

# Wudang



A MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER

9/21



## From Sifu Paul

Greetings, everyone,

Early one Sunday morning in June, I watched two Tiger Swallowtail butterflies in a swirling, playful dance with each other. They darted in and around a sweet mock orange bush in full bloom before the more colorful female rested briefly on a flower. She offered a fleeting “now or never” pose showing the top side of her wings before the pair flew off to another yard. My camera phone clicked, and this time, I got lucky.

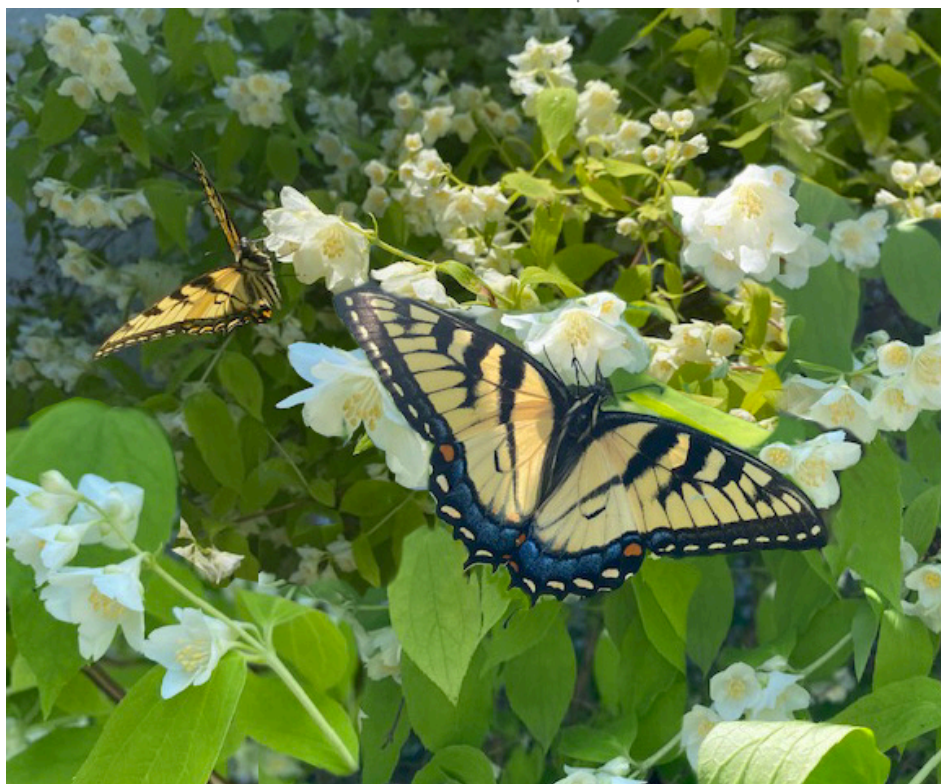
For me, summer always seems a little like that dance of the butterflies: colorful, playful, and over a little too quickly. Now in our early autumn equinox transition, I hope there will be more fair-weather T'ai Chi practices in the park—they've been great so far, and our upcoming expanded fall schedule will make it enticing to return to the studio.

In this issue: the return of the T'ai Chi Weapons class, the return of the T'ai Chi Symmetries class, new opportunities to serve on our board of directors, how to learn and master the Solo Form, and more.

Be well, and enjoy the changing season.

## Join Our Board and Help Us Grow

Twin Cities T'ai Chi Ch'uan has been a nonprofit organization since 1993. The studio has a five-person board of directors comprised of our members who both practice T'ai Chi and want to help foster its growth and flourishing at the studio and in the community at large.



This year is unique in that over the course of the next 12 months, all of the current board members' terms will be up, and we will need to replace them. A standard term length is three years, but a prospective member can opt for a shorter term. The most important consideration in joining the board is having a desire to help the studio grow and accomplish its mission.

The following positions need to be filled:

- **Board chair:** Officiates at board meetings; serves as the contact for other board members; calls for voting on board business, and other organizational functions.
- **Treasurer:** Prepares profit-and-loss statements for the studio.
- **Secretary:** Records the minutes for each meeting.

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New board members  
needed

- **At-large members:** Contribute ideas at meetings; work on special projects and committees.

A person does not need to be a long-term member or advanced in T'ai Chi to be on the board; youth and seniority are equally valued, and a mix is healthy and desirable, as every generation brings unique perspectives to things. This is an opportunity to contribute to the studio, gain experience valued by employers, be creative, and share your skills and ideas.

Contact Sifu Paul at the studio, or send us an email at [studio@tctaichi.org](mailto:studio@tctaichi.org) for more information or to apply.

### Our Mission

*Twin Cities T'ai Chi is dedicated to teaching the art, science, and spirit of T'ai Chi and related practices to improve the quality of life for its members and community.*

To fulfill this mission, we teach traditional practices through methods that are clear, practical, and accessible to people of all ages and backgrounds. We provide an environment that is safe and conducive for members to learn the arts at their own pace, develop tranquility and focus, foster healthful habits and self-confidence, nurture friendships and community, and experience more deeply the presence of what the Chinese call Qi or the life force in their daily lives.

### Vision Statement

Dedicated to integrating body, mind, and spirit through T'ai Chi and other movement and meditative arts to help foster self-discovery in an expanding community.

### Studio Values Statement

We are committed to:

#### 1. Excellence

We are committed to the practice of T'ai Chi. We strive to embody and teach authentic T'ai Chi principles and practices at the highest possible level.

#### 2. Our membership and community

Our individual members and community of members are why we exist. T'ai Chi has



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A belated happy birthday to the late Master Gin-foon Mark, born Sept. 14, 1927.

the power to change lives for the better as the practice develops and awakens the life force (Qi) in each of us. We are committed to helping our members integrate T'ai Chi into their lives at whatever level fits their needs.

#### 3. Acceptance and diversity

Our lives are made rich through diversity, and we are committed to equity and inclusion. We welcome all people.

#### 4. Harmony and balance

T'ai Chi is a movement practice designed to relax and balance the body, develop the subtle breath, and quiet the mind to states of relaxed awareness. Over time, this internal experience begins to influence our external experience and interactions with the world.

#### 5. Life-long learning and aging well

T'ai Chi has four interconnected branches: health, self-defense, philosophy, and meditation. Each of these branches helps keep the body-mind clear, relaxed, strong, supple, and inspired to keep learning and growing for a lifetime.

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Our studio vision and values

## Contact Us

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

**Email:** [mail@tctaichi.org](mailto:mail@tctaichi.org)

**Website:** [tctaichi.org](http://tctaichi.org)

**Phone:** 651.767.0267

## Our Annual Fundraiser Begins in October!

October is the month we officially begin our annual fundraiser, which will run through December 31. Thank you to those who have already donated.

Since 2017, the studio has been offered a \$5,000 gift by a generous studio member to be used as an incentive for a matching-grant fundraiser that has been held in the fall. This year, we are grateful and pleased to announce that we have been offered the same opportunity and gift: If we raise five thousand dollars, we'll get a \$5k bonus.

We have made our match four years in a row—and even exceeded it. We hope to do the same this year.

If you feel inspired to donate—in any amount—please know that your tax-deductible contribution will be immediately doubled; \$10 becomes \$20, \$100 becomes \$200, etc. We celebrate having served our members and community for the past 28 years in our current location and look forward to many more.

### A Comedian Walks Into a Funeral Home

Congratulations to studio member Dennis Kelly on the publication of his second novel: *A Comedian Walks Into a Funeral Home*. “

This is a brilliant story with thought-provoking subject matter and clever humor around usually dark issues.”

—Readers Favorite Review

Popular comedian, actor, and best-selling author Jim Gaffigan writes, “An exclusive peek into the obsessive compulsion that drives comedians to make strangers laugh under some of the darkest and most unusual circumstances. A hilarious story with heart felt honesty that reveals the best kind of comedy is always rooted somewhere in tragedy. Highly recommended!”

All book sale proceeds will be donated to: Second Harvest Heartland—*Working together to end local hunger*; The Sanneh Foundation—*Empowering kids. Improving lives. Uniting Communities*; and Twin Cities T'ai Chi—*Teaching the art, science, and spirit of T'ai Chi to members and community*.

There will be copies of the book available for sale at the studio. The book is also available

on Amazon. If you purchase it through Amazon Smile and donate to Twin Cities T'ai Chi Ch'uan studio, we will receive a small percentage of the proceeds.

For more on Dennis's work, go to [denniskellywriter.com](http://denniskellywriter.com).

### Learning and Mastering the Solo Form

The complete system of T'ai Chi Ch'uan encompasses solo and partner practices, weapons practices, philosophy, and meditation. The root and center of the system, however, is the T'ai Chi Solo Form.

People begin learning T'ai Chi for a variety of reasons, such as improved balance and circulation, the experience of deep relaxation, concentration and memory, and other markers of good health. In addition, there is a rapidly growing body of scientific evidence supporting the health benefits associated with T'ai Chi that attract people to begin learning and develop a practice.

In order to maximize the potential benefits inherent in the T'ai Chi Solo Form, it is important to have a systematic and graduated

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Studio member Dennis Kelly publishes his second novel!



approach to learning it. Understanding the different facets of the form and when and how to integrate them into your practice will make the form a vibrant and unlimited resource for health, self-empowerment, and moving meditation.

There are three primary categories or stages in learning the Solo Form, each with an associated internal quality to be focused on and mastered. They are (1) Relaxation, Posture, and Sequence, (2) Rhythm and Harmony, and (3) Breath and Energy. A brief look at each of these facets of the form will serve as a guide to learning and mastering the Solo Form.



### Relaxation, Posture, and Sequence

In a typical first T'ai Chi class, a student will begin learning some of the foundational movements of the Solo Form. They might be surprised to learn that these individual movements, called postures, are what make up the fluid, dance-like T'ai Chi Form. The individual postures are distinguished from each other by unique, often poetic names such as White Crane Spreads Its Wings,

Needle at the Sea Bottom, and Bend the Bow Shoot the Tiger.

The arrangement of postures in the form is called a sequence, which includes natural break points in the form called sections. The form taught at Twin Cities T'ai Chi is the Yang-style long form, which contains three sections. In our school, each of these sections has been divided into smaller groups of postures to make the form easier to learn.

Learning any of the postures in the form requires that the student understand three components:

1. **Footwork**—knowing where the feet begin and end in a posture and how to transition smoothly with the feet from start to finish. These beginning and ending points are called stances.
2. **Movement mechanics**—how the whole body moves in relation to the feet, the ground, and the force of gravity.
3. **Shapes and measurements**—the shapes formed by the arms throughout the posture and their height, distance, and angles from the torso.

In addition, knowing the names of the postures gives them an identity and helps a student remember the posture and the larger form sequence.

There is an energy quality that should be focused on in this phase of learning the form, and that is relaxation (called *Song* in Chinese). Becoming aware of excess tension in the body and letting go of it requires repetition and practice of the postures. Triggering deep relaxation while moving through a sequence of postures, even a limited sequence, begins to produce a feeling of calm that diminishes the effects of stress in the body by releasing blockages and opening the energy channels.

### Rhythm and Harmony

Each of the postures contains a fixed number of movements that can be counted numerically to help one learn the posture and develop

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Do you know the three stages of learning the Solo Form?



continuity. When the posture can be performed smoothly, an inherent rhythm and harmony emerges that adheres to the phrase “start together, stop together; if one thing moves, everything moves.” This unity and harmony in a posture is called Zheng Ti Jing in Chinese, or “whole-body power,” in which maximum efficiency is achieved in a flow of movement and timing, and the whole body is integrated into every individual part. This deepens the feeling of relaxation in the body and also connects the bones through the joints in a kinetic chain that roots to the ground through the feet, increasing balance and stability.

From this unity of the body comes a mind–body unity that goes beyond the concentration required to know what comes next, as in the posture and sequence phase of the form, to an imagined resistance as if you were doing the form in a medium denser than air such as water. This imagined resistance builds toward the direction of completion in the posture. This is known as “swimming in air.” Forms from the past were long in order to sustain this body–mind harmony. Today’s T’ai Chi forms are short to accommodate the collective erosion of our ability to pay attention mentally and physically for long periods. We are not

too busy to learn a long form as much as we’re too distracted.

### Breath and Energy

The T’ai Chi classics say, “The Qi should be stimulated; the spirit of vitality should be retained internally.”

To the Chinese, Qi is the primal energy that underlies all existence. It is everywhere in everything. The most commonly written Chinese character for Qi simply means air or breath. In T’ai Chi practice, the body and breath work slowly, softly, smoothly, and silently together to increase blood oxygen saturation levels. Oxygen diffusion in the tissues increases and is felt as a warm and pleasant tingling in the extremities. Excess tension in the body or mind will make the breath shallow and erratic. Movements that are relaxed and unified allow the breath to be natural, deep, and continuous.



Our bioelectromagnetic energy becomes stimulated through the rhythmic repetition of the postures, and it begins to move the cerebrospinal fluid along the spine and in the brain as well as moving the lymph to help remove toxins. The crystalline structure of the bones, when stressed, converts the mechanical

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“Start together, stop together; if one thing moves, everything moves.”



energy of the form into electric current, which promotes bone growth and repair.

The regular and correct practice of T'ai Chi builds up the physical body, the body's bioelectric energy body, and relaxes and settles the mind into lower brainwave frequencies that reduce stress and release our positive brain chemicals.



## The Art of Mastery

*The greatest art conceals effort.*  
—Huei Ming

The process of mastering something difficult happens in three fluid and distinct phases: (1) the Imitation Phase, (2) the Assimilation Phase, and (3) the Innovation Phase.

When we begin to learn the form, we simply begin by imitating what we see and what we are told by a qualified teacher. If the teacher has a deep understanding of T'ai Chi Ch'uan, the teaching will be grounded in the principles outlined above. In addition, the teacher should encourage and inspire the student to embrace the one essential element that will bring them to their next phase of mastery: practice.

A teacher's admonition to practice is put in perspective by Grandmaster Wai-lun Choi who said "I can teach you, but I can't practice for you."

With sufficient practice, the student will begin to assimilate the principles into their movements, and they will start to feel and become natural and effortless.

Practice can be formal, structured, and measured, but it should be balanced with practices that are flexible, creative, and playful. Insights and discoveries emerge from the contrast. Over time, this process can produce real innovation that elevates a practice to the level of an art. Practices evolve and new styles emerge when imitation, assimilation, practice, and time merge to create this innovation phase.

Each of the stages of mastering the form is challenging but ultimately rewarding. New learning requires repetition. Beginners practice something until they can do it right. Mastery requires practicing in harmony with the fundamental principles until you can't do it wrong. Having a map to follow makes the path clear and lets the journey of mastery be fulfilling, one Solo Form at a time.

## New Class Schedule

The new class schedule begins November 1. The current class schedule will run through the end of October.

### Solo Form

**Monday, Wednesday, Thursday: 6:00 p.m.–7:15 p.m. and Saturday 12:30 p.m.–1:45 p.m.**  
These are full form classes and are simulcast on Zoom.



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New schedule:  
weapons (cane) and  
Symmetries are back!

## 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

The T'ai Chi Symmetries are two-person form  
cycles that teach applications for each of the  
postures in the T'ai Chi Solo Form in the  
order they appear in the form. Symmetry 1  
teaches applications for Ward Off, Roll Back,  
Press, and Push.

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 in this class need to

have finished the T'ai Chi Solo Form with at  
least a year of practice. Limited to 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.

Limited to 12 people. Register online.

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*“The world is not a problem to be  
solved; it is a living being to which we  
belong. Our separateness from cre-  
ation lies in our forgetfulness of its  
sacred nature, which is also our own  
sacred nature.”*

*—Thich Nhat Hanh*

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