

Wudang

Twin Cities T'ai Chi

02/23



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

From Sifu Paul

Greetings, everyone,

Happy New Year(s). The solar and lunar new years have come and gone, and it's still winter in Minnesota, but the emerging luminous light and longer days foreshadow the coming of spring, just a few weeks away. T.T. Liang's birthday was traditionally celebrated in the U.S. on January 23 and in China on February 13. This year, he would have been 123 years old.

In this issue: I've reproduced a short talk T.T. Liang would give before demonstrating T'ai Chi for audiences in America; with a nod to Valentine's Day, a piece on heart rhythm meditation and another on gratitude; a quick guide to doing short T'ai Chi practices at home; the new shirts are in; upcoming classes; and more.

For those interested, an online magazine called Canvas Rebel did an interview with me recently that you can read [click here](#) to download a PDF: [Meet Paul Abdella](#).

We'll see you at the studio.

The New Shirts Are Here

If you ordered a new studio T-shirt, you can pick it up on Saturday, February 18, from 11:30 to 12:30. Drew Johnson will be here to fill the orders, and we'll have more shirts available in limited quantities and sizes for on-the-spot purchases. Please bring cash or check for payment. Thanks.



A Lecture on T'ai Chi Ch'uan

By T.T. Liang

T.T. Liang came to the U.S. in 1963 with his teacher, Professor Cheng Man-ching, and gave the first official demonstrations of T'ai Chi at the United Nations. Master Liang stayed in the U.S., settling at first in New York City and then in Boston for an extended period before moving to Minnesota.

While on the East Coast, he gave many lectures-demonstrations at colleges and universities, including Tufts and Harvard, to both expose Americans to and educate them on this uniquely Chinese art form. He always gave some opening remarks at the start of each demonstration that he handwrote in cursive with a ballpoint pen on a yellow legal pad. He gave me the handwritten notes when he left Minnesota. I reproduce them here for the first time.

~ Paul

Ladies and gentlemen,

Now I am honored to be here to give a lecture-demonstration on T'ai Chi Ch'uan. There are many books written about T'ai Chi Ch'uan. As the philosophy, classics, and the principles of this art are so profound and

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In his own words:
Master Liang's lecture-
demonstration notes

obstruse, and the time is limited, I can only give a rough idea of what T'ai Chi Ch'uan is.

T'ai Chi Ch'uan is an ancient Chinese form of classical dance for health and self-defense created by a Taoist named Chang San-feng of the Sung dynasty. The fundamental principles quoted from the T'ai Chi classics are:

1. "To concentrate the Chi, (an inherent oxygen in the body for stamina and vitality) and bring one to the pliability of an infant." This is for health.
2. "To conquer the forceful and unyielding with the gentle and unyielding." This is for self-defense or practical use.

Now let me explain the first fundamental principle, which is for health. In the classics of T'ai Chi Ch'uan it is said, "When the lowest vertebrae are plum erect, the spirit of vitality reaches to the top of the head; with the top of the head held as if suspended from above, the whole body feels itself light and nimble."

This is the way for strengthening the spine. By strengthening the spine, one not only automatically strengthens one's internal vital organs, but the brain itself.

The classics again say, "The Chi sinks to the tantien (abdomen)." When your chi sinks to the tantien, your whole body will be relaxed and the blood will circulate freely through the whole body.

After you have practiced in this manner for a certain period of time, you will enjoy perfect health. It is also the way to immortality (immortality as stated here is a term used in Daoism that means becoming one with the ever-flowing energy of the cosmos). When you have perfect health, then we can talk about the second fundamental principle, which is self-defense or the practical use of T'ai Chi Ch'uan.

The application or functioning of T'ai Chi Ch'uan hinges entirely upon the player's consciousness. "To take advantage of your opponent's weak points and your own superior position," "to deflect the momentum of a



thousand pounds with a trigger force of four ounces" and "from the most pliable and yielding you will arrive at the most powerful and unyielding" are sayings which emphasize mental activities rather than external physical force.

My Personal View

Men cannot live healthily without taking exercise. The book of changes (I Ching) says: as nature is always in motion, so should a man act to strengthen himself without interruption." An ancient Chinese proverb says: "a door pivot will never rust and flowing water will never become putrid."

These aphorisms indicate that taking exercise leads to robust health.

There are, however, many kinds of exercises from which one will have to make a choice.

Contact Us

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

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All articles and other content written by Paul Abdella unless otherwise noted.

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Master T.T. Liang came to the U.S. in 1963 with his teacher, Cheng Man-ching, to give the first official demonstrations of T'ai Chi at the United Nations.

Photo by Dan Polsfuss

Of all the exercises, I should say, T'ai Chi Ch'uan is the best. You can ward off disease, banish worry and tension, and achieve better physical health and prolong life. It is suitable for everyone—the weak, the sick, the aged, as well as women and children. They will all get benefit from it. It is also an economical exercise. So long as one has three feet square of space, and can spare 30 minutes a day, one can practice it without spending a single cent. So I must continue studying forever and ever...it is the only way to improve and better myself.

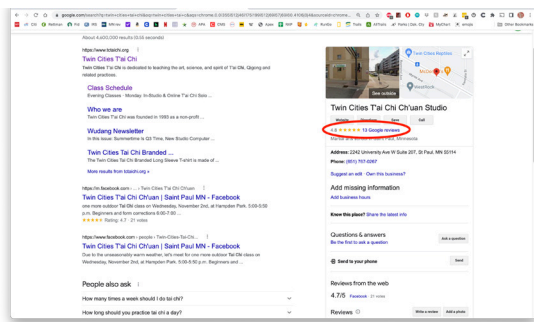


Dancing With the Stars

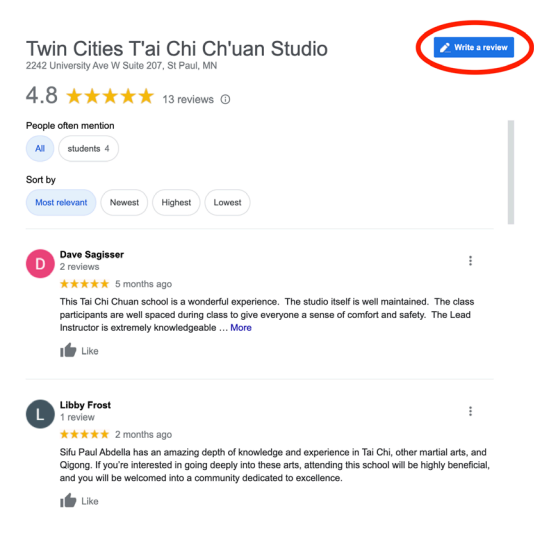
When we have a positive experience buying a service or product, we often want to tell our friends and family about it so that they might have a similar experience. In the digital world we live in, with a few keystrokes on a computer, we can tell the whole world about our experience. Ratings and reviews are now the primary means for consumers to choose a product or service. Five-star ratings get a business noticed, and a positive review—even just a sentence or two—will instill confidence in consumers about a business or product.

If you enjoy what you are learning at Twin Cities T'ai Chi and would like to help us expand our reach in the digital marketplace, please consider leaving us a positive review on your favorite online platform such as Google, Facebook, or Yelp. For example:

- Do a Google search for Twin Cities T'ai Chi. Our studio will be one of the first results.
- You'll see a window open near the search results with our name at the top, a photo of the building we're in, and a hyperlink that says "Google reviews."
- Click the link, and it opens to a page where you can read the reviews already written.



- In the upper right corner, click on the blue "write a review" tab that opens a window to rate (1 to 5 stars) and review the studio.



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Help spread the word—review the studio online.

Any positive comment about your experience, on anything from the T'ai Chi and the teaching to our studio space and community, would be helpful to others. Positive reviews not only help our studio get discovered but also allow us to reach higher levels of excellence in how we share the art of T'ai Chi.

New and Upcoming Classes

T'ai Chi Fundamentals Class: Wednesdays 12:30–1:45 p.m.

If you are learning the T'ai Chi Solo Form and have completed at least a six-week sequence of classes, come and continue to learn the Solo Form and progress toward its completion.

The class is also open to members who have completed the form and want to refine their fundamentals.

The class is taught by studio veterans Lynn Dennis and Tim Dennis, each with 25 years of T'ai Chi experience.

The T'ai Chi Symmetries: Tuesdays

6:00: Group 1 will begin learning Symmetry 2; Group 2 will begin learning Symmetry 3.

7:15: Group 3 will finish Symmetry 4 and begin learning Symmetry 5.

For a full view of all our class offerings, go to our website at tctaichi.org.

The Heart of Well-Being

In the T'ai Chi/Taoist view of the human body, three primary energy centers are cultivated with specific movement and meditation practices to optimize health and well-being. These energy centers, called dantiens, are located in the lower abdomen, the center of the chest, and the center of the brain. Taking a deeper look at the middle dantien, or heart center, reveals it to be a source of wisdom and intelligence, intuition, and creativity, not just an efficient pump that sustains life.

Science has revealed a sophisticated two-way dialogue between the heart and the brain, with the heart's influence on the brain being much greater than previously believed. The heart communicates with the brain in four primary ways: (1) neurologically—through nerve impulses; (2) biochemically—through hormones and neurotransmitters; (3) biophysical-

ly—through pressure waves; and (4) energetically—through electromagnetic fields. When these four energy streams are operating in an integrated and harmonious way, the heart is said to be in a state of coherence.

One simple meditation technique that focuses on the heart center to help create a state of coherence is heart-focused breathing. Here 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 slightly sloping downward (not upward), with your feet flat and anchored firmly on the ground. This is called a Pharaoh's pose, like an seated ancient Egyptian ruler. In this position, you can breathe fully, your energy can circulate freely, and you don't fatigue easily. Do the best you can with this, but make sure you are comfortable.
2. Close your eyes and notice your breath. Breathe in and out through 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 exhalation. Again, do the best you can with this, mostly breathing in a slow and relaxed manner. Keep your awareness focused on the breath for a few minutes or longer until you feel yourself relax. If thoughts enter your mind, let them go when you notice

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Heart meditation cultivates the "middle dantien," or heart energy center.



you are thinking and simply return your attention to the breath.

3. Rub your palms together, generating some heat between your hands. Place one hand over your heart at the center of your chest and the other over the first. Feel the warmth from your hands seep into your chest and into your heart center. Keep your attention on your heart and the area around the heart. As you continue to breathe slowly and deeply, imagine the breath is directed inward to the heart as you inhale. Then 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 your pulse if your heartbeat isn't strong or easily detected. Do this by curling the fingers of your top hand around the wrist of the lower hand and finding your pulse with your fingers. Count six beats/pulses while breathing in and the same number breathing out. If that becomes too long or short a breath for you, simply decrease to four counts or increase to eight. 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. Now breathe into your heart a feeling of appreciation, compassion, or love; or focus on a loving person, pet, relationship, or healing experience. Do this for a few minutes or more. Then gently open your 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, 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.



Creating a T'ai Chi Practice at Home

Moving more, eating better, sleeping better, and becoming more fit are common goals in a typical new year. So every year, during New Year's resolution season, I reprint some version of this short article on simple strategies to energize your day with short practices taken from a typical Solo Form class at the studio.

As we spend more time at home, it's important to find ways to move; being in the familiar environment of home offers tempting distractions, and producing the discipline and focus to sustain a home practice can be difficult. A successful strategy to overcome this is to take elements from the studio T'ai Chi class and practice them in short, easy-to-do sets throughout the day. Even at work, a 5-minute break of stretching, balancing, form work, or Qigong has a quick rejuvenating effect that has lasting results if done consistently over time.

The following are some short practices taken from the three parts of the studio class: stretching, Qigong, and Solo Form. You can use them as is or as part of a longer practice.

If you have just started learning T'ai Chi, the practice sheets and videos available [on our website](#) offer a simple way to get started.

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There's no place like home for bringing T'ai Chi movement into your daily routine.

Stretching warm-ups: Perform each for 1 minute for a total of 5 minutes.

1. 2 arms coiling forward—with breathing
2. Spinal cord breathing
3. Spinal wave
4. Spinal twist
5. Willow Tree Bends in the Wind (both directions)



Balance warm-ups: Perform each for 1 minute for a total of 4 minutes.

1. Golden Rooster Stands on One Leg
2. Sweep With the Knee
3. Bend the Bow Shoot the Tiger
4. Separate the Foot

Qigong: Practice number 1, 2, or 3 as a single practice for 5 minutes; or 1, 2, and 3 together as a set for 1 minute each; or 4 as its own set for 5 minutes.

1. Ocean Breathing
2. Gathering Heaven and Earth
3. Deep Earth Pulsing
4. The T'ai Chi Qigong sequence: Crane Breathing, Energy Spheres: rise/sink; side to side; expand/contract; White Crane Spreads Its Wings.

T'ai Chi Solo Form

1. Grasp the Sparrow's Tail in Four Directions (right side only or right and left sides)
2. T'ai Chi 5 Elements Form: (1) Beginning, (2) Cloud Hands, (3) Diagonal Flying, (4)

Golden Rooster, (5) Push (with Qi ball). Repeat Beginning Posture to close the form.

3. First section only; second section only; third section only
4. The whole form

It takes 15 to 20 minutes to perform the T'ai Chi Long Form—not long when we consider daily screen time on our phones, binge-watching a television series, or other distractions. The above list features short practices that take 3, 5, 10, or 20 minutes to do. Taking these short movement and energy breaks throughout the day will perfect the practices and make them easy to do and just might get you in the mood for a longer practice at home.

These are just a few possibilities. Be creative and flexible, and design your own routines. You'll be inspired and motivated to elevate your mood and season your day with energizing movement.

Reflections on Gratitude

By Sam Harris

An excerpt from a short talk on gratitude by neuroscientist and meditation teacher Sam Harris.

I'd like to talk for a few minutes about gratitude. There's now a lot of research to suggest that gratitude is good for us. No surprise there. And as an emotion, it is very easy to invoke. Unless you are living the worst possible life, it should be easy to find something for which you are grateful; and it can be very skillful and wise to do this. One reflection I find myself doing when I'm in some ordinary, contracted state of mind—let's say I'm stressed out by something not going well. I'm reacting to some hassle. I could be caught in traffic and late for an appointment. I sometimes think of bad things that haven't happened to me. I think that I haven't been diagnosed with a fatal illness, I'm not caught in a war zone, and I think of all the people on earth in that moment, who are suffering those sorts of dislocations in their lives. And then I reflect that if I were in their shoes, I

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“There are at least 1 billion people on earth at this moment who would consider their prayers answered if they could trade places with you.”

would be desperate to get back to precisely the situation I'm now in—just stuck in traffic and late for an appointment without any real care in the world.

I noticed this at dinner the other night with my family. Everyone seemed to be in a fairly mediocre frame of mind. We were all in some way, disgruntled or stressed out. I had a million things that I was thinking about, and I suddenly noticed how little joy we were all taking in one another's company. Then I thought, if I had died yesterday, and could have the opportunity to be back with my family, I thought of how much I would savor this moment right now. It totally transformed my mood. It gave me instantaneous access to my best self and to a feeling of pure gratitude for the people in my life. Just think of what it would be like to lose everything, and then be restored to the moment you're now in—how-

ever ordinary. You can reboot your mind this way, and it need not take any time. The truth is, you know exactly what it's like to feel overwhelming gratitude for your life. If you have the freedom and the free attention to listen to this lesson right now, you are in an unusual situation. There are at least 1 billion people on earth at this moment who would consider their prayers answered if they could trade places with you. There are at least 1 billion people who are suffering debilitating pain or political oppression or the acute stages of bereavement. To have your health, even just sort of, to have friends—even only a few; to have hobbies or interests and the freedom to pursue them, to have spent this day free from some terrifying encounter with chaos, is to be lucky. Just look around you and take a moment to feel how lucky you are. You get another day to live on this earth. Enjoy it.

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