

Connections

The Newsletter of Abundant Peace Aikido and T'ai Chi School

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Upcoming Events

Imamura Shihan Seminar: April 20th through 22nd, 2012, at Aikido of Missoula. Imamura Shihan was a direct student of O'Sensei; there are very few of these left alive, so this seminar presents us with an opportunity to connect with a very rare and disappearing treasure. Clear your calendars and join us!

Special Bridge Seminar: Friday, April 13th from 6:30 to 9:00 PM, in place of our monthly "Special Training" we will offer joint training with our friends from the Northern Alberta Aikido Club. These events always offer friendly and stimulating training. Join us for a fun evening of training and camaraderie with other fellow Aikidoists!

T'ai Chi Sabre Set: Two Sundays, April 29th and May 6th. Students of T'ai Chi, add a dimension to your training by participating in weapons training. This amplifies the sharpness and clarity of the mind, to develop stronger intent and body mechanics. Plus, it is a lot of fun!

David Goldberg Seminar: June 2nd and 3rd, 2012. The second annual of these, this seminar is an excellent opportunity to engage in some deep and valuable training without having to incur the expense of travel. Details are available at the Dojo; as we are the sponsoring Dojo for this special event, we will need strong support from all.

Editorial

These newsletters have existed for several years now, and even though personal circumstances keep me from the mats I enjoy the connection to our community that these offer. That said content from our members is always welcome. In this issue, you will find a book review from Elly, one of our T'ai Chi students; I wanted to express my thanks for that contribution, and indeed to each of our members who has provided photos or articles in the past.

Moving forward, I challenge each of you to do the same. Some ideas are to write up a brief book review, or to share a story from your personal journey in our Dojo. Be assured that all contributions are welcome; I will happily offer quiet advice or guidance if you feel some is needed; and, so far all contributions received by me have been published.

As winter melts away and the world begins to turn green once again, remember to find some time in your life to get outside and make the most of the season!

Promotions

We congratulate as well the following aikido students on their advancement:

Kids: Jr. 14th Kyu: Angelina W, Maddie M, Aidan B; 12th Kyu: William H, Brynn G.

Adults: 9th Kyu: David M, George M, Lucas V; 8th Kyu: David D, Andrey P, Scott C; 5th Kyu: Colleen M, Scott R.

We recognize as well the achievement of our T'ai Chi Beginner Class, on reaching the first "cross hands" of the Yang Set. Congratulations and well done!

Remember our Library, named for a member of the Canadian Forces, Corporal Francisco Gomez, who was killed in Afghanistan. The Library exists for all to enjoy.

Reader's Review

NEWS AND EVENTS

The Beginner T'ai Chi Class celebrated reaching the first "cross hands" of the set with their first Noodle Night in March. This event was well attended

Gift Certificates are still available from Sensei Brad. "Give the Gift of Health"! Purchase gift certificates for your friends and family, for T'ai Chi or Aikido classes, to encourage them to keep their wellness goals in 2012.

Training supplies such as uniforms and weapons are available for purchase through the School. These items are chosen by Sensei Brad for their quality, value, and suitability for our training level and environment. Prices are reasonable and quantities limited, so see Sensei today.

Keep an eye on our web site at www.abundantpeace.com to stay current and to check out new content! It is always kept fresh by our Web Master; in addition to the regular events pages and the like, there are always new videos and articles.

Sensei Brad is pleased to announce the launch of a new Health Newsletter! This on line publication will cover a wide range of general health related topics, with a special focus on the blending of timeless wisdom with modern science and technology. Check it out at www.improvehealthnow.net or ask Brad for details.

The Annual Meditation Retreat was held in March, at the Star of the North Retreat Centre in St. Albert. As always, this event was well attended, and those in attendance gained from their shared experiences.

Great News!! Mitsugi Saotome Shihan is scheduled to return to Missoula, Montana, for his annual Seminar on the 28th through 30th September 2012. This is always a great event; one you don't want to miss, so mark your calendars now!

Easter Weekend is fast approaching; we need Senior Students in both Aikido and T'ai Chi to volunteer to cover classes through that weekend. **Note: there will be no classes on Easter Sunday, April 8th!** Aikido students: if there is sufficient interest we will hold a Holiday Morning Keiko on the Easter Monday, with our customary breakfast to follow. Let us know!

I recently read the book What is 'Tai Chi'? by Peter A. Gilligan and I'd have to say it is one of the better books I've read on the subject. Gilligan describes T'ai Chi as one of many ways of self-cultivation, the aim of which is to "... live a calm, unstressed, peaceful and productive life" (pg 42). He describes it as a holistic art, one that engages or connects the mind, the body and the breath. I enjoyed the author's humble approach as well as his explanations and insights.

Gilligan explains how as Westerners, we cannot ignore the fact that T'ai Chi developed within a different culture if we wish to fully grasp the art of T'ai Chi. We need to understand, for example, how Traditional Chinese Medicine views concepts of how our bodies can be strengthened or weakened. The concept of Chi (or Qi) flow, for instance, is integral to practicing T'ai Chi. The Chinese philosophy of Yin and Yang is thoroughly ingrained in Chinese culture and Gilligan explains how T'ai Chi both demonstrates and expresses this fundamental philosophy. I agree with Gilligan and would argue that if we simplify T'ai Chi to fit into our existing Western worldview, we will surely miss out on much of what T'ai Chi has to offer. We can gain much by exploring the background of T'ai Chi.

This book is not a step-by-step guide, but it does give insight into many fundamental concepts, such as not blocking or wasting Chi, relaxation ('Song' in Chinese) and balancing Yin and Yang. He discusses Qi Gong at length, which he defines as "...effort, work or exercise on that which is essential to life" (pg 135). Qi Gong is about working with, studying and cultivating Chi. T'ai Chi, therefore, is one method of Qi Gong. More advanced training, such as Nei Gong (meaning 'inner work') is described as "... a method of refining our perceptions from the gross to the fine" (pg 199). Through Nei Gong, practitioners will eventually move beyond "...mechanical and physical descriptions and move to talk about the experience of Qi and its manipulations through 'directions of intent'..." (pg 199). Although it may start out this way, T'ai Chi can be so much more than just copying movements.

Gilligan discusses the importance of working with a good teacher and explains how the teacher's role is to guide, inspire and make corrections. He also makes a good point in saying that progress will only come through the student's own efforts to practice and internalize what the teacher is showing him. Progress in T'ai Chi is not linear; we move forward but we keep coming back and build on previous experience. If anything it's circular and there is always something to work on and towards.

This book does not explain everything there is to know about T'ai Chi, nor can it since T'ai Chi is something each individual needs to experience for himself. I will say though that this book has contributed to my understanding and I would suggest to fellow students that, in my opinion, it is worth reading. The copy I read is available through the Library at Abundant Peace.