

Wudang



12/21



A MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER

From Sifu Paul

Greetings, everyone,

As our beautiful autumn color fades into the frosted tones of winter, the year 2021 is coming to a close. The waning light lulls us into a quiet stillness, yet the studio has been slowly and steadily reemerging this past year from the pause of 2020. I intend for that to continue into the new year with an expanding class schedule, new practice videos for members, and more.

Recently, an online magazine called Voyage Minnesota did a nice profile on me and the studio, with some exceptional photos by studio member Tom Reich. You can check it out here: <https://voyageminnesota.com/interview/exploring-life-business-with-paul-abdella-of-twin-cities-tai-chi/>

In this issue: an update on our fall fundraiser; gratitude for our members and staff; our current class schedule; practicing at home in the age of COVID; and a look at the Five Fundamentals of the Mind from the legendary Wang Xiang-Zhai.

It's been a great joy to share the practice of Tai Chi with everyone and to move, breathe, and laugh together this past year. A passage from the Tao Te Ching comes to mind:

I have three treasures that I cherish and hold dear.

The first is love.

The second is moderation.

The third is humility.

With love one is fearless.

With moderation one is abundant.

With humility one can fill the highest position, and be a leader in the world.

Have a peaceful holiday season and a happy new year.



Weather or Whether Not

In case of bad weather, any class cancellations will be posted

1. on our website's landing page as a red ribbon at the top of the page,
2. on our Facebook page, and
3. as an email sent to your inbox.

Home Sweet Home

In January of this year, we resumed having live classes in the studio after a nine-month period of outdoor and online-only classes. It was a joy to be in our space again and feel the energy of moving and practicing together. We have since opened up weapons and partner-work classes, adding another dimension to the live class experience.

Studio Holiday Closing

The studio will be closed for the holidays and cleaning from December 24 through January 1. We will be open on Monday, January 3.

Yet many of our members, for a variety of reasons, prefer to take classes from home. We're happy to be able to provide online classes via Zoom and grateful the technology works as well as it does. With more time being spent at home, it's important to find ways to move even beyond online classes in order to stay active, centered, and healthy. Being in the familiar environment of home offers tempting distractions. Producing the discipline and focus to sustain a home practice can be difficult, but cultivating a home practice has some advantages, too; there's no travel time, parking issues, or venturing out in bad weather. You can practice what you want when you want, and you can really focus on you and what you need. It's important to create a practice space—even if it's temporary—where you will be undisturbed. It's also important to be consistent. Let your practice become a ritual you look forward to.



Some days, you just won't feel like getting out of your favorite chair to get started. 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, formwork, or Qigong has a quick rejuvenating effect that yields lasting results if done consistently over time. The important thing is to just start moving.

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

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: Practice number 1, 2, or 3 as a single practice for 5 minutes; or do 1, 2, and 3 together as a set for 1 minute each; or do 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 both 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.

Contact Us

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

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Use our regular classroom warm-up exercises to anchor an at-home practice.

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

It takes 15 to 20 minutes to perform the Solo Form. We often spend more time (much more) checking email. The above list features short practices that can 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 it 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 practices, and you'll be inspired and motivated to elevate your mood and season your day with energizing movement.



With Gratitude

The success of the studio is the result of many people sharing their time and talents to

Fall Fundraiser News: We Did It!

In mid-November, we did it: we hit our \$5,000 matching grant amount for our fall fundraiser!

Our annual fundraiser helps manage our monthly overhead of rent, insurance, salary, and taxes. It also seeds studio projects, education, archival projects preserving our legacy, technology upgrades, studio upgrades, and more.

There's still time for an end-of-the-year tax-deductible contribution; we're grateful for any amount. Our members and friends are our greatest asset. Thank you to everyone for your contributions and continued support of the studio.

bring our unique programs to the public. The following is a short list of our members who have helped so much this past year.

Our Board of Directors

The board brings a variety of perspectives to every studio issue and collaborates on important decisions; manages and balances our budget; and keeps a detailed record of every meeting. They were so helpful and wise in navigating through challenges and creating opportunities this year.

John Grey: Board President. John ends his term as board chair at the end of the year. Thanks, John, for all you've contributed to the board and the Studio the past 3 years. You will be missed.

Tom Hautman: Treasurer. Thank you, Tom, for an amazing job at managing and balancing our numbers.

Ed Phillips: Secretary. With gratitude, Ed, for great notes, gentle reminders, and extending your term another year.

Morgan Willow and Dave Sagisser: At-Large Members. Thanks for all the input, ideas, and



support; we're so grateful to have you both for another year.

New Members: We would like to welcome studio members **Stephen May** as our **new board chair** and **Libby Frost** as a **new At-Large board member**. We're happy to have you on board.

Our Teaching Staff

The studio is lucky to have a group of teachers who possess a lot of experience and ability in the practice and transmission of T'ai Chi. We opened up for new business in June for the first time since March of 2020. **Christopher Knudtson** stepped up to get our new beginning T'ai Chi class up and running. **Stephen May**, **Tim Dennis**, and **LaVonne Bunt** followed suit and joined him as a team. Together, they have done an extraordinary job of restarting our beginning T'ai Chi program.

The practice of T'ai Chi out in nature is a special experience. We had some beautiful weather for our classes in the park this season that included being observed by a mother hawk and her two hatchlings, who received flying lessons overhead all summer.

Kim Husband, **LaVonne Bunt**, and **Stephen May** showed up an hour early each class to teach beginners, and anyone who hadn't completed the Solo Form.

In addition to her teaching, **Kim Husband** manages our Facebook page and designs and edits the *Wudang*, our beautiful newsletter.

Todd Nesser has developed our branding and does all our print and online design. He

designed and upgraded our website and shoots and edits our online practice videos.

Thanks to **Lynn Dennis** for her office help.

For their continued and generous support, a special thanks to

- Tim and Lynn Dennis
- Patrick Jarvis
- Fran Myers
- Steve Silver

A deep bow to everyone above and to all our members—you're the reason the studio exists.

Current Class Schedule

Solo Form

Monday, Wednesday, Thursday 6:00 p.m.–7:15 p.m.

Saturday 12:30 p.m.–1:45 p.m.

These are Full Solo Form classes and are simulcast on Zoom.

Beginning Solo Form

Saturday 11:00 a.m.–12:15 p.m.

T'ai Chi Weapons

T'ai Chi Cane—Drills and Applications:
Monday 7:30–8:30 p.m. You must know the Cane Form to be in this class.

Beginning T'ai Chi Cane Form: Thursday
7:30–8:30 p.m. You must know the Solo Form to be in this class.

Raising Cane

The T'ai Chi Cane classes are off to a great start, made even more enjoyable by the canes handcrafted by Tim Dennis. Made of exotic hardwoods, an artisan's touch, and a fusion of Heaven and Earth Qi, these canes are a blast to play with. Thanks, Tim!

The T'ai Chi Symmetries

These are two-person partner classes. You must be vaccinated and wear a mask.

Beginning T'ai Chi Symmetry I: Tuesday 6:00–7:00 p.m. Students need to have finished the Solo Form and have completed at least a year of practice. Limit 12 people. Talk to Sifu Paul if you are uncertain about whether you should participate in this class. Register online.

Symmetries I, 2, & 3 Review: Tuesday 7:15–8:30 p.m. Students in this class need to have learned at least these three symmetries before. Limit 12 people. Register online.

Wang Xiang-Zhai: Master of the Minimal

Wang Xian-Zhai was a formidable and innovative martial artist of the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

He was born in 1886 in Hebei province, China. He was weak and sickly as a child, so his parents decided to send him to the famous Xingyiquan master Guo Yunshen to strengthen his body and improve his health. He became strong and healthy and highly skilled in fighting. An inherent part of the Xingyiquan system is the practice of standing meditation (zhanzhuang gong: “standing like a post” skill). Wang would stand in meditation for hours, perfecting his posture, circulating Qi, and cultivating his mind.

As his skills and insights in the martial arts developed, he became disillusioned with what he perceived as a decline in the quality of martial arts in China. “It is really a pity that the boxing art of our country is now in a state of great chaos, which can be summed up in one sentence: it has rejected the essence but assimilated the dross.”

Wang set out on a seven-year quest of traveling throughout China, seeking out and studying with masters of different styles, conducting research, and challenging many masters to test their skills against his. After



this period, he proclaimed, “I have traveled across the country in research, engaging over a thousand people in martial combat. There have been only 2.5 people I could not defeat, namely Hunan's Xie Tiefu, Fujian's Fang Yizhuang, and Shanghai's Wu Yihui.” In other words, he was defeated by two of the masters and fought to a draw with one.

A worthy footnote:

Wu Yihui was the Liu Ho Pa Fa grandmaster who defeated Wang. Wu Yihui passed his art on to Chen Yiren, who was the teacher of my teacher, Wai-lun Choi. Master Choi was a great admirer of Wang Xiang-Zhai and taught one of his standing meditation practices and many of his principles and methods at our studio.



Wang Xiang-Zhai became well known and respected in Beijing, Tianjin, and Shanghai,

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Wang Xian-Zhai, a formidable and innovative martial artist of the late 19th and early 20th centuries

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Wu Yihui, the Liu Ho Pa Fa grandmaster who defeated Wang Xiang-Zhai. He was the grandteacher of Sifu Paul's teacher in that style, grandmaster Wai-lun Choi.

teaching many influential martial artists there. He began to innovate and modify the traditional martial arts he was taught, reducing and then eliminating sets, sequences, and forms. He developed an art he called Yiquan—Mind Intention Boxing—that favored developing the mind and perfecting structural alignment through standing and simple moving meditation practices. There's been a resurgence of interest in his methods in contemporary martial arts and fighting sports that traditionally have had no internal or meditative component.

Later in life, Wang Xiang-Zhai became more interested in the health and healing aspects of his art, worked within different hospitals, and had several disciples, to whom he passed on his art. He died in 1963. ~Paul

The Five Fundamentals of the Mind

By Wang Xiang-Zhai

Translation and commentary by Wai-lun Choi

There are five basic fundamental concepts which will allow a practitioner the insight or background needed to develop a clearer idea as to how to achieve greater levels in the martial arts.

These concepts will help you in your overall relaxation (meditative skills). Your ability to relax is important for several reasons: the first and foremost is that when you are in a relaxed state, your breathing is not restricted. The breath is full and natural. Second, your alertness (focus) is clear and refined, and finally, your reaction time is quick and uninhibited.

In order to achieve this relaxed state, you must practice meditation. However, the usual method of meditation emphasizes the physical acts of monitoring your breathing, feeling for any stress or tension, etc.

These five guidelines deal with your state of mind, a precondition of one's behavior.



Respect—Respect refers to how you treat others. You should always maintain a sense of mutual respect. You should not take a position of superiority, whether or not it may be justified. There exists an infinite amount of experience in a lifetime and a single person cannot have participated in, or have been witness to, every possible event or situation. Therefore, your fellow man has experiences and ideas that you may never have encountered or contemplated. It is here that you can always learn from others. In the area of the martial arts, your classmate/opponent possesses differing ideas, skill levels, etc., all of which are legitimate. There may exist better, faster, more effective techniques, but nevertheless, your opponents are real, and must be addressed. Everyone will not attack and react in the same way (power, angle, or methods). If you are perceptive, you can learn from every variation and situation that exist.

Care—Be thoughtful and careful when acting. It is important that you analyze and commit yourself to whatever actions you take. You must believe in the decision-making process you undergo. If you do not believe (have faith) or do not understand, you will create a

mental block which will hinder the end result. Once you understand how a process will help you, your mind will accept it, giving it value and allowing you to concentrate. It will also allow you to expand, gaining greater insight into how other issues relate to one another.

Thoughts—This is a simple process. Understanding that you are only capable of doing one thing at a time, you can only process (solve) one issue at a time. Do not try to do two things at once. This will only separate your focus as you move from one problem to another and bring about anxiety and stress. Single-mindedness will allow you to attack the opponent with unrestrained whole-body power.

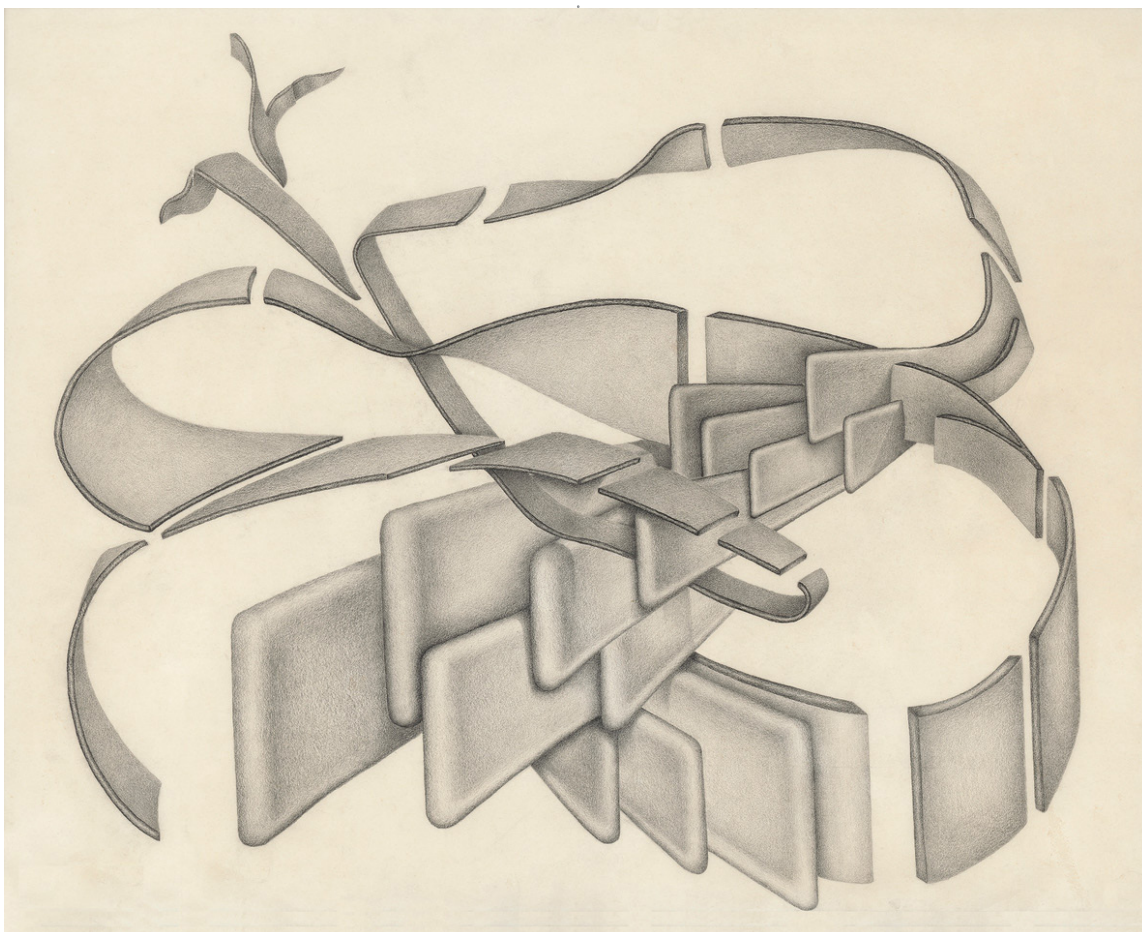
Cut—You must understand completely what you are trying to achieve. That is, what is the end result of what is to be gained. You must, therefore, strip away all the processes and methods to seek the essence of the subject matter. At this point, you then will understand the process and the method by which you achieve the desired end.

Harmony—Your interaction with others should be based on self-respect and honor.

You should not take a position of superiority or inferiority. In this harmonious (neutral) posture you are at ease with others allowing yourself to be relaxed, calm, and composed.

*“In silence there must be movement,
and in motion, there must be silence.
A small movement is better than a
big movement,
no movement is better than a
small movement
silence is the mother of all movement.
In movement you should be like a
dragon or a tiger.
In non-movement you should be like
a Buddha.”*

~ Wang Xiang-Zhai



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Static Motion

Drawing by Paul
Abdella

Graphite on Paper;
1976