

Mississauga Realtor spreads the word on Falun Gong

Group fights oppression of practitioners in China

BY SUSAN DORAN

“I grew up in a hot blooded, short-tempered, southern Italian family . . . Mention spirituality to me and I laughed in your face,” says Joel Chipkar, associate broker with Chipkar Real Estate in Mississauga, Ont., a company that his family has operated for over 35 years.

“I had all the toys,” says Chipkar. “I had all the girls. I had everything except happiness and peace. And as the years went by my anger and confusion grew.”

Two years ago, he turned to his mother for help.

“I knew she practised this new technique and I’d noticed big changes in her. She smiled more than she used to. Tribulations bounced off her.”

His mother explained that the improvement in her attitude was largely due to Falun Gong, also called Falun Dafa. The meaning of both terms is something along the lines of “universal law of energy”, a meditation and exercise practice that sprung to popularity in China in the early 1990s, one of many modern Qigong disciplines derived from Buddhist teachings and rooted in traditional Chinese medicine.

Consisting of five sets of slow-motion exercises, Falun Gong revolves around the principles of “truthfulness, compassion, and tolerance.” It integrates physical well being with ethical behaviour, and has been claimed to improve health and even cure illness.

Zhuan Falun, the main book of teachings by Falun Gong founder Li Hongzhi, relies on the sort of wisdom stressed by most of the world’s great spiritual teachings: Take responsibility for your own life and be kind to others.

Practitioners say Falun Gong

is not a religion and has no political agenda — at least not in the normal sense.

Since its introduction into China in 1992, it has attracted an estimated 70 million practitioners in that country alone, and an additional 30 million in other countries around the world, placing it among the fastest-spreading spiritual teachings in history.

Falun Gong is often in the

police, jailed, tortured, or forced into labour camps or mental hospitals.

Explains a director of Amnesty International; “They were arrested purely because they were practicing their own beliefs. We have documented closed-door trials where no one knew what happened . . . Lawyers were threatened not to represent Falun Gong practitioners.”

The brutal crackdown in China has failed to wipe out the movement.

No doubt at least partly because the emergence of Falun Gong coincided with the rise of the Internet, Beijing’s oppressive

struggled against oppression. And coming from the acquisitive world of real estate as he does, he’s impressed by the fact that Falun Gong classes are always free. His feeling is that enlightenment shouldn’t have a price tag.

work.” It takes time and effort to avoid slipping back into old negative patterns and to understand the “inner connotation behind truthfulness-compassion-tolerance at different levels,” he says.



Above: This move, called “holding the wheel” is part of the Falun Gong meditation and exercise routine.

news for other reasons, however. In the past couple of years, practitioners in China have suffered widespread human rights abuses at the hands of the country’s Communist government. After supporting the belief system initially, the government now apparently views it as a threat to the regime’s stranglehold on China.

Government officials have tried to discredit Falun Gong globally, saying — among other things — that it represents a reversion to superstitious beliefs that run counter to Communist doctrine.

More than 200 people have allegedly been killed in China for practicing Falun Gong, while tens of thousands of others have been arbitrarily detained by

policies have galvanized millions of people world-wide against the human rights violations. Particularly perplexing to this network of people is the fact that Beijing was awarded the 2008 Olympic games, despite these ongoing abuses.

Chipkar admires the consistently peaceful manner in which Falun Gong practitioners have



Above: Members of the Falun Gong movement perform a massive co-ordinated demonstration.



Realtor Joel Chipkar addresses a rally outside the Chinese consulate in Toronto with professor Kun Lun Zhang, a Canadian art professor at McGill University in Montreal, who was arrested in China and tortured for three months until he was released last January.

Today, he has an easier relationship with others and himself. “I’ve become such a peaceful person. Before, I fought with everybody and wanted everybody to change to suit me.”

He says: “It’s all cause and effect. When I relate to my world with selflessness and kindness others also become kind.”

He now facilitates free Falun Gong exercise classes in his area and also spends time spreading awareness of the Chinese government’s persecution of Falun Gong practitioners. He says he does what he can — be it speaking out at different forums, hitting the streets with petitions and flyers, or attending large demonstrations (where many Falun Gong members wear distinctive yellow shirts).

Says Chipkar: “Falun Dafa has offered me a path back to my fundamental nature. All I have to do is walk it.”

More information about Falun Gong is available on the Internet at www.faluninfo.net or www.falundafa.ca

When he tried the exercises, he found them peaceful and powerful. “I was told, ‘Do not go into any sort of trance. You must know where you are at all times. You hear everything. You feel everything.’”

But the next day something one of his brothers said threw him into a rage. He realized then that “true spirituality is hard