

# Wudang

Twin Cities T'ai Chi 3/19

A MONTHLY E-NEWSLETTER

## From Sifu Paul

Greetings, everyone!

Our beautiful summer season is coming to an end and making way for Autumn. As the equinox approaches, mother nature puts on a colorful display before her long exhale into the dark night of winter. I have always associated the Labor Day weekend with back to school. This is our back to school issue of *Wudang* announcing the fall class schedule, our fall fundraiser; a call for new board members; a farewell to outgoing board president Adam Nelsen; an article on form practice by studio member Fran Myers, and much more. Cheers to the end of summer and the beginning of autumn.

## Autumn Matching Grant Opportunity

September is here and calling in a new season. It also calls in the studio's annual fundraiser. This is our major fundraiser for the year and an opportunity for members to help the studio meet its financial needs and grow in the year ahead.

Once again the studio has been presented with an exciting fundraising opportunity: Every tax-deductible donation made to the studio will be doubled. In other words, if a member donated \$100 to the studio it would generate \$200. Donations will be matched up to \$5,000. If we get to the 5k figure we will have generated \$10,000 for the studio's operations, education fund, studio upgrades, and more. Your contributions are tax deductible.

We are making it easy for members to donate and for their donations to have an impact on our future.



To donate simply leave a donation in the pay box in the office or swipe a card there, mail a donation to the studio, or add it to your upcoming dues. Please write "matching grant" in the memo of your check made out to Twin Cities T'ai Chi.

The matching grant opportunity will begin September 1 and run through November 15th. Help us celebrate our more than a quarter century as Twin Cities T'ai Chi by making a donation!

Our studio is unique in the Twin Cities, with our enormous breadth and depth of knowledge, our experienced team of instructors, our beautiful training facility, our affordable tuition, and our community oriented spirit, let's strive to meet, and even exceed this financial goal. Thank you for helping to create opportunities and keep the studio fiscally strong.

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Victoria Water Lilies  
and Victoria Platters  
at Como Park

## Observations and Insights on Learning T'ai Chi

by Fran Myers

I had a bad class recently. My work day started early, went long, and I didn't feel like going to class. I **made** myself go. Of course, the struggle began early in the warm-ups and went through to the end of class. I absolutely love doing the Solo Form when I turn to the next posture and see everyone else doing a different posture – oops. This lead me to think about studying T'ai Chi and how to make my practice time more productive.

*I can train you, but I can't practice for you. . .*

*~Grandmaster Choi*

The answer isn't easy. Come to class every day, take private lessons, practice on my own. . . and yes, that's the answer and one I am quite familiar with. The confusion is that more isn't always about time. . . Earlier in my life, Martial Arts was what I did. Go in 6 days a week, up to 5 hours a day was **normal** (I worked all night). But that was when I was 22 years old, 75 pounds lighter, and both of my knees were intact. Now at age 55, with responsibilities, and 30+ years of physical neglect. . . more practice has a different meaning. 30 years ago, it wasn't uncommon for advanced students in my school to do a complete 90-minute class then go off and practice by themselves. One student decided to practice kicks. Straight Leg, Side Kick, Round House, Fan Kick, jump kicks, and then variations. I remember his knees hitting the front of his shoulders doing straight leg kicks. . . He left 5 hours later with no calluses on his feet. Even his belt was dripping wet. The count was 150,000 kicks.

**Beginning Student Tip...** For three years I have tried a lot of different shoes for T'ai Chi. My favorite is XeroShoes. Lite, wide, soft sole, and comfortable. As close to being bare footed as you can get without tearing your feet up on the wooden floor. Perfect for class. Check out [www.xeroshoes.co](http://www.xeroshoes.co)



**Beginning Student Tip...** Watch videos to learn the names of the postures in the Solo Form. I used to keep the sign off cards next to my chair and watch YouTube video's before and after class. Search "TT Liang 150 Posture Long Form" (Jonathon Russell). There are also different dvd's around showing Master Liang and Sifu Paul doing the Solo Form. Master Liang said a step to Mastering T'ai Chi is learning the names of the postures.

At our T'ai Chi studio, we don't train that way. I really don't know if what I did 30 years ago was good or bad. During my **bad** class, it occurred to me that there are things we all can do to get the best learning experience possible. Yes, we need a good teacher. But Sifu Paul is only part of the solution. There is an even more important teacher we must listen to and that person is ourselves.

Before I explain, let's look at the bigger picture of T'ai Chi Ch'uan. It can be confusing for students. Try going to YouTube and look up 'Yang Style T'ai Chi'. Just the differences in the number of postures in the Solo Form are remarkable. Then consider all these postures have familiar names but can look different. Where does this variation come from?

## 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

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Yin Yang Cranes.  
Golden Heaven  
Temple, China



Consider this... We are learning Sifu Paul's version of Master Liang's Yang Style T'ai Chi Ch'uan. Master Liang learned from Cheng Man Ching and 15 other significant Martial Artists. All these teachers affected how Master Liang practiced his T'ai Chi. Sifu Paul learned Martial Arts from other master's as well and that knowledge affects how he practices and teaches T'ai Chi. This is part of the reason there is so much variation.

**Beginning Student Tip...** I have trouble with balance. To improve my balance I pick a spot on the wall to concentrate on while doing Balance Postures. I do this for the Golden Roosters, kicks, and other twisting exercises.

Despite the confusion, these variations are meaningless. We are all doing the same form when we do the posture elements correctly. The trap with all this variation is that it gives the impression that T'ai Chi is some sort of interpretive dance where we can do what we want, whenever we want. This is far from the truth. T'ai Chi is all about the details. If any element isn't correct, we aren't doing T'ai Chi.

As students, our first task is to learn the basics of the Solo Form. This is an elephant sized task. Everything is important. There are so many details that we learn them in stages. Our understanding changes as our experience increases. For us to be our best T'ai Chi teacher, we must make ourselves do the details correctly. Let any of those elements be off – and we are just flapping our arms.

**New Student Tip...** Tea Cup Exercise

To help understand what this exercise meant I really used a little ball in the palms of my hand. It showed me that just waving my hands around doesn't work. You have to change the directions and angles of many body parts at the same time to keep from dropping the balls. It's kinda fun once you get into the exercise to see how you can change the lines of travel the ball takes and how you need to bend and twist. You can even use two balls at once or any body twisting scheme you can think of. This is very Jackie Chan...

To further confuse things is every student is different. Some are slight, some heavy, some older, some younger. Some have injuries. These differences affect the degree of challenge



a student has with the T'ai Chi postures. The inner teacher battles with these differences to maintain the key elements as best we can so each posture becomes as natural as breathing.

When starting to learn T'ai Chi, just stepping into Wu Chi was difficult for me. So, I broke it down to the barest element. Feet shoulder width and pointing straight ahead. Sounds simple doesn't it? Well, not so much. My ankles were very weak. They were so sore I could barely walk down the stairs after class. Our inner teacher is what makes us look at our position, adjust, and maintain correct posture. It may only be for 5 seconds or less at first. Keep at it and next thing you know weak areas are strong and you won't even remember the difficulty. Do you just step into a posture and never **look** to make sure your structure is correct?

**Beginning Student Tip...** Being strict with yourself in class is important, but it is also important to be reasonable. It is a mistake for a new student to try to copy an advance student that may have a deeper stance. Maybe the beginner gets the depth of the stance but can't do it without having hips and upper body out of alignment. The better practice would be to shallow the stance so that you can maintain proper position in all areas at the same time. Over time, increase depth while maintaining structure and you will improve your T'ai Chi even more.

This sounds abusive. Forcing yourself to get into correct postures can be uncomfortable. Weak muscles and joints can scream in protest. But the process improves over time. Once the feet are correct the other elements become the focus and they become natural. By you trying to maintain the correct posture, you are

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**Mountain Blooms,**  
**Hua Shan, China**



teaching yourself T'ai Chi. Since I started coming to T'ai Chi classes, I make it a point to pick one thing and concentrate on it. It may be for a class, a week of classes, or until I have gotten the result I am looking for.

Before anyone thinks this is **easy**, it's not. With 300 postures (right **and** left) we have to give ourselves a break and work on what we can. Just pick one element of one posture. Like Feet Shoulder width and straight ahead. You decide that whenever you are in a position even close to a posture, whether in Warm Ups, Qigong, or just standing in the studio waiting for class – that you will keep your feet shoulder width and pointed straight ahead. That is how you teach yourself T'ai Chi

**Revelation #1...** While doing the warm up exercises, I learned what 'Turning at the Waist' really means. It was during the shoulder twisting exercises. I was just finishing the shoulder twist to the side and switched to the shoulder twist to behind and I **felt** my body twisting from the waist. It was like a light bulb coming on. Now when I do a posture where 'Turning at the waist' is important, I know what that feels like and I **know** when I am doing it correctly.

Another way we teach ourself T'ai Chi comes in what I call 'Revelations'. This is where the activities we do in class cause some sort of deeper understanding of T'ai Chi than we had before. The catch to getting revelations is you must be doing the posture correctly. You don't have to be doing T'ai Chi specific things either. I get revelations in the warm up exercises, Qigong, and weapons. It all relates and when we make these discoveries, our T'ai Chi gets better and becomes 'Ours'.

**Revelation #2...** A T'ai Chi Principal is that our bodies should feel like we have a cord pulling us up

from the crown of our head. One day in class I was concentrating through the top of my head. What happened was my neck stretched upward through the crown of my head – as if a cord were pulling on it. Like the neck of a turtle going in and out. I have been concentrating on this and the results have been longer neck stretches, straighter postures, shoulders and back more relaxed. When I do balance or spinning postures, I pause, feel the stretch in my neck, and then do the posture. My balance is improving.

Most people come to T'ai Chi for health reasons. I certainly did. Recovering from cancer, obesity, and other physical abuses. Health is a long road that starts with the first step. I just wanted to add a low impact, moving activity to my life and begin transforming myself. For my body, doing anything physical would improve my health. T'ai Chi promises fantastic health improvements. But these improvements will only be gained by concentrating on the T'ai Chi elements. If a person is lax, improvements will still be made but very early on these improvements will stop and the persons T'ai Chi will stop improving. With the discipline of your internal teacher, you will quickly see and feel your body changing. Maybe you will start and because you have weak ankles the discomfort only allows you to stay correct in a posture for a few seconds. That's OK. You might only do 10 seconds for a week. Over a time shorter than you'd think, you'll notice that you can be in proper position for 5 minutes. That is a massive improvement. It can **feel** like you will never learn T'ai Chi in your lifetime. But it doesn't have to. Being our own teacher has such a profound impact on our T'ai Chi performance, but it all depends on how we practice.

**Revelation #3...** During the hottest part of July, Sifu Paul started a new to me practice of Rocking (shifting weight back and forth) between postures. If you are at all out of alignment, you can tell in your balance immediately. From feet being on correct compass pointers, to proper spacing...get all the little things correct and the rocking becomes smooth and effortless with the clear understanding of how energy transfers from root to limb. I got quite excited about it. Rock enough, and you can feel your feet relax, widen, and soften giving you even better balance. **Very cool.**

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Flowers of Growth

## Join the Board and Help Shape our Future

The studio is seeking new members for its board of directors, including a new board president. The board is the heart of our studio school. This is where we dream of new ways to bring the art, science, and spirit of T'ai Chi to the broadest number of people in our community. We track how we're doing with numbers and statistics then imagine and plan how to improve and implement our ideas. Board positions are inherently creative and both process and results oriented. Board members serve a three-year term but can opt for a shorter term. They attend board meetings, which are held 8-10 times a year on Saturday afternoons. Meetings are efficiently run and usually last between 60 to 90 minutes; so about 10 to 15 hours a year. Consider how much time you spend in line or on your smart phone in a week to put this in perspective.

- Board members may be but do not have to be members of the studio.
- Anyone with a passion for T'ai Chi and our studio and its mission is welcome to apply.
- If you have a group or interest you are affiliated with such as health and wellness, a spiritual practice, education, business and marketing, etc. please consider networking within your group to help broaden our search for qualified and interested people

If you are interested in serving on the board, or in an advisory capacity or just want more information please contact Paul at the studio or send us an email. Any of our current board members would be happy to explain more about what we hope to accomplish and what the positions might entail. This is an opportunity to help us grow and to give back to our studio, now 26 years strong.



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Adam Nelson

### Farewell to a friend

Adam Nelson, president of our board of directors, will be leaving the board when his term ends at the end of September. Adam joined the board 3 years ago as an at large member and transitioned to be board president. He served during the rebranding of the studio including the creation of our mission, vision, values, statements; the revision of our bylaws; and our 25th anniversary celebration in 2018. Adam brought clarity, creativity, and commitment to the board during his term. We say goodbye with deepest gratitude.

"It was an honor to serve on the board for Twin Cities T'ai Chi Studio. In the course of my tenure I was able to see the deep commitment of my fellow board members and the joyful willingness of community members to support the studio with generosity of time and financial support. As a non-profit organization, the studio relies on such generosity.

Of course, just as evident, is Paul's dedication in sharing the healing art of t'ai chi. His willingness to share his knowledge and further develop his teaching will ensure community members continue to benefit in numerous ways. I leave the board with great confidence in the studio's future success."



## Upcoming Classes and Schedule Changes

There are exciting classes on the horizon this fall.

**Weapons Beginning Monday October 7, 7:30-8:30.** We will begin to learn the T'ai Chi Sword Form, this graceful and powerful form develops stances and foot work, waist and leg power, and projecting energy beyond the hands. In addition to the Sword Form we will learn the 13 fundamental sword techniques in a gradual '3 techniques at a time' manner. Some partner work featuring the 13 techniques will also be included. Open to those who have completed the T'ai Chi Solo Form.

**T'ai Chi 43 Postures Form Tuesday September 3rd at 6:00-7:25 pm, Saturday September 7 at 11:30-12:25.** We will learn to combine Symmetries 1, 2, and 3.

Starting in October we will begin to learn Symmetry 4 which covers the postures Cross Hands, Embrace Tiger Return to Mountain, Fist Under Elbow, Repulse the Monkey, Diagonal Flying, Fan thru Back, Turn and Chop with Fist.

Section Two of the Solo Form increases the difficulty and complexity of the postures and sequence of the form. Symmetry 4 reflects this complexity and is a longer more intricate sequence. Don't miss out on the fun. Prerequisite: Symmetry 1, 2, 3.

Come and learn Symmetry 1 if you've finished the Solo Form.

**The Healing Tao Wednesday September 4th at 7:30-8:45.** We'll begin a twelve-week course in internal qi breathing, rooting, bone breathing and marrow cleansing. This class is one of the Healing Tao Fundamentals series of courses. Our bones pair structure and function, strength and lightness, and are living organs that make our red and white blood cells and produce electrical current when properly stimulated. Taoist masters saw the bones as much more than physical structure and protection for our organs. Bones are highly porous and are always breathing; they draw in

oxygen, nutrition, and blood. In this course, we will learn the Taoist methods for bone breathing and compression and marrow cleansing to help create optimal marrow growth and bone health as we age. We will learn internal qi breathing methods that assist the process. We will learn to get grounded and stay grounded through specific rooting practices, learn a bone breathing Qigong, and more. Experience your bones in a new way. Free to members, \$144 for nonmember

**Eclectics Saturday September 7th 9:30-10:25**

This class teaches how to strike and throw combinations of punches with proper body mechanics, flow and rhythm, to maximize leverage and conserve energy. And also how to train with a partner using safety training gear: focus mitts, punch balls, and foam sticks. It's also a lot of fun. This class develops an understanding of the striking aspects of T'ai Chi. Beginners are welcome.

**12 Animals Class Saturday 10:30-11:25.** The 12 Animals is the foundation practice for the Liu Ho Pa Fa system. Beginning

Saturday September 7th we will begin learning the Pang—a mythological animal that teaches 3 levels of pulling power. Beginners are welcome.

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**The Question of the Month column will resume next month.**

**Celestial Beauty**  
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