



Wudang

A MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER

7/20



From Sifu Paul

The summer Solstice ushered in the season of the fire element, complete with a solar eclipse, and the cool temperate spring has given way to full summer heat. In this short summer issue: an update on the studio's reopening, my trip to Asheville, revisiting the T'ai Chi Classics, a third-quarter update, and more. Have a happy and safe Fourth of July.

The Studio Inside and Out

In early June, the governor announced phase III of a gradual reopening of the state and decreed that gyms, personal fitness, and yoga and martial arts studios may open at 25% capacity.

Our studio is engaging in its own four-stage phased-in reopening strategy that began with the release of T'ai Chi and Qigong practice videos and weekly T'ai Chi Practice Meet-Ups in the Park and will now move to virtual online classes on Zoom and then to the final phase of a limited reopening at our studio space sometime in September. The exact date will be announced in late summer.

The T'ai Chi Meet-Ups in the Park have been well attended and enjoyable due to the beautiful spring and early-summer weather we've been having. The online virtual classes have been delayed due to some technical issues that have now largely been resolved; They will begin in mid- to late July.

We are delaying the opening of classes in our physical space for three reasons:

1. Safety. Our practice hall is spacious and beautiful, but the COVID-19 virus is still in an exponential growth phase, and the



health and safety of our members is our primary concern.

2. Maximizing the T'ai Chi Experience. The summer season is short in Minnesota, but the heat is on, especially in July and August, in a typical summer with temperatures in the 90s and humidity at tropical levels. This can make for an uncomfortable classroom experience under normal conditions; add masks and other pandemic protocols to the mix, and the pleasures of the practice diminish quickly. It's better to wait until things cool down a little on all fronts to restart our live classes at the studio.
3. Preparing the Space. We are replacing our ceiling fans this summer to be quieter and more efficient at moving greater volumes of air as well as adding two additional fans in the practice hall. The studio space is being reconfigured in other ways that will

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Outdoor meet-ups continue; phased reopening of studio planned

maximize the flow of members into and out of the studio as classes resume. As the seasons change, outdoor practices will need to move indoors, and we will be ready.

Thanks to everyone for your flexibility and understanding.

A Return to Asheville

This summer (July 10–15), I will be returning to the Blue Ridge Mountaintop home of my teacher, Healing Tao USA founder Michael Winn, for five and a half days of advanced training in Qigong, T'ai Chi, related internal arts, and inner alchemy meditation.

I began studying in the Universal Healing Tao system in 1986 and started training with Michael in 2015. I am currently an Associate Instructor in the system, and this summer's training session will secure a Full Instructor Certification for me.

In the 1930s, a Wandering Taoist named Yi Eng (One Cloud) lived and cultivated on Chaingbai Mountain in Northern China and created seven Taoist alchemy methods that he passed on to his student Mantak Chia. Chia brought the methods to the West and created the Universal Healing Tao System. He taught the methods to Michael Winn, who further refined the system for Western Taoists.

With more than 40 years of practice in internal energy methods and 20 years of study on China's sacred mountains and in Beijing hospitals, Michael developed a process that integrates religious and scientific cosmologies into a heart-centered Conscious Energy Science accessible to anyone who wants to learn it.

I'm excited to return to the Blue Ridge Mountains and connect with old classmates, some of whom I've traveled around China with; immerse myself in the practices; and enjoy the big nature and the fun.

As Michael once said, "Playing with the chi field is meant to be fun. While refining the elixir, laughter is the best medicine."

With Gratitude to Our Members

The second quarter of 2020 came with a surprise: the mandatory shutdown of the studio by the state due to the coronavirus. This is normally a robust financial quarter, but this spring, there were no live class offerings available to generate revenue. Many members stepped up and paid their dues and even made additional donations. This had a tremendous impact on our ability to navigate through the quarter.

The third quarter, Q3, has arrived. It's typically a slow time financially for the studio under normal circumstances; things are currently anything but normal. It's been heart-warming to have received a few payments for Q3 even before the quarter began. If you are able to pay third-quarter dues—or any part of your typical membership—it would be essential for us and deeply appreciated.

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Sifu Paul to complete
Healing Tao instructor
certification this month

*"The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious—the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science."
—Albert Einstein*

Contact Us

For timely updates, follow Twin Cities T'ai Chi Ch'uan on **Facebook**.

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A String of Pearls

“In every movement the entire body should be light and agile and all of its parts connected like a string of pearls.”

For those of us who practice T'ai Chi, this is a familiar passage from the T'ai Chi Ch'uan classic attributed to Chang San-feng, T'ai Chi's legendary founder. When one reads a mystery novel, the payoff to the story is at the end. When a joke is told, the punch line also comes at the end. But when an oracle in a wisdom tradition or work of philosophy is examined, often the most profound ideas are offered first. The first chapter, page, paragraph, aphorism, sentence, or even word is a summation of the core insight that gets expounded upon in later writings.

There have been many translations and interpretations of this line over the centuries.

T.T. Liang referred to “every movement” as every posture in the T'ai Chi form. The body, when performing the movements, is light or free of excess muscular tension, which produces agility, the ability to move quickly and effortlessly. Master Liang saw the postures as pearls, individual patterns of movement that are cultivated over time and represent a particular technique or martial arts idea or strategy. It is important for the postures to maintain their identity as individual pearls when strung together in the context of the form and not be blended together as they are in many contemporary Wu Shu style forms. For Master Liang, the string that unites the postures in the form is mind-intent: the faculty of conscious and unconscious thought merging with the will to produce a particular result. In this case, that means a full round of the T'ai Chi sequence undisturbed and unbroken by random thoughts and distractions.

Grandmaster Wai-lun Choi sees the string of pearls as the structure and proper alignment of the bones and joints. If the bones are properly aligned via the joints, they can receive and channel force effectively. This alignment allows the body/muscles to relax and become light and agile, which lets the Qi/energy flow



unobstructed. Energy follows intention, so again the mind-intent threads or directs the Qi through the pearls of alignment. Master Choi was fond of saying, “The outside creates the inside, the inside creates the outside” to describe the relationship between the physical and nonphysical in martial arts.

In ancient China, copper coins were strung together through the square holes in the center of each coin in groups of a thousand. This was a unit of currency known as a diao. It was also another metaphor used interchangeably with the string of pearls—that of a string of coins. When clasped and swung from the hand, the chain of coins would undulate in a wavelike motion resembling the body of a snake, bringing forth yet another image: that of a spine, agile and free of restrictions. In my more than 40 years of martial arts practice, I have come to believe the most valuable physical benefit of my practice has been the simple act of staying supple. When the muscles are elastic enough to extend beyond a normal range of motion yet toned, where the residual tension in a muscle at rest is balanced between firmness and relaxation, when the sinew is strong yet flexible, the joints open and lubricated, then the body is supple, vibrant, and alive.

In our modern society, back pain and the slow degeneration of the spine have become common conditions. With more and more

people working in sedentary office environments, neck pain has become a condition that affects at least three-quarters of the population at some point in their lives. As a result, large amounts of money are spent on medical treatment and medication by people in search of relief.



A federally funded study by the National Institute of Health's Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine compared chiropractic spinal manipulation, home exercises, and medication for effectiveness in relieving neck pain. The study used 272 people reporting neck pain without a specific cause for at least two weeks but not longer than three months. It was expected that spinal manipulation would be the most effective treatment. What the researchers actually found, however, was that spinal manipulation and home exercises were equally effective at relieving neck pain after 12 weeks of treatment. One measure reported about 80% of both the spinal manipulation group and the home exercise group experiencing a reduction of at least 50% in pain levels after 12 weeks, and about 30% of the patients showed a 100% reduction in pain compared with 13% from the medication group. Dr. Gert Bronfort, one of the designers of the study, said a chicken-like maneuver of the head in which the participants pull their heads back while tilting their chins downward "seemed to be

especially useful."

The results of the study were surprising (and possibly disappointing) to the chiropractors who designed it, but the fact that regular and specific exercises for the neck and spine proved to be as effective as spinal manipulation administered twice a week is great news for us all. Here at the studio, great care is taken to provide specific and targeted joint release to all three sections of the spine as well as to the rest of the body, even before we practice the form. The Solo Form, with its rhythmic and gentle movements practiced with an open and elongated spine, completes the restorative session of exercise begun in the warm-up.

Whether you prefer a string of a thousand coins or a string of pearls, you know you've acquired something of value.

For Love in a Time of Conflict

When the gentleness between you hardens
And you fall out of your belonging with each
other,
May the depths you have reached hold you
still.
When no true word can be said, or heard,
And you mirror each other in the script of
hurt,
When even the silence has become raw and
torn,
May you hear again an echo of your first
music.
When the weave of affection starts to unravel
And anger begins to sear the ground between
you,
Before this weather of grief invites
The black seed of bitterness to find root,
May your souls come to kiss.
Now is the time for one of you to be gracious,
To allow a kindness beyond thought and hurt,
Reach out with sure hands
To take the chalice of your love,
And carry it carefully through this echoless
waste
Until this winter pilgrimage leads you
Towards the gateway to spring.
—John Donohue

