



8/17



Wudang

A MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER

From Sifu Paul

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Greetings everyone,

It's been a beautiful summer, and now the late-summer season is upon us with its golden tones and cooler nights. There is plenty of summer left, and I hope you are able to get out and enjoy it. In this issue of *Wudang*, there are some important topics covered, including an upcoming studio meeting, an update on our matching grant, a new meditation class being offered, and more. Please take a moment to read it.

Autumn Gathering in September

In September, it will be six months since our spring celebration Golden Rooster Greets the Dawn that was held last March. Even more notable, the month of September marks the one-year anniversary of our revitalized studio with a new direction under new leadership and our recommitment as a nonprofit. This is something worth celebrating.

We will be hosting a gathering sometime in September (to be announced) that will focus on the following agenda items:

1. I will provide a summary of all we've accomplished the past year and an update on the current status of the studio and a vision for what I hope to accomplish in the next year.
2. The studio is a community of members, and I want to hear your thoughts and ideas on what you'd like to see happen and offered at the studio. So I'm planning on some brainstorming and discussion time to



help shape our vision for the future and create a studio that best serves our community. Everyone is welcome and encouraged to participate; the more people that contribute, the better.

3. Get together and enjoy some food and social time. There are new members to meet and get to know, and it's always fun to catch up with old friends.

Check your inbox and postings at the studio for a date and details of the gathering. If you are able to help with the event, please see me at the studio or send an email, and I will let you know how you can help. There will also be a sign-up posted at the studio.

The Tao of Practice

In the early 1980s, I had the good fortune to study T'ai Chi Ch'uan with T.T. Liang in St. Cloud, Minnesota. I had a weekly two-hour, two-person private lesson in his home that continued for nearly seven years. In that

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Fall celebration
coming in September

time, I managed to learn all the forms and practices that comprised his Yang-style T'ai-Chi system to a level that he deemed "up to standard." This was, as I came to learn, all that could be expected in the way of confirmation that my T'ai Chi had a baseline of competency. "Up to standard" implied that my T'ai Chi was good enough to be further developed to the level of an art if the proper care was taken to stay aligned with the principles and if regular and deliberate practice was part of the equation.

Practice was fundamental to my classes in St. Cloud. Each class was spent demonstrating my forms for Master Liang then receiving corrections on how to improve them. If one of those corrections wasn't completely understood, I would ask for clarification, and it would be provided. If a more exalted question was asked, such as, how do you develop internal power? Or, how do you develop and circulate qi in the body? It was always met with a one-word answer: practice. Initially, this seemed like an evasive response to my question, but I decided to embrace it, and I set up a rigorous practice schedule for myself. Over time, the deep and subtle aspects of T'ai Chi began to reveal themselves. I still needed guidance, but now some of that came from within.

Years later, when I began to study with Wai-lun Choi, he had some terse advice

regarding practice: "I can teach you, but I can't practice for you."

For many people, starting a practice is easy; sustaining a practice is not. They enter into new activities with excitement and enthusiasm, not being fully conscious of all that's involved in order to become accomplished. The first thing to bring to light is the fact that whenever you say yes to something new, you're saying no to something old. Something needs to be set aside in order to begin a new activity and give it time and attention. The old thing may not have to be eliminated from your life, but it must take on a new status and be relegated to a lower position of importance.

The following is an excerpt from an article written by entrepreneur Penelope Trunk about the experience of her 11-year-old son auditioning for the Juilliard School of music and the dynamics of practice that were required to succeed:

"The first round of auditions for Juilliard's pre-college program is by video.

"From December to March, my son practiced for three hours a day to prepare. At the end of March, we recorded him playing *Cello Concerto in A Minor* by Saint-Saëns, and we sent it off to Juilliard. The results of the first round came quickly. He made the cut.

"Then he practiced three hours a day for two more months. The piece he played is about four minutes long. So it's probably hard for you to imagine how he spent three hours a day for six months working on that one piece. But practicing—for anything—is a science.

"When he told his teacher, Amy Barston, he was bored, she told him boredom in practice comes from a lack of engagement. She

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Get your practice
"up to standard."

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Photo of Master Liang
by Marc Norberg



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showed him how to recognize disengagement. Then she taught him to look more closely at each note and listen more deeply with his ears and his heart.

“He learned to practice by changing the rhythm of the piece. He learned to play one note at a time with a tuner. He learned to play each measure with a different metronome timing, and then he played the piece so slowly it took twenty minutes instead of just four.

“During these insane lessons where Amy and my son spent one hour on five notes, the more we worked on the art of practicing the more I saw that practice is a method to do anything ambitious and difficult. He learned to create a system and process instead of just focusing on the goal itself.

“The first 3,000 hours of cello lessons are learning how to recognize a wrong note and stop and fix it. And now he has to learn how to recover from failure, very quickly, so when he plays a wrong note in competition he can move on immediately. Even though I don’t know if he’s sharp or flat, I do know that if he’s sulking about making a mistake he can’t focus on not making the mistake.

“Resilience is about being able to get back up on your feet on your own, so I teach him not to rely on other people to prop him up. ‘You don’t need a teacher to tell you how great you are. Tell that to yourself. Right now.’

“It’s a hard concept. On different days I tell it to him differently. And then I watch hopefully, because I tell that to people I coach all the time and I know it’s hard, even for adults.”

Whether the stakes are this high or not, building a practice begins with creating new habits that enable it to develop and grow. There are many strategies out there worth looking at but I have found five simple ideas that have consistently established new practice habits for me.

1. **Attach a new habit to one that already exists.** This is very simple and relatively easy to do. If you want to start flossing your teeth put dental floss by your tooth-

brush; then the habit of flossing becomes easy to start. Several years ago I found myself inconsistently practicing a form that I had learned in another non-T’ai Chi style and I wasn’t finding time for it in my schedule. I had a well-established T’ai Chi practice so I included this form at the end of it. Problem solved. It only added twelve to fifteen minutes onto my T’ai Chi practice and my performance and understanding of the form rapidly improved.

2. **Small changes add up.** I learned the hard way that you can’t change everything at once or take on too big a project. It must be broken down into smaller units, and habits should be created at a level that’s easy to do consistently. Want to begin a T’ai Chi practice at home? Limit yourself to five postures or fewer. Often we set a minimum for a goal with an implied upper limit that is too large. I want to get to the pool at least five times a week. I want to lose at least fifteen pounds before summer. I start with an easy minimum and maximum until I can establish the habit. I’m going to practice at least five minutes and no more than fifteen on these five postures three times a week. If you’re consistent, you will naturally move past those numbers and on to another achievable level. Meanwhile, the practice habit has been formed.
3. **Change your environment.** Create an environment that promotes positive practice habits. Our habits are often a response to the environment we find



ourselves in. Not having a suitable place to practice or an environment free of distractions will make it difficult to engage in any kind of consistent process for positive change. Small changes will again add up, especially those that you have more control over, like stepping away from the computer or cell phone for a while. In time it may be possible to adapt to less-than-ideal surroundings as your ability to concentrate develops—but don't count on it. As human potential author James Clear wrote, "If your environment doesn't change, you probably won't either."

4. **Seek a ritual not a result.** Although it's useful and necessary to have goals, I've found that treating practice like a ritual and focusing on that over specific outcomes makes a practice more consistent, enjoyable, and productive. A ritual can be as simple as changing into practice clothes and engaging in the practice at the same time every day or as elaborate as you want to make it. Regard it as protected, untouchable time for yourself and do what is necessary to keep the world at bay for the duration of the practice.

*"I can teach you, but
I can't practice for you."*

*—Grandmaster
Wai-lun Choi*

5. **Be creative and flexible in your practice.** A friend of mine named Alan who has traveled to China numerous times told me of a trip where he went to practice T'ai Chi in one of the parks in Beijing. There were many Chinese people practicing forms, including an elderly man who caught his eye because of his relaxed and elegant T'ai Chi form. The man noticed my western friend as well. Alan returned to the park every morning for several days, and each time the elderly man was there practicing forms or qigong. They began to acknowl-



edge each other with a look and a nod until Alan approached the man on his last day in Beijing and introduced himself with his passable Chinese. The man observed that Alan practiced the same routine every day and asked him why. Alan replied with a standard answer about proper sequence and building energy then asked the man what his daily practice consisted of. The gentleman replied, "On sunny days I practice sunny-day T'ai Chi; cloudy days, cloudy-day T'ai Chi; rainy days, rainy-day T'ai Chi."

This speaks to the need for all of us to be creative and flexible in our approach to practice and to check in with our mood and spirit each day. We all have different motives and needs that have brought us to the study of T'ai Chi; in the end, using the elements and process of practice to benefit the body, mind, and spirit will move us toward the creation of a personal art form that expresses our deepest needs and aspirations.

In case you're wondering, the 11-year-old cellist was accepted into Julliard.

Dog Days, Dues, and a Race to the Finish Line

The dog days of summer are upon us. August is the time for hot afternoons at the beach and late-season vacations. Check your list carefully: cooler, sunscreen, grill, charcoal, studio dues. Yes, it's easy to overlook that last one while preparing for your vacation, but we need your third-quarter dues to keep the studio going

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Sip the nectar of small changes to your practice; they add up to sweet results.

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Challenge Grant deadline approaching

through the slower late-summer season, so please add it to your priority list.

When paying your studio tuition this quarter, please consider rounding up and donating to our Challenge Grant campaign. We are in the home stretch of an amazing opportunity that ends September 30. If the studio can raise \$3,000 from its members and match a donation already given, we can raise an additional \$6,000 for a total of \$12,000. As of this writing, we have raised \$2,300 of the total amount. So if you are a member at the \$165 level, consider rounding up to \$200. If you are a \$270 member consider, rounding up to \$300. Just indicate when paying your tuition that you want the extra to go to the matching fund grant and not the general fund. We are so close to our goal! Let's sprint past the finish line, reap the reward, and enjoy the end of summer.

More Baby News

On June 28, my step-daughter Julia gave birth to my fourth grandchild, Elizabeth Marie. Mother and daughter are both doing well.



Volunteer(s) Wanted

The studio is seeking a volunteer to do some ongoing photocopying and printing of some of our in-house forms, posters, and new member booklets. The time investment will be approximately two hours per month or less. See Sifu Paul or Rondi at the studio, or send us an email to apply or inquire.

Seeking Articles

The *Wudang* newsletter is seeking contributions. If you would like to write a story about your T'ai Chi, qigong, or meditation experience or a related topic, send it to Sifu Paul or send an email to mail@tctaichi.org.

Class Schedule Update

All current classes will continue through the month of September except the Wednesday-night meditation class.

Microcosmic Orbit Meditation

Begins Wednesday, September 13, 7:30–8:45, for 12 weeks. Cost: \$144 for nonmembers; free to members

The Microcosmic Orbit is the best-known Taoist meditation practice. The Chinese call it “the Small Heavenly Round” (*xiao hou tian*), and it was first written about more than 2,000 years ago.

The Orbit Meditation activates two primary deep channels in the body, which help control the balance of yin and yang qi flow. The yang fire channel in the spine is known in Chinese medicine as the Governor Vessel, and the yin water channel up the centerline of the torso and chest is called the Conception Vessel.

These two deep channels nourish the twelve meridians or pathways of qi flow that are used in acupuncture. This greater circulation of energy has a positive impact on the overall health of the body.

We will learn a standing qigong practice that opens the orbit as well as a seated practice.



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The Microcosmic Orbit meditation activates deep qi channels in the body.