

Wudang

Twin Cities T'ai Chi

08/23

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



From Sifu Paul

Greetings, everyone,

The changing light, chorus of crickets, and garden harvests announce that late summer is here. A truly beautiful time of the year. There have been some premium outdoor practices as well.

In this issue, we outline our new fee structure, changes to paying online, upcoming classes, articles, and more.

From the Board of Directors

A New Fee Structure Begins in October

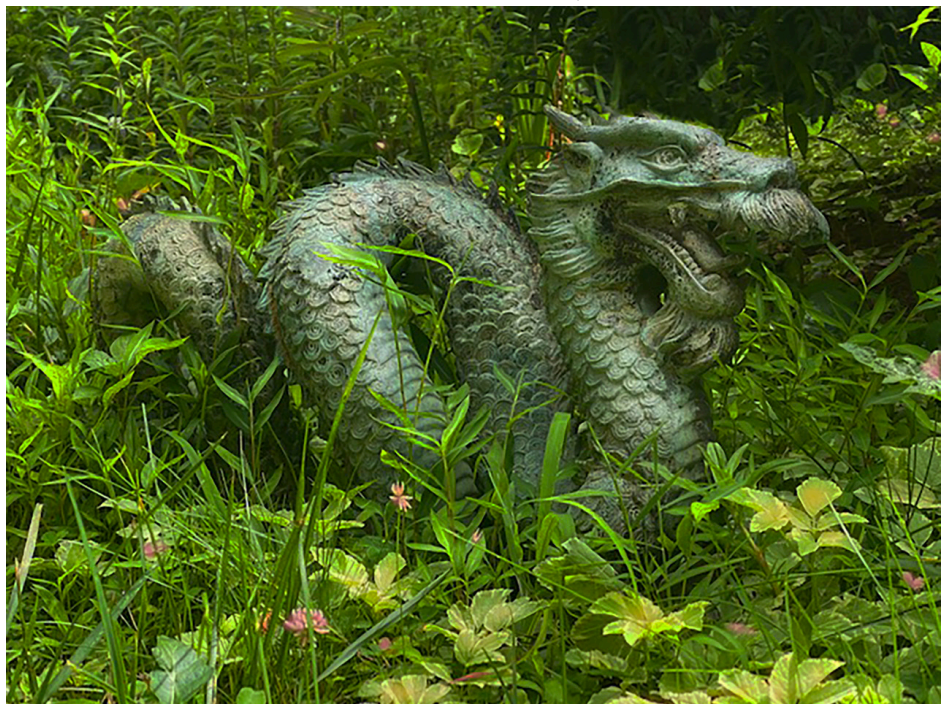
Public servants act in response to changes, and changes occur in time; so those who know the times do not act in a fixed way.

~Huainanzi, trans. Thomas Cleary

Everything changes, and usually, it's best if change happens gradually. The studio's current fee structure has served us well through major upheavals since October 2014, but it is now in need of updating. The board has approved a new fee schedule that we hope is both sustaining for the studio and gentle for its members.

Note that each quarter has 13 weeks, and for regular members and senior members, there are as many as five class options each week: (Monday, Thursday, and Saturday Solo Form/Refinements, plus one weapons and one Symmetries class), for a total of 65 possible classes each quarter.

Beginners currently have only Saturday and Wednesday options, or 26 possible classes each quarter.



Effective with the fourth quarter of 2023 (October), the new rates are:

Regular: \$297/quarter (as little as \$4.57/class at 5 classes each week). This is an increase of \$9/month over the current rate.

Senior (65+): \$197/quarter (as little as \$3.03/class at 5 classes each week). This is an increase of \$10.67/month over the current rate.

Beginner: \$100/6 weeks (\$16.67/class at 1 class/week, or \$8.33 at 2 classes/week). Viewed as a half-quarter option, this can simply be renewed indefinitely until you're ready to commit to a full quarter. This would also be an option for those who only want to take one class per week after completing the Solo Form.

Single class: \$25/class

As you can see, your favorite T'ai Chi class can cost less than your favorite coffee and

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New rates take effect starting in October.

pastry—and is better for you!

While cash and check payments are always welcome, we are encouraging everyone to consider making payments online via credit card. Doing so will greatly streamline our accounting process and bookkeeping. Simply go to the studio website (tctaichi.org) and, under the “JOIN” tab, click on “Online Membership Payment” and select your membership level.

Thank you for being with us over the years, and we look forward to seeing you in the years to come.

Simplifying Online Payments

Thanks to all of you who have paid dues for the third quarter—a typically slow “summer vacation” time of the year. Your payment keeps the studio running smoothly during the season.

Some of you may have noticed that PayPal is no longer available as an online payment option. There are a few reasons for this.

- We are streamlining our payment system and accounting, which is more efficient with our credit card company and less expensive.
- Also, the way that PayPal is structured and implemented for our organization, we’ve been made aware that it is less secure as well. If you were a PayPal user, we hope that you can transition with ease into our more efficient and secure online payment method.

Autumn Cleaning Project at the Studio

Christmas only comes once a year, just like spring cleaning. We had originally hoped to do a thorough housecleaning in the spring, but we have waited until the fall in order to be better prepared. And just as you might get excited about what you’ll find under that fake fir tree, now you might get excited about what you’ll find in a truly spruced-up studio.

We have two goals in mind. One is cleaning out the back rooms of all the things we no longer need that might be of some use elsewhere (or perhaps simply tossed). We want to make the Community Room a common access point, with an inviting entrance and an informative bulletin board.

The other goal is to get to those places that escape routine cleaning, such as removing the dust on the tops of the fan blades and conduits near the ceiling and clearing out the mysteriously accumulated items in the changing rooms.

We plan to gather after the midday class on Saturday, September 23. Come for a T’ai Chi session at 12:30 and stay as long as you like (or until the work is done, whichever comes first). We’ll provide the cleaning materials and good company. Even if you can’t stay, you can still help us by clearing out any personal belongings in the changing rooms, at least for that weekend.

So come and join us!



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.

No Deficiency, No Excess

The saying “No deficiency, no excess” is frequently heard in T'ai Chi practice. Usually, this refers to some aspect of the postures, but it even extends to aspects you might not expect.

We all take steps to make sure our bodies and clothing are clean and presentable. Not to do so would obviously be deficiency.

But sometimes, we might go a little too far, such as using strongly scented soaps and perfumes, thinking we are being thorough and showing respect. But in a closed room, even with the HEPA filters running, the effects might be too strong for those with allergies. At such times, we have unwittingly moved into excess.

Often, the greatest culprits are fabric softeners and dryer sheets. Fortunately, many products now come in unscented versions, or better still, fragrance free, especially for the benefit of those with such allergies. “Fragrance free” means that nothing was added to conceal other scents, while “unscented” may indicate the addition of chemicals to mask other scents.

With time, the regular contact with your skin could create sensitivities to those added chemicals, causing still more problems. Everyone benefits from the lack of those added chemicals, whether it is your neighbor's nose or your own.

So, for the comfort of all, please use fragrance-free products when coming to the studio. The lack of potential allergens will help make the space safer and more inviting to all.



Upcoming Classes This Autumn

(Starting dates to be announced)

Solo Form Fundamentals: Thursday 6:00–7:30 p.m.

If you have recently finished learning the T'ai Chi Solo Form, this class will offer a review of form fundamentals before the warm-up, Qigong, and Solo Form practice. The class will still be on Zoom.

T'ai Chi Fan: Thursday 7:30–8:30 p.m.

This fall, the beginning weapons class will feature the T'ai Chi Fan, taught by Stephen May.

The T'ai Chi Fan is the most un-weapon-like of all the T'ai Chi weapons. Most practitioners choose to practice the fan for its grace, color, and beauty. The quick snapping movements that open the fan develop the timing and release of energy for short power and also develop dexterity in the hands. Using a heavier metal fan will build strength in the hands.

The T'ai Chi Symmetries: Tuesday

6:00 p.m. Those students who have been working on Symmetry 3 will begin Symmetry 4.

7:15 p.m. Those who have been working on Symmetry 2 will begin working on Symmetry 3.

To view the class schedule online, go to:
<https://www.tctaichi.org/schedule>

On Deception

by Stephen May

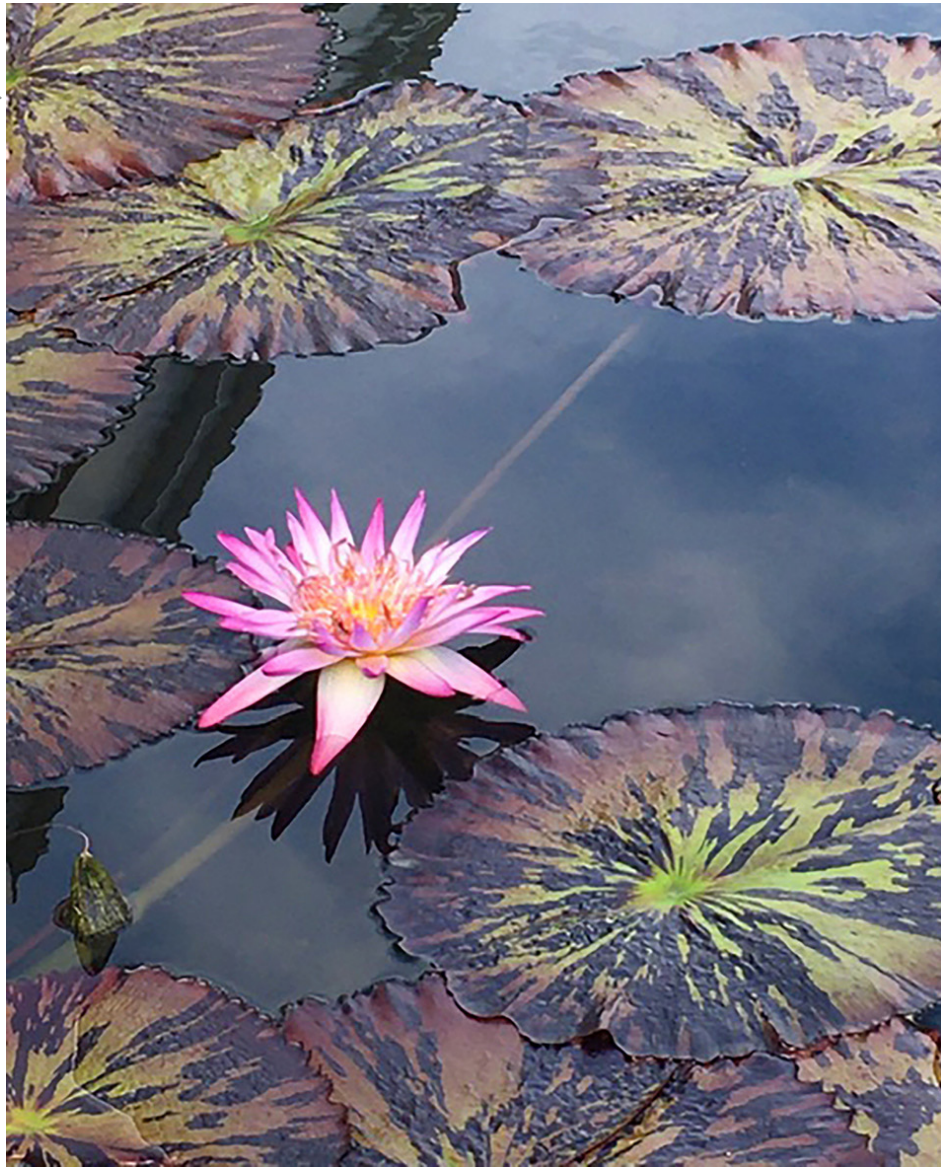
Sometimes, deception can be a good thing. When left on its own, the body can often do wonders to heal itself after illness or injury. But patients can sometimes be too impatient, and doctors long ago discovered the benefits of sugar pills. The pills generally do nothing themselves, but the patient gains a feeling of well-being, that something is at last being done, which positive attitude can in turn contribute to the healing process. We call those little pills “placebos,” from the Latin for “I placate.”

A Matter of Perspective

Sometimes, deception may be either good or bad, depending on one’s perspective. A baseball pitcher and a base runner may both try to deceive the other, one to gain another out, the other to try to gain another base (or even a run if the base being stolen is home). There is also considerable deception between the pitcher and the batter, and the catcher is always in collusion with the pitcher so that, ideally, only the batter is deceived by the pitcher’s intended throw. Whether a successful deception is good or bad depends on whether it was carried out by your team or by your opponents.

Sometimes, deception is simply bad, such as all those phishing scams. We’ll say no more about those.

Sometimes, deception can be entertaining, even useful. Some years ago, three people walking through New York’s Central Park were held up by muggers. Two of them handed over everything. The third calmly went through all his pockets to show he had nothing, and the muggers gave up and left. That third individual happened to be the famous illusionist David Copperfield, who was simply using his considerable sleight-of-hand skills to move his valuables from one pocket to another. Such deceptions are at the heart of magic tricks and card tricks and, in this instance, also make a great story.



It is also possible to deceive ourselves. At one time, the Spanish Riding School in Vienna would make certain of their retired horses available on certain occasions to be ridden by members of the public. On one such occasion, a young Alois Podhajsky, a future director of the school, observed a gentleman attempting to perform one of the trademark “airs above ground.” But it was not quite right: the front end was dutifully prancing, while the rear end was simply walking along, not at all engaged the way it should have been. Podhajsky pointed this out to the director, who wisely told him, “The old gentleman believes he is accomplishing something very difficult. The horse is saving his energy. No one is being harmed. Just let them be.”

A Shift in Perspective

T'ai Chi also has its deceptions, though generally unintentional. Take the Cross Kick

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Photo by Ruthann
Godollei

from the third section. From the front, it looks like my arms are extended completely flat, making a 180° angle, as though forming the uprights of a goalpost. Beginners will often try to execute the posture in just this way. But when viewed from the side, you would see that they are actually closer to 90° , which puts much less strain on the chest and makes much more sense for an application.

Bow stances are another common deception. Many people simply see one foot in front of the other. They do not see the shoulder-width separation or the weight distribution that contribute to the stability of a true bow stance.

Whole Body as One Unit

But again, perhaps the most unfortunate deception is when we deceive ourselves, which may not always be so harmless as it was for the rider at the Spanish Riding School.

One common example is count 2 of Single Whip. People see the arms moving from east to northwest and, accordingly, move just the arms when they attempt the posture. What is missing is the waist turn. If the arms are simply held out in front of the body, it is the waist turn that moves the arms 135° .

Without the waist turn, the arms simply collapse, with the left arm extended to the side (or worse yet, flinging behind) and the right arm bent at the elbow and collapsed across the chest. That same waist turn will also bring the right foot around to point north, another subtlety lost in the deception of watching just the arms.

There are even those who, when asked to turn the waist, simply turn the head from side to side (as though signaling very slowly, “No, I won’t do that”). They see a change in view-point and assume they have made the requested turn, but in fact, the navel has not budged. Sometimes, simply having them look down and follow the navel helps solve this puzzle.

Similar but Not the Same

Sometimes, deception occurs when postures are confused because the differences between

them are not clear. There are two Kicks With Heel in the second section, and many beginners eventually execute them essentially identically to the Cross Kicks in the third section. But whereas the kick in the third section is perpendicular to the arms, in the second section, the kick is lined up parallel with the lead arm. At a casual glance, the two kicks look to be the same, but that is a deception. The Kick With Heel is actually a little more challenging, so the substitution is understandable, but it still should be avoided.

Initially, Lift Hands and Play Guitar seem to be the same posture, as do White Crane and Retreat to Ride Tiger. It can take a while to understand the differences, to see that these are not simply the same posture with different names but two different postures.



Watch and Follow

Ironically, the effort to learn through imitation also invites the problem of disconnection. Beginners are always asked to get in the middle of the group as it goes through the form. That way, they are surrounded by others who already know the form and can simply look straight ahead.

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Butterflies (detail)

Art by Christopher Marley

See his exhibit at the Minnesota Science Museum through Labor Day

Too often, though, their gaze is fixed on the one leader in front, so that the head becomes disconnected from the rest of the body as the postures assume various angles in the course of the form. (This is the reverse problem of those who turn the head without turning the waist, and it's just as unhelpful.)

With time, that disconnectedness becomes a learned aspect of the form. We may think we are doing T'ai Chi, but we lack the whole-body integration essential to true T'ai Chi.

Don't Cut Corners

Self-deception can also lead to cutting corners, which may not only deprive one of touted health benefits but even become harmful. Simply shifting the weight back and forth in a bow stance (70/30 to 40/60 to 70/30, such as in Ward Off Right to Roll Back to Press) starts to exercise and strengthen the thighs in a way that maintaining a more-or-less 50/50 weight distribution will never do. Falling into stances such as from Ward Off Left to Ward Off Right will strain the knees.

Overextending, especially putting the knee past the toes, will also cause strain. People I have worked with who have complained about pain on the sides of the knees are surprised at how much it helps to just make sure that the lower leg is going straight down over the ankle and not out to the side.

Pay Attention

The greatest cure for deception is often simply paying attention. When you hear a reminder about alignment or weight or a waist turn, don't assume that the remark is directed to someone else. Check yourself. Even if you are doing things correctly, a mindful practice will yield even greater benefits than going through the form on autopilot.

As someone once said,

*O what a tangled web we weave
When first we practice macramé.*

Now just pay attention.

Mountains, Meditation, and a Journey to the East

In early July, I spent a week in the Blue Ridge Mountains of North Carolina for a Daoist (Taoist) meditation retreat with Healing Tao USA founder Michael Winn. This was the tenth such retreat I've attended on Black Mountain in North Carolina, as well as traveling on two study trips in China.

Daoist cosmology states that the universe emerged through a unified field of energy called Tai Yi (the Great Oneness) and began to polarize and divide into complimentary forces called T'ai Chi (the Great Polarity). These complimentary opposing polarities began to move. They continually transform and mutually create each other; they are called Yin and Yang—opposites that cannot be separated. There is no night without day, no up without down, no inside without an outside.

This polarity is bound by a neutral force—an element of the Tai Yi, creating a trinity of energy that manifests all things. Think: atoms. This inspired the Daoist sage Lao Tzu to write in 400 B.C., "One created two, two

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Healing Tao USA
founder Michael Winn
teaching at the July
meditation retreat.



created three, three created all things." Atoms come together to form molecules, which come together to become cells, which become organs, which become organisms. Anything that is simultaneously a whole and is also part of a greater whole reflects the nature of the Dao.

And it works in both directions. We are part of the galaxy; the galaxy is part of us. As above, so below; as within, so without.

The early stages of the Healing Tao practices begin with the recognition that some parts of us may not be integrated into the whole: the unconscious/shadow self, ancestral and family patterns, trauma, emotions, etc. The fundamental practices work to reintegrate those elements. The practices progress over time to harmonize with greater and greater fields of energy. We work with the elements and energies of the earth and beyond to connect more deeply with Tai Yi and the source.

The retreat featured lectures, discussions, seated practice, standing practices, and practices outdoors in nature. A nearly perfect week of weather and a great group of participants, some of whom I've known for years, made for a deep and restorative experience.

Thanks to those who made the trip possible and to all the instructors who covered classes in my absence.



The Way of Outdoor Practice

"I took a walk in the woods and came out taller than the trees."

~Henry David Thoreau

We've all experienced the beauty and the power of nature. From the warmth of the sun, a walk through a canopy of trees; the chorus of birdsong, a nourishing breath of air in the spring; we long to be in nature because we are part of it. The word biophilia means "love of life." It was coined by the philosopher and psychoanalyst Eric Fromm, who defined it as "the passionate love of life and all that is alive."

The "biophilia hypothesis" posits that humans have evolved with nature to have an affinity for nature. Our long history and dependence on nature for survival have produced in us an instinctive bond that connects us to the creatures and creations of our planet even as we become more digitized and urbanized. We know this innately and from our experience.

Yet we spend more and more of our time indoors, staring at screens. Including our phones, computers, and television, recent studies show that more and more Americans spend as much as 10 hours or more a day in front of a screen, with adverse effects on our mental, emotional, and physical well-being.

Movement and exercise can be at least a partial antidote, as it becomes more and more

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The stone practice circle at the Black Mountain Healing Tao retreat in North Carolina.

convenient to get to the gym before or after work or step onto the treadmill or other equipment at home. Despite the fact that many gyms and health clubs have more TV screens running than a sports bar, and home training equipment requires an app or also features a screen integral to the functioning of the equipment, movement and exercise are still good for us and help to offset the detrimental effects of being sedentary.

But is exercising indoors as potent as moving outdoors in nature? An overwhelming body of scientific research suggests the answer is...no.

In a scientific paper entitled “Associations between Nature Exposure and Health: A Review of the Evidence,” the authors found evidence that contact with nature contributed to improved cognitive function such as focus and attention, sleep quality, immune function, mood and mental health, blood pressure and heart rate, and more. The study found that people who had spent at least two recreational hours in nature during the previous week reported significantly greater health and well-being. That pattern held true across subgroups, including older adults and people with chronic health problems, and the effects were the same whether they got their dose of nature in a single 120-minute session or spread out over the course of the week.

Several other studies support these findings.

Any quality time spent in nature is beneficial, but the practice of T'ai Chi can be particularly potent when done outdoors. The Daoists

are the antecedents of T'ai Chi practitioners. They developed detailed health and healing practices based on the cycles of nature and the cosmos—including the earliest forms of T'ai Chi Ch'uan. Deep, slow breathing, rooting into the earth, slow and mindful movements that flow through the cardinal and ordinal directions, the stimulation and circulation of Qi, and the practice of moving meditation are part of the inheritance.

A small space in nature and the willingness to mentally and physically let go and connect to it are all that's required.

The Zen monk Thich Nhat Hanh describes the mindful practice of being in nature beautifully:

Every day we are engaged in a miracle which we don't even recognize. A blue sky, white clouds, green leaves, the black curious eyes of a child, our own two eyes. All is a miracle, so smile, breathe, and go slowly. Walk as if you were kissing the Earth with your feet. Drink your tea slowly and reverently, as if it is the axis on which the world earth revolves. Slowly, evenly, without rushing toward the future. Many people think excitement is happiness, but when you are excited, you are not peaceful, true happiness is based on peace. The mind can go in a thousand directions, but on this beautiful path I walk in peace. With each step, the wind blows; with each step, a flower blooms. Feelings come and go like clouds in a windy sky. Conscious breathing is my anchor. The present moment is filled with joy and happiness. If you are attentive, you will see it.

