

March Newsletter 2024



Wu Tan Alaska

9900 Old Seward Hwy
www.wutanalaska.com

Notice

Recently there was a small fire in the shop next door. This has affected our space, WIFI, and electricity. Things are not resolved yet, but we hope to be back to normal soon. We are using a hotspot from cell phones for our zoom sessions. Apologies for the inconvenience.

An Irish Blessing

May the road rise to meet you,
may the wind be to always at your back,
may the sun shine warm upon your face,
the rains fall soft upon your fields and,
until we meet again,
may God hold you in the palm of his hand.



Upcoming Events

Shuang Yue [Deerhorn Knives] Essentials

3 Lines with Sifu Kevin
Sat, Sun -April 27th & 28th 12-1:30pm
Cost: \$100 general; \$60 Seniors and Kids
\$20 or \$35/pair-Wood practice weapons

Master Wong Gathering

Sunday April 7th 4-5pm @ Wu Tan

Wu Tan April Potluck

Sunday April 21st
2-3pm

Meditation with Master Wong

Sunday April 21st
3pm (zoom available)

Short article: *Tips for Instruction & Self-Correction in Kung Fu practice* pg. 2
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Master Wong will be here in April. Everyone is invited to attend a gathering with him on Sunday April 7th from 4-5pm.

This month students have been gathering for a seminar on the Sudden Thunder Style Taiji Chuan [Hu Lei Jia]. If you haven't had a chance to participate and would like to, this seminar will also run March 23rd and 24th. All levels of practitioners are welcome.



Photos of Hu Lei Jia Seminar



Day 2 of Hu Lei Jia Seminar:
Left to Right: Nick, Monica, Tyson, Derek, Jacob, Kevin, Emily Padraic, Katie, Henry, and Shannon



Tips for Instruction and Self-Correction

The following is a checklist for instruction and self-correction – abandon it at your own risk!

1. Are the toes pointing in the right direction, are they softly grasping the ground, are the feet correctly aligned?
2. Is the weight centred in the foot, is the root properly established?
3. Are the ankles relaxed and at healthy angles, are they corresponding appropriately to the toes and knees?
4. Are the knees correctly oriented, is the weight and energy flowing through the knee instead of to it?
5. Are the gua (upper thighs) being held correctly?
6. Are the hips (pelvic bone) placed and oriented correctly, is the weight distribution correct, is the spine erect?
7. Is the waist relaxed and is it holding the upper torso correctly?
8. Is the breathing and focus being allowed to sink into the lower Tan Tien?
9. Is the chest contained and relaxed, the back round and full?
10. Are the shoulders round and the elbows sunk – are they correctly placed?
11. Are the wrists supple and the hands free of excess tension- are they positioned accurately?
12. Is the neck relaxed and the head properly oriented and suspended?
13. Is the focus sharp, the chi sunk, and the spirit raised - does the energy flow smoothly, is the jing accurate and complete, does understanding guide the movements?

This is a general checklist and is mostly concerned with structure and alignment. It begins with the feet, which are the root of most problems in stance or form. This shouldn't be surprising as they are root of all upright movement. Bad upper-body habits rarely disappear before the lower body begins to attain some semblance of correctness. Therefore, with beginners, make corrections from the ground up, regardless of the level or experience; this is always a valid set of checkpoints.

When it comes to those who generally have the basics and are beginning to work more on correct expression of energy, look more at a few simple physical points as well as a few more abstract or energetic points. Look to see that the stepping/dynamic weight distribution is rooted and whole, the intent and focus are sharp and clear, the body and breathing relax and tense appropriately (as per specific style), and whatever specific jing and or flavour appropriate to the technique and style is expressed accurately. Students at this level should have some understanding of the usage of at least some of the movements and should be able to begin distinguishing the various energies within styles and forms.



Featured Wu Tan Practitioner: Shannon Gularte

Emily: Hi Shannon thank you for being here today and interviewing with me. Could you tell me a little bit about yourself and how you got interested in Kung Fu?

Shannon: So currently I'm an acupuncturist and how I got into Kung Fu is a kind of long story, to get quick into the timeline. I had some family friends who used to teach me martial arts when I was a toddler and later on, you know, after my dad left the military, we came back to Alaska where I was growing up. And I always had an interest in martial arts, I mean I used to buy books on martial arts and tried to do kicks and punches by watching and looking at the books. My dad wouldn't let me take any martial arts classes until I was a teenager at 15.



[Left: Shannon performing at the Chinese New Year 2023]

So, I actually started in Taekwondo then and for a while my teacher, Rob Barnet, took Kung Fu classes over at Shifu Wong's studio for a while. But that's not how I started Kung Fu - so after I finished high school I got my black belt in Taekwondo and when I went to college I started another Korean martial art called Hwarongdo and when I got back after college to Alaska there were no studios here. I had my cousin, who was a really high-ranking student over at the Northern Shaolin Temple with Frank Wood and so that's kind of how I got into Kung Fu, so I got into the Northern Shaolin Wushu style for the couple of years and I was back after college. And at that time actually I had met you, Emily - and Kevin, during that time and I learned a little bit of Tai Chi from you during that time - but it never really interested me and so when I went to college for Chinese medicine I still did some Northern Shaolin Wushu there, and when I got back again in 2000 that's when I became Shifu Wong's steady

student. I used to visit his school here and there over the years so I met him when I was a teenager and because of Rob so I would drop in every so often to take a class from him but then go back to my Northern Shaolin Temple and vice versa. I think I used to see Kevin at our classes too and so that was my introduction really back in 94. So 94 and 96 was when I did the Northern Shaolin Wushu style. But during that time like I said, I came here quite a bit I used to go to the Buddhist meetings, so I did a lot of meditation and took refuge at that time - but yeah so 2000 was when I officially became Sifu Wong's student.

Emily: So, you've experienced a wide variety Kung Fu and the things that you have done and just in your martial arts in general. It sounds like you've been interested in martial arts since you were just a small child. What was it about martial arts that sparked you, that drew you in?

Shannon: I think at first it was a TV show with David Carradine - Kung Fu, and that was back in the 70s when that show came out and so I was a toddler. When I started watching that and I was just fascinated by the whole thing so I that's when I first saw Kung Fu and I just thought it was beautiful and was thinking Wow! that's so cool, I wish I could do moves like that and I used to try to practice the moves I would see on TV. But I was also really interested in the Buddhist aspect of what was going on, so it was also a personal interest in Buddhism. And I thought it was such a beautiful religion and it was just a beautiful way. Even as a child I thought this, that I knew I wanted to be a Buddhist when I grew up. So you know, growing up with that background you know and seeing that, and then finally being able to go to martial arts class when I was a teenager. You know, that's when I started reading a whole lot of books about Buddhism and just Eastern philosophy just in general. And so when I graduated from college I had a degree in Russian language and literature but I had no clue what I wanted to do with my life, you know so it was my counselor that I was seeing for a while who said you know your

interests lie in the eastern philosophy of martial arts why don't you do something like Chinese medicine or naturopathy which kind of goes along with your whole structure and belief system. And so that's what I did and I love it, and before I went down for Chinese medicine there was one Buddhist meeting I just happened to come to on a Sunday here, and they had some monks who were visiting, so that's where I first took refuge in Buddhism and so I became officially a Buddhist at that ceremony which I just thought that was really awesome and the Nun told me, she said you must have had a lot of good karma in order to find Buddhism again to help you along your spiritual path and so I just thought that was really special. That I just happened to be there at the time when that was going on.

Emily: So it sounds like you have always seen Kung Fu and martial arts as a spiritual practice, even tying it into religion, and so I'm wondering if you could talk a little bit about that, and what connects you, because some people don't really practice martial arts for the spirituality or a specific religion but for you it seemed to be very tied in. So, can you talk a little bit about that and how you found that connection?

[Shannon teaching the Dragonlings class]

Shannon: So, I got a lot from that TV show Kung Fu, it sounds kind of funny to some people, but it was then, because you know, the little boys, and you know - David Carradine, all the training he did was when he was a boy and it was in the Buddhist Temple. And so all the philosophy that the boys were given was Buddhist philosophy which I thought was just fascinating. And then also too, the active meditation. I mean somebody had showed before this time, how to meditate when I was really little, you know, just kind of close your eyes and just not think but so I had been doing that even before then and so I must have gotten a lot of that from watching the TV show but I would have my friends over and I would say hey we're going to meditate now, this is how you do it - you try to think of nothing, you know, we used to sit there trying to think of nothing for a while. So even when I was little I was I was with my friends trying to do the same thing. So because of that TV show I had that correlation and then when I got up to, you know, going to the Northern Shaolin Temple here for a while, again you know, the Buddhist tradition was very apparent you know, and we always had the incense lit. There's a special incense you light while you practice Kung Fu, martial arts. I'd say it helps to bring you back to that spirituality of what you're doing. And you know, what we were told is you you're learning how to hurt people, how to kill. You know you can't use this really - ever, and if you use it, you know it's self-defense. It has to be one movement for one movement so you don't gain karma and so that whole, yeah, but in me was you know OK yeah you don't want to gain karma because you would get tied to this world. And you know you look at people who use it you know and even in self-defense, you know by hurting somebody else you're still getting karma from that action, and so in a lot of ways you can get too caught up in thinking is this bad karma or is this good karma, and it made a lot of sense to me that when a person tries to hurt you, they try to throw a punch - then block it, they try to kick - get out the way. The whole point was you know, do what you need to do to get out of the way of that person and just keep running you know and not to fight at all. And so that goes back to how you would view life as being special and precious. All life is precious, and we were always told you never kill anything inside the space where you work out, because it's a temple, and so you know you see bugs you know, people want squash bugs. So you don't do that. You go over, you pick up the bug, if you don't want it there, you put them outside. So I mean really the Buddhist philosophy has permeated everything - Buddhism and Daoism to a certain extent too.



Emily: So if you had to pick a style or more than one what would be your favorite?

Shannon: Oohh are we talking favorite martial art or favorite style of Kung Fu?

Emily: You could talk about both if you want to.

Shannon: OK so, that's a hard one, Looking at what we learned in Hwarongdo, they really incorporated – when you look at Taekwondo it's very hard - but Hwarongdo is older than Taekwondo and so the system is meant to be hard but we also have a soft style, a softness to it, so you're learning to be more circular and gentle, not just hard and linear. So I had started that, you know like I said in college when I was about 18 and I mean it was definitely a full system. You know, you learned your footfalls and you had to fall and do all that. So when I came to this school I learned a lot about martial arts like I felt like I was starting from the very beginning again because it was so difficult and just it was different way of moving your body than what I learned from the Shaolin temple because Wushu is very different from the traditional Kung Fu and what I found here, I realized gosh there's this is a gem because I'm learning different styles of Kung Fu here and really when you look at a lot of it coming from a hard linear style you don't know how to defend yourself against that. And just a level difficulty that it is just to do Tan Tui - you have to hold your postures and hold your foot up and then kick for you know several breaths and stuff that was extremely difficult for me and I felt like a beginner all over again. So if I had to take though, from the school my favorite one - I spent my first year here I spent one year learning the 10 lines the 10 Tan Tui lines and that's Shifu would have me do, is work on one line basically every month and then my second year here I learned Pao Chuan, which was over 70 movements and so that was another year of just doing Long Fist again. And so it was after that year where Shifu Wong said OK it's time to take some the Praying Mantis from Kevin so did Kevin's class so I ended up loving Praying Mantis, it's a beautiful one, plus it's a really good system you know, just self-defense-wise and so I think my two favorite styles here are Long Fist and Praying Mantis. I know Bajji and Piqua are kind of like the backbone of what Wu Tan is and we practice that a lot and that that seems to permeate a lot into my other styles as Kevin was saying, it's not wrong to have that, but my favorite ones are definitely Praying Mantis and Long Fist.

Emily: OK, as a practitioner, and you've been around at Wu Tan for a long time. Can you give any advice or tips for newer students to the Wu Tan system - just anything that you think would be helpful?

Shannon: Yeah, I think the basis of everything that we do in Wu Tan is based in stances so I would say stances is like probably the most important for any level, from beginner to even expert level. You know Shifu Wong I think has said that practicing an hour of stances a day is equal to about 10 hours of training and so the stances build your energy, But it also gives you the basis of your foundation because every time you do any sort of form you're in a stance and so your feet, your footwork, and your root I think are like the most important things to pay attention to and then after that I would say basics like your basic kicks and punches, you know doing 200 punches a day, you know, before you practice forms, whatever you want to do, you know I think it's important - even in your basic kicks. It keeps you in shape but it's also, you're doing punching and kicking you know and everything that we do here and so if you only do the form, and practice the kicks in the form, you do that maybe 10 times if you do the form 10 times. And you want to be able to get to a place where you can just do a lot of repetition at one time to make you get better at the basics. So you know doing 10 kicks you know front kicks, 10 kicks for sidekick, you know and switch your feet. And doing your punches and your kicks, and then you're internal training and I think that' a good place to start from for any level but especially beginners.

Emily: Thank you for sharing your thoughts with us. Just one more question -and that is - What keeps you practicing because we see so many people come and go from the Kung Fu school. I mean, even people that have been here a long time come and go. What has kept you coming back all these years?

Shannon: I just know the further I learned about things, the more questions I end up having, and you think you understand the movement, and you do, we start to do that movement over and over again you start to analyze like little nuances of how your body's actually moving and so I mean so the more I practice you know anything, I sit there I think -Oh! you know there's stuff going on I hadn't thought about, because I was just doing this movement and thinking about how when you slow it down, what is your actual like worst case supposed to be at certain time during that punch, or how is your body supposed to be moving and drawing it in? And I will say

everybody here, you know, the teachers are very good about explaining, especially Kevin. Shifu Kevin does very good job of explaining, you know, what and why and how the movements are going, and he's able to demonstrate that, you know, and it's just no other style I've ever gone to has had that amount of nuance in each movement. It took me, when I got here, because I came from the hard styles - it took me 3 years of doing punches and I practiced every day so, actually three years and one day I went to class and we had a break after doing punches, and Shifu Wong looked at me and he goes – “Ohh! you look like Kung Fu now and because you didn't look Kung Fu doing your punches before but I don't know what changed but it looks like Kung Fu now.” And so what has kept me coming is that I started to make improvements and you come to a higher caliber, you know, the longer you're here. And I can see where people might get frustrated because it's a long process. I mean three years to finally get a Kung Fu punch? You know and I've been doing martial arts like most of my life, so I thought that was just amazing so I think people get bored easily or like this is just too hard. And People come in and are like oh gosh - you guys pay for this kind of torture - and so you know I'm obsessed with it. I mean, I think because from a very young age I've watched it and I've always wanted to do it and it wasn't allowed to do it until I was a certain age and, so yeah, I mean I think people who do Kung Fu and stay here, they're just wired in a certain way so want to keep coming, you know, and I think all of us who have been here, you become obsessed with it because you want to keep making improvements because you start to notice your deficiencies, and your movements. You want to keep practicing to perfect it as much as you can.

Emily: Thank you so much for your sharing your thoughts and experiences. I really appreciate you being here today.

Shannon: Thank you and thank you for listening to everything I had to say, it was good interview.



[Left to right: Katie, Shannon, Sifu Emily, Monica]