ENJOYING SERENITY: New Yorkers perform the meditation of Falun Gong in a city park. A central component of the practice is self-improvement, or "cultivation," making it truly a practice of mind and body.

Cultivating Yourself

A portrait of the practice and history of Falun Gong reveals much not commonly seen in the headlines

Falun Gong is an ancient Chinese spiritual discipline in the Buddhist tradition. It consists of moral teachings, a meditation, and four gentle exercises that are a truly unique and highly enjoyable way to improve your health and energy levels.

At the core of Falun Gong are the values of Truthfulness, Compassion, and Tolerance (or in Chinese, *Zhen* 真 *Shan* 善 *Ren* 忍). Falun Dafa teaches that these are the most fundamental qualities of the universe, and takes them to be a guide for daily life and practice.

In the words of Falun Gong's teacher, Mr. Li Hongzhi, "assimilation to the highest qualities of the universe—*Zhen* 真 *Shan* 善 *Ren* 忍—is the foundation of practice. Practice is guided by these supreme qualities, and based on the very laws which underlie the development of the cosmos."

Falun Gong is also commonly known as "Falun Dafa."

By 1999 Falun Gong had grown to become the largest and fastest growing practice of the sort in Chinese if not world history. In just seven years since its 1992 introduction to the public, an estimated 100 million people in China were by then learning or practicing Falun Gong.

In Asia spiritual practices of this variety are often referred to as ways of "cultivation," or "self-cultivation," and form an integral part of classical Chinese culture. Various Daoist, Buddhist, and Confucian practices fit this rubric.

Through consistent and dedicated practice, the student of Falun Gong comes to achieve a state of selflessness, greater insight and awareness, inner purity, and balance—the deeper workings of what might be called true health. Ultimately he or she approaches a state of spiritual attainment that in the Asian tradition is known as "enlightenment" or "attaining the Dao (Way)."

While Falun Gong aspires to inner transformation of the self, it nevertheless typically translates outwardly into positive change in the world, insofar as the practitioner becomes a more patient family member, a more conscientious employee, or a more active member of society.

Falun Gong has thus been the subject of many citations, awards, and proclamations, conferred by government officials and a variety of organizations. Many who practice Falun Gong have been the recipients of service awards in their communities and at their workplaces.

The practice's founder, Mr. Li Hongzhi, is a five-time Nobel Peace Prize nominee and was nominated by the European Parliament for the Sakharov Prize For Freedom of Thought. He is the recipient of Freedom House's International Religious Freedom Award.

Eschewing the spotlight, Mr. Li guides the practice through his writings and occasional speeches, typically at Falun Gong conferences.

Mr. Li has always insisted that the practice be taught for free and available to all, and as such, all Falun Gong books, video recordings, and the like are available for free viewing online.

Few people today are aware that Falun Gong and its followers received much in the way of official recognition in China during the 1990s, prior to a dramatic and violent change in political winds in 1999 which saw the practice persecuted.

In 1993, Mr. Li was named the "Most Welcomed Qigong Master" in Beijing and bestowed by an official body with the Award for Advancing Frontier Science.

The same year, *The People's Public Security News*—the official newspaper of China's Ministry of Public Security—praised Mr. Li for his contributions "in promoting the traditional crime-fighting virtues of the Chinese people, in safeguarding social order and security, and in promoting rectitude in society."

By 1999, Chinese officials went so far as to quantify Falun Gong's benefits, such as when one official from China's National Sports Commission, speaking with *U.S. News & World Report*, declared that Falun Dafa "can save each person 1,000 yuan in annual medical fees. If 100 million people are practicing it, that's 100 billion yuan saved per year in medical fees."

The same official went on to note that, "Premier Zhu Rongji is very happy about that."

Today Falun Gong is practiced in more than 100 countries around the world, with clubs and associations existing in a range of cities, companies, universities, and other settings.

There might very well be one coming soon to a park near you.

Family Matters

To hear Kate describe how her mother, Susan, once was, you'd think she had horns.

"Judgmental. Unaccepting. Never satisfied. Self-absorbed." Not the stuff good mother-daughter relationships are forged of.

Yet today, both cherish their friendship—no longer merely a "relationship"—and look back at the Susan of the past as a whole 'nother creature.

"Falun Gong completely changed our relationship, our family," the 61-year old mother says, looking back. "It enabled me to finally think about others first, to put myself in their shoes. I can now put others before myself."

By distilling a range of classical Chinese sensibilities, values, and ideals, Falun Gong brings the best qualities of Chinese tradition to bear on lives in the present.

The Five Exercises

1

Buddha Displaying a Thousand Hands
Using gentle stretching movements, the exercise opens all of the body's energy channels, creating a powerful energy field.

2

Falun Standing Stance
Comprised of four still positions that can be held for several minutes each, the second exercise boosts energy levels and awakens wisdom.

3

Penetrating the Two Extremes
With its gentle hand-gliding movements, this exercise purifies the body using energy from the cosmos.

4

Falun Cosmic Circuit
By gently tracing the hands over the body, front and back, the fourth exercise rectifies abnormal conditions in the body and circulates energy.

5

Strengthening Higher Abilities
A meditation that incorporates special mudra and hand positions to refine body and mind, it strengthens higher abilities and energy.