



Wudang

8/20



A MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER

From Sifu Paul

Greetings, everyone,

The late-summer season has begun, with its beautiful blooming plants, emerging golden palette, and waning sunlight. It's one of the most radiant times of the year.

As we move toward autumn, world events continue to intensify, creating the need and opportunity to be of service. Having the ability to cultivate resiliency skills in order to navigate through difficult times becomes more and more essential. Tai Chi, Qigong, and meditation offer us tools to stay grounded and centered in order to hold a clear and positive vision of the future.

In this issue: meditation as a simple and accessible practice and also as a lifelong path of discovery, a brief report on my trip to Asheville, upcoming online classes, a studio upgrade, and more. Enjoy the season's beauty and energy.

Studio Upgrade Complete

In preparation for opening our studio space for limited classes sometime this fall, we have made some upgrades to the studio space during the break. The fluorescent lights in the office have now all been replaced with dimmable LED fixtures.

All the fans in the practice hall have been replaced, and two additional fans by the windows have been added (for a total of six); the fans are completely silent, even on the highest setting.

With deepest gratitude to studio member Fran Myers, who funded the project and saw it through to completion.



Zoom In to Online Classes

We will begin some online Solo Form classes starting the week of August 10 on Zoom. We will send a separate email with days and times and other details this week.

Blue Ridge Mountain High

I recently returned from a six-day study retreat in the Blue Ridge Mountains near Asheville, NC. The retreat was taught by Healing Tao USA founder Michael Winn at his log-cabin home atop Black Mountain. My course of study was called Greatest Kan and Li, an advanced alchemy practice in the One Cloud (Yi Eng) Taoist lineage. Taoist practices first train in Qigong to regulate breathing and posture and to calm the mind of the practitioner in order to stimulate and feel the Qi field within and understand and experience how it shapes the body. As your physical Qi

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Studio upgrade:
new lights and fans

field comes into balance, the body-mind experiences healing.

As you get more advanced, Neigong (inner cultivation) meditations are taught, in which the mind cultivates the Qi; Taoist Water and Fire (Kan and Li) alchemy is a special class of dynamic meditation that shapes and refines your Qi field. There are Yin practices (centered on receiving and building structure), Yang practices (centered on expanding energy through dynamic movement), and Yuan practices (based on stillness that holds the interplay between Yin and Yang). It's an elegant and refined meditation path that leads to realization of the Light Body.



The beautiful weather and big nature of the mountains added to the serenity of my stay; I even found an inexpensive Airbnb nestled in the woods just 15 minutes from the retreat site. The small group of experienced adepts really got the energy flowing in our little cauldron by week's end; I didn't want to leave.

The safe distancing, masking, and cleanliness of the plane and low volume at the airports made the travel there and back easy and

relaxed. I'm already looking forward to next year's retreat.

Two of Three

August is month two of the third quarter. Many thanks to those of you who paid Q3 dues in July—it's helped us out immensely. We have now added Stripe as another payment option on our website as well as PayPal. And checks are always welcome; send them to Twin Cities T'ai Chi, 2242 University Avenue, St. Paul, MN 55114.

The Importance and Simplicity of Meditation

Meditation is an ancient, time-tested, and science-tested practice that reduces the effects of stress and anxiety and helps practitioners realize their full potential when practiced regularly. Although there are many schools and methods of meditation, the basic techniques and skills required to meditate are simple and easy to learn. All that's required is a quiet space, a simple method of practice, and a willingness to learn and consistently meditate.

When we are under stress, the body activates a part of the neuroendocrine system called the HPA (hypothalamus-adrenal-pituitary) axis, which releases stress hormones such as cortisol and neurotransmitters such as adrenaline that stimulate the heart, lungs, muscles, brain, and blood circulation to ready the body for fight or flight. This is called the "stress response." Our nervous system is well

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Healing Tao USA
founder Michael Winn's
log-cabin home near
Asheville, NC

equipped to deal with acute stressors such as those from a predator that suddenly appears then disappears. Fortunately, the body is ready with a follow-up to the stress response called the “relaxation response” that returns the body to its pre-emergency state once the threat has passed.

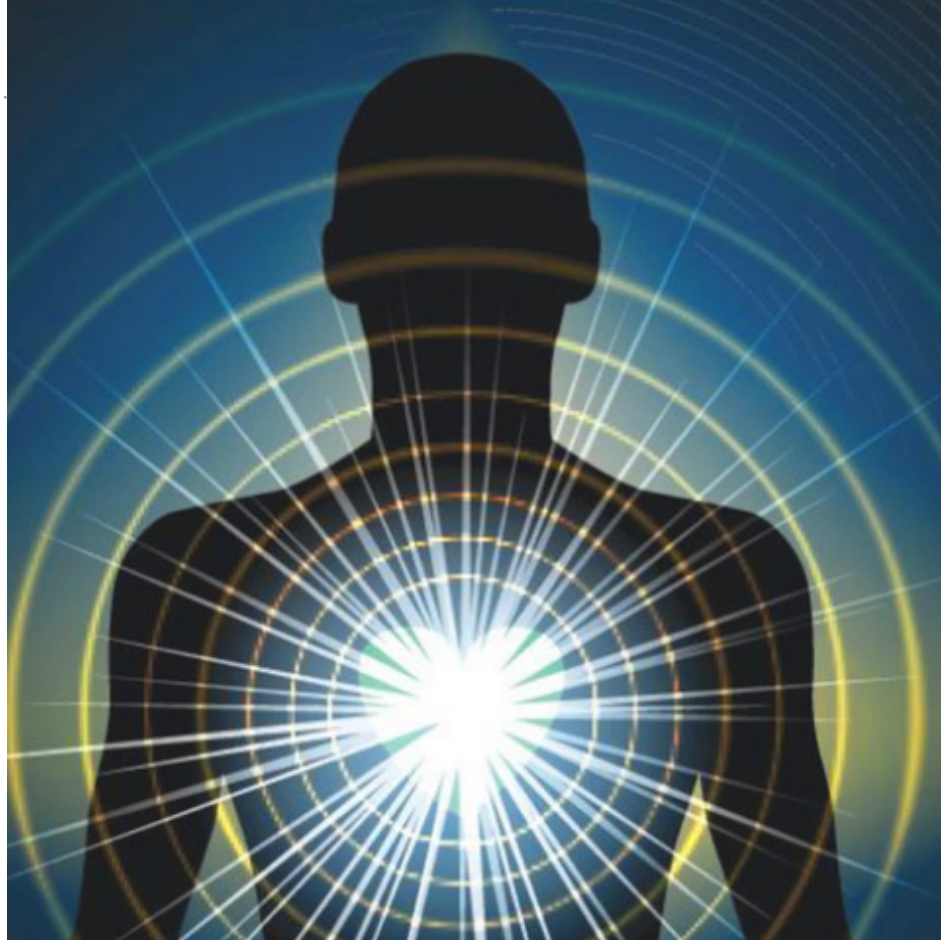
Actual physical threats to us are rare compared to the mental and emotional challenges that cause stress. Modern life has made chronic stress—the continual activation of the fight-or-flight response—a common condition. Due to electric lighting that alters our circadian rhythms, air and airwave pollution, 24-hour cable news, traffic jams, overwork, cell phone use, and real and imaginary dangers produced by the excessive thoughts from our own minds, chronic stress has become a new normal that exhausts the body’s natural defense systems.

Stress can stimulate growth if we can cultivate effective coping mechanisms that help us destress. The relaxation response can be voluntarily activated through the practice of meditation. It’s important to find a simple meditation that benefits you and can be practiced easily. Create the habit of meditation by finding a time that works efficiently and consistently for you. Set an intention for your meditation such as calming the mind; being mindful of the breath, pulse, or heart-beat; attaining a deep state of relaxation; or something particularly meaningful to you.

Having a meditation group or friend to meditate with is helpful to keep you focused in the early stages, but it’s easy to begin on your own. There are also many good online options for guided meditation. The most important thing is to have a quiet space and a consistent practice time and a meditation practice that works for you.

The following is a simple meditation practice to get you started:

1. Begin by sitting up straight and not leaning back; the seat of your chair should be high enough that your thighs are level or sloping downward, not upward, with your feet flat and anchored firmly on the ground. This is

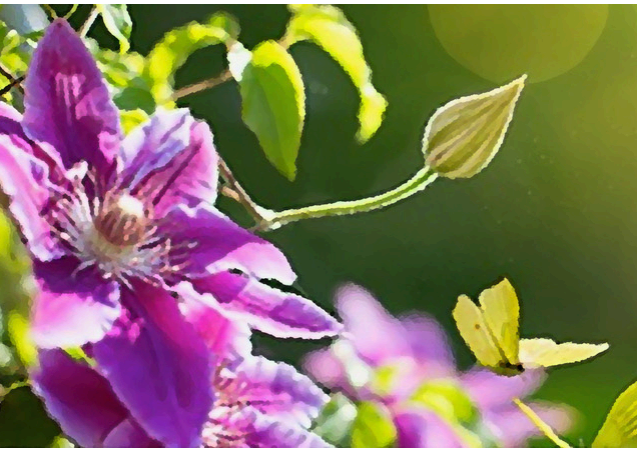


called a Pharaoh’s pose, like a seated ancient Egyptian ruler. In this position, you can breathe fully, circulate freely, and not fatigue easily.

2. Close the eyes and notice the breath. Breathe in and out of your nose. Let your belly expand as you breathe in then expand your chest at the top of your inhalation. Breathing out, relax your chest, then contract your abdominal muscles gently in the last seconds of that exhalation. Keep your awareness focused on the breath for a few minutes or longer until you feel yourself relax.
3. Rub your palms together, generating some heat between the hands. Place one hand over the heart at the center of your chest and the other hand over the first hand. Feel the warmth from the hands seep into the chest and into your heart center. Keep your attention on the heart and the area around the heart. As you continue to breathe slowly and deeply, imagine the breath is directed to the heart as you inhale. Feel the exhale clear any feelings of constriction or heaviness or unwanted emotions. Do this

for a few minutes or longer until the heart center feels open and spacious.

4. Tune in to your heartbeat, or use the pulse if the heartbeat isn't strong or easily detected. Do this by curling the fingers of the top hand around the wrist of the lower hand and finding the pulse with the fingers. Count six beats/pulses while breathing in and the same number breathing out. When that becomes too short a breath for you, increase to eight counts. When this begins to feel natural and relaxed, hold the inhalation for four beats/pulses before exhaling. Do this for a few minutes or longer until it feels natural and rhythmic.



5. Shift your attention to breathing into the heart a feeling of appreciation, compassion, or love; or focus on a loving person or pet, a relationship, or a healing experience. Do this for a few minutes or longer then gently open the eyes and return from the meditation.

At any point during the meditation, if thoughts or other distractions come to mind and cause you to lose your focus or concentration, simply acknowledge them, let them go, and return to the meditation. Begin with a 5-minute meditation twice a day, then increase it to 10 minutes, then finally to 15 or 20 minutes twice a day. Extend any of the sections of the meditation for longer periods as needed or desired.

If your first attempts at meditating seem challenging, don't give up; meditation becomes easier with practice.

Five Discoveries and Stages of Meditation

By Puran Bair

The following is a transcription of a short talk given by meditation teacher Puran Bair on the stages and his discoveries of long-term meditation practice. —Paul

1. Stage one: Discover the inner world of the self. There's an inner world and an inner being. There's so much going on inside us while we're continually looking outside. Our senses by nature are tuned to the outside world while the good stuff is happening inside. Become aware of one's body, few people are deeply aware of their body. What's the body doing? What state is it in? There are many senses and signals that we can get from the body that it's a tremendous advantage to have consciousness held in the physical body so that you have access to these physical signals; the body tells you things. Also, there's the experience of the thoughts and emotions. As one goes within, you find things happening like the breathing and the heartbeat. When you change the breath, you change the interaction between the conscious and the unconscious mind. If you breathe consciously you get a flood of information coming from the unconscious that you don't have access to otherwise. Conscious breathing opens the doors. We need our Inner Self to make the first big discovery of meditation.

2. Stage two: Discovery of the Greater Self. Our image of ourselves is too limited and too narrow. We think of ourselves as skin bound; whatever I is, it's inside the skin. We are immense because we are energetic beings. We are much larger than a physical being; with

“If this world is to be healed by human efforts, I am convinced it will be by ordinary people whose love for life is even greater than their fear.”

—Joanna Macy

our heart field, upper field, and lower field. We discover the nonphysical aspects of the larger self: magnetism, light, aura, etc. It's still personal, but bigger. The impact of one's identity is huge; it changes the sense of who you are. We're not just a local entity. We are co-mingled with others and with nature; with no limit. There's no edge to who you are.

A meditation method has to provide the means by which people can get into these stages. Some of it is philosophical and also derived from experience. This stage modifies our self-concept and our concept of the world.

3. Stage three: The discovery of a universal field of energy, which is shared. It is omnipresent and all pervading. The field of stage two is a field inside a much greater field. That which generates the source field is the source of all existence.

A universal vibrating energy, which creates space and time and from that, everything else. All of existence is an interaction of waves of vibration generated from the source field. It's everywhere in us, and around us. It's not personal, it just is. It is of two kinds—light or love. There's only one such experience of the source field and that is Unity. Unity consciousness; the experience of the oneness and the source of everything. The experience is interpreted in different ways depending on one's paradigm; depending on basically what you expect and what you believe. One person can experience unity consciousness and say this is the experience of Nirvana, of nothing,

of the void; the essence reduced to such a point that nothing exists. Another person from a different tradition would say this was the experience of everything; this was all. The entirety. It has to be the same experience; how many experiences of unity can there be? There are many interpretations of that experience because there is still a sense of who we are experiencing this. Many people have the concept that in unity consciousness the self disappears. The self can't completely disappear in unity because the self is part of unity. You can't say unity except for self! That would

be throwing out something. There has to be a place for self—the individual self—in the wholeness. That place is similar to the metaphor of placing a drop in the ocean. The drop of water doesn't cease to exist; it just becomes part of the ocean.



You can hold a candle in front of the sun; the light of the candle doesn't cease to exist, but it's overwhelmed by the light of the sun; absorbed, subsumed. The self exists in unity consciousness, because if the self disappeared, that wouldn't be unity. Self exists as part of all.

How do I know if I've experienced enlightenment? You'll know. It's transformative. It's something you don't forget; it so transforms your sense of yourself and the world. It's not something that goes away. It comes in steps, in repetitive experiences, a big flash, maybe it's very short; maybe it lasts a day. Then it goes away, and the rest of your life is in pursuit of

that experience because now you know what it is. Sometimes it takes people decades to get back to that experience again. Hopefully through having a practice or method it will occur again, and again. Eventually it gets to the point where it occurs on demand. It's difficult walking around in duality experiencing unity, but you can turn on the experience as desired. This is what we call enlightenment; the conscious, deliberate, reliable experiences of unity consciousness. What we're experiencing follows one's interpretation, paradigm, or belief system. What we're experiencing is the universal heart—the heart of all beings, returning to source, Tao, Christ consciousness, etc., which is generating this vibrating field of energy, the source field.

These are the first three: The Inner world, the Greater world, (the inner self and the greater self or heart and hearts field), we identify with this infinite field—that's the self.

The third discovery is an even greater sense of self, which is not my self but the Self, the one and only being; the infinite, eternal, whole being. We experience the heart of that being—the universal heart, and the field that it generates—the source field.

4. Stage four: The discovery of bi-dimensional consciousness. You exist as a bi-dimensional consciousness; a being aware of the universal conscious part of yourself and the individual part of yourself at the same time. The

universal heart is informing, energizing, and directing the personal individual heart. Desire signals this. These are the needs of the universe. Whose desire is it? They are the needs of the universe. The universe discovers itself through us. You're an instrument by which a greater consciousness—the only consciousness—explores itself.

5. Stage five: The discovery of bi-directional consciousness. In the fourth stage the one being is directing the individual being; the universal heart is showing up in our own chest as our own heart. The desires of the one being show up as your own desires. In the fifth stage, your desires, words, thoughts, and actions affect the entirety. This is the completion of the work. Our interaction between personal and universal is bi-directional. The universe affects us and we affect the universe. Our hearts, which generate these fields, affects the source field.

Puran Bair is an American mystic, co-founder of iamHeart, and an instrumental figure in bringing heart-based meditation to the public. He designed the curriculum of iamU and pioneered the teaching of meditation in online courses. Since 1971, Puran has worked with leading researchers to measure the effects of meditation on heart-rhythm, brain waves, and electromagnetism, demonstrating mastery of both transcendent and heart-centered meditation techniques.



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Mountains, NC