now... I can't help but think of how your cultivation path reminds me a bit of Sun Wukong. You know — how he studied Taoist arts under Patriarch Bodhi and mastered all those transformations, then later followed the Buddhist path with Tang Sanzang to fetch the scriptures and eventually became the "Victorious Fighting Buddha."

I'm sorry if that's a silly comparison — it just struck me, since you were carrying the *Dao De Jing* while also shaving your head and entering the Buddhist path.

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma smiles warmly, clearly amused and touched by Avery's comparison.)

Not silly at all, Avery.

Actually, that's quite an interesting way to put it.

Sun Wukong is a very unique character — and his journey has a lot of hidden layers about cultivation, if you think about it.

You're right — carrying the *Dao De Jing* while becoming a Buddhist monk might seem like two different paths. But now, looking back, I do feel a bit like Wukong. I was given a Taoist classic by my grandfather... but I was led into Buddhism by the vision of that high monk in my dream.

When I chose to become a monk — it was because that image of the Buddhist master had been burned into my mind.

That was what led me to shave my head, to put on the brown robe.

It was a new beginning.

An outward change — a symbol of leaving my old, misguided life behind.

And yet... the *Dao De Jing* remained with me.

It was my grandfather's gift.

My companion.

I didn't feel any contradiction back then.

As I wandered, seeking the Way... I read it, meditated on it.

Every time I faced hardship or came across something puzzling...

those ancient words from Laozi — or lines from Buddhist texts I happened to hear — they'd light up something in me.

They were like little lanterns, showing me the next step.

To me... the sages of old — whether Taoist or Buddhist — they all taught people to be good, to live with kindness, to transcend suffering.

So I thought: whichever path I follow, they'll all lead somewhere good.

(Uncle Ma pauses, his gaze drifting slightly — thoughtful.)

Of course... that was my understanding *back then*.

Many years later, when I had the chance to receive the true Dafa, I came to realize much more deeply what it means to walk a *non-dual path* — the importance of being single-minded in cultivation.

My perspective on all that changed entirely.
But that came later — when the time was right.

At the beginning...

I was just a beggar with a weathered book, chasing a faint light ahead.

And to me, the teachings of the enlightened ones — they all seemed to point in the same direction: toward goodness.

Just like Sun Wukong —
first studying the Tao under Patriarch Bodhi, then

following Tang Sanzang, going through trial after trial,
bound by the golden hoop...
and finally becoming the Victorious Fighting Buddha.

Maybe every stage... was a necessary preparation.
A process of tempering.

(Uncle Ma turns to look at Avery, his eyes filled with encouragement.

He's clearly pleased to see her pondering things deeply

—

a sign of someone sincerely seeking the Way, someone who truly reflects on the spiritual path.)

Avery Lin:

So after that early stage... how did your journey unfold?

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma lets out a long breath, as if bracing himself to recount a chapter filled with hardship. The evening light has fully faded now, and the little house is wrapped in a gentle twilight. He reaches over and turns on a small table lamp. A warm golden glow spreads across the room.)

After all the confusion and early struggles, that's when the real journey began — a true wandering of the four

directions, just like the high monk had instructed. And it wasn't a short trip, Avery. It stretched out over nearly thirty years. Thirty years of wandering. Thirty years of tasting every bitter and sweet flavor life has to offer. Thirty years of facing trials so intense... that sometimes, life and death felt just a breath apart.

My footprints are scattered across countless temples and Taoist sanctuaries — not just the well-known ones, but remote, hidden places too. I traveled from lush lowlands to the desolate plateaus of Tibet. And sometimes, fate carried me beyond China's borders — into Buddhist regions like India, Nepal, even down to Thailand. Whenever I heard whispers of sacred mountains, ancient temples, or reclusive sages... I'd go. Always hoping — just maybe — that I'd find the True Law.

That path... it was a constant struggle for survival. Hunger and cold became daily companions. Sometimes I'd go days without a single meal — begging for scraps to get by. At night, the eaves of temples, under bridges, behind markets, caves, tree roots — they all became "home." I've felt the bone-piercing chill of northern winters... the blistering heat of southern summers... and the endless rain and wind with nowhere to hide.

Sickness didn't spare me either. I had bouts of jungle malaria, dysentery — they ravaged my body. There were times I really thought I wouldn't make it. Lying

unconscious deep in the forest, with only my vow — and the memory of that high monk — keeping me tethered to life.

Then there were the dangers along the road. Being robbed was almost lucky. Once, I was even tricked by someone pretending to be a monk — he stole the very robe off my back. Wild animals on remote mountain trails. Sudden slips that nearly sent me over a cliff. Almost drowning while crossing a river. So many things... too many to count.

(His voice lowers, heavy with the weight of those years.)

Hunger and cold were constant, sure. But the thing that wears you down the most... isn't the physical hardship. It's the rejection. The way people look at you. The suspicion. The scorn. People thinking you're a scammer, or a spy. Those stares... sometimes they hurt more than any beating.

And then... the loneliness. Those long nights... with no one else around. Just you — facing yourself. Your weaknesses. Your doubts. Missing home... missing the people you left behind. There were moments when I asked myself: Am I really on the right path? Was this worth it?

(Uncle Ma pauses for a moment. The silence settles thick between them. Only their breathing fills the room.)

And yet, Avery... it was in that endless hardship that my faith became stronger. And oddly enough... it was in the darkest, most hopeless moments... that I experienced the most miraculous things. Things beyond belief. Things that gave me just enough strength... to keep walking.

Avery Lin:

Yes... a thirty-year journey to seek the Way... That's longer than I've even been alive. It sounds like you went through countless trials — almost like the tribulations in Journey to the West. But in the middle of all that... were there more signs? More moments of insight? Surely a journey like that came with incredible encounters too?

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma nods, his eyes drifting far, as if flipping through the pages of a distant memory.)

Yes, thirty long years. If not for those flashes of hope amidst despair... If not for those moments of clarity, those unexpected encounters... I don't think I could've made it. There were so many trials, I lost count.

I remember one winter — I was deep in the northern mountains. Snow covered everything in white. Temples were shut tight. Not a soul around. I found a small cave and curled up inside, trying to survive the night. I had no food left — hadn't eaten in days. I was freezing. That night, I couldn't sleep. I just sat there, huddled, clutching the Dao De Jing to my chest, trying to keep warm... trying to stay awake. I really thought... I might die there. In that half-conscious daze, I saw the high monk again. He didn't speak — just looked at me. Kindly. Reassuringly. When I woke up, the snow had stopped. Morning light was breaking. Somehow... I had a little strength. Just enough to get up, start walking. A bit down the mountain, I met a hunter. He gave me some dried rations and pointed the way to a small village. That time... I truly escaped death by a hair.

Another time, I had jungle fever in the southern borderlands. I was in a collapsed grass hut — no medicine, no one to care for me. At one point, I gave up. I really thought, "This is it." But in my fever dream... I saw myself walking barefoot on a road covered in thorns. It hurt like hell. But at the end... there was this bright, radiant light. When I came to, there was an old ethnic woman sitting beside me. She'd found me — brought a bowl of herbal tea. I drank it... and my fever broke. She told me she'd seen me lying there for days — thought I wasn't going to make it. Moments like those... They

made me believe there really was a guiding light. That somehow... I wasn't walking this path alone.

As for encounters — yes, there were many. I remember once I went to Mount Song, where the famous Shaolin Temple is. By that time, Shaolin had already changed a lot. It no longer held that sacred, ancient air people speak of in legends. But still... I hoped to meet a true cultivator. I wandered around the area for days. And then I noticed an old monk. He was very plain-looking, always sitting alone under a great old tree on the mountainside — far from the tourist paths. Every day I saw him — just sitting there, quiet, like he was part of nature itself. Eventually, I gathered the courage to approach him. I bowed and asked humbly if I could receive some teaching. He slowly opened his eyes, looked me over, and smiled — a gentle smile. He didn't ask me where I was from or what I wanted to learn. He just said: "If the heart is sincere, even stone will open. But the stones here are worn down — the Law no longer dwells in this place. Head south. There are higher mountains there... whiter clouds." Then he closed his eyes again. Said nothing more.

I stood there for a long while, trying to digest his words. "Stones here are worn... the Law no longer dwells..." It felt like cold water thrown on my hopes. I had come all that way to Shaolin... hoping to find something. But then the next part — "Go south, where the mountains are

higher and the clouds are whiter” — it was like a signpost. A subtle push in a new direction. I didn’t receive any concrete teachings. But I felt a deep compassion in his words. A wisdom that ran far, far beneath the surface. So I bowed. Thanked him. And left quietly. But in my heart, a new resolve had begun to flicker. A new direction — however hazy — was taking shape.

Encounters like that... Even if brief... They were like little lighthouses — helping me find my bearings in a vast sea of confusion. They also showed me that true cultivators... they don’t sit in flashy halls or draw big crowds. They live quietly. Blended into the world. Peaceful. Humble.

(Uncle Ma pauses. He looks out the window. The sun has nearly vanished. Golden light spills over the landscape. And in the stillness, the soft hum of insects begins to rise.)

Avery Lin:

That high monk at Shaolin Temple... he must’ve seen deeply — understood something about your destiny, your path.

These moments of insight... the fated encounters that cultivators like you experience while seeking the Way...

they're always so moving and inspiring — especially for younger cultivators like me.

But it's getting late now. The sun is nearly gone behind the mountains...

I think we should pause here for today. Would it be alright if we continued tomorrow?

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma nods, his warm smile still resting gently on his face.

He glances out the window one more time, watching the last rays of sunset spill in brilliant orange across the mountain peaks in the distance... then turns back to Avery.)

Yes, of course, Avery. You're right — the day's winding down.

And these stories... they're long.

Not something to rush through.

Let's pause for now.

If you have time tomorrow, we can pick up where we left off.

(He stands, stretching just slightly, then looks at Avery with gentle affection.)

I'm glad I could share these old memories with you.
Seeing how attentively you listen — and how deeply you
reflect — it reminds me of myself in those early years.
That same longing... that same sincere heart seeking the
Way.

Alright then — go get some rest.
And be careful on the mountain path at night.

DAY TWO

Avery Lin:

Hello again, Uncle Ma. I'm back...

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma is seated by the tea table, gazing out the window where slanted rays of afternoon sunlight begin to stretch long across the floor.

At the sound of Avery's voice, he turns and smiles gently.)

Hello, Avery. Come, have a seat.
I just brewed a fresh pot of tea.

(He gestures for Avery to sit in the chair across from him, then carefully pours a cup of steaming tea. Wisps of fragrance from the mountain leaves curl into the quiet air.)

So today, we pick up where we left off yesterday.
Thirty years of wandering in search of the Way — that really was a long stretch of life, filled with so many ups and downs, wasn't it?

Like I mentioned yesterday, that journey wasn't just about braving hunger, sickness, and danger.

There were also moments of wonder — things beyond belief.

Encounters that shook me.

Times when I thought I had found it — only to realize...

I was still so far away.

(Uncle Ma sips his tea, his gaze drifting off, clearly returning to the long, colorful road of his past.)

Avery Lin:

Yes, I'm really eager to hear more.

Don't worry too much about the exact timeline, Uncle —

just follow your memories.

Whatever feels most vivid to you, start there.

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma smiles and nods.)

You're right. Thirty years is a long time. Some memories are clear as crystal, others just scattered fragments. But I'll try to recall the ones that truly left a mark — the turning points, the moments that really shaped my path. We may not go strictly in order, but as long as the spirit of the journey stays true, that's what matters most.

(He sets his teacup down and looks at Avery with encouragement.)

If we're talking about extraordinary things that strengthened my faith... One of the most powerful moments for me was when I witnessed a Tibetan lama pass into final stillness. That was probably... more than ten years after I'd left home. At the time, I was wandering through a remote part of the Qinghai-Tibetan plateau. The air there was unlike anywhere else — so clean, so still. And the people... deeply devout. One day, I arrived in a tiny village and heard people whispering: A great lama, a truly revered one, was nearing the end of his life. He was going to give one final teaching before his departure. My heart stirred with hope — and curiosity.

I made my way to where the lama was staying. By the time I arrived, the teaching had already finished. The lama — elderly, with a kind and radiant face — was sitting in meditation on a stone platform. He looked utterly peaceful. Calm beyond words. Around him sat a few disciples and villagers, all in complete silence. The atmosphere was... reverent. I quietly found a spot and sat down, hoping for a blessing, or even just a moment of presence.

Suddenly — the lama, who had been meditating with eyes closed — opened his eyes. They were... luminous. Clear and bright in a way I've never seen. And he looked straight at me. I was startled. I couldn't understand why he would single me out. He didn't speak a word aloud — but I heard it. A voice, gentle and warm, rang clearly in my mind: "The road is still long. Stay steadfast." I froze. Stunned. Before I could even process what had just happened, the lama smiled softly... and closed his eyes again. Returning to meditation.

My heart was pounding. Shaken... and deeply moved. That simple message — so brief — felt like a surge of energy through my spirit. It cleared away all the exhaustion, all the doubts I'd been carrying. And then, maybe five minutes later... Something incredible happened — something I will never forget. His body, still seated in meditation, began to glow. A radiant light, shimmering with five colors, spread out from him. It

grew brighter and brighter... Then slowly — his form began to shrink. Smaller... smaller still... Until only a sphere of rainbow light remained. A glowing orb — brilliant but not blinding. It hovered gently above the platform for a few moments... and then slowly rose into the sky, vanishing into the endless blue.

There was no body left behind. No trace. Everyone around me was stunned into silence. Then, almost in unison, we all dropped to our knees. Heads bowed. I too knelt there — tears streaming down my face. It was the first time in my life I had seen something like that. A true ascension. A departure beyond this world. No more doubts — I knew then: Gods and Buddhas truly exist. There are cultivators who have reached unimaginable realms. And that message — “The road is still long. Stay steadfast.” It struck deep into my heart. That moment became one of the greatest sources of strength for me... In all the years to come — whenever I wavered, whenever I felt too tired to continue — I would remember that rainbow light. And the voice that told me to stay the course.

(Uncle Ma pauses, visibly moved. The tea in his cup has long gone cold.)

Avery Lin:

Wow... that's such a powerful scene. I've read about *tòa húa* on the internet before, but this is the first time I've heard it told by someone who actually witnessed it...

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma nods gently, his eyes still carrying the weight of that memory.)

Yes, Avery. There are some things that, when you only read about them or hear others talk, it's easy to doubt. But once you've seen it with your own eyes — experienced it with your own senses — the belief becomes solid. Unshakable.

During my years wandering the Himalayas, I was also fortunate to witness something else... equally extraordinary. I was passing through a remote mountain region in Nepal — a land of endless peaks, drifting white clouds, and incredibly pure air. Before arriving, I'd heard a few rumors — from fellow pilgrims, from locals — about a mysterious “flying monk.” They said sometimes, in those mountains, people caught glimpses of an old monk — no one knew where he came from — who could float through the air from one mountaintop to another, as effortlessly as a drifting leaf. Some said he was a Bodhisattva in disguise. Others believed he was a master who had cultivated for many lifetimes.

I'd heard so many strange tales along the way that I didn't think too much of it. But then... one late afternoon... I was in a quiet valley, trying to find my way. I happened to glance up toward a high ridge — and there he was. An old monk, slight in build, standing calmly on the edge of a cliff. What struck me was how... weightless he seemed. As if gravity barely applied to him. My heart started racing. Some instinct told me this moment was different.

Then, without warning, he bent his knees — and gently lifted off. He didn't shoot into the sky, nor did he move quickly. He floated — softly, slowly — drifting across the deep chasm between two peaks. His posture was relaxed, dignified. Like he was just strolling... but through midair. His saffron robes fluttered in the wind — like the wings of a great butterfly. I stood frozen, hardly daring to breathe. The whole thing lasted only a few minutes. He touched down on the other ridge... then calmly disappeared into the trees.

It was only once he was gone that I could move again. Inside, I felt a mixture of awe... and gratitude. I knew what I'd seen was real — a true gongneng, a supernatural ability, something that only those who had reached a very high state of cultivation could achieve. All those rumors I'd heard before? They were no longer “stories.”

I didn't try to follow him. Didn't dare disturb him. I knew — this was a gift. A rare blessing. Meant only for me to witness — to strengthen my resolve. He came and went like a legend... leaving no trace behind. Encounters like that... they didn't point me to a specific practice. But they did something just as important. They confirmed for me that what the ancient texts said about divine powers, about transcendence — it wasn't fantasy. It was real. That vision made the goal I was seeking — the True Law — feel real, too. Tangible. No longer some vague ideal. It gave me strength to keep walking... even though the road ahead remained long and steep.

(Uncle Ma lets out a soft sigh, then turns to Avery with a gentle smile.)

These were blessings, Avery. But they were rare. Most of the time... I had to face the bare, raw struggle of the mundane world — and the bitter sting of rejection.

Avery Lin:

Yes... for us cultivators, the idea of someone flying isn't that surprising.

But for those who haven't stepped onto the path yet — even if they witness it with their own eyes, they'll probably still think it's an illusion, or some kind of magic trick...

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma nods, his expression full of understanding.)

You're absolutely right. To the average person... it's almost impossible to believe. They'll think it's a hallucination, or a hoax — or maybe some clever stage trick. Because these things are beyond the framework of modern science. Beyond the physical laws they've been taught. But for someone who has already stepped onto the cultivation path — even if they've only had a tiny glimpse of the spiritual world, a hint of how energy and consciousness truly operate — then such things... they don't seem so far-fetched anymore.

We understand that this universe holds countless mysteries. That there are laws higher than what the human mind can currently grasp. That's why these encounters — even if they didn't hand me a specific method or teaching — were still like torches in the dark. They kept the flame of seeking alive inside me. They reminded me that what I was looking for was real. And worth every sacrifice. Every ounce of patience.

But, like I said, it wasn't always about miracles. Most of my journey to find a teacher... was filled with disappointment. I visited countless temples, countless Taoist sanctuaries. Whenever I heard of a great monk or sage — someone with true virtue — I'd go. Wholeheartedly. Begging to be taken in as a disciple.

Some of them — after hearing my story — would just look at me quietly... then gently say: “Your fate is not with this place, Shi Changxing. Your path is wider, farther than what we can offer you here.” Others would say: “I can sense your sincerity... but I don’t have the virtue to guide someone like you. Your true teacher is still ahead of you. Keep walking. Don’t stop.” And then there were those who, after I bowed and poured out my heart — would remain silent for a long time. Then simply say: “Keep going. When your heart is still enough — when your fate is ripe — you will hear the call. And you’ll know what to do.”

At first... those gentle refusals hurt. I felt lost. Like I was wandering endlessly. Searching for a shelter I couldn’t find. But later... I understood. Those rejections... they were actually full of compassion. And subtle guidance. They didn’t turn me away because I lacked sincerity. But because the time wasn’t right. Or because their paths weren’t the one I was meant to follow. Those quiet, enigmatic words — they only strengthened my belief... That somewhere out there — the True Master, the Great Law the high monk once spoke of — was still waiting. And my task... was to keep going. To keep refining myself — until fate brought us together.

That feeling — of disappointment and faint hope intertwining — it followed me for years. It was one of my greatest tests. To remain steadfast. To not give up.

Because without an unshakable will — without that deep faith in my original vow — I would've abandoned this path long ago.

(Uncle Ma pauses, pouring more tea into both cups. His gaze is distant, fixed on the wisps of steam curling from the surface — as if seeing again the faces, the roads, the long search that filled those thirty years.)

Avery Lin:

In those moments when you were turned away... do you still remember any of them in more detail?

Did you ever ask for another chance — like, even if they couldn't accept you as a disciple, did you ever say, "Could I at least stay for a while, listen to your teachings, and help around the temple?"

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma nods slowly, as if the memories are returning with vivid clarity — as if they happened just yesterday.)

Yes, of course. Those rejections... they left deep marks. Because each one came after a spark of hope — followed by disappointment. And you're right — I didn't always

walk away immediately. With such a strong yearning to learn the Way, I often tried to plead.

I remember one time... I had traveled to a famous mountain in Hunan Province. Rumors said there was a hermit Taoist there — a master with great cultivation. After days of searching, I finally found him in a tiny thatched hut, hidden deep in a bamboo forest. He was already over seventy, but his presence was powerful. Eyes like stars. I bowed deeply and told him everything — my journey, my intentions. I begged to become his disciple. He simply stared at me — for a long, long time. His eyes... seemed to look straight through me.

Finally, he said slowly: “I can see your heart. But the bond between us as master and disciple... it’s not there. The path you’re meant to walk is not here.” My heart sank. But I wasn’t ready to give up. I begged: “If I’m not fated to be your disciple, please, Master... let me stay for a while. I’ll do chores, serve quietly — I only ask to listen, to hear a few of your teachings each day. I don’t ask for more than that.” The Taoist master remained calm. He shook his head and said: “I have little to teach you. What you need to learn... you must discover for yourself, through your own journey, through your own realization. If you stay here, you might only slow yourself down.” Then he added, with a deeper tone: “Water must flow to be clear. Fire must burn to shine. Keep going. Don’t fear the hardship.”

I knew then... I couldn't press him further. As disappointed as I was... I could still feel the compassion in his words. He didn't want me to settle. He knew I had to keep walking. That my path had been set another way. So I bowed in gratitude... and left, with a heavy heart... and one more question in my chest: "Then where is my true destination?"

Another time — I went to a famous temple on Mount Emei, in Sichuan. It's one of the Four Sacred Buddhist Mountains in China — a place of beauty and legend. I met the abbot — a noble monk, strict in discipline, with an air of great virtue. Again, I begged to be accepted, to stay and cultivate. He listened patiently. Then said: "I see potential in you. A sincere heart. But this temple, with its rituals and sutras — this is not where you'll find what you're truly looking for. The Dharma you seek... is not in these scriptures. Not in the morning bells or evening chants."

I offered to do manual work — anything — just to be close to the Triple Gem, to absorb even a little Dharma. But he waved his hand and said: "Your path is like the wind — you must travel far, see the vast sky and sea. Staying here would be like a bird in a cage — well fed, well cared for... but unable to soar. Your karma must be resolved through real-life trials — not through peaceful chanting in seclusion." Then he added: "Your true master... he holds a Law of incredible power — one that

can truly liberate you. Keep seeking. When the time comes, you'll find him."

Those rejections... they never gave me a specific answer. But they felt almost prophetic. Like veiled encouragements. They didn't crush my hope. They made me believe even more — that maybe this long journey... was preparing me for something greater. So when the true master, the Great Law, finally came... I would be ready. Worthy. Grateful.

Each time I was turned away, I reminded myself — it's just another test. Just one more step.

(Uncle Ma pauses, gently rubbing his forehead.
Though these memories speak of disappointment...
they now carry a deeper understanding —
the quiet clarity of someone who has seen the meaning in
what once seemed like failure.)

Avery Lin:

So... in all those long years of seeking...
did you ever meet anyone who was like you?
Someone also searching — also walking the path?

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma nods, a faint smile forming — the kind that comes from shared experience.)

Oh yes, Avery. Many, in fact. The road was mostly lonely — but there were moments of grace, when I met fellow travelers... People with the same longing. The same quiet ache to find the Way. They came from everywhere — all walks of life. Some were scholars who had abandoned their books. Some were humble farmers. Some were former officials who had given up everything.

Each had their own style. Some buried themselves in scriptures, trying to extract truth from the words. Others focused on strict meditation, training their bodies and minds. And some — like me — just wandered from temple to temple, hoping... hoping to meet a true teacher.

I remember once — while in Sichuan, making my way toward Tibet — I met a man whose face was weathered... but whose eyes were clear as crystal. He was practicing a form of extreme devotion. He would walk three steps — then drop to the ground, forehead pressed to the earth, prostrating himself completely. Then rise — walk three more steps — and do it again. Step. Bow. Step. Bow. He had come all the way from Hubei Province like that. Through towns and mountains. For weeks.

One midday, we both stopped to rest beneath a tree. We talked. His voice was calm. His conviction — unshakable. He believed that only by pouring out his entire being, by enduring such hardship, could he cleanse his karma — could he move the hearts of the divine — and be accepted as a disciple in a Tibetan monastery. I was deeply moved. At that time, I myself felt lost — unsure of my next step. Seeing his sincerity... I thought, Maybe I should try it too. Maybe that's the way to show devotion. To burn away karma.

So I tried. For one stretch of road — step... bow... step... bow... But oh, it was brutal. After just a short distance, my entire body ached. I was exhausted. And I realized — his willpower was on a whole different level.

Eventually, after much hardship, we both arrived at a great monastery in Tibet. He — with his discipline and devotion — was accepted. He wept with joy. And I... I bowed and made my request to stay and learn. The lama looked at me for a long time. Then said, slowly: **"Your heart is sincere — but your karma is still heavy. Your path is not here. You must keep walking — keep experiencing. Only then will your true teacher appear."**

His words hit me hard. I had tried so much. I had suffered too. So why wasn't I accepted? Watching my friend stay behind... while I kept drifting... It was a pain hard to describe. But then I remembered — what the

high monk had said in my dream. That this journey would be long. Full of trials. Meant to cleanse me. To test me. So even though I was sad — the rejection only deepened my belief: Maybe my fate was different. Maybe I wasn't supposed to stop yet. Not until I was ready. Truly ready.

(Uncle Ma pauses again, letting the feeling settle.) Encounters like that... even if brief — they were powerful. They reminded me: I wasn't alone. That many others were also walking, also seeking. We shared what little knowledge we had. Sometimes... we just sat in silence, looking to the horizon — each of us hoping, in our own way, to find the answer waiting beyond the mountains.

Of course, such bonds never lasted long. Everyone had their own path. Their own destiny. We'd meet for a while — then part ways. Like little boats drifting together on a vast sea — then carried off in different currents. But I never forgot them. Their faces. Their hearts. Their longing for the Way. They live on in me — even now.

Avery Lin:

I've heard about that "three steps, one bow" practice too. I even saw a video of someone doing it on YouTube once. I haven't witnessed it in person... but even through a screen, I could feel their sincerity.

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma nods, his gaze distant again.)

Yes, that's right. Nowadays, with the internet, you young people can see videos and images of such practitioners. But back in my time, there was almost no information. To witness that level of devotion with your own eyes — to see that kind of willpower — it leaves a deep impact. It makes you realize just how far sincere faith and reverence can push a person — beyond the limits you thought were possible.

(He pauses for a moment, then continues with a slightly lower tone, as if opening a more reflective part of the story.) Those chance encounters I told you about — those moments of meeting fellow seekers — they were like small bursts of light. Moments of strength. Energy refueling a long journey. But most of the time... as I've said — it was solitude. Just me. Fighting through hardship. And most importantly — learning. Contemplating. By myself.

I never had a fixed teacher to follow in any formal way. My learning came from many places. My grandfather's *Dao De Jing* was always with me. That book was my closest companion. Every time I went through a crisis... or witnessed something that shook me... I would open it again. And somehow, a passage I had read before — suddenly revealed a deeper meaning.

Then there were the occasional teachings I overheard from monks and Taoists I met along the road. Each had their own practice, their own interpretation. But sometimes... just one line from them — could open a door in my mind. I remembered everything. I pondered it all on my own. And tried to connect the dots myself.

Even among ordinary folks — farmers, laborers, craftsmen — sometimes in their stories... I found wisdom. Lessons in patience. In compassion. Truth doesn't always come dressed in profound words. Often, it hides in simplicity. In the rawness of real life.

And nature too, Avery. The mountains. The rivers. The forests. Even a single blade of grass, a wildflower by the roadside — they all became silent teachers. Watching how the earth breathes, how things are born, grow, fade, then return — I began to sense the rhythm of impermanence. The harmony of the cosmos.

But perhaps... the greatest teacher of all was suffering itself. Hunger. Cold. Illness. Loneliness. They shaped my will. They polished the rough edges of my heart. They made me confront my attachments — my fears — my desires. And slowly... helped me let go. Every hardship I overcame... left me lighter. Clearer.

(Uncle Ma looks at Avery, his eyes full of quiet sincerity.) This path of self-learning, self-realization... it's difficult. There's no one to guide you step by step. But maybe... maybe that was the arrangement all along. Because when you stumble through the dark on your own... when you fall, get back up, and figure things out through direct experience — what you learn becomes part of you. Not borrowed knowledge. But something earned. Something real.

Avery Lin:

Yes... I can feel that, just from hearing your stories. But for young people like us, most of what we learn still comes from books. We haven't really experienced anything that deep yet...

So during those years of searching for the Way — besides Buddhist and Taoist traditions, did you ever come across other practices?

Like those “unusual disciplines” that Master talks about in *Zhuan Falun*?

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma smiles faintly — a subtle smile, layered with meaning.)

You’re asking about “unorthodox cultivation ways”? Yes... in those thirty years of wandering, I didn’t just visit orthodox temples and Taoist sanctuaries. With such burning desire to find the True Law, I explored many paths. Many teachings. Some of them... strange. Mysterious. Little-known by the world.

(His voice drops a little, his eyes taking on a more cautious light.) There was a time... I almost lost my way. It was a painful lesson — one that taught me how dangerous spiritual practice can be without true guidance — without a proper understanding of what is righteous and what is not.

It happened around twenty years into my journey. By then, I had seen and heard many strange things. Someone told me about a “master” living in a remote southern mountain — a man said to have great power, who could unlock supernatural abilities quickly. They said he could help people “open up” to other realms, gain special powers.

I was eager. Impatient. Hoping for a shortcut. So I went. This “master” was indeed charismatic — well-spoken, used lofty language full of cosmic terms and mystery. He spoke of the universe, of energy, of realms beyond human comprehension.

At first, when I practiced his breathing techniques and strange movements, I felt something. Tingling. Sensations in my body. I thought, maybe this is it. Maybe I had found the real thing. But as time went on... I noticed something off. His words — though sophisticated — lacked compassion. Lacked righteousness. He focused on gaining power. On control. On receiving benefits. He never spoke of kindness, or letting go of ego, or cultivating one’s heart. His demands grew strange. Even exploitative.

Eventually, one day while meditating under his system, trying to “unlock” what he described... I was suddenly surrounded by horrifying visions. Not radiant deities. Not heavenly light. But blackness. A cold, oppressive atmosphere. And in that darkness — twisted, grotesque beings. From low realms. Demons, spirits — fighting, screaming, fierce and terrifying.

I was paralyzed with fear. My whole body shook. A dread filled my chest. I forced myself out of the state — heart pounding, soaked in sweat. And I realized... I had gone down the wrong road. That path — though it

appeared mystical — was steeped in darkness. It wasn't Righteous Law. It was dangerous.

If I had stayed... I might have lost myself. Or become possessed by those lowly forces. The very next morning, I left. No farewells. Just gone. Frightened. Ashamed. Ashamed of my foolishness. Of my lack of discernment.

After that... I became far more careful. I realized — cultivation is no game. You can't just be impressed by fancy words, or exotic techniques. You must feel with your heart. Compare everything to the core principles of kindness, compassion, and virtue. If a practice violates those — no matter how “impressive” it looks — it can't be righteous.

That misstep — as painful as it was — became a treasured lesson. It sharpened my discernment. It made me alert. Grounded. And it only deepened my longing — to find a true Master, to find a genuine Great Law.

(Uncle Ma exhales slowly, as if letting go of an old weight —
one that has long since become wisdom.)

Avery Lin:

Listening to your story, I suddenly recall a saying in

Buddhism: *“Rare is it to be born human, rare to be born in the Central Land, and rarer still to hear the True Law...”*

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma nodded gently, his face contemplative, deeply resonating with the words.)

Yes, Avery. *“To obtain a human body is hard; to be born in the Central Land is harder; to hear the True Law is hardest of all; and to meet a true Master is even more rare.”* The Buddha’s words are absolutely true. Every single one of those things is incredibly precious and difficult to attain.

This human life we have—it may seem easy, but according to the scriptures, to be reborn as a human being, with all the faculties needed to learn and cultivate, requires the convergence of immeasurable karma and destiny.

And then, to be born in the “Central Land”—the place where divine culture was passed down, where saints and sages descended to leave behind scriptures and cultivation paths—is an even greater blessing.

But to not only obtain a human body and be born into a land with spiritual culture, but to actually *hear* the True Law, to *encounter* a genuine Master—now that is beyond rare. It’s like searching for a needle in the bottom of the sea.

That experience I had, nearly being led astray by an evil path, was a searing lesson in what it means to say “to hear the True Law is hardest of all.” On the surface, these deviant teachings may cloak themselves in noble words, lofty-sounding principles. They may even offer some superficial sensations to lure people in. Without clear discernment, without a sincere heart seeking the Way, it’s all too easy to be seduced and led down the wrong road without even knowing it.

Over the thirty years I spent seeking, I encountered countless people calling themselves “masters,” “spiritual guides.” Some truly had some skill, some insight—but their methods were either not aligned with the True Law, or were simply not suited to my nature or destiny. Others were outright frauds, exploiting people’s faith for their own gain. To discern truth from falsehood, righteousness from evil—it’s no small feat, especially for a lone seeker like myself without anyone to guide me.

And that’s precisely why, later on, when I was fortunate enough to encounter the True Great Law, I cherished it with all my heart. It was not something easily gained. It was the fruit of a long journey, forged in sweat, tears, even blood. It was the infinite compassion of Heaven that did not abandon a sinner who truly wished to turn back.

That brush with a false path, dangerous as it was, became like a kind of spiritual vaccine—it sharpened my defenses, made me more discerning. It strengthened my longing for the True Law, and made my resolve even more unshakable. Even if I stumbled, even if I grew weary, the fire in my heart to seek never went out.

(Uncle Ma looked at Avery, his eyes steady with the weight of lived experience and unshakable faith.)

So when young people like yourself have the fortune to encounter the True Law, to be guided by a true Master—cherish it. It's an immense blessing, one that not everyone receives. Don't let temporary hardships or worldly temptations shake your will. The path of true cultivation may not be paved with roses, but it is the only road that leads us home.

Avery Lin:

Hearing your story makes me reflect on my own journey. I obtained the Great Law so easily—without trials, without tribulations. Maybe it was just destiny and a bit of inborn insight that let me gain it so effortlessly...

When I imagine wandering alone, seeking the Law across mountains and lands—I honestly can't see myself

doing it. So much hardship, so many trials... and all of it done in solitude.

During all those years, did you ever encounter solitary cultivators deep in the mountains?

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma smiled gently, understanding Avery's reflection.)

There's truth in what you're saying. Every person walks a different path, with different destinies. Some must endure countless hardships to find the Way; others obtain it with ease when the time is ripe.

What matters isn't whether one's path is hard or easy—but whether, after gaining the Law, one truly treasures it, truly applies oneself to cultivation. Perhaps your destiny was sown over many lifetimes, so that in this life, things unfolded smoothly for you.

As for solitary cultivators in deep mountains—yes, Avery, during my thirty years wandering, I did encounter them. Sometimes directly, sometimes through stories, and sometimes by sensing their presence.

(Uncle Ma nodded slightly, his gaze drifting toward the distance as if recalling a long-lost scene.)

I remember once, trekking through a treacherous mountain region in southwest China—remote, wild, untouched by travelers. Locals whispered of reclusive cultivators deep in the forest—beings with profound skills who rarely showed themselves. Moved by curiosity and hope, I ventured in alone.

After days navigating rivers and thick forests, I found a large cave hidden behind thick vines. The air inside was cool and damp, yet eerily still. As my eyes adjusted, I saw something that made my heart stop.

In the center of the cave, on a flat stone slab, sat a man in deep meditation. I couldn't tell how long he had been there. His robes were tattered and coated in dust, as if untouched by time. His hair and beard were long and silver, making him seem ancient—perhaps in his seventies. But his skin was smooth and glowing, like that of a man in his thirties. Strangest of all—he didn't seem to breathe. His chest didn't rise or fall. No air passed through his nose. He looked more like a statue—or a mummified monk.

I stood there, heart pounding, stunned and unsure. I didn't dare move closer—just observed from afar. One day passed. Then two. Then three. He remained absolutely still—no sound, no movement. I began to wonder: Was he alive? Or had he passed away while

meditating? What kind of cultivation could bring someone to such a profound state?

On the fourth day, curiosity overwhelmed me. I thought to myself—maybe I should check for a pulse. But just as that thought formed in my mind, before I could take a step, a deep, steady voice rang clearly inside my head:

“Do not disturb me.”

I froze in place, stunned. His mouth hadn’t moved. His eyes remained closed. Yet the voice had echoed clearly within my mind, as if spoken soul-to-soul. A surge of awe and guilt rushed through me—I had let my thoughts disturb his meditation.

I immediately pressed my palms together and bowed several times, silently apologizing. Then I quietly turned and left, never once looking back.

As I descended the mountain, my heart was filled with wonder. There are indeed beings in this world whose cultivation surpasses anything we can imagine. There are Laws and paths that reach depths beyond words. That experience convinced me further—this path I was on, though filled with hardship, was not in vain. Somewhere out there, true cultivators and the True Law awaited me. I just hadn’t reached the right timing, or the right level.

(Uncle Ma paused, then continued.)

Besides those rare encounters, there were also times I saw signs of other recluses—tiny thatched huts nestled along mountainsides. Nothing inside but a straw mat and a few simple tools. The owner often absent—perhaps deep in the forest, or in long meditation. Yet the austerity of those huts spoke volumes—the quiet resolve of someone committed to inner transformation.

Such cultivators choose a very different path. They don't seek recognition. They don't need to be known. They simply face themselves, nature, and the tests of the heart—in absolute silence.

That road demands unshakable resolve, deep endurance, and a powerful faith in their method.

I've come to believe: everyone walks their own way. Some cultivate amid the bustle of worldly life, some in remote solitude. No path is easy. What matters is whether the cultivator's heart truly longs for liberation.

Seeing such people only deepened my respect for the vastness of the cultivation world—and made me even more grateful for the day I finally encountered the True Law.

A path that allows people to achieve true perfection, even while still living in the secular world.

(Uncle Ma paused and took a sip of tea. His tale of solitary cultivators opened up a different realm—a

hidden world that seemed to float quietly amid the mountains surrounding that little cottage.)

Avery Lin:

Perhaps those reclusive practitioners were cultivating through some form of “*grain abstention*” or a solitary esoteric method...

But returning to your path—though you were never formally accepted by a *true master*—surely, through scriptures and real-life experience, you must have come to realize many meaningful insights.

And regarding the *Dao De Jing* your grandfather gave you—the one you always kept by your side—did your understanding of it deepen over the years?

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma nodded slowly, his eyes lighting up with reverence at the mention of the *Dao De Jing*.)

Yes, just as you said. Though I was never formally accepted by a true master or given step-by-step instruction, those thirty years—filled with hardship, rare encounters, and brushes with error—became my great teachers. And the scriptures that walked with me, especially the *Dao De Jing*, became my closest companions.

That book wasn't just an heirloom—it truly became a lifelong friend, a lantern illuminating my long road ahead. In the beginning, as I mentioned, I read it like a duck listening to thunder—clueless. But over time, through trials and tribulations, every time I opened it again, the words seemed to come alive. New meanings would emerge—layer upon layer—each time I read.

(Uncle Ma paused, as if tracing his memories through the haze of time.)

I remember once, while traveling through the Kunlun Mountains. I'd been wandering for nearly two years along perilous ridgelines, and hadn't encountered anything noteworthy.

One day, exhausted beyond measure, I came upon a tiny, weathered Daoist temple perched precariously near the summit. I asked to rest there and, completely drained, I fell into a deep, dreamless sleep for more than a full day. But during that slumber, I had a dream that changed everything. I saw myself standing amidst vast clouds—soft and billowy—and then Laozi appeared. His beard and hair were long and white, and he stood with a bamboo staff, calm and serene.

He looked at me kindly and said in a gentle, resonant voice that carved itself into my mind:

“Good. But if you want to truly understand my book,

you must first place yourself in the context of 2,500 years ago—understand the original meanings of the words as they were used then.”

Then, like mist, he slowly faded away.

When I awoke, the sun was already high. But the words from the dream lingered vividly.

That was when I realized: all this time, I had been reading the *Dao De Jing* through the lens of modern language, interpreting it as someone from today would. But language changes. Over millennia, words shift, meanings distort. If I didn't grasp the **original meanings**, how could I ever understand what Laozi truly meant to convey?

That dream—I now see it as a profound moment of *enlightenment*. From then on, whenever I read the *Dao De Jing*, I didn't just read passively. I started to actively research classical annotations, delve into historical and cultural contexts from the Spring and Autumn period, and try to understand how ancient people used those words in their time and place.

That shift became a turning point in my relationship with the text. Gradually, I felt like I was tapping into the living current that flows beneath its words. Passages that once seemed cryptic or abstract now became clearer—almost luminous.

Take the opening verse, for example:

“Dao ke dao, fei chang dao; Ming ke ming, fei chang ming.” (道可道，非常道。名可名，非常名。)

At first—like many modern readers—I misunderstood “fei chang” (非常) to mean “extraordinary,” “magnificent,” or “sublime.” That led to interpretations like: “The Dao that can be spoken is the great Dao; the name that can be named is a remarkable name.”

It sounds lofty, even poetic—but it completely misses the point.

Once I studied the etymology, I realized that “fei” (非) simply means “not,” and “chang” (常) means “constant” or “eternal.”

So “*fei chang dao*” means: **“not the Eternal Dao.”**

In other words: *The Dao that can be expressed in words is not the true, unchanging Dao.* The very act of trying to “dao” it—verbalize it—limits it. It becomes a concept, a philosophy. But the **Chang Dao**—the Eternal Dao—is beyond description, beyond form, beyond capture by language.

Likewise, “*Ming ke ming, fei chang ming*” means: *The name that can be named is not the eternal name.* Names are just conventions, labels. The true nature of things transcends names.

That realization helped me loosen my attachments to names, appearances, and ornate interpretations.

I began to see that truth isn't found in how many sutras you memorize or how many grand phrases you recite—but in whether you can actually feel the Dao in each breath, in every ripple of life around you.

It also made me more cautious when listening to teachings—less quick to be dazzled by “magnificent” interpretations that veer too far from original intent.

Take the line, “*The highest good is like water*”—**Shang shan ruo shui**.

Water nourishes all things but never contends. It settles in low places that people avoid.

That taught me about humility, endurance, and silent giving—doing good without seeking credit. During the years I was scorned and rejected by society, these words helped me maintain equanimity, without bitterness or resentment.

So, piece by piece, each chapter and line of the *Dao De Jing*, illuminated through my lived experiences, unlocked deeper meanings for me. It became more than a book—it became a mirror, a teacher, a guide I could consult again and again.

(Uncle Ma gazed out the window, where the evening light had begun to fade. His face carried the peace of someone who had found wisdom in hardship.)

Avery Lin:

Oh! Hearing your explanation of “*Dao ke dao, fei chang dao; ming ke ming, fei chang ming,*” I finally understand what Laozi meant... And now I feel I can also grasp the next line:

“*Wu ming, tian di zhi shi; you ming, wan wu zhi mu.*”

Ma Changsheng:

Exactly, Avery.

Once you truly understand what “*fei chang Dao*” and “*fei chang Ming*” mean in the first line, the next one becomes much clearer:

“*Wu ming, tian di zhi shi; you ming, wan wu zhi mu.*”

When the *Chang Dao*—the Eternal Dao—had not yet been named, not yet limited by “*ming*” (names), that was the state of “*wu ming*” (namelessness). That was the origin of Heaven and Earth—*tian di zhi shi*.

At that point, all things were still undivided, undefined—without form, without name. It was pure essence. Primordial.

Then, as human perception emerged—distinctions arose, names were given: this mountain, that river, this tree, that animal... That was when “*you ming*” (having names) appeared.

And “*you ming*” became the “mother of ten thousand things” (*wan wu zhi mu*).

Because only through naming, through distinguishing,

could things take shape in the human mind. Diversity emerged. Everything we see—its shape, form, and meaning—came alive through this act of naming.

Understanding this made me marvel at the brilliance of Laozi's language.

"Wu" (non-being) and "You" (being) are not opposing forces—they are two aspects of the same reality.

From the nameless Dao arises the world of names.

"Wu" is essence. "You" is function.

It also helped me realize the importance of keeping the mind "void of desires"—*wu yu*.

Only when our minds are not clouded by attachments, by imposed meanings, by the "names" we've given things—only then can we *observe the mystery* (*guan qi miao*).

But when the mind is full of cravings, judgments, and distinctions, we only *observe the manifestations* (*guan qi jiao*)—the surface, the shell.

(Uncle Ma pauses briefly, then continues with a more reflective tone.)

These realizations from the *Dao De Jing* didn't just deepen my understanding of philosophy—they changed how I viewed life, and how I faced suffering along the path.

I learned to let go of the "names" the world gave me—

beggar, failure, superstitious fool...

Instead, I tried to look deeper—at the essence of things—not just their outward form.

And you know, Avery, this understanding of *wu ming* and *you ming*—later on, when I encountered Buddhist texts, I found surprising similarities to the concepts of *emptiness* (*śūnyatā*) and *non-self* (*anattā*).

Though the language is different, the aim is the same: to transcend all dualities, all conceptual forms—to glimpse a higher, unconditioned reality.

That realization made me believe even more deeply:
Truth may be one, even if it wears many robes.

(Uncle Ma smiles gently—the kind of smile that comes from seeing the hidden connections among great streams of thought.)

Avery Lin:

Hearing your insights makes me understand how important it is to stand in the author's time and context... only then can we uncover the original meaning and touch the deeper truths hidden in those words.

But history spins forward—words that seem unchanged on the surface may have meanings that have shifted 180 degrees.

That must make reading ancient texts incredibly difficult...

Did you find that to be true in your own experience?
Were there many words you discovered had lost their original meaning?

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma nodded, a contemplative look settling over his face.)

You're absolutely right.

That's one of the greatest challenges we modern readers face when trying to understand the ancient scriptures—the teachings of sages long past.

As time flows, cultures shift, societies evolve—and the meanings of words shift with them.

Some meanings become distorted. Some are lost entirely.

The characters on the page may look the same...

But the spirit, the essence within those words—has often changed.

If we aren't careful—if we don't research and reflect deeply on the original context—we risk misunderstanding the ancients, even misrepresenting their message entirely.

My experience with the *Dao De Jing* is a perfect example.
Had it not been for that moment of clarity in my dream, I

might have remained stuck in modern interpretations—trendy, polished, but divorced from what Laozi actually meant.

And it's not just the *Dao De Jing*, Avery.

As I delved into Buddhist scriptures, and also the Confucian classics, I saw this same pattern again and again.

There are terms we use today with negative or shallow meanings—yet in ancient times, those same words carried profound, even sacred significance.

(Uncle Ma pauses, eyes lighting up as if recalling something.)

Ah—take the word “*jianghu*” (江湖), for instance.

Today, when people hear *jianghu*, they think of gangsters, outlaws, shady dealings—a dark and chaotic world.

But if we look back to older texts, we find something far more elegant.

I once discovered an origin story that few people today seem to remember.

Long ago, in the regions of Jiangsu and Hubei, there were two highly respected Daoist teachers—renowned for their cultivation and virtue.

People from across the land, seekers of wisdom, would journey great distances hoping to learn from them.

Over time, those who walked this path were referred to as “people of *jianghu*” —pilgrims heading toward *Jiang* and *Hu* to pursue the Dao.

So originally, *jianghu* referred to a fellowship of seekers—those united by a longing for truth.

There’s another layer of meaning, too—rooted in nature. *Jiang* means river. *Hu* means lake.

Together, *jianghu* conjured the vast, open lands beyond the reach of officialdom—beyond rules and rituals.

It symbolized freedom.

A place for people of spirit, unshackled by power or wealth, to live in harmony with the natural order.

In *Zhuangzi*, there’s a beautiful passage about two fish.

When their stream dries up, they stay alive by moistening each other with their own spit—desperately clinging to life.

But Zhuangzi laments this, saying:

“Wouldn’t it be better to forget each other entirely—lost in the great rivers and lakes?” (*bu ru xiang wang yu jianghu*)

Here, *jianghu* becomes a symbol of total freedom—of returning to one’s natural self—without dependence, without struggle.

So back then, *jianghu* meant something noble:

A realm for those on the Way, for sages wandering the

land, for heroes living by justice.

It was where seekers lived out their ideals.

And yet, over time, all of that was forgotten.

Once people lost touch with the spirit of *dao-seeking*, with that yearning for freedom and integrity—the term *jianghu* took on a new, darker form.

Today, it's often synonymous with lawlessness, danger, corruption.

That's just one example, Avery, but it shows how deeply language can shift.

There are many other terms in the ancient texts that have suffered similar distortions.

If we fail to trace their original meanings—if we don't "seek the root"—we risk misunderstanding, even misrepresenting the wisdom of the ancients.

This doesn't just hinder our learning.

Sometimes it leads to false beliefs, even misguided actions—both in life and in spiritual practice.

That's why serious study, thoughtful comparison, and consultation of older commentaries are so important.

Only by sifting carefully—by "clarifying the muddy and drawing from the pure"—can we rediscover the true resonance of these sacred teachings.

(Uncle Ma lets out a gentle sigh—not of fatigue, but of deep reflection on how language drifts over time, and how difficult it is to return to the wellspring of original meaning.)

Avery Lin:

Oh! Now I finally understand the original meaning of the word “*jianghu*”—it’s much more beautiful than I thought.

I realize now that without understanding the historical context, not only would ancient scriptures be lost on us, but even literary classics like *Journey to the West* would be like “playing music to a cow”—it’d be nearly impossible to grasp the deeper intentions of the author, wouldn’t it, Uncle?

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma nodded, his eyes reflecting deep agreement.)

You’re absolutely right.

This isn’t just true for spiritual texts—it’s also the case with classical literature, ancient poetry, fables, and timeless novels.

If we don’t understand the historical and cultural setting in which they were written—if we can’t decipher the “cultural code,” the metaphors hidden in every line,

every image—we end up just scratching the surface.
We see the shell but miss the soul.

The great works of the ancients weren't written merely for entertainment.

They often contain layered meanings—life lessons, moral teachings, and sometimes even hints of divine mysteries. But to “decode” those meanings, the reader needs a certain level of familiarity with traditional culture, history, and the classical references the author drew upon.

(Uncle Ma pauses briefly, preparing to give an example.)

Take *Journey to the West*, for instance—a story nearly everyone knows and loves.

On the surface, it's an epic adventure about a monk and his three disciples journeying to India to retrieve sacred scriptures, facing 81 trials along the way.

But if we stop there, we're only seeing the tip of the iceberg.

Do you remember the part where Sun Wukong is trapped under the Five Elements Mountain?

To a casual reader, that might just seem like a punishment for a mischievous monkey who wreaked havoc in Heaven.

But when we reflect more deeply, we realize it's a profound allegory.

The Five Elements—metal, wood, water, fire, and earth—are the foundational materials that make up everything in the Three Realms, including the human body and all sentient beings.

So, Sun Wukong being trapped under the *Wuxing Shan* isn't just about a rock.

It symbolizes how all beings in the Three Realms are bound and suppressed by these material laws—by the very structure of the world.

We are imprisoned by the Five Elements, subjected to the cycle of birth, aging, sickness, and death, endlessly spinning in the wheel of reincarnation.

Sun Wukong, with his unmatched powers—his 72 transformations, his somersault cloud that spans thousands of miles—represents the soul's yearning for freedom and transcendence.

But no matter how powerful, as long as he remains within the Three Realms, as long as he's bound by the laws of matter, he still "can't escape the Buddha's palm." Meaning: no one can truly break free from the cosmic order without the guidance of True Law, without genuine spiritual cultivation that transforms one's very essence and allows one to transcend.

Those 500 years under the mountain symbolize countless lifetimes of suffering and wandering—enduring hardship within the bounds of this world, gradually

shedding karma and dark tendencies, until one is ready for salvation and the true path of cultivation.

Then there's the dynamic between the four pilgrims. Each has a distinct personality, a unique role, but together they form a complete whole, overcoming challenges as a team.

Tang Sanzang may be naive and easily deceived, but he possesses unwavering devotion and compassion—that's the root of cultivation.

Sun Wukong is powerful but impulsive—he needs the golden circlet (symbolizing discipline and the Law) to rein him in.

Zhu Bajie is lazy and gluttonous, full of base desires—he represents our inner cravings and selfishness.

Sha Wujing is diligent and humble, always carrying the burden—he symbolizes perseverance and endurance.

In truth, the four travelers are symbolic aspects of one person's inner world.

Their pilgrimage is our spiritual journey—our quest to purify the mind and elevate the heart.

Every trial they face is not random, but a test—a mirror revealing their weaknesses, so they may grow and ascend.

Without understanding these layers, *Journey to the West* becomes just a fantastical tale of magic and demons, and we miss the timeless teachings on cultivation and the

nature of existence that Wu Cheng'en carefully wove into it.

(Uncle Ma spoke with passion, as if reliving the story himself, eyes glowing with the excitement of someone rediscovering hidden wisdom.)

Avery Lin:

Wow!.. Hearing you explain *Journey to the West* like that gave me a whole new layer of understanding.

When I was a kid, I loved watching the TV adaptation, fascinated by the magical battles and transformations—but I never grasped the profound messages that Wu Cheng'en intended...

Oh—but look! I didn't even realize how late it's gotten... I'm so sorry, Uncle. I didn't mean to keep you this long and disturb your evening rest.

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma smiled warmly and glanced out the window. Indeed, night had fully fallen, with only faint streaks of twilight left in the western sky. The quiet hum of mountain insects had begun.)

No need to apologize, Avery.

When a conversation flows with such resonance, time passes quickly.

And sharing these reflections with someone who listens so intently—it brings me joy.

Seeing the spark of realization in your eyes... That, to me, is a reward.

(Uncle Ma stood and stretched gently.)

Yes, the night is here.

These stories, these realizations—there are many more. They can't all be told in one sitting.

Today, we've covered quite a bit: from the journey's trials and cryptic refusals, to the danger of straying into false paths, and even the hidden meanings within ancient texts.

Perhaps we should pause here, give ourselves time to rest and reflect.

Tomorrow, if you still wish to hear, I'll share the final chapters of my thirty-year search—and how I finally encountered the true Great Law I had been seeking all along.

(Uncle Ma looked at Avery with warmth and encouragement.)

Take your time to contemplate what we've discussed today.

Young people like you have access to a flood of information—but what matters is knowing how to sift through it, to find the essence beneath the surface. Sometimes, the oldest things contain the most timeless wisdom.

Now, go on—best not to linger too long.
Even familiar mountain paths deserve caution in the dark.

(Uncle Ma walked Avery to the doorstep.
The crisp mountain air flowed in, laced with the scent of wild grass and the stillness of night.)

Avery Lin:

Yes, thank you, Uncle.

I truly enjoyed our conversation...

I'll see you again tomorrow!

DAY THREE

Avery Lin:

Hello, Uncle Ma. I'm back to continue listening to your stories...

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma looked up from the book he had been reading and gently set it down on the table. That familiar warm smile lit up his face as he saw Avery.)

Hello, Avery. Please, have a seat. I was looking forward to your visit.

Today, we'll talk about a phase in my life that was perhaps the most meaningful—a true turning point after thirty long years of searching.

(He poured tea. The scent of afternoon tea leaves once again filled the small room, blending with the soft golden sunlight streaming through the window. The atmosphere remained quiet and cozy, just like the previous visits.)

Avery Lin:

Yes, yesterday you shared with me some of the extraordinary encounters and lessons from your thirty-year journey in search of the Way...

Would you start today by telling me how you eventually came to obtain the Fa?

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma nodded, setting his teacup gently on the table. That same gentle smile returned, and a bright, joyful light appeared in his eyes.)

After so many years of wandering—so many hopes followed by disappointment, so many times thinking I had found it only to see it slip away—around the year 1996, when I was nearly fifty, it seemed that fate was finally ready to open a door.

At that time, I was resting temporarily at a small, secluded temple in the Inner Mongolia region. My health had already deteriorated from years of exposure to the elements. One afternoon, while helping sweep the temple courtyard, I had the chance to converse with the elderly abbot. He, too, was advanced in years, but his eyes remained sharp—radiating compassion and wisdom.

I honestly shared with him my thirty-year journey in search of the Way—my hardships, my doubts, and even the times I almost strayed down the wrong path.

The old abbot listened in silence, occasionally nodding.

When I finished, he looked at me for a long time—his gaze seemed to pierce straight into my soul.

Then he slowly said something—his voice wasn't loud, but it echoed in my heart like a bell:

“Child... Changxing, your desire to seek the Way is admirable. Your perseverance has become complete.

It may be that your destined moment has come.

Go south—go to the city of Beijing.

There, you will obtain the Fa.”

When I heard him say that, my heart pounded.

“Obtain the Fa... in Beijing?”

Over the past thirty years, I had heard countless suggestions, countless refusals.

I had hoped and despaired more times than I could count.

But this time—for some reason—even though a trace of doubt remained, I felt a powerful intuition rise within me.

The abbot's words, his eyes—there was a weight, a certainty to them that I had never felt before.

(Uncle Ma paused, took a sip of tea, and gazed off into the distance, as though reliving that fateful moment.)

I stayed at the temple for a few more days, and the abbot's words kept echoing in my mind.

Beijing... a massive metropolis, the nation's capital—could that really be the place where the True Fa awaited me?

How could a wandering seeker like me possibly find anything in that vast sea of people?

But that intuition... that glimmer of hope, long dormant in my heart, suddenly reignited.

I thought, I've already spent thirty years walking this path, suffering so many trials—if there's even the faintest chance, I must pursue it.

If I don't go, I'll regret it for the rest of my life.

So I made the decision to depart.

I bid farewell to the elderly abbot, carrying in my heart what felt like one final hope—and also a surrender to fate.

The journey from Inner Mongolia to Beijing wasn't

without difficulty, but strangely, I felt a new strength in me.

My steps felt lighter, my spirit somehow renewed.

When I arrived in Beijing, it was grand and crowded—so different from the remote mountain regions I was used to.

I managed to find temporary lodging at a small temple on the outskirts—a quiet and modest place.

After settling in for a day or two, besides helping with chores, I kept my ears and eyes open—silently watching and listening, hoping to find a clue about the “Fa” the abbot had spoken of.

There was a quiet restlessness in me, a silent anticipation...

Until, one early morning, as the first light of dawn broke through the sky—

(Uncle Ma’s voice grew slightly choked, his eyes shimmering with emotion as he recalled this pivotal moment.)

Avery Lin:

Yes, from what I’ve learned, by 1996 Falun Dafa had already spread widely in major cities.

Did you face any difficulties when you first encountered

Dafa?

Did you recognize it immediately when it was introduced to you?

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma nodded gently, a faint smile forming on his lips—the kind of smile one wears before recounting something wondrous.)

Just as you said, I later found out that by 1996, Dafa had already been widely spread in Beijing and many other large cities.

But for me at that time—a man who had just come down from the remote mountains of Inner Mongolia, temporarily staying at a small temple in the suburbs—those things were completely foreign.

I had no idea that there was a cultivation practice that so many people were already learning.

Fate led me to it in the most natural way, Avery.

There wasn't any active searching from me once I arrived in Beijing—just that vague hope still burning quietly within.

As I mentioned earlier, after staying at the temple for a day or two, one early morning before the dew had even lifted, I was awakened not by the temple's usual bell, but by a strange and beautiful sound.

It was exercise music—gentle, serene, harmonious—but

it carried with it an incredibly powerful energy of compassion.

That music seemed to possess a magical pull—it seeped into every corner of my heart and soul, washing away all weariness and sorrow.

It echoed from the front courtyard of the temple.

Curious, I quietly stepped outside to look.

What I saw left me stunned.

Under the soft light of dawn, about thirty people— young and old, men and women—were practicing a set of elegant, graceful movements.

Their motions were fluid, peaceful, and somehow solemn—ancient.

Each face radiated a profound calm and serenity.

As I watched them practice, a strange feeling stirred inside me.

There was something deeply familiar about it all—like I had seen it before, perhaps in a distant dream, or maybe in a memory from a previous life that I couldn't quite grasp.

It wasn't like any martial art or qigong I had encountered in the past thirty years.

There was something truly unique about it—something incredibly pure.

I just stood there, silently observing, afraid to disturb them.

I was both curious and filled with a strange, inexplicable yearning.

Then, as the group began the fifth exercise—the seated meditation—something truly extraordinary happened.

I felt as though some invisible force was gently pulling me forward.

Without a second thought, without hesitation, I stepped forward and quietly took a seat at the back of the group.

I crossed my legs into the double-lotus position, imitating their posture.

At that moment, I had no idea what practice they were doing.

No one had invited me or guided me.

It was simply an irresistible impulse from deep within.

And then... the miracle happened.

Within just thirty minutes of meditating in that tranquil, pure state, accompanied by that compassionate music—
my **celestial eye suddenly opened!**

(Uncle Ma's voice trembled. His eyes glistened with tears as he recalled that sacred moment.

He paused briefly to let the emotions settle.)

It's an experience I will never forget for the rest of my life, Avery.

It wasn't like the dreams or vague intuitions I'd had

before.

This time, everything appeared vividly—clearly—like reality itself...

Avery Lin:

Wow... Opening your celestial eye during your very first time practicing—

that's incredibly rare.

What did you see through the celestial eye that shook you so deeply?

But even if it wasn't much—after thirty years of seeking—even just a glimpse must have been soul-stirring!

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma nodded, his eyes still carrying the awe of that moment.

He gently rubbed his brow, as if to see the past more clearly.)

Yes, that's right, Avery. Later, after I officially began practicing, I learned that to have one's celestial eye open so strongly the very first time — that was truly rare, a special arrangement by Master. Perhaps those thirty years of enduring hardships and maintaining a sincere heart to seek the Way were part of the reason such a great blessing was bestowed.

When my celestial eye suddenly opened, the first thing I saw wasn't the space around me anymore — but like a slow-motion film... memories of my own life, not this life — but lives from long, long ago.

(Uncle Ma's voice lowered, filled with deep emotion.) I clearly saw myself in a past life as a mid-ranking military officer of Shu Han during the Three Kingdoms period. I was completely loyal to General Guan Yu. I saw myself fighting alongside him — life and death on the battlefield. Then came the tragic Battle of Maicheng. As Guan Yu was defeated, I was one of the last soldiers standing by his side... and I died with him. That sense of heroic loyalty and fierce sacrifice — I could still feel it vividly, as if it had happened just yesterday.

Then another scene appeared. I saw myself as a Chancellor during the late Tang Dynasty — an upright, virtuous official, filled with ambition to reform the nation and save it from decline. I served for nearly a decade, offering many petitions and policies, but the emperor was deluded, favoring corrupt ministers and ignoring my advice. Disheartened by the situation, helpless to stop the empire's fall, I eventually resigned and retired to a mountain retreat, seeking peace for my soul. The sorrow of a loyal minister who failed to turn the tide, that lingering anguish — it too was painfully real.

There were other glimpses as well, though less clear. But just those two were enough to make me realize — the human soul doesn't begin and end with this one life. We've lived countless lives, played countless roles, endured joys and sorrows again and again in this endless cycle of reincarnation.

And then — suddenly — the scene changed. Before me was no longer the past, but other realms, brilliant and majestic beyond imagination. I saw palaces made of divine materials not found in this world, glowing with radiant light. I saw gods, Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, Arhats — noble, dignified, infinitely compassionate — their bodies emanating glorious halos. The scene surpassed all human imagination. No words could describe its beauty and sacredness.

(Avery Lin remained silent, eyes wide, no hint of doubt. She could feel the truth in every word Uncle Ma spoke. A deep reverence for the sacred, a rising desire to cultivate diligently welled up within her. Perhaps a gentle nod, a look of understanding and encouragement — that was all she could offer at that moment, not wanting to interrupt the flow of his memories.)

And that's not all, Avery. As I sat in awe of those divine realms, something else happened. My gaze drifted toward the group of people still meditating... and I suddenly saw threads of destiny connecting them —

invisible lines tying their fates together. I saw a female practitioner sitting in the front row — someone I would later learn was very dedicated to guiding newcomers. I suddenly saw a scene from a previous life — that woman had been my wife in a past incarnation. And the man sitting beside her — her current husband — in a past life during the Tang Dynasty, he had been a military officer... and my political rival, the one who had made life extremely difficult for me.

(Uncle Ma paused, his voice tinged with both sorrow and understanding.) I've never told those people about this. I'm only sharing it with you to show the miraculous nature of karmic ties — and to illustrate the compassion of Dafa, which dissolves old grievances from past lives, bringing those once entangled by karmic debts back together — so they can cultivate side by side in the same Fa.

All of those scenes — my past lives, those divine realms, those karmic ties with fellow practitioners — they all unfolded in just a brief span of time... yet they completely overturned my view of reality. When the music ended and everyone came out of meditation, I remained seated, stunned — unable to return to myself. A middle-aged woman — that same practitioner I had just seen in a past life — smiled and came over kindly to greet me. She handed me a small booklet — no fancy cover, just plain pages stapled together. She said it was

the book that guided their practice. If I was interested, I could take it and read it.

I took it with trembling hands. At that moment, I didn't even know what the book was called. But later, when I began reading those first lines... then turned page after page — an even greater shock than the opening of my celestial eye shook me to my core. Every sentence, every word — it struck directly into my soul. It answered all the questions and longings I had carried with me through thirty years of searching. It spoke of the universe, of life, of the meaning of being human, of the righteous path of cultivation, of Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance... Everything I had ever longed for — it was all there, in that book.

I knew instantly — this was the True Great Law. This was the Master that the old monk in my dream had foretold. This was the goal I had been searching for all those thirty years. I could no longer hold back. Tears streamed down my face. Not tears of sorrow or despair — but tears of joy, of unspeakable gratitude for finally finding my true home.

I cried for the blessing... for the great Master who had compassionately brought this Dafa to the world, to save sentient beings. I cried for the divine arrangement that had guided me — even in the twilight of my life — to find the Fa.

(Uncle Ma lifted a hand and gently wiped the tears still glistening on his cheeks.

His voice was choked with emotion,
but his face radiated a boundless happiness—
a peace that only someone who had truly arrived could ever know.)

Avery Lin:

Yes... after thirty years of drifting across the land, to finally obtain Dafa, to have the celestial eye opened and witness such scenes—both majestic and divine—and even see karmic connections... it must have been deeply soul-stirring.

I once read a story of a similar experience:

A female practitioner came to practice with a group at a public park for the first time.

She joined them during the fifth exercise, the sitting meditation, just like you did, and her celestial eye opened.

She saw heavenly scenes—realms where she was once a high divine being.

She felt as if she had finally found her *true home*, after countless lifetimes drifting through reincarnation.

She was so moved that tears flowed down her face.
Other practitioners nearby saw her crying and thought she was just in pain from sitting in double-lotus for the first time, so they gently consoled her, saying:
“If your legs hurt too much, you can release them—it’s okay, take your time...”

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma smiled softly, a smile that radiated deep empathy and understanding.
Tears of joy still shimmered faintly in the corners of his eyes.)

You’re absolutely right.
That kind of inner tremor isn’t just surprise at witnessing something miraculous—
it’s the culmination of a lifetime of seeking.
It’s a moment of complete affirmation that the path you’ve walked for so many years was not in vain.
That the spiritual world is real.
That there exists a Law so grand, so profound, it transcends human cognition.

The story you just shared—I relate to it deeply.
Yes, Avery...
When the celestial eye opens and one sees scenes far beyond anything in this world—
when one catches even a glimpse of their origin or karmic destiny—

the emotion is overwhelming.
Tears flow not from physical pain, but from joy...
from infinite gratitude to Master,
to Dafa, for illuminating the truth.

(Uncle Ma chuckled softly at the innocent
misunderstanding in Avery's story.)

It's perfectly understandable that other practitioners
thought she was crying from leg pain.
For those who haven't had similar experiences, it's
difficult to imagine the inner realm —
the realities one can perceive when the celestial eye is
open.
They can only interpret it through ordinary worldly logic.

Back then, when I couldn't stop the tears of happiness,
that female practitioner —
the one I saw in my past life as my wife —
she looked a bit puzzled.
She kindly asked if I was alright, perhaps thinking I was
just overwhelmed by something new...
or dealing with some internal struggle.

I didn't quite know how to explain everything I had just
seen.
All I could do was stammer a heartfelt "thank you" —
thank you for giving me that precious book.

That book, which I later learned was called *Zhuan Falun*, truly turned my entire life around—my fate, my outlook, my very being.

From a wandering beggar weighed down with sorrow and unanswered questions, I felt as though I had been **reborn**.

The three years that followed, from 1996 until mid-1999, were the most beautiful and peaceful years of my entire life.

I immersed myself in the Fa, dedicated myself to Fa study, practiced the exercises every day.

My entire worldview was transformed.

I came to understand the true meaning of life—that we're not here to compete or indulge in worldly pleasures, but to cultivate, to return to our original true selves.

The principles of **Truthfulness–Compassion–Forbearance** were like divine nectar, cleansing my soul.

I measured myself against the Fa, gradually working to rectify my thoughts and actions—letting go of the deep attachments that had taken root over decades.

My health also improved in miraculous ways.

Chronic conditions from years of hardship and poor nutrition faded away quietly.

My temperament softened.
I became more patient, more forgiving.

(Uncle Ma gazed out the window, eyes distant, lost in those precious memories.)

The cultivation atmosphere in Beijing back then—
it was so vibrant, so pure, Avery.

Every morning and evening,
parks, plazas, and other public places all across the city
were filled with people doing the exercises.

The gentle, compassionate practice music echoed
everywhere.

People of all walks of life—government officials,
intellectuals, factory workers, the elderly, the young—
everyone practiced together in a spirit of kindness and
sincerity.

There was no need for supervision;
everyone was self-motivated,
everyone cherished the rare opportunity to cultivate in
Dafa.

Seeing those scenes moved me deeply and strengthened
my faith even more.

Those were truly golden years—
a time of rare and precious peace before the great storm
began to gather.

(Uncle Ma's tone fell noticeably as he spoke these last words.

A flicker of worry clouded his expression.)

Avery Lin:

I've read accounts about that era too...

At its peak, it's said that nearly 100 million people were practicing throughout China—

public parks, temple courtyards, community squares, all packed with practitioners.

I've never witnessed anything so grand.

Even here in the U.S., it's rare to find a practice site with more than 30 people...

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma nodded, eyes gleaming with bittersweet nostalgia.)

You're absolutely right, Avery. That figure — 100 million — might sound enormous, but based on what I saw with my own eyes in Beijing, it wasn't an exaggeration. It reflected a genuine reality — an unprecedented wave of moral self-improvement and health cultivation.

Like you said, even in America today, with its freedom of belief, it's rare to find a practice site with thirty people. But in Beijing back then, sites with several hundred, even

a thousand practitioners, were completely normal. I remember large parks like the Temple of Heaven, or Purple Bamboo Park — every morning, before the sun was fully up, waves of people would arrive from all directions. They would unroll small mats, set down cassette players with exercise music, then quietly form rows and begin practicing the five sets of exercises. No chatter, no pushing — just serene music and flowing, beautiful movements. Thousands of people practicing together in a field of pure, compassionate energy... standing amidst them, you felt your soul being cleansed. All your worries would melt away.

And it wasn't just in parks. Even small courtyards in residential blocks, wide sidewalks, or the temple courtyard where I was staying — you could find people peacefully doing the exercises everywhere. It had become an integral part of daily life for so many in Beijing — and in China as a whole.

But this wasn't some organized campaign. No one was mobilizing crowds or issuing orders. It was completely voluntary — spreading naturally because of the real, tangible benefits people were experiencing. They saw their health improve. Their illnesses disappeared. Their tempers softened. Families became more harmonious. Good word spread quickly — one person introduced another, and the number of practitioners grew and grew.

It was an extraordinary phenomenon — a manifestation of moral and spiritual elevation in society. People weren't drawn to Falun Dafa for politics, or for any material gain. They came simply because they wanted to be better people — healthier people — living by the principles of Truthfulness–Compassion–Forbearance.

(Uncle Ma paused. A somber note crept into his voice.) But perhaps it was exactly that — the rapid and righteous growth, the pure hearts and immense spiritual strength — that frightened those filled with jealousy and darkness. Those in the Chinese Communist Party who couldn't tolerate something they couldn't control... something they couldn't buy off with power or profit.

In those peaceful years of cultivation, my celestial eye — which had opened with great force — gradually dimmed around early 1999, right before the persecution began. At first, I was puzzled. But then I realized — it was Master's arrangement. He didn't want me relying on abilities. He wanted me to focus on improving my heart, to face the coming trials with righteous thoughts — with firm faith in the Fa.

And indeed, that peace did not last. At that time, we all believed in the goodness of Falun Gong, and trusted the government would uphold justice. No one could have imagined the terrifying storm that was about to sweep in

— a brutal campaign that would plunge the country into a long, dark night.

(Uncle Ma's voice fell to a hush.

The atmosphere in the room grew heavy with unspoken foreboding.)

Avery Lin:

Those years must be a treasured memory—truly a golden era for practitioners like you...

At that time, I was only four or five years old, too young to understand anything, and then my family emigrated to the U.S. right before the persecution began in 1999.

As for the celestial eye, based on my understanding, when someone's celestial eye opens, it can be both a blessing and a potential danger. The benefit is that it strengthens one's faith in cultivation; the downside is that one might easily fall into "illusory scenes," or what's known as "creating demons from one's own mind," and end up straying from the righteous path...

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma nodded, his gaze softening with empathy upon learning that Avery had left China so young and

had been fortunate enough to avoid the darkest years of persecution.)

Then it seems you too had a special karmic arrangement—Master arranged for you to leave before the storm hit. That is a great blessing.

And what you said about the celestial eye makes a lot of sense. Your insight into the benefits and drawbacks of its opening is quite profound. You're absolutely right, Avery.

The benefit, as you said, is that it can greatly strengthen one's faith.

In my case, having the celestial eye open during my very first encounter with Dafa—seeing past lives, other dimensions—it was like a powerful confirmation that what Dafa teaches is real, is extraordinary. It dispelled any remaining doubts I had after thirty years of searching. It allowed me to enter the path of cultivation without hesitation.

It also helped me understand more deeply about reincarnation, predestined relationships, the existence of divine beings—things I had previously only vaguely sensed through scriptures or spiritual encounters.

But the danger is not small either, especially if one doesn't maintain a strong heart or doesn't have the guidance of righteous Fa.

Like you mentioned, it's easy to fall into "illusory visions"

or create illusions born of one's own attachments.

When the celestial eye opens, one may see strange phenomena, hear unusual sounds. If the mind is not steady, it's very easy to be misled—thinking you've cultivated high, that you have this or that supernatural ability. That can give rise to a desire to show off, pride, or worse—be manipulated by low-level beings or evil entities that feed you false messages, leading you astray from true cultivation.

I've heard of cases like that—people with a bit of supernatural ability from their opened celestial eye, but who didn't know how to guard themselves. In the end, they were misled by the very things they saw, even going on to do things not aligned with the Fa.

So when Master arranged for my celestial eye to gradually close right before the persecution began, I realized it was actually a profound form of protection.

Because in those harsh, chaotic circumstances, if my celestial eye were still open, I could've been shaken by fake visions conjured by demons, or feel fearful upon seeing the suffering of fellow practitioners. I might have lost my resolve.

With the celestial eye closed, I had no choice but to turn inward—focusing completely on studying the Fa and improving my character, measuring myself against the standard of Truthfulness–Compassion–Forbearance.

Every judgment, every action had to be based on the Fa—not based on what I saw or heard. That helped me stay clearheaded and steadfast through the life-and-death trials that followed.

Our cultivation path in Dafa is fundamentally about genuinely improving the heart and mind—aligning with the cosmic characteristic of Zhen-Shan-Ren—

not about chasing after abilities or mystical experiences. Supernatural abilities are merely byproducts of cultivation. They naturally appear when one's xinxing reaches a certain level.

But if one clings to them or seeks them deliberately, that becomes a detour—or worse, a trap.

Master has spoken very clearly about this in *Zhuan Falun*. A true cultivator should “gain naturally without pursuit.” As long as we firmly cultivate the heart according to the Fa, whatever is appropriate will manifest naturally. And whatever is not beneficial for our cultivation, Master will help us avoid.

(Uncle Ma spoke with wisdom and deep gratitude for Master's arrangement. He looked at Avery with encouragement in his eyes.)

Your understanding of this shows that you've truly internalized the Fa. That's something very precious.

Avery Lin:

During those golden years, did you have any memorable cultivation experiences with fellow practitioners—before the "storm" struck in 1999?

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma smiled warmly, his expression softening at the memory of those beautiful days with fellow practitioners.)

Oh yes, Avery.

Though those years were short, they were full of unforgettable moments and meaningful cultivation experiences shared with fellow practitioners.

It was an incredibly pure environment—where everyone progressed diligently and helped each other wholeheartedly, without personal motives.

What I remember most were the group Fa study sessions. After morning or evening exercises, we would often gather in small groups—sometimes right in the parks, other times at a practitioner's home—to read *Zhuan Falun* together and share our understandings.

The atmosphere was both solemn and open.

Everyone, regardless of age or social status, sincerely shared their insights from the Fa, challenges they faced

in improving xinxing, or positive changes in their lives after practicing.

There were elderly practitioners who weren't very literate, but their words were so sincere and grounded, they touched everyone's hearts.

There were also scholarly practitioners who shared profound understandings from perspectives of science or philosophy, broadening everyone's perception.

I learned a great deal from those sharings—not only deepening my understanding of the Fa, but also seeing my own shortcomings reflected in the mirrors of others.

And then there were the times we went out to clarify the Fa.

Everyone who had personally experienced the benefits of Dafa naturally wanted to share it—with family, friends, or those with predestined connections.

We would bring flyers, small introductory booklets, and go to public places or even remote villages to introduce Falun Gong to others.

There was never any pressure—just a sincere wish to help others benefit from the Fa as we had.

I remember one time, we went to a poor rural village outside Beijing.

At first, the villagers were hesitant, even wary.

But after we patiently explained how cultivation had improved our health and character,

after showing them a few gentle movements from the exercises,
they gradually opened up.
Seeing their simple smiles, the spark of hope in their eyes
when encountering the Fa—
it warmed my heart immensely.

Of course, sometimes we faced misunderstanding or even resistance.
But the practitioners always responded with kindness and patience—
explaining, resolving tensions.
And through those moments, our own xinxing was tempered and elevated.

Another memory I'll never forget is the selfless care and support among fellow cultivators.
When someone faced hardship in life or encountered difficulty in cultivation,
others would readily offer help—
comforting, encouraging, assisting without any thought of gain.
That bond between practitioners was so pure and genuine—unlike any social relationship outside.
We saw each other as family—walking the same path, with the same goal:
to cultivate and return to our true selves.

I still remember the female practitioner I mentioned earlier—the one I saw as my wife in a past life. She was so patient in guiding me during those early days. She never hesitated to take time, carefully showing me the movements, explaining the deeper meaning behind the Fa. Other practitioners, upon learning that I had no relatives nearby, often checked in on me, offered supplies or small necessities. Those seemingly small gestures carried immense warmth.

(Uncle Ma sighed gently, a touch of wistfulness in his eyes.)

Those years truly were an ideal cultivation environment—a pure land amidst the mundane world. Everyone lived by Truthfulness–Compassion–Forbearance. There was no competition, no jealousy—only kindness and mutual encouragement. That field of righteous energy helped many improve rapidly, both in mind and body.

It's a pity that such goodness didn't last.

“The tree wants peace, but the wind won't stop blowing.”

Those dark forces simply couldn't tolerate something so pure and upright flourishing like that.

(The room grew quiet.

Both Uncle Ma and Avery felt a quiet sorrow settle in, as they contemplated the storm that would soon follow those golden years.)

Avery Lin:

Yes... What happened afterward was truly like "the tree desires stillness, but the wind won't stop."

I still can't comprehend how the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party at the time couldn't see the goodness of Dafa—how they let their paranoid jealousy explode like a volcanic eruption of evil!

Uncle, as someone who personally lived through that era, could you share some events that you either witnessed or experienced yourself—something that illustrates the miraculous nature of Dafa?

For instance, someone walking away unharmed from a car accident, or a terminally ill patient being sent home with no hope, only to recover fully after sincerely practicing Dafa?

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma gently nodded, a trace of sorrow appearing on his face as he recalled the senseless brutality of the persecution. Then he took a deep breath, as if steadying himself before recounting the miracles.)

You're absolutely right. The madness of those in power at the time defies common logic.

Perhaps it was the very goodness, the purity, and the immense spiritual strength of Dafa that made their dark, jealous hearts feel threatened.

They couldn't tolerate something that was beyond their control, beyond the materialistic values they worshiped.

But putting aside those painful events, during the years of cultivation before the persecution, I did indeed witness and experience many occurrences that clearly showed the miraculous nature of Dafa.

These weren't rumors—they were real people, real events.

(Uncle Ma paused for a moment, organizing his memories.)

I remember an elderly woman, nearly seventy, who practiced at the same exercise site as I did.

She suffered from a severe heart condition. She'd gone to countless hospitals, but every doctor said there was nothing more they could do. She could only survive day

by day on medication, and her family had already prepared for the worst.

Then someone introduced her to Dafa.

At first, she was so weak she had to be helped to the site. She couldn't do the exercises, just sat and listened to the exercise music, trying to softly recite along when we read the Fa.

But something miraculous happened. After about a month of this, her complexion began to look better. She could walk on her own and started doing the gentle movements of the first exercise.

After three months, she went for a check-up, and the doctors were stunned. Her supposedly incurable heart condition had improved dramatically.

She no longer needed medication. She was healthy, moving around quickly, and even participated in truth-clarification activities with us.

Her children, who had been skeptical, exclaimed that it was truly a miracle.

Or take the story of a young man who drove long-distance trucks.

He said that one night, while driving, he dozed off from exhaustion.

His heavy truck veered off the road, down a steep slope, and rolled over several times.

When he woke up, he was trapped inside a crushed cabin.

Strangely, his body was unscathed—just a little dazed. People who witnessed the crash thought for sure he wouldn't survive.

But when they pulled him out, completely unharmed, everyone was amazed.

He said that in that brief moment, as the truck plunged, he could only think of Master and Dafa.

He firmly believed that it was Master who had protected him through that deadly ordeal.

Later, when the vehicle was inspected, the cabin was practically destroyed. No one could believe the driver walked away without a scratch.

As for myself, as I've mentioned before—after decades of wandering, my health was completely worn down.

I had many illnesses caused by poor nutrition and harsh climates.

But once I began practicing Dafa, within a short time, those ailments disappeared.

My body felt lighter, my mind clearer—like I had shed an old skin.

Previously, I'd ache all over whenever the weather changed. Now, it no longer happens.

This wasn't due to medicine. It was purely the result of cultivating my heart and practicing the five exercises.

There are many, many such stories, Avery.

They are living testimonies of the extraordinary nature of Dafa.

Dafa is not merely a qigong practice for physical health—it is a genuine path of cultivation that purifies the body, elevates the mind, and provides divine protection in moments of danger.

That is why more and more people chose to believe and step onto this path.

(Uncle Ma spoke with unwavering faith, his eyes bright with reverence as he spoke of the wonders Dafa had brought.)

Avery Lin:

I suppose the miraculous nature of Dafa can only truly be appreciated by those who experience it firsthand.

For outsiders, no matter how much they hear, they often remain half-believing—or think it's made up...

As for me, although I've been cultivating for over ten years, I've never encountered anything as dramatic as what you described.

I've simply relied on enlightenment and faith to persist in cultivation...

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma nodded, his eyes gentle as he looked at Avery, filled with understanding and encouragement.)

You're absolutely right.

"Hearing a hundred times is not as good as seeing once; seeing a hundred times is not as good as experiencing once."

The miraculous power of Dafa—those extraordinary moments—it's something only those who've lived through it can truly understand.

For others, even if they hear countless stories, unless their minds are open, unless they can overcome the rigid notions of empirical science, it's hard for them to believe. Some might even think it's superstition or fabrication.

But the fact that you've cultivated Dafa for over ten years, despite not witnessing any supernatural events, and instead relying on your enlightenment and unwavering faith—

that is even more precious, Avery.

It shows you have a deep foundation and a strong karmic bond with the Fa.

You know, Master has taught that each person's cultivation path is different.

The arrangements for each individual are not the same.

Not everyone needs to experience overt miracles or life-and-death tribulations to achieve consummation.

Some only need to quietly study the Fa, reflect on their thoughts and behavior, practice the exercises consistently, and they too will elevate and transform from within.

The kind of faith you hold—one that does not depend on external manifestations or supernatural displays, but instead stems from a righteous understanding of the Fa principles and recognition of Master's greatness—that is the most solid kind of faith.

It's not easily shaken by hardship, temptation, or criticism from others.

As for me, although I've witnessed many miraculous things,

I understand those were only to strengthen my initial faith—to help me through the most difficult stages.

The root of cultivation is still to genuinely cultivate the heart,

to measure oneself against Zhen-Shan-Ren in every thought and action.

If one only focuses on miracles and neglects inner cultivation, there's no way to truly improve.

So just keep walking your path steadily, Avery.

Each of us validates the Fa in our own way.

Some through miraculous health recoveries, some by enduring hardship with steadfastness, some through spiritual elevation and deeper understanding of the Fa.

All of these are manifestations of Dafa's greatness and sacred power.

What truly matters is whether we can maintain our original heart—

whether we truly cherish the Fa, and genuinely wish to cultivate and return.

If we have that heart, Master will always be by our side, guiding and protecting us every step of the way.

(Uncle Ma spoke with heartfelt sincerity.

His gaze toward Avery was full of confidence and joy, seeing that the younger generation held a correct understanding and unwavering faith in Dafa.)

Avery Lin:

Thank you, Uncle...

It's getting late, so perhaps we should pause here for today.

I'm truly grateful for everything you've shared—about your predestined encounter with Dafa and the cultivation atmosphere in China during those years from 1996 to 1999...

Tomorrow, I'd like to discuss the terrifying scenes that unfolded when the "storm" arrived. As a living witness, would you be willing to share what you personally saw and heard?

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma looked out the window. Indeed, the sunset had begun to cast its golden-orange hue over the treetops. He nodded slowly, a trace of concern flickering in his eyes as he contemplated the memories he would revisit tomorrow.)

Yes, of course, Avery. You're right—it's already late in the day.

The memories of those peaceful years of cultivation, as beautiful as they are, were also a kind of preparation for the greater trials that were to come.

Today, we've walked through the thirty-year journey of my search,

and especially the fortunate destiny of encountering Dafa, experiencing the pure cultivation environment, and the profound transformations the Fa brought into my life.

I'm truly happy to have shared all this with you.

(Uncle paused briefly, his tone growing solemn.)

Tomorrow, we will speak of a different chapter—one filled with challenges and suffering—when that “storm” struck.

As someone who was in the very eye of the storm, I will do my best to recount what I personally saw and experienced,

so that you—and perhaps future readers—may better understand the evil of the persecution, and also the unwavering faith and compassion of true Dafa disciples amid the great tribulation.

They won't be joyful stories, but they are an inseparable part of Dafa's history, and a significant chapter in my own cultivation journey.

Now, go get some rest. I'll see you again tomorrow afternoon.

(Uncle Ma walked Avery to the door, his heart slightly heavy as he prepared to reopen painful memories. But he understood—speaking the truth is also a way to expose evil and affirm what is righteous. And that, too, is something that must be done.)

DAY FOUR

Avery Lin:

Hello again, Uncle Ma...

Yesterday, I had the chance to hear your recollections from 1996 to 1999—that is, from the moment you encountered Dafa until just before the persecution began...

Today, would you continue sharing about the atmosphere right before the “storm,” and your journey afterward? Would that be alright?

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma smiled gently, his eyes still holding that calm, profound gaze. He nodded softly.)

Hello, Avery Lin. Please, have a seat. I was just waiting for you.

Yes, yesterday we talked about a truly special time, those years when the light of Dafa illuminated countless hearts and gave them a path forward.

(Uncle let out a gentle sigh. A glimmer of nostalgia passed through his eyes—not of sorrow, but of deep appreciation for the past.)

You want to hear about the time before the “storm” and what followed... Very well.

That was a period when even heaven and earth seemed to shift, and people were tested in profound ways.

To help you understand, before the gale struck, the atmosphere in China toward those of us cultivating Dafa... you know, it used to be very different.

(Uncle paused for a moment, as if gathering the vivid memories.)

Before 1999—especially from around 1994 or 1995 onward—Falun Dafa was widely spread.

From cities to countryside, from intellectuals to working-

class people, you could see people practicing everywhere. Practice sites sprang up in public parks, gardens, schoolyards...

Every morning and evening, the music for the exercises would echo gently as people moved slowly, gracefully, and peacefully.

It had become a beautiful part of daily life for many.

What I found most precious was the change from within. People learned to live by the principles of *Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance*.

They began thinking of others first.

Conflicts within families and in society began to dissolve naturally.

Health improved significantly—many people who had been deemed incurable regained their vitality.

There were no campaigns, no pressure—everything was voluntary, born of real experience and the benefits Dafa brought into their lives.

Even local authorities at the time had a generally positive view.

They saw citizens becoming healthier, society becoming more stable, healthcare burdens decreasing...

There were commendations, articles of praise in the media.

Everything seemed to be moving in a very wholesome, positive direction.

(Uncle Ma slowly shook his head, a shadow of concern briefly crossing his face.)

But then... dark clouds began to gather.

At first, they were just faint wisps, but they gradually amassed—foreshadowing the coming storm.

Would you like to hear about those early signs, before we talk about the “storm” itself and what happened afterward?

Avery Lin:

Yes, could you tell me how you and those around you felt at the time?

Ma Changsheng:

Yes, speaking of our mindset and emotions back then... there were many layers to it, Avery Lin.

When the first signs appeared—like some local newspapers publishing distorted, slanderous content about Falun Gong—many of us were initially surprised, even disbelieving.

Because we knew exactly what we were practicing.

We knew Falun Gong taught people to be kind, to be better human beings, and it brought peace and health to

society.

Many of us thought it must be a misunderstanding by a few reporters, or that someone who didn't understand had written things that weren't true.

Most practitioners at that time were still very open-minded and good-natured.

We believed in the goodness of people.

We believed that if we were sincere and kind, the misunderstandings would naturally be resolved.

So, when those articles appeared, the natural reaction for many was to visit the newspaper offices or write letters to relevant departments, explaining the truth—what Falun Gong was, the benefits it brought.

It was all done peacefully, with one single hope: that people would understand the truth.

Many of us, including myself, continued to practice daily in the parks, to study the Fa together.

Our faith in Master and in Dafa was unwavering.

We believed that *Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance* are universal values—they couldn't possibly be wrong.

At times, we even thought, perhaps this is just a test—to see whether we, as cultivators, could remain steadfast and compassionate in the face of false words.

However, Avery Lin, as such incidents increased, as secret instructions began circulating from higher levels telling workplaces and agencies to “keep an eye on”

Falun Gong practitioners,
some people—especially older ones who had lived
through past political campaigns—began to feel a
growing unease.

They sensed something unusual was happening.

In our Fa study groups, we began quietly discussing
these concerns,

but overall, our faith in the righteousness of Dafa
remained firm.

As for me personally, given all I'd experienced and
enlightened to from the Fa, I began to sense a field of
negative energy forming.

I understood that anything truly good being spread in
this world—especially in this End Time—would attract
tribulations, would be interfered with by old forces that
don't want humanity to be saved.

I tried to keep calm, to observe, and to remind myself
and fellow practitioners to become even more diligent, to
truly take the Fa as our teacher, and to measure all our
actions against *Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance*.

Emotionally, it was a mix.

There was the calm faith of a cultivator, but also some
sorrow at seeing something so good being
misunderstood and deliberately twisted.

But never did we feel fear or consider retaliating with
force.

Our only weapon was kindness—and the truth.

That was the time just before the “storm” truly hit—a time when innocence and strong faith still prevailed, even as unsettling waves had begun to stir.

Avery Lin:

According to the historical information I’ve read, the situation back then was extremely tense, leading to the peaceful appeal of tens of thousands of people outside Zhongnanhai.

Later, the CCP used that incident as one of their excuses, claiming that “Falun Gong surrounded Zhongnanhai” with alleged rebellious intent...

What were your thoughts at the time, and did you take part in that peaceful appeal?

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma nodded, his expression growing more serious.)

Yes, Avery Lin, you’re right. The April 25, 1999 incident was a turning point—a moment after which everything began to change rapidly.

Before that, as I mentioned, there had already been smear campaigns and covert interference.

But the real escalation began with a slanderous article written by a scholar named He Zuoxiu, published in a

youth science magazine in Tianjin.

Some practitioners in Tianjin went to the magazine's office to clarify the facts in a peaceful manner.

All they hoped for was a retraction, to restore the reputation of Falun Gong.

But instead of engaging in dialogue, the Tianjin authorities deployed riot police, who beat and arrested some practitioners.

When others went to request their release, Tianjin police told them that the arrest order had come from Beijing, and that if they wanted to resolve the issue, they should go to Beijing and file their complaints there.

That one sentence, combined with the unjust arrests, made many feel they could no longer remain silent.

As cultivators, we had no political ambitions, no desire to oppose anyone.

We simply wanted a lawful and free environment to practice, to become better people following Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance, and to see our Teacher treated with respect, and Dafa books published legally.

When news of the Tianjin incident spread, many practitioners—including myself—felt a responsibility to speak out peacefully.

There was no organization, no formal call to action.

It was a spontaneous response, driven by conscience and

the belief that the government would listen to the people's legitimate concerns.

(Uncle Ma paused, his gaze distant.)

That day, I was also in Beijing, near the National Petition Office, which we had learned was the proper place to voice our concerns.

I joined thousands—tens of thousands—of practitioners from all over.

What struck me most, and what was later most severely distorted, was the extraordinary calm and order of the crowd.

We stood silently on the sidewalks, along the streets, under the guidance of the police.

There were no slogans, no provocative banners, no pushing, no traffic obstruction.

Everyone acted conscientiously—even picking up cigarette butts discarded by officers.

Many brought Dafa books and read quietly.

The atmosphere was serene and dignified.

There was only one goal: to have a conversation, to present the truth.

The so-called “siege of Zhongnanhai” that they later broadcast so widely, Avery Lin, was a complete fabrication and distortion.

Zhongnanhai is the central government compound—

highly sensitive.

Not a single practitioner had any intention to “surround” it.

We stood only where the police directed us, far from the main gates.

Moreover, if we had truly intended to “siege” it as they claimed, given the CCP’s nature, would they have allowed tens of thousands of people to stand there for an entire day without being violently suppressed?

Our intentions were simple:

- ✧ Release the unlawfully detained practitioners in Tianjin.
- ✧ Allow legal publication of Falun Gong books.
- ✧ Ensure a lawful, interference-free environment for practitioners.

That day, Premier Zhu Rongji came out to speak with a few representatives.

Afterward, the detained practitioners were released, and things seemed to calm down temporarily.

Everyone quietly left the area, even cleaning up every bit of trash—leaving not a single scrap behind.

At that moment, I and many others held a flicker of hope—that our peaceful sincerity had been heard, and

the government might view us more fairly.

But deep down, with what I knew of the regime's true nature, I also sensed that this might only be the calm before a far greater storm.

Because the rapid growth and spiritual values Dafa brought—completely at odds with their atheist, struggle-based ideology—had stirred deep jealousy and fear in certain powerful figures.

They could not tolerate such a large group of people believing in divine beings, upholding Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance—concepts they dismissed as “superstition” and threats to ideological control.

The excuse of “surrounding Zhongnanhai” was just one of countless lies fabricated to justify a brutal persecution they had already been secretly planning.

Avery Lin:

Then could you share some scenes or specific events you personally witnessed when the persecution officially began?

Ma Changsheng:

(A moment of silence. His eyes drifted far away, as if

returning to those turbulent days. His voice grew heavier.)

When the persecution officially began on July 20, 1999, Avery Lin, it felt like the sky had fallen.

Everything changed overnight.

The faint hope we had after April 25 suddenly turned into a suffocating nightmare.

I remember vividly—on that morning, and for many days thereafter—every national and local TV channel, every radio station, every newspaper, began broadcasting slanderous, venomous content attacking Falun Gong and our Teacher.

Vicious words, outright lies, edited footage—repeated around the clock.

Society's atmosphere instantly turned oppressive, suspicious, hostile.

Neighbors, coworkers, even family members—those who once praised Falun Gong—now began to look at us differently.

Some were afraid.

Some kept their distance.

Some, believing the propaganda, even turned critical.

It felt like the whole world had turned against us.

One scene I'll never forget was when key volunteer coordinators—the ones who selflessly ran our practice sites—suddenly disappeared.

Word spread quickly among practitioners: so-and-so had been taken overnight, another was summoned by police and never returned.

I personally witnessed police storming the home of a fellow practitioner—a local volunteer.

It was around 2 or 3 a.m.

Loud pounding on the door, harsh shouting, a child crying, the wife pleading...

They ransacked the home, confiscated Dafa books and Teacher's photo, then handcuffed him and dragged him away.

The flashing lights of the police car vanished into the night, leaving behind an eerie silence and a lasting sense of terror.

We realized this was no longer a misunderstanding.

This was an organized, deliberate crackdown.

The parks and plazas where we once joyfully practiced together each morning were now guarded.

Police, security patrols stationed everywhere.

Anyone approaching would be driven away, identified, even arrested if they tried to practice.

The Dafa books we cherished like life, the gentle music of the exercises—they suddenly became “contraband.”

Many homes were raided by police and local officials. Some tried to explain, others wept as books were stuffed violently into sacks.

We were forced to surrender our books, to sign statements renouncing our practice—under threat of losing our jobs, our children being barred from school, and our families being implicated.

Immense pressure fell upon each individual, each family. Many who had only sought better health and peace of mind were suddenly forced to choose between their faith and their everyday safety; between truth and temporary survival.

Those were days of fear, confusion, pain—and a silent yet powerful indignation.

I, like so many fellow practitioners, felt tremendous sorrow.

Sorrow for our Teacher being vilified.

Sorrow for Dafa being slandered.

Sorrow for the people deceived by such vicious propaganda.

Yet deep within, our faith in *Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance*, in the righteousness of Dafa, remained unshaken.

I knew—this was the greatest test.

The tribulation that every cultivator must face.

And no matter how hard it got, we had to hold firm to compassion, and use the truth to counter every lie.

Avery Lin:

That scene sounds truly terrifying...

So at that time, were you personally harassed by the police?

Ma Changsheng:

(Nods slightly, a faint smile crosses his face, though it cannot mask the gravity of the memories.)

Yes, Avery Lin. During that storm, who among the practitioners of Falun Dafa wasn't given "special attention" by the authorities or police? I was no exception.

After the ban was issued, it wasn't long before I received an "invitation" from the local police station, and later the district police. They didn't call it a "summons" to arrest me right away, but used softer terms like "come in for a conversation," or "clarify some matters." But everyone knew the implications behind those words.

I remember once they held me at the station for an entire day. In a small office, several officers took turns "talking" to me. They started off mildly, asking when I began

practicing Falun Dafa, whether I'd benefited from it, and gradually shifted toward requiring me to recognize the so-called "reactionary and superstitious nature" of Falun Gong, in line with the state's propaganda. They handed me pre-prepared materials—slandorous articles—and asked me to read and "raise my awareness."

(Uncle Ma pauses, takes a small sip of the tea Avery had poured, then continues.)

My mind was very calm at that time. I thought, this is my chance to speak the truth, to help them understand. I gently explained that Falun Dafa teaches people to be good through Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance, that it improves health and elevates moral character, and that it has no political motive whatsoever. I told them about the benefits my family and I had experienced, and the positive changes the practice had brought to society. I said what the TV and newspapers were saying was not the truth—it was slander.

Some of the younger officers just listened silently. I sensed a bit of curiosity in their eyes, even slight wavering. But others, especially older ones or those who seemed very "firm in ideology," dismissed it all, saying I had been "deceived" or "brainwashed." They demanded I sign a pledge to renounce Falun Gong, turn over my books and materials, and promise not to contact other

practitioners, not to practice or "spread" the practice anymore.

I told them, "Officers, Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance are noble values that everyone should strive for. Falun Dafa teaches us to live by those principles, to be better and healthier people. What's wrong with that? If you ask me to renounce Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance, to stop trying to be a good person, I simply cannot do it. The Dafa books are precious teachings that help me understand the meaning of life—I cannot hand them over."

They changed tactics many times, from being soft to making threats.

They said if I didn't cooperate, I could lose my job, my children could be affected, or I could be sent to "reeducation through labor." Those threats, Avery Lin, carried real weight—especially when you have a family and loved ones to worry about.

But each time, I recalled Master's teachings and the sacrifices of so many fellow practitioners. I told myself, as a cultivator, I must face this trial with uprightness and kindness. Fear would not solve anything; it would only embolden the evil.

There were also workplace officials, and the neighborhood committee head, tasked with "persuading"

and “guiding” me. Some carried out orders mechanically, others appeared sympathetic and whispered, “Just try to get through this period—practice at home if you must, but don’t go outside.” I understood their dilemma.

As a result of those “conversations,” I was labeled a “special subject for surveillance.”

They didn’t arrest me outright—maybe because I wasn’t a lead coordinator, and my responses were always calm and reasonable, giving them no excuse for immediate action. But life was no longer peaceful.

I constantly felt watched, monitored.

Those were my early experiences when the persecution began. Compared to what many other practitioners endured—being arrested, tortured, imprisoned, even losing their lives—what I went through was relatively light.

But it was enough for me to understand the brutality and absurdity of this persecution.

Avery Lin:

From the information I’ve read, things became increasingly tense at that time. Some practitioners even went to Tiananmen Square to protest...

Did you witness that?

Ma Changsheng:

(Slow nod, a deep sorrow flickering in his eyes.)

Yes, Avery Lin.

When all avenues of peaceful dialogue were blocked, when every effort to clarify the truth to the authorities was shut down, when slander and vilification grew rampant in the state-run media, and when more and more practitioners were arrested, beaten, even brutally tortured just for not renouncing their faith, some chose to go to Tiananmen Square to make their voices heard.

It was an act born of desperation—but also of courage and unwavering faith in Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance.

They didn't go to stir up trouble, or to overthrow anyone. They only wanted to say to the world, to the people of China, "Falun Dafa is good!", "Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance is good!", and to call for an end to the unjust persecution.

Many carried small handwritten banners, or simply sat in meditation.

(Uncle Ma pauses, as if reliving the memory.)

I... I was there too, Avery Lin, on a few occasions.

I couldn't just stand by while my fellow practitioners were being persecuted.

Even knowing it was an extremely dangerous place, where any “unusual behavior” would be immediately suppressed.

I remember one particular day very clearly.

That day, as usual, I wore my monk’s robe and had a shaved head.

From the time I was ordained until I obtained the Fa, I had kept the appearance and lifestyle of a monastic.

When I approached the square with a small group of practitioners, we hadn’t even done anything yet when police and plainclothes agents swarmed us.

They rushed in, shoving and violently arresting practitioners around me.

There was shouting, chaos.

I braced myself, expecting to be taken too.

But then some officers approached me, one of them stared at my robes and shaved head, and suddenly waved his hand and barked, “Let the monk through! This has nothing to do with you—go on!”

Another officer chimed in, “Let that monk go—don’t bother him!”

They assumed I was a monk from some local temple, unrelated to Falun Gong—so they let me go.

In that moment, Avery Lin, I felt a sorrow that’s hard to put into words.

I was “spared” not because they respected me, but because they had mistaken me—because they didn’t realize I too was a Falun Dafa practitioner, standing there with my fellow cultivators.

I wanted to say, “I am also a Falun Gong practitioner!”

But the others were already being dragged off too quickly, and the scene was too chaotic.

I just stood there, watching their backs fade into the crowd, my heart twisting in anguish.

The scenes at Tiananmen Square during those days were heartbreaking.

Peaceful practitioners, unarmed, only wanting to speak one honest sentence, were treated like dangerous criminals.

They were beaten, shoved into police vans, and then came days—weeks—of detention, torture in police stations, detention centers, labor camps.

Many never returned.

Each time I witnessed or heard about these events, I understood more deeply the true evil of the persecution—and the greatness of those practitioners who dared to stand up for their faith, for the truth, even at the cost of their freedom and their lives.

They were true cultivators of Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance.

Avery Lin:

Under such tremendous pressure from the persecution, the environment for cultivation must have completely changed...

How did you study the Fa and do the exercises back then?

I assume going to the park wasn't an option anymore...

And spreading the Fa must have become even more difficult...

Ma Changsheng:

(Nods, his eyes gazing into the distance, carrying a deep and quiet sorrow.)

That's right, Avery Lin. You're absolutely right. From an open, public environment for cultivation—one that was even viewed positively by society—we were suddenly pushed into the shadows, hunted, and treated like enemies. The cultivation environment changed completely, just as you said—180 degrees.

As for Fa study and doing the exercises, going to parks or public places was no longer possible. Those places were now guarded by police and local security. Anyone showing signs of doing the exercises would be immediately stopped or arrested.

The Dafa books, especially *Zhuan Falun*, were as precious to us as life itself. Many had to hide them very carefully, because if found, the police would confiscate them

instantly. Often, those confiscated books were destroyed in offensive, humiliating ways.

You know, Avery Lin, for those who still managed to keep their books, they only dared to read them at home—usually late at night or during the most discreet moments. Group Fa study had to move underground. Only those truly trusted would gather, usually at someone's home, in small groups of just a few people, to read the Fa and share understandings. Those gatherings became incredibly precious, helping us maintain our faith and find direction amid the hardship.

Many even tried to memorize the Fa, because while books can be taken away, what's in your mind and heart can't be.

Master's teachings became our compass, helping us discern right from wrong, truth from lies amid overwhelming propaganda and pressure.

As for the exercises, we had to move them indoors as well—often at dawn before the sun rose, or late at night when everyone else was asleep, just to avoid being reported by suspicious neighbors or even misunderstood family members.

Gone was the vibrant collective atmosphere of group practice. Each person had to persevere alone, quietly. Sometimes, if conditions were safe and trustworthy, a

few close practitioners might gather at someone's house to do the exercises together—but even then, extreme caution was needed.

As for spreading the Fa—what we call *hongfa*—that became nearly impossible in the usual public ways.

But something even more urgent arose: *clarifying the truth*.

Do you know why we had to do that, Avery Lin?

Because the government's propaganda machine was working at full force to slander Falun Gong, deceive the people, and incite hatred.

If we remained silent, lies would only spread further, poisoning public opinion and providing excuses for continued persecution.

We knew that speaking the truth wasn't just about clearing Falun Gong's name—it was about saving people from being deceived and unknowingly committing crimes against the Fa.

So how did we clarify the truth?

Mostly by starting with those we trusted—family, friends, coworkers, neighbors.

We shared our personal experiences with Falun Gong: the health benefits, the spiritual upliftment, the peaceful and compassionate nature of the practice.

We explained that what the media said was untrue.

Many practitioners even used their own savings to produce materials: buying paper, ink, typing and printing flyers that exposed the lies and told real stories about Falun Gong's goodness and the brutality of the persecution.

Then they distributed them discreetly—into mailboxes, tucked into doorframes, left in public spaces.

Some even wrote short messages like “Falun Dafa is good” and “Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance is good” on currency notes to spread the message as money circulated.

Those with technical skills or resources tried to use the internet to email or post on forums, to get the truth out overseas or to people in China who could break through the firewall.

Avery Lin, all of this was extremely dangerous.

Being caught distributing such materials could mean long prison sentences, torture in labor camps or jails.

But many practitioners persisted—because they believed in the power of truth, and out of compassion—they wanted to save others.

It was an unequal battle: on one side, a vast state machine with tools of violence and media control; on the other, unarmed cultivators, equipped only with faith and kindness.

Yet precisely in such harsh circumstances, the faith of true practitioners was refined—and the difference between those who cultivated genuinely and those drawn by worldly motives became even clearer.

Just like the saying goes: fire tests gold; adversity tests the heart.

Avery Lin:

So in that situation, did you decide to stay in one place to avoid the “storm,” or did you have something else in mind?

Ma Changsheng:

(Gently smiles, a smile filled with many layers of feeling.)

Staying in one place—even if it might be called “safe”—didn’t sit well with my heart, Avery Lin.

Master was being slandered. Dafa was being defamed. So many fellow practitioners were suffering, and countless people were being deceived. How could I only care about my own safety?

We cultivators understand that when tribulations come, it’s time to show our character, to validate the Fa. Hiding is not the way.

I thought—I have to go. I have to reach places where the truth has yet to be heard.

That too is cultivation. That too is a way to fulfill the vow I made when I obtained the Fa.

Besides, the fact that I still retained the appearance of a Buddhist monk sometimes made things a little easier, like the situation at Tiananmen Square you just heard about—though it was a misunderstanding on their part.

So, after taking some time to steady my mindset and prepare, I set off on a new journey—a journey that lasted many years, spanning many provinces across the country.

I called it my time of *spreading the Fa and clarifying the truth*.

During those years, Avery Lin, I met all kinds of people—from everyday citizens to religious figures in other faiths.

In some places, I stayed briefly, just long enough to share the truth about Falun Dafa and the persecution before moving on.

In other places, if conditions allowed, I stayed longer to quietly help rebuild small Fa-study groups, helping practitioners there stay strong in their faith.

I maintained my lifestyle: eating vegetarian, observing precepts.

Even without a formal temple, my heart was always

devoted to cultivation.

Whenever I met someone with a predestined connection, I would talk to them about the beauty of Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance, and the benefits of Falun Dafa. And I would never forget to expose the lies that the authorities used to poison people's minds.

Of course, that journey was far from easy. Danger was always present.

Police inquiries, surveillance, even arrests... those things were hard to avoid.

(Uncle Ma pauses for a moment, then continues.)

Let me tell you something...

During that time of "spreading the Fa and clarifying the truth," things didn't always go as smoothly as they did at Tiananmen, where I was let go due to a misunderstanding.

There were also times when I was truly arrested—interrogated, detained.

In fact, getting arrested didn't always happen because of direct discovery by the police.

Sometimes, it came from fear, misunderstanding, or even betrayal from people you never expected.

Once, I remember being in a rather remote mountainous province.

I found an old temple—quiet and secluded. I thought maybe in such a tranquil place, I might meet genuine cultivators with whom I could share something.

I asked the abbot for permission to stay for a few days.

At first, the abbot was friendly—asked about Buddhism, the places I'd visited.

I used the opportunity carefully and gently to share about Falun Dafa, the principles of Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance, and the unjust persecution we were enduring.

He listened attentively, nodded, and even seemed to agree with much of what I said.

I gave him a few truth-clarifying materials I had with me.

But... Avery Lin...

(Uncle Ma stops, a trace of sadness crossing his face.)

Just a few days later, while I was meditating in my room, the police burst in.

They said someone had reported me for “illegally promoting Falun Gong.”

I knew immediately. It must have been the abbot.

Perhaps he was afraid of the authorities, worried his temple would be implicated, or perhaps he didn't truly understand or believe what I said.

As they handcuffed me and led me away, I saw the abbot standing in a corner, avoiding my gaze.

I didn't resent him, Avery Lin. I just felt sorry for him.

In this Dharma-ending age, the pressure of the secular world—the fear of power—is sometimes greater than one's faith in truth and goodness.

That time, I was detained and interrogated for quite a while.

They tried every tactic—from tempting offers to harsh threats—trying to make me renounce my faith, to give up names of other practitioners.

But of course, I could never do that.

It's one of the arrests I remember most—not because the police were especially harsh, but because of *how* it happened—from someone I had tried to share the truth with, with all sincerity.

It made me see more clearly the complexity of people's hearts, and the challenges of clarifying the truth in such a special and difficult time.

Avery Lin:

I've heard that during the Dharma-ending period, many temples are no longer pure. Some monks in those temples are not true cultivators, and some even act as "agents" for the Chinese Communist Party...

So after you were arrested, were you tortured like many other practitioners?

Ma Changsheng:

(His gaze dims, carrying a deep, contemplative look. He gently nods.)

Avery Lin, you're not wrong. In this Dharma-ending age, it's truly heartbreaking that not every place draped in Buddhist robes still maintains the purity it once had. Temples can be exploited, secularized, and not every monk is a genuine cultivator.

Some, out of fear, personal interest, or under the spell of the regime's words, have knowingly or unknowingly become tools for them—doing things completely contrary to the Buddha's teachings. That abbot I mentioned earlier is one such example.

I don't blame him. I just see it as a reflection of the chaos of our times.

(Uncle Ma pauses for a moment, then looks directly at Avery Lin. His voice remains calm but carries the weight of experience.)

As for whether I was tortured after being arrested, like many other fellow practitioners...

Avery Lin, you must understand—

The goal of the Chinese Communist Party in this persecution was never just to arrest us, but to “transform”

us. They wanted to break our will, to force us to abandon our faith in Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance, to turn our backs on Master, to speak ill of Dafa. And to achieve that, they would stop at nothing.

I was no exception.

After being arrested at that temple, I was taken to a local police station, then to a detention center.

During those days, the “pressure” was no longer limited to questioning or verbal threats.

They used many methods, Avery Lin.

Some nights, they wouldn’t let me sleep—officers took turns interrogating me under bright, blinding lights, trying to wear me down mentally to make me easier to break.

They played slanderous recordings insulting Master and Dafa over loudspeakers, or said the words themselves—provoking, waiting to see my reaction.

As for physical mistreatment—there was no shortage of that either.

Even though I was elderly, they still forced me to stand or squat for long periods, not allowing me to move.

The meals were poor, the hygiene deplorable.

At times, because I refused to “cooperate,” refused to sign the “three statements” (a repentance letter, a pledge to renounce Falun Gong, and a statement to expose others), they resorted to harsher tactics.

I was beaten by a few younger officers—perhaps seeking merit, or inflamed by the propaganda they had consumed.

(Uncle Ma exhales—not a despairing sigh, but as if releasing the weight of past memories.)

But Avery Lin, as practitioners, when we face these things, we hold the Fa in our hearts.

I constantly recited Master’s teachings to myself, keeping righteous thoughts, not allowing fear or resentment to take hold.

I understood this was a demonic test, a tribulation.

They could harm my body, but they could never shake my faith in Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance.

I also tried to treat them with compassion—speaking the truth to them, even when they didn’t want to hear it.

Compared to what I know—what countless other practitioners endured: truly barbaric torture, crippling injuries, and even death in labor camps and prisons—what I went through was still “mild.”

But it was enough for me to grasp, on a deeper level, the cruelty of this persecution and the extraordinary steadfastness of those Dafa disciples.

They truly are genuine cultivators—willing to use their very lives to defend their faith.

Avery Lin:

While you were in prison, did you witness other practitioners being beaten, or even—
did you hear or see anything about organ harvesting?

Ma Changsheng:

(His face grows very solemn. A deep pain and restrained fury flicker in his eyes. He remains silent for a while, as if searching for the right words to express something unspeakable.)

Avery Lin, what you're asking about... these are crimes that go far beyond what any kind-hearted person could imagine.

When I was inside—whether in detention centers or forced labor camps—torture of fellow practitioners was almost a daily occurrence.

I witnessed many heartbreaking scenes firsthand.

Terrible screams coming from the interrogation rooms.

Practitioners dragged back, bloodied, or returning to the cell covered in bruises and wounds, barely able to walk.

Some were handcuffed and hung up for days.

Some were shocked with electric batons, especially on sensitive areas.

Some were force-fed with thick plastic tubes that tore their throats and made them bleed.

Some had cold water dumped on them during the freezing winter.

The purpose was to inflict unbearable physical pain in order to break our spirits and force us to renounce our belief.

Many fellow practitioners remained unshakable.

Even after being tortured within an inch of death, they would still firmly declare “Falun Dafa is good” without a word of complaint—only silent endurance.

Sometimes, that very steadfastness made their persecutors even more vicious.

As for... organ harvesting...

(Uncle Ma takes a deep breath. His voice turns raspy.)

When I was inside, Avery Lin, I never personally saw anyone being cut open.

Such monstrous things are usually done in secret, leaving no trace for ordinary people to witness.

However, I did witness things that made your blood run cold—things that forced us to ask terrifying questions.

Some practitioners—especially younger, healthier ones who refused to “transform”—suddenly disappeared without a trace.

Before that, they were often taken for “medical exams,” very thorough ones—blood tests, scans—much more

comprehensive than any regular prisoner would receive. Then... they were gone.

When their families asked, the detention centers would casually say they'd been "released," "transferred," or had "died from illness."

But no one ever saw the body.

And if they did, it had often already been cremated.

There were whispers too—rumors passed around the prison:

"Falun Gong organs are very good," "they sell for high prices..."

At the time, we were filled with fear and disbelief.

We couldn't bring ourselves to think it was true.

It was only later, after I was released and gained access to outside information—from international investigative reports, from witness testimonies—

that I began connecting the dots: the missing practitioners, the strange medical exams...

And then, Avery Lin, I realized the truth was even more horrifying than we had imagined.

This wasn't random.

It showed signs of being a state-sponsored system—targeting detained Falun Gong practitioners, who were no longer even treated as human,

and harvesting their organs to feed a lucrative transplant industry.

Thinking back on those healthy practitioners who vanished...

those unusual “health checkups”...

I can’t help but connect them to this monstrous crime.

It’s a pain—a scar that will never heal in the hearts of those who survived and know the truth.

This... this is a crime against humanity, Avery Lin.

Avery Lin:

Yes, those scenes are truly heartbreaking...

So how long were you imprisoned?

Ma Changsheng:

(Uncle Ma gently nods, his eyes reflecting a thoughtful look that gradually becomes clearer.)

Let me recall it accurately... The time I was arrested at that temple—after the interrogations, detention, and their attempts to “transform” me—I was actually imprisoned for about three or four months, Avery Lin.

Indeed, compared to many fellow practitioners who were imprisoned for years, even decades, that period

wasn't particularly long.

I believe part of it was because I always tried to maintain righteous thoughts and unwavering faith in Master and the Fa.

Even under pressure and interrogation, I did my best to speak the truth to them with a compassionate heart—no fear, no hatred. I told them that Falun Dafa teaches people to be good, that Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance is right, and that this persecution was unjust.

There were times I truly felt Master's reinforcement, helping me get through the most difficult moments.

When your mind is pure and righteous, without fear, the evil has no place to enter. I believe that a cultivator's strong righteous thoughts can transform the environment around them, even dissolve tribulations.

During those three or four months, although short compared to others, I still witnessed and endured all kinds of their tactics—from coaxing and threats to psychological and physical pressure, as I've shared.

When they saw they couldn't shake my faith, couldn't force me to sign the "three statements," and perhaps felt that holding onto an "old monk" like me without being able to "transform" him wasn't of any use, they eventually released me.

Even if it was just three or four months, it was still an incredibly harsh cultivation ground, Avery Lin.

It helped me see more clearly the nature of the persecution and further solidified my resolve on the path I had chosen.

And after being released, even though I was still monitored and restricted, I continued to do what a Dafa disciple should do.

Avery Lin:

After you were released, did you continue your path of “spreading the Fa and clarifying the truth”? Could you share some of the events you still remember clearly?

Ma Changsheng:

(Smiling gently, his kind expression reveals a firm inner resolve.)

Of course, Avery Lin. How could I possibly stop?

After being released, although I knew I was still “under surveillance,” the responsibility of a Dafa disciple—the deep pain of seeing Master and Dafa being slandered, of seeing so many people still deceived—urged me to press on.

My time in detention only made me understand even more how important it is to clarify the truth.

So my journey of “spreading the Fa and clarifying the truth” resumed—perhaps more cautiously, but with even stronger conviction.

There were so many memorable moments, Avery Lin. Every encounter, every person I had the opportunity to speak with, was a story in itself.

I remember one time I went to a very remote rural area. There, information was heavily censored, and people only knew about Falun Gong through the negative propaganda on TV.

I approached a farming family whose son was seriously ill. They had tried everything without success and were struggling financially.

They seemed kind and simple.

At first, when I gently mentioned Falun Gong, they were frightened. They waved their hands urgently, saying it was an “evil cult” banned by the government.

I didn’t rush. I simply asked them for a little time so I could tell my story—the benefits I and many others had experienced through cultivation, and the truth about the persecution.

I talked about the principles of Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance, about being a good person.

I stayed at their home for a few days, helped out with little chores, and treated them with sincerity.

Gradually, they saw that I was nothing like what the TV described. They began to listen, then started asking questions.

I gave them a few truth-clarifying materials I had carefully brought along.

By the third day, their bedridden son suddenly felt better and wanted to sit up.

The whole family was astonished and overjoyed.

I told them it might be because their hearts had begun to turn toward kindness and that the Buddha Fa is boundless—when people hold true belief, divine beings will see it.

I also taught them to quietly recite, *“Falun Dafa is good, Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance is good.”*

When I left, the whole family walked me to the edge of the village.

Their eyes were filled with gratitude and respect.

The mother held my hand with tears in her eyes and said they would never again believe the lies on TV.

I don’t know whether they eventually began cultivation themselves, but I believe that a seed of goodness had been planted in their hearts.

For me, that was a tremendous joy—a source of encouragement on this difficult path.

There were other times too—when I handed out truth-clarifying materials at markets, or posted small flyers in

public places—some people reacted with hostility, even threatening to report me to the police.

In such situations, I always tried to stay calm, explain kindly, and if they wouldn't listen, I would quietly walk away.

The important thing was that I had done what I needed to do.

On those journeys, I also met many people from temples and Taoist monasteries.

Not everyone was like that abbot who reported me.

Some were genuinely seeking the Dao, though they might not yet understand Falun Dafa or the persecution.

And through those encounters, I had many dialogues that made me reflect deeply on the times we live in and the path of cultivation...

Avery Lin:

So, was your journey to spread the Fa smooth? Did you encounter many people who were truly predestined with Dafa? I've heard that many monks in temples, after reading numerous scriptures and cultivating for years, believe they've already enlightened to many Fa principles... That kind of mindset often puts them on a high pedestal, making it hard to dialogue or share understandings with them.

Ma Changsheng:

(Smiling gently, a kind expression tinged with a trace of reflection.)

“Smooth” may not be the right word to describe that journey, Avery Lin. Every step carried potential dangers, and every word spoken had to be weighed carefully. But if you're asking whether I met people truly predestined with the Fa—then yes, I met quite a few.

“Predestined connection” comes in many forms. There were people who, from the moment I shared something, could feel the sincerity and goodness of Dafa and were willing to listen and learn more. Those were people with good inborn quality—perhaps they'd been waiting for this moment all their lives. Like that farming family I mentioned before—that was one such example.

But there were also others who were initially suspicious, even resistant. Yet after I persistently clarified the truth with a kind heart, they gradually changed their attitudes. Some didn't believe immediately, but at least they started to think for themselves and stopped blindly accepting the propaganda. To me, planting even one seed of righteous thought in their hearts was already a success.

As for the monks you mentioned... indeed, that's a very particular situation, and not always easy to navigate.

(Uncle Ma pauses, letting out a soft sigh, his gaze drifting into the distance.)

You're absolutely right, Avery Lin. Many monks have devoted their lives to studying scriptures, strictly following the precepts of their school. In their minds, the Fa principles they've understood, the cultivation experiences they've accumulated, have become inseparable from their identities. When they feel they've "awakened" to many truths and have a certain standing in the spiritual community, accepting a new Fa or a new understanding can become a major challenge.

The mindset of "being above others" that you mentioned—it can come from many sources. It might stem from their attachment to their own knowledge, thinking that what they know is already the highest. It might come from being long accustomed to receiving respect from others, making it hard for them to humble themselves and listen to something "new" from someone they don't know. Or perhaps, in this Dharma-ending age, many who appear outwardly as monks—wearing robes and reading scriptures—are no longer cultivating genuinely. Their heart of true spiritual seeking has been diluted by worldly concerns. They might speak eloquently about principles, but lack the humility and open heart to embrace something that goes beyond their current understanding.

When I encountered people like that, Avery Lin, I never tried to argue over right or wrong, or prove that “my Fa is higher.” I simply shared from a place of sincerity and respect.

I would speak about my own experiences of gaining Dafa, of how both my body and mind were elevated.

I would talk about the principles of Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance as universal values that any true cultivator should strive for.

If the moment allowed, I’d gently mention the signs of the Dharma-ending age, and the decline of purity in the spiritual world—things that many of them could already feel.

Some of them just listened silently, without showing much reaction.

Some expressed disagreement or even rejection.

But I understood—every person has different predestined relationships and enlightenment quality.

All I could do was sow the seed; whether or not they would accept it was their choice.

That said, not all were like that. I also met a few monks who genuinely sought the Way. They weren’t bound by rigid notions. Among them, there was one encounter that left a deep impression on me—a profound conversation with the abbot of an old mountain temple.

We talked at length about the Dharma-ending era, the challenges of cultivation today, and the true meaning of

“no second cultivation way” (*Bu Er Fa Men*) as each of us understood it. That meeting gave me a lot to ponder.

Avery Lin:

Yes, could you share about that meeting with the abbot, if you still remember it clearly?

Ma Changsheng:

(Smiling, his eyes gazing toward a distant but vivid memory.)

Certainly, Avery Lin. I still remember that encounter very clearly.

It was one afternoon when I stopped at a secluded ancient temple nestled against a hillside.

The abbot there appeared to be in his seventies—dignified, with a compassionate face.

After I requested and received permission to stay the night, we sat down for tea.

His room, Avery Lin, was filled wall to wall with scriptures—so many types. There were orthodox Buddhist canons, Taoist texts, even scriptures from other religions and some folk religious writings—like the *Scripture of Queen Mother of the West*.

He seemed quite proud of his breadth of study, telling me he had explored many schools and teachings.

He lamented the chaos of the world, the moral decline, and how difficult cultivation had become.

He said that his extensive study was his way of seeking a path that could truly help sentient beings.

But as he spoke, I sensed a kind of confusion, a lack of certainty—something he tried to mask.

After listening quietly, I shared my own insights about this Dharma-ending age.

I told him that the moral decline wasn't just superficial. More fundamentally, many orthodox scriptures had been lost or were difficult to comprehend.

In contrast, many texts written later by ordinary people based on personal interpretations—though seemingly easier to read—lacked the original depth and true meaning.

People easily get caught up in surface-level understandings, thinking they've "attained the Way" when they've only grasped fragments.

I also told him something crucial:

In the past, the Divine beings—Buddhas, Daos, and Gods—descended to impart the Fa, but their teachings could only be preserved for a certain period.

Now, in the Dharma-ending era, many of those cultivation paths have lost their spiritual efficacy.

The enlightened beings who once upheld them have "completed their term," so to speak—like a president whose term has ended and no longer has governing

power.

This is a time when sentient beings await a new, true Fa—a future Buddha, such as Maitreya, who is prophesied in scriptures to descend to save the world.

Seeing his room filled with all sorts of scriptures, I gently shared my understanding of the principle of “No Second Cultivation Way.”

I told him it’s not wrong to study and learn, but in true cultivation—especially when aiming for liberation—single-mindedness is essential.

I said: A cultivator not only cultivates their character and enlightenment to the Fa principles, but also needs *virtue* to be transformed into *gong* (energy).

Each orthodox school has its own mechanism through which the Master helps disciples transform virtue into gong.

If someone has a limited amount of virtue, but divides it across many cultivation paths—like trying to build several houses with enough money for just one—none of them will ever be completed.

By reading too many different texts, especially those outside the orthodox canon, one’s mind becomes scattered. Energy becomes unfocused.

And the Master of whatever path they’ve chosen will find it difficult to truly help them elevate.

Unknowingly, they’ve violated the principle of “No Second Cultivation Way.”

The abbot was silent for a long time, Avery Lin.

I saw surprise on his face, followed by deep contemplation.

Perhaps my words touched upon the confusion and impasses he had long felt in his own cultivation but couldn't articulate.

He didn't refute anything—he only nodded slightly, his expression no longer so confident, but instead deeply pensive.

Before I left, I gave him a copy of *Zhuan Falun*.

I told him, "These are the teachings of our Master about the universe, human life, and the path of cultivation in this Dharma-ending age. If you're predestined, please read it and reflect for yourself."

I saw him accept the book—his hands trembling slightly—and his eyes looked at me with a quiet sense of gratitude.

I don't know if that abbot ever truly stepped into Dafa cultivation, Avery Lin.

That depends on his predestined relationship and his choice.

But I believe that conversation, and the Dafa book, planted a seed in his heart.

At the very least, it made him reconsider his path and what true cultivation means in this extraordinary era.

Avery Lin:

Those efforts, at the very least, meant you were able to plant a seed of goodness...

I get the sense that your journey of spreading the Fa and clarifying the truth must have been full of hardship—but certainly carried a completely different mindset compared to your earlier 30-year journey of seeking the Fa...

Ma Changsheng:

(Smiling, a gentle smile filled with deep understanding.)

You're absolutely right, Avery Lin. Those two journeys—though both involved walking a path, both about seeking and sharing—were worlds apart in terms of mindset.

That 30-year journey of seeking the Fa was one of a person groping through darkness, longing for the light. I walked it with the heart of a disciple looking for a Master, burdened with questions and yearning to understand the meaning of life and the path to liberation.

Every time I met someone regarded as a high monk or a Daoist adept, my heart would stir with hope—only to sometimes feel disappointment when I realized it wasn't what I was truly seeking.

It was a journey of seeking, often of confusion and solitude, and at its core, it was for myself—for my own

liberation.

I still remember the times I was turned away—back then, I felt disheartened.

But later, upon enlightenment, I realized those were actually the best arrangements—unseen protection, preserving my purity so I could one day receive the True Fa.

(Uncle Ma pauses briefly, eyes brightening as he speaks about the later years.)

But the 16-year journey of *spreading the Fa and clarifying the truth*—that was after I had found the light, after I had obtained the True Fa, and had a Master guiding me.

The mindset was no longer that of one seeking, but of one giving, one offering.

I walked not for myself, but for sentient beings—for those still being deceived, for those in need of hope and truth.

First, the purpose was different:

Before, it was “seeking for myself.” Afterwards, it became “giving to others.”

Second, the state of mind was different:

Before, I had uncertainty, anxiety, and restlessness.

Later, even in the face of danger, arrest, or torture, my heart remained calm and steadfast—because I knew I was doing the most righteous thing, with the Fa as my

support.

No longer wandering in fear, but walking with certainty, guided by the beacon of the Fa.

Third, the source of strength changed:

Before, my strength came mostly from personal will and longing.

Later, it came from Dafa, from the empowerment of the Master, and from unwavering belief in Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance.

It was a boundless strength, far beyond anything I could've imagined.

And fourth, the people I approached were different:

Before, I sought out "masters."

Later, I went to ordinary people—the general public—and to other spiritual practitioners, to share the truth.

It's true, this later journey was far more difficult externally, filled with danger.

But Avery Lin, when one carries the Fa in their heart and has compassion for sentient beings, then these hardships become tests that help elevate one's character and fulfill the role of a Dafa disciple during the Fa-rectification period.

Each time I overcame a tribulation, each time I helped someone awaken to the truth, a profound peace and joy would rise in my heart.

It was no longer the loneliness of a seeker, but the happiness of one who had found and was sharing a treasure.

Though the physical body may suffer, the spirit was always full and purposeful.

That is the greatest difference, Avery Lin.

Avery Lin:

And how long did that journey last?

I heard there was even a time you traveled to both Hong Kong and Taiwan?

Ma Changsheng:

(Smiling gently, his gaze distant, as if embracing a long stretch of life.)

Yes, Avery Lin.

This journey of *spreading the Fa and clarifying the truth*, from the start of the persecution until the time I recently left mainland China, lasted about sixteen years.

Those sixteen years weren't spent constantly on the move—there were times when I stayed in relatively secluded places to hide, to study the Fa quietly and recharge, before continuing on again.

And you heard right.

During those sixteen years, I also went to *Hong Kong* and *Taiwan* for a period.

(Uncle Ma pauses briefly, as if recollecting a special chapter.)

You know, Avery, at that time, Hong Kong—though returned to China—still retained a certain degree of freedom under the principle of “One country, two systems.”

It was an important *window*, a place where the truth about the persecution in the mainland could be revealed to the world, and also a rare opportunity for mainland Chinese visitors to come into contact with information they could never access back home.

I went to Hong Kong hoping to do my small part in clarifying the truth—especially to mainland tourists and business travelers passing through.

Taiwan, on the other hand, was an entirely different land. There, Falun Dafa was openly practiced and respected by society.

The Taiwanese people had preserved much of China’s traditional moral and cultural values—values that had been nearly destroyed in the mainland after so many political campaigns.

When I arrived in Taiwan, it was partly to personally witness how Dafa had flourished in a free environment, to learn from fellow practitioners there, and also to find a temporary place of peace for quiet cultivation, to strengthen myself again after the years of danger on the mainland.

My time in Hong Kong and Taiwan left many memorable impressions, Avery Lin.

Each place brought its own experiences, its own encounters—giving me new perspectives on the path of cultivation and the mission of a Dafa disciple during this extraordinary time.

Avery Lin:

So when you left China, did you face any difficulties?

I've heard that for many Falun Gong practitioners, leaving China is incredibly difficult—sometimes requiring diplomatic intervention from the U.S. or other countries just to get out...

Ma Changsheng:

(Nods, a trace of concern flickering in his eyes as he reflects on the struggles many fellow practitioners have faced.)

You're absolutely right, Avery Lin. For most Falun Gong practitioners, leaving mainland China is extremely difficult—almost impossible. Their control system is very tight.

Most practitioners who are identified by the authorities are on a blacklist, banned from leaving the country. Many have had their passports confiscated, or were denied renewal or issuance.

What you heard about diplomatic intervention by other countries to help some people leave—yes, that's true. Those are rare cases, often involving people with special circumstances or international attention.

As for my case... perhaps it was somewhat special too. There are things that, even now when I think back on them, feel like they were divinely arranged.

(Uncle Ma pauses briefly, then continues with calm composure.)

As I mentioned before, I had spent a long time “moving around” within China, never staying in one place for too long.

Perhaps that made it harder for them to keep close tabs on my whereabouts compared to someone who lived at a fixed address.

Regarding leaving the country, I still had my passport from earlier—which was a stroke of luck.

When I decided that I needed to go abroad—partly to find a freer environment to continue my cultivation, and partly to do more in clarifying the truth to the world and exposing this persecution—I went through the process like any ordinary person.

At the border checkpoint, when the officer scanned my fingerprint and checked my passport, I knew full well that their system must contain information about me.

My heart beat a little faster at that moment, but I did my best to stay calm and hold firm righteous thoughts.

I thought: everything is arranged by Master. I will walk this path righteously and upright.

And then something miraculous happened, Avery Lin.

After my file popped up on the screen, the officer looked up at me.

I looked straight into his eyes—without fear, without evasion—only calmness, compassion, and the dignified presence of a practitioner.

He stared at me for quite a while. I could sense his surprise, a kind of hesitation, and then a subtle change in his expression.

He said nothing. He didn't question me. He simply stamped my passport and handed it back.

He showed no signs of trying to block me or give me trouble.

I truly believe that in that moment, the righteous field of a true practitioner—the compassionate and upright energy—touched his conscience, or at least awakened a bit of his kindness, making him unwilling to obstruct me. Of course, on a deeper level, I knew this was Master’s arrangement, opening the way for me.

And so, I was able to leave China in a relatively “normal” way—though I knew this was almost impossible for many other fellow practitioners.

That made me cherish the opportunity even more—and made me feel a greater sense of responsibility.

Avery Lin:

That customs experience really exemplifies the mindset of a true cultivator—and the power of Dafa...

So during your time in Hong Kong and Taiwan, did you participate in any group activities with other practitioners? Were there any events that especially stood out to you?

Ma Changsheng:

(Smiling, his eyes lighting up with joy and gratitude as he recalls those days.)

Oh yes, Avery Lin.

Though my time in Hong Kong and Taiwan wasn't as long as my years on the mainland, it was incredibly meaningful.

There, I could truly immerse myself in activities with fellow practitioners in a free environment—something we could only dream of in China.

In Hong Kong:

You know, Hong Kong is a very special place.

It served as a gateway, a point of contact. Practitioners in Hong Kong did an excellent job of clarifying the truth to tourists from the mainland.

I often joined them at tourist sites, where many visitors from China passed through.

At first, these people were cautious, even afraid—but then they were drawn in by the banners, by the powerful images depicting the persecution, and most of all by the practitioners' calmness and patience.

Many eventually stopped to listen, accepted flyers, and some even quietly made the "three withdrawals" (withdrawing from the Party, Youth League, and Young Pioneers) on the spot.

To be able to speak directly with them, to help them break through the lies—that felt incredibly meaningful.

Now, around 2016–2017, when I was there, the political climate in Hong Kong had already begun tightening.

The large-scale parades and rallies from the early years of the persecution had become much harder to organize.

Still, the practitioners in Hong Kong remained courageous and creative.

They continued holding public events to speak out—even if on a smaller scale or in altered formats to fit the environment.

There were candlelight vigils, modest-scale parades through central areas, peaceful gatherings—all conducted with dignity and grace to raise awareness.

The Tian Guo Marching Band still appeared, though with fewer members.

To me, even if these events didn't involve tens of thousands like before, being able to witness and participate in any public activity in that increasingly tense environment was deeply precious and unforgettable.

It showed extraordinary bravery—a steadfast resolve to stand firm before tyranny.

I took part in several peaceful appeals and moderate-scale parades.

Although the crowds weren't massive, the orderliness, the peaceful presence, and the powerful messages about Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance and ending the persecution were clearly conveyed.

And most importantly, they still left a deep impression—awakening many minds, especially those of first-time

mainland visitors who saw such scenes with their own eyes.

In Taiwan:

Now, Taiwan had a completely different feel.

There, Falun Dafa was openly practiced, respected by society and supported by the government.

The number of practitioners was very large.

I had the chance to attend major Fa study sessions—sometimes with hundreds of people—sharing cultivation experiences openly and sincerely.

What touched me most were the large-scale Fa Conferences and *character formation events*.

You might have seen those photos, Avery Lin.

Thousands of practitioners, dressed in neat exercise clothes, sitting in peaceful meditation—forming huge sacred characters like “Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance,” or images of Master or the Falun emblem.

To be part of that sea of people, to feel the harmonious, compassionate energy that enveloped everything, to see the unity and sincerity of fellow practitioners—it moved me deeply.

It truly reflected the beauty and greatness of Dafa.

It was a living image of Dafa’s wide spread, a complete contrast to the persecution on the mainland.

I also joined some truth-clarification efforts at tourist sites in Taiwan, where many mainland tourists visited. The warmth and support of the Taiwanese public toward Falun Gong was another thing that deeply moved me.

Those experiences in Hong Kong and Taiwan, Avery Lin, not only opened my eyes and allowed me to learn from overseas practitioners, but more importantly, they strengthened my confidence and inner strength.

I saw that no matter how brutal the persecution was in China, outside of it, Truthfulness-Compassion-Forbearance was still spreading. The light of Dafa still shines.

And in this battle between good and evil—goodness will ultimately triumph.

Avery Lin:

I haven't witnessed the atmosphere in Taiwan firsthand, but I can feel that it's probably quite similar to the grand activities organized by practitioners here in New York...

It's already getting late—later than yesterday...

Could you share a bit about your journey to the U.S., and perhaps offer a few words for sentient beings, especially young people?

Ma Changsheng:

(Smiling gently, his eyes filled with warmth as he looks at Avery Lin.)

That's right, Avery Lin. The activities in Taiwan, with their freedom and large scale, do indeed have a similar atmosphere to what our fellow practitioners have created here in New York.

They are all vivid demonstrations of the widespread transmission of Dafa around the world—a stark contrast to what's happening in our homeland.

You're right, it's getting late. We've been talking for quite a while.

(He pauses for a moment, his gaze drifting into the distance before turning back to Avery Lin with a calm, reflective air.)

As for my coming to the U.S.... after the years in Hong Kong and Taiwan, I felt that my mission needed to continue in a place where I could raise my voice even more, a place where the truth could reach more people around the globe.

New York—as you know—is often called the “capital of the world.” And our fellow practitioners here are doing many great things to clarify the truth and expose the persecution.

Being able to come here—I also consider it a part of Master’s arrangement.

Just like my departure from China, everything went surprisingly smoothly, beyond what I could have imagined.

I simply held one thought in my heart: that I needed to go where I was meant to go, and do what I was meant to do. And the path naturally opened up.

(He smiles softly, then his voice takes on a more heartfelt tone.)

If I could share a few words—especially for sentient beings in this special time, and especially for young people like you...

First of all, I hope everyone, no matter where you are or what ethnicity you belong to, will make an effort to learn the truth about Falun Dafa and the brutal persecution by the Chinese Communist Party.

Don’t blindly believe the one-sided propaganda or distorted information.

Truthfulness–Compassion–Forbearance are universal values, the moral foundation of humanity.

A spiritual practice that teaches people to live by Truthfulness–Compassion–Forbearance and brings health and peace to millions cannot possibly be an “evil cult.”

Use your conscience to judge.

Especially for the younger generation—you are the future of the world.

In this era, you face countless material temptations and overwhelming chaos of information.

It's easy to get swept up in surface-level trends and forget core spiritual values, forget the true meaning of life.

I hope you will **cherish kindness and uphold morality**.

Don't be afraid to go against the crowd if it means doing what is right.

Be brave in seeking the truth—don't let lies blind you.

Within each person is a lamp of conscience; let it light your path.

The world is going through a time of great upheaval.

Many speak of the “End of Dharma,” of the trials humanity must face.

But in every crisis, there is also hope.

I believe that as long as people hold onto kindness and choose to stand with righteousness, a bright future awaits.

Falun Dafa has given me—and millions of others—the answers to life's biggest questions, bringing inner peace and a genuine path of cultivation.

If you are fated, I hope you will look into it. It could be a tremendous blessing.

Remember, human life is incredibly precious.

Don't waste it on meaningless things.

Live with purpose, live in a way that honors your existence—and leave behind something good for future generations.

(Uncle Ma looks at Avery Lin with tenderness and hope in his eyes.)

Let's wrap up here for today, Avery Lin.

Thank you for your patience in listening to the stories of an old man like me.

Avery Lin:

Thank you for sharing, sir...

When you just mentioned "human life is incredibly precious," it reminded me once again of the phrase:

"To be born as a human is rare; to be born in China is rarer; to encounter the True Law is even rarer; and to meet a True Master is the rarest of all..."

Once again, thank you so much—and I wish you all the best!

Ma Changsheng:

(Smiling, his eyes glinting with deep empathy and appreciation upon hearing Avery Lin recall that line.)

Avery Lin, what you said is truly meaningful and profound.

"To be born as a human is rare; to be born in China is rarer; to encounter the True Law is even rarer; and to meet a True Master is the rarest of all."

Every part of that saying speaks to a great truth—a reminder of the precious and rare opportunities in this human life.

(He nods gently, looking at Avery with satisfaction and admiration.)

For myself, after so many years of seeking, through all the ups and downs, I've come to understand these words more deeply.

Precisely because "human life is rare," we must treasure it.

And because "encountering the True Law and meeting a True Master" are so rare, once we have the chance, we must cherish it, remain steadfast, and cultivate diligently.

The fact that you can reflect on this, Avery Lin, brings me great joy.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to listen.

I hope you always hold onto kindness and wisdom—and

that many good things come your way.
All the best to you.

* * *

EPILOGUE

Four afternoons of conversation with Ma Changsheng have passed like a long, lingering dream.

As our final talk came to a close, darkness had already enveloped the mountain.

He walked me to the doorstep.

The night was still, broken only by the soft chirping of insects and the warm yellow glow spilling out from the small house behind him.

I looked at him—a cultivator who had nearly walked a full cycle of life. His face bore the deep traces of time, yet his eyes remained clear and serenely radiant.

His stories continue to echo in my mind: the thirty-year-long journey in search of the Way, the moment of overwhelming joy when he found the True Law, the years of peaceful cultivation that were followed by the storm of persecution, and the unwavering faith that endured even amidst trials that seemed insurmountable.

Ma Changsheng's account did not contain grand rhetoric, nor did it carry accusations or resentment.

It was simply a steady stream of memory—honest and unembellished—told by someone who had used his own

life to search for and defend a belief.

A belief in **Truthfulness–Compassion–Forbearance**—universal values that, deep down, perhaps every human heart yearns for.

As I left his home and made my way down the familiar mountain path, I looked up at the star-filled sky.

In that moment, I realized that Ma Changsheng's journey is not just his own story.

In many ways, it reflects the paths of countless other lives in this era—those who persist in holding onto kindness amidst a chaotic world, those who quietly seek answers to life's deepest questions.

This book may close, but each of our own journeys continues onward.

May the story of one who walked ahead be like a small lantern—casting a little light, a little warmth, a little courage—for those still walking their path in search of truth and meaning.

Avery Lin

THE LIVES MEDIA

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR & THE LIVES MEDIA PROJECT

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Avery Lin is an independent author who writes about culture, society, science, and spirituality, with the aim of seeking truth, awakening conscience, and reflecting on the destiny of humankind.

Her works often originate from real-life interviews, recorded with honesty, emotional depth, and a spirit of enlightenment.

ABOUT THE PROJECT

This book is part of a series published by THE LIVES MEDIA – an independent publishing initiative with a global vision and a mission to preserve and spread timeless echoes. Without chasing the daily news cycle, we aim for books that can deeply touch the human consciousness.

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Thank you for taking the time to read this book!

**May God and Buddha bless you on your journey of
discovering the truth.**