

Wudang



02/22



TEACHING THE ART, SCIENCE, AND SPIRIT OF T'AI CHI

From Sifu Paul

Greetings, everyone,

Happy new year!

Our solar new year began in January, the month named after Janus, the Roman god of beginnings, transitions, and time. He held his two faces—one looking symbolically into the past, the other toward the future, with a steady gaze.

The Chinese celebrated the lunar new year early this year on February 1. We transition from an Ox year to the Tiger, whose nature the Chinese refer to as the “king of all beasts.”

I saw this firsthand at a Siberian tiger preserve in China in 2016. The tigers were allowed to roam freely, while visitors walked on a long wooden deck out into their field, protected only by chain-link fence on both sides of the deck and above it. The cats seemed docile and disinterested as they lay in the August heat...until it was feeding time. The alpha males charged the food with ferocious speed I didn't think possible for an animal upward of 600 pounds.

This is the Year of the Tiger, whose figurative attributes of bravery, confidence, and willpower can inspire us to set our course for the year ahead.

In this issue: In honor of T.T. Liang's 122nd birthday this past January 23, I offer his article on practicing T'ai Chi to music. You'll also see another short article on keeping your feet supple and stable in the season of heavy boots, our current class schedule—with possible new course offerings in 2022—and more.

May the new year be all that you hope and imagine it to be.



New Practice Videos on the Way

There will be some new practice videos available soon in the Members section on the website.

1. Basic T'ai Chi Footwork and Stances
2. T'ai Chi Walking Practice
3. T'ai Chi Qigong
4. T'ai Chi 5-Posture Short Form
5. T'ai Chi Cane Form
6. T'ai Chi Cane Practice Cycles

Stay tuned for even more videos this year. If you have something you would like to see, send us an email and let us know.

New Year, New Quarter

Thanks to all of you who have paid membership dues for the first quarter. We're working

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Photo by Paul Abdella,
China, 2016

hard to get our memberships to meet our overhead, so every payment counts. If you know someone who is interested in T'ai Chi, please let them know about us. They can learn more at tctaichi.org.

Why We Should Practice T'ai Chi to Music

By T.T. Liang

T.T. Liang studied T'ai Chi in Taiwan with his teacher, Professor Cheng Man-ching, in the 1950s. They both came to the United States in 1963 and gave the first official demonstrations of T'ai Chi at the United Nations. In China and Taiwan, T.T. Liang was also an accomplished ballroom dancer—which sparked his idea and interest in practicing T'ai Chi to music.

In order to be a fluid ballroom dancer, one must learn the movements to a specific count and rhythm in order to move harmoniously with a partner. This requires both practice and concentration. When applied to the practice of T'ai Chi, music that has a slow, steady beat and a calming melody can be used to relax the body-mind and synchronize the movements within each posture to the beat. This creates precision in the movements and aligns them with the principles of T'ai Chi Ch'uan.

Master Liang began teaching his T'ai Chi-to-music method in the U.S. and it was well received—but not by everyone. Some thought it an unnecessary distraction and a violation of tradition. One prominent teacher on the East Coast wrote a negative critique of practicing T'ai Chi to music in the most popular T'ai Chi magazine of the time, without mentioning T.T. Liang specifically. Master Liang wrote his own article, not so much as a rebuttal but simply to state why he felt practicing T'ai Chi to music was beneficial. The following is the article that he wrote. —Paul

More than 1000 years ago a Chinese monk named Chan Chung developed a method of concentration during meditation. He told people to repeat silently “what did I look like before I was born?” . . . that is, “what did I look like when I was in my mother’s womb?” Later this method was handed down to Japan as Zen Dao, using the question “what is nothing?” for concentration.



We often say that a human heart is like a monkey, jumping and turning around all the time, and their mind is like a horse galloping without pause. When one begins to practice meditation their heart and mind are fully occupied with shortcut thoughts. When one thought is gone, it is immediately replaced by another, giving the heart and mind no chance to rest and concentrate. So, Monk Chan Chung used his way of concentration to cut out all the other short confused thoughts.

As the question, “what did I look like before I was born?” can never be solved, you have to repeat it over and over again for a long time. Gradually your heart and mind will become

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T.T. Liang

Photo by Dan Polsfuss

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peaceful and quiet, and only one thing will be left to think of—"what did I look like before I was born?" Finally, you forget even the words you are concentrating on, so your heart and mind will be all empty; your body will be completely relaxed; the Chi will sink and abide in the tan-tien, and the blood will circulate through the whole body without hindrance. It is good for health, and also the way to metamorphose into a Buddha.

It is the same with practicing t'ai chi. In t'ai chi the ascent to the highest level is divided into four steps:

1. When beginning the practice of t'ai chi, you will have to memorize the number of beats, the directions, the practical uses of each posture and the 10 guiding points as described in my book. You will breathe naturally, and will not use music.
2. After you have mastered all the points mentioned above, you'll have to use beats, music and breathing (proper methods of inhaling and exhaling) for concentration, and get rid of all the rest.
3. At the next stage you will use only music for concentration and skip the others.

4. After practicing t'ai chi with music for a sufficient time you'll forget the music, the movement, even yourself—although you are proceeding as usual. At this stage you are in a trance; your five attributes of form, perception, consciousness, action, and knowledge are all empty.

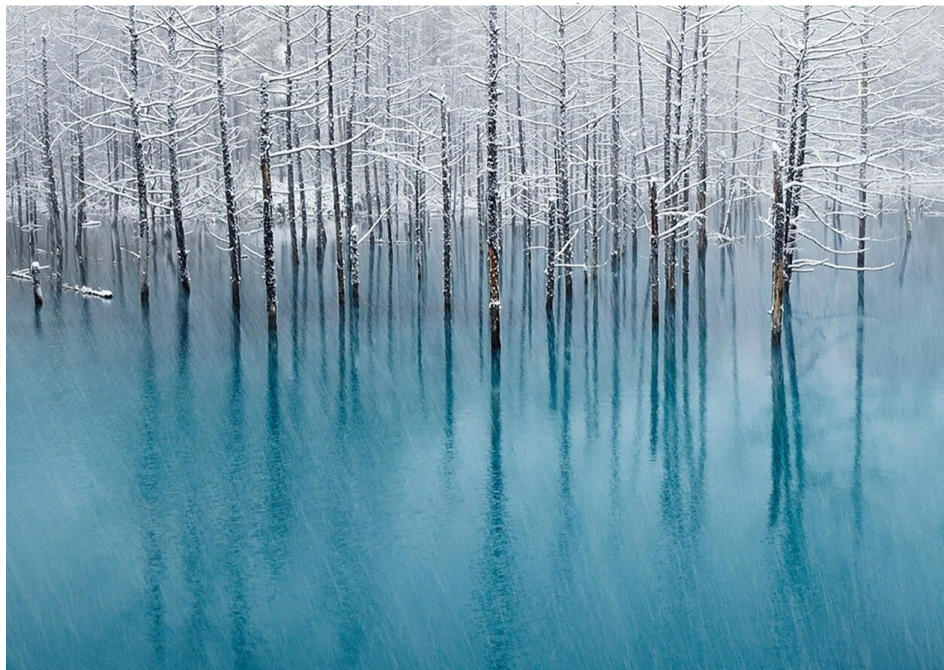
This is meditation in action and action in meditation. When you finish and come to the end of the postures, suddenly you're back. Where have I been? What have I been doing? I don't know and I don't remember. This is complete relaxation of body and mind—truly good for your health, and also the way to immortality.

Of course, if one can reach the highest level while practicing t'ai chi without music, so much the better. But I cannot do it because I am a human being, an ordinary ignorant person with a heart like a monkey and a mind like a horse. So, I must use music as a means of concentration, as a steppingstone to the highest level of t'ai chi.

I have been learning and practicing tai chi with music for more than 35 years. After the first five years I thought I knew everything and started to criticize this man as no good, that man as no good, and to consider only myself as really good. After another 10 years of learning and practicing I began to realize that I knew only a little. Instead of criticizing others I started to criticize only myself, because I was not qualified to criticize

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"I must use music as a means of concentration, as a steppingstone to the highest level of t'ai chi."



others with my superficial smattering of knowledge—and besides, I had no time for criticizing others.

After continuously practicing and painstakingly learning from teachers, books and classics, and seriously criticizing myself for another 20 years, I understood that I was not qualified and dared not to criticize others because the more I practiced, the more I wanted to learn from teachers, books and Classics; and the more I learned, the less I felt I knew.

The theory and philosophy of t'ai chi are so profound and abstruse, and the functional use is so subtle and ingenious, that I must continue studying and practicing t'ai chi with music forever and ever. It is the only way to improve and better myself.

I like music, especially soft music, because it is in a human being's nature. It can relieve one's tension and anxiety, produce happiness and relaxation, improve harmony and coordination.

I have been teaching and practicing t'ai chi with music for 30 years. During these 30 years I have taught in many universities, colleges and high schools and have had thousands of students study with me. They all say that t'ai chi with music is good, and they have all benefited from it because they are human beings and to like music is in their nature. If t'ai chi with music were no good and were extraneous to the essence of t'ai chi I would have disappeared from this world 30 years ago. I am now 81; I am still living and enjoying perfect health because as a human being I like music and have chosen to continue practicing t'ai chi with music to prolong my life.

“The true use of music is to become musical in one's thoughts, words, and actions. One should be able to give the harmony for which the soul yearns and longs every moment. All the tragedy in the world, in the individual and in the multitude, comes from lack of harmony, and harmony is best given by producing it in one's own life.”

— Hazrat Inayat Khan, Indian mystic and musician

Class Schedule

Solo Form

Monday, Wednesday, Thursday:
6:00 p.m.–7:15 p.m.

Saturday 12:30 p.m.–1:45 p.m.:

These are Full Solo Form classes and are simulcast on Zoom.

Beginning Solo Form

Saturday 11:00 a.m.–12:15 p.m.

T'ai Chi Weapons Classes

Monday: 7:30–8:30 p.m. **T'ai Chi Cane — Drills and Applications:** You must know the Cane Form to be in this class.

Thursday: 7:30–8:30 p.m. **Beginning T'ai Chi Cane Form:** You must know the Solo Form to be in this class.

The T'ai Chi Symmetries

These are two-person partner classes. You must be vaccinated and wear a mask.

Tuesday 6:00–7:00 p.m. **Beginning T'ai Chi Symmetry 1:** Students need to have finished the Solo Form with at least a year of practice. Limit 12 people. Talk to Sifu Paul if you are uncertain about whether you should participate in this class. Register online.

Tuesday 7:15–8:30 p.m. **Symmetries 1, 2, 3, Review:** Students in this class need to have learned at least these three symmetries before. Limit 12 people. Register online.

Possible Return of Healing Tao Meditation and Neigong Practices

Wednesdays 7:30–8:30 p.m.

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Our current class schedule includes both beginning and advanced classes in:

- Solo Form
- Weapons (Cane)
- Symmetries

Meditation and Neigong practices could return soon!

Time for Tee

Stretch, massage, and reactivate your feet for optimum stabilization.

Take a look at your hand—the palm side, the back side, and the thumb side. Now draw your fingers and thumb together, then separate the thumb while leaving the fingers connected. Now connect the thumb to the index finger and separate the rest; now move the thumb to the center of your palm. Make a fist; then open the fist. That's enough. For most of us, those movements of the hand are relatively easy to perform.

Now take your shoes and socks off. Lift your big toe while resting the others on the floor. Now raise the four toes while resting the large toe on the floor. Now separate the toes, then draw them together. How did you do? For most people living in a shoe-wearing culture, the answer is typically, not very well.

Your foot has a similar bony architecture to the hand, with many joints that provide information to the brain on your balance and stabilization that's designed to improve your movement. We spend long periods of time in our shoes, often in shoes with stiff soles and shoes that are over engineered to control the foot in different ways or that put the foot in unnatural positions (think high heels). This makes it difficult for the brain to receive the same amount of signaling that it would while wearing nothing on the foot, or a shoe that was more flexible and allowed the foot to move more naturally. This will keep the joints mobile and the muscles of the feet strong.

It's not always possible to wear minimal footwear if the foot needs protection from occupational or environmental concerns, but moving away from stiff, motion-controlled footwear to more neutral shoes that promote movement in the foot is a good idea. Reactivating strength and range of motion in the foot can also be achieved through stretching and tissue work (massaging the soft tissue). If you can't get a regular foot massage, using a ball to massage and release tension in the foot is an excellent substitute and allows for daily tissue work sessions.



A simple and effective tissue work practice is to use a solid-core, soft rubber Tee Ball (try a Pro Brite Sponge Solid Core Tee Ball) or similar solid rubber ball on the bottoms of the feet. Place the ball under the heel and press down firmly, slowly rolling down the center of the foot toward the toes. Once at the toes, grip the ball with the toes as if trying to pick it up, then go in the other direction and lift the heel while bending the toes upward. Press the inner arch of the foot, the outer edge, and anywhere that relieves tension in the foot.

Over time, you can begin using a firmer ball such as a tennis ball. Work up to being able to put your full body weight onto the ball.

Practice spreading the toes and bringing them together, lifting the large toes then the other four as described above, then curl the toes, then press them flat to the floor. This might not be easy at first but will develop with practice. Try walking on the balls of the feet then the heels. From a seated position, point the toes and foot toward the knees, then go the other way and point the toes and foot away from the knees. Circle the feet in both directions. Finally, massage the foot with your hands and separate the toes manually.

Begin with a ten-minute daily practice, and you will begin to restore natural movement to the foot. You can also increase your balance and stabilization.

<< **Stretching and soft tissue massage will help keep the joints of the foot mobile and the muscles strong, which fosters natural movement and better balance.**

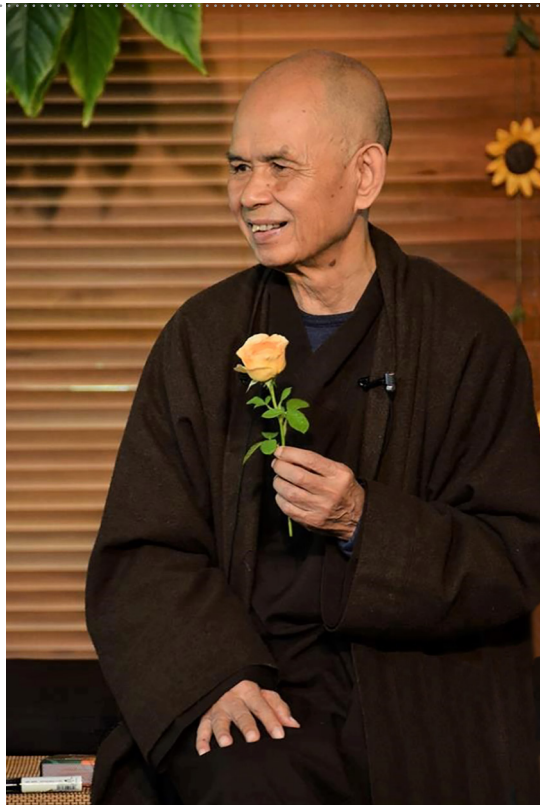
“When you are a young person, you are like a young creek, and you meet many rocks, many obstacles and difficulties on your way. You hurry to get past these obstacles and get to the ocean.

But as the creek moves down through the fields, it becomes larger and calmer and it can enjoy the reflection of the sky. It's wonderful. You will arrive at the sea anyway so enjoy the journey. Enjoy the sunshine, the sunset, the moon, the birds, the trees, and the many beauties along the way. Taste every moment of your daily life.

“The rhythm of my heart is the birth and death of all that is alive.”

—Thich Nhat Hanh

Oct. 11, 1926–Jan. 22, 2022



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Thich Nhat Hanh
Oct. 11, 1926–
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Known as the “father of mindfulness,” Thich Nhat Hanh was a major influence on Western practices of Buddhism.

A Note of Thanks

To my T'ai Chi Friends:

I want to thank you for your support in my brother's passing. Caring energy sent my way strengthened me and allowed me to hold the center for my family. My Thanks and Blessings!

—Chris Knudtson

