

# INSIGHT

Shaolin Kung Fu Studios Medford Kwoon Newsletter

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## Changing Our Future to Meet Our Past

By Shih Fu Mike Evans

In the Shaolin Kung Fu Studios mission statement, we make the assertion that it is our goal to teach our system to all of those willing to learn it. I like to believe that our school, in keeping with our mission statement and the traditions upon which it was based, does a fair job of this. However, I have also noticed a few shortcomings. In ancient times, different lessons were taught to different students in order to guide each student on his or her own path to perfection of character. While only disciples of the highest integrity were taught the complete system, everyone who wished to had the opportunity to learn.

Over the past year or so, my staff and I have received several requests for various different types of classes, both from current students, and from people looking to potentially join our family. Unfortunately, we were not able to accommodate these requests at the time. We have also had a few people leave the school for no other reason than that they did not like one particular portion of the curriculum, although they

said they thoroughly enjoyed every other part. Charging membership fees is another great struggle of martial ethics: do we pay rent, or do we teach for free? These are examples, I feel, of times we have failed to completely live up to the mission statement I myself composed.

*Nothing endures  
but change.... The  
swing of the pendulum  
is ever in evidence.*

*~ The Kybalion*

In keeping with the traditions of our system, and in order to eliminate these problems, we will be restructuring the workings of the school's class and tuition structure.

We will be combining the best of ancient training methods with the proven technologies of western teaching methods. We will be adding more classes, each being specialized for one portion of the curriculum, allowing students to choose their own customized learning track and tuition rate. Most importantly, we will begin offering free Foundations classes.

My goal has always been to re-introduce the tradition of the Kwoon as being a central part of the community. In the old days in China, a Kwoon was a place not only for martial training, but an institute of scholarly pursuits, a place of

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## American Shaolin

A Book Review

By Paul DeStefano

Once upon a time, Matthew Polly decided to simply drop his entire life, take whatever money he had and go to find the Shaolin temple in China to learn Kung Fu with the monks. When he came back, he wrote "American Shaolin", available in the Martial Arts section of pretty much any bookstore. This is a story of a fish way out of water, a man looking for something and finding an absolutely alien culture. Not the Shaolin Monks, but more the Chinese.

Even though Kung Fu is the plot mechanism that drives him to China, most of the book dwells on the political and economic machinations surrounding an American in China. While a few moments are spent describing the actual martial training, far more is spent describing the social importance of smoking, the government run television system, the astounding poverty surrounding the temple, and the incredibly intricate rules of negotiating and lying in China. Luckily, the author was fluent in Chinese before attempting this trip. It might be a biography or a travel log, but it borders on a comedy, mainly due to Polly's style. It really seems out of place in a Martial Arts shelf. Matthew is an unpolished person. The book details his various escapades with local Chinese girls, which are borderline illegal to begin with, and is peppered with obscenities and pro-

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## Meditation

by Sihing David Weber

We've all heard this word bandied about, but what is meditation? The Webster's II New College dictionary defines meditation as: a devotional exercise of contemplation or a contemplative discourse, usually on a philosophical or religious subject. While this is certainly true, it only scratches the surface as a definition. It is not a complete definition, as eastern forms of this activity are not considered, nor does it compare and contrast the two types of meditation common to what I will refer to as the Western and Eastern Traditions.

Western styles of meditation are as defined above. Practitioners of this style usually begin with some form of prayer common to Judeo-Christian religion. Immediately following, the practitioner is urged to engage the emotions as well as the mind, in the form of critical thinking and analysis of the topic under scrutiny. With time, patience and practice, something deeper and more meaningful is usually derived from the original text or subject under consideration. This is the practice as used by monks of Catholicism in the monastery of old, and the various religious houses of the same. The Hebrew faith

has similar types of meditations, as does Islam.

All of these meditations are specifically designed to bring the practitioner closer to the subject at hand, or their Divine Source. Some also have a more practical use, such as reminding the aspirant of their moral obligations in day to day life. Paintings and imagery are also common in western forms of meditation. The practice begins by looking at a painting or photo of some spiritual subject, and mentally noting or recording what ideas or thoughts come to mind regarding the subject, much like free association, as popularized by Freud and Jung in the early days of psychology.

One less common form of Western meditative practice was the practice of Alchemy. Outer Alchemy, the forerunner of modern chemistry, is actually not true alchemy at all! Unknown to most, the practice of alchemy was always intended to be a form of spiritual discipline, and not converting lead into gold. True inner alchemists, the ones who had the keys to unlock the texts (always written in code and allegory to avoid the Holy

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### *~ Change Continued*

help in times of need, and healing in times of pain. In order to bring this dream to fruition, we must change our present condition. In the Kybalion, it says that to change our condition, we must change our vibration, change the very way we think. In redirecting our thoughts from paying the landlord to providing for the education of the community, I believe that we will take the first steps on our path to our ultimate goals, both personally and as an institution.

Be sure to keep an eye out for the new schedule, which is currently still under development, as existing students will get priority when enrolling for classes. If there are days or times that are absolutely impossible for you or your child, please let us know. We will do our best to ensure a smooth transition to the new model, and with your input, I'm sure we can make this transition even smoother. As always, if you have any questions or concerns, or if you'd simply like more details on the change, please do not hesitate to contact me or anyone on my staff. Ping An!

### *~American Shaolin Continued*

fanatics, including trying to teach one of the young monks how to swear like an American. The details of when he meets a monk 'superstar' who has developed the skill of "iron crotch" is hilarious and wince inducing.

While the book takes place largely within the Shaolin Temple, it really focuses on the system of friends and obligations that is built deeply into Chinese culture more than Shaolin itself. There are times where he specifically mentions things like roundhouses and being

pummeled during *San Da* matches, but extremely little is mentioned about his training, except that it ends up being fairly painful. A whole chapter details Polly being brought on a trip into the city to help a man who lives under a staircase in the temple (his last name is not Potter) get a refund on a blender. While this seems to be a total aside, it ends up displaying just how alien a six foot Caucasian is in China, as Polly acts like the insane white man so that the store owner is finally intimidated into a deal of sorts. Another lengthy section and subplot deals with a

drinking game that is a variant of Rock Paper Scissors and the impact that this game has on everything from price negotiations to personal debts.

I would recommend the book as a somewhat comedic view of an alien culture, realizing that the focus is on China as much as the temple. The characters that the author has to deal with are often outrageous and bizarre. It definitely is not to be read by anyone easily offended by harsh language, politics or religion. Enjoyable, if somewhat unfocused.

# Health Kick

## No Grains or Whole Grains?



By: Jennifer G. Galea MS RD

Many of the latest diets, and even some news reports, proclaim the need to eliminate “carbohydrates” from your diet. But do they really mean to eliminate all carbohydrates? Carbohydrate-rich foods include whole grains and fruits as well as pasta and potatoes and sugar. The healthiest choice is to focus on whole foods while incorporating all food groups into your diet. For grains, make sure that your “carbohydrates” are whole grains, and not empty “white” foods.

According to a recent survey, most people (86%) agree that eating whole grains is an important part of an overall healthy diet, but 53% reported eating whole grains less than once per day! Only 25% of those surveyed were getting at least one serving per day. Considering that the current nutrition recommendation for grains is six to 11 servings per day, your personal goal should be to make at least three of them whole grain, if not all of them. Non-whole grains (such as white potatoes, regular pasta, white rice, and white bread) are devoid of most of the nutrition that grains provide, such as fiber and phytochemicals, while still providing significant empty calories.

So avoid the mashed potatoes and the processed white bread, along with sugars of all varieties. Instead choose carbohydrates composed of whole grains. There are many varieties: wheat, oats, corn, rye, barley, spelt, groats, wheat berries, millet, and flaxseed, as well as brown rice.

To transition to “whole grain” eating, try some simple substitutions, like mixing whole grain pasta with your regular pasta (and eventually replacing it completely), making sandwiches with whole grain or mixed grain bread, or even mixing whole grain cereal with a favorite breakfast cereal. But whole grain eating can be much more interesting than just replacing pastas, breads and breakfast cereal; you can incorporate new grains, or at least new forms of grains, into your diet. Try something new as a side dish or mixed in with other dishes. Try whole grain varieties of common foods, such as waffles, crackers, tortillas, and breads.

Like any dietary change, modifying your whole grain intake will take time. Start with simple substitutions. Add to those some new whole grain food items and recipes. Your new diet will be more interesting in addition to being much healthier.

~ *Meditation continued...*

Inquisition) used derogatory terms for their 'operative' brothers, 'puffers' being the most common. (Referring to blowing on flames and fire in a futile attempt to change that which cannot be changed)! This subheading of mediation actually contains what we now know as forms of eastern and western methodology.

Eastern forms of meditation are, at least from the Buddhist point of view, very different. However, Taoist forms of meditation are actually much closer to their western alchemical brethren!

Buddhist mediation is designed to assist the practitioner to free their mind from frivolous and 'unnecessary' mental gymnastics. Through steady practice, the practitioner is taught to first calm the mind, and reduce the 'chatter' within. Common side effects of such practices are reductions in blood pressure, and hyper focus, the ability to concentrate on subjects without the teeth gritting and forehead scrunching so commonly seen in school children and adults alike as they try to study! Of course this list is not all inclusive.

Taoists meditation also contains this method, as well as the use of imagery and free association in order to

learn more about one's true nature. Eastern forms also can include the use of a mandala, or intricate staring pattern, which aids the practitioner in calming the mind in order to gain insight.

So what does this have to do with Shaolin Kung Fu? Simply put, the practice of Kung Fu is in itself a meditation! Our Temple predecessors developed our system of practice with multiple layers. Externally we see benefits in the form of exercise. A strong body creates a strong mind. The precise movements of our forms are a type of story telling or mandala. If we study mindfully the movements of our bodies, we can gain insight into ourselves and the universe within which we live. The physical activity also creates a form of no-mind or inner stillness in that precise moment of practice, were we focus solely on the task at hand, and nothing else, building focus and concentration; quieting the mental chatter we all are aware of. Very much a meditation indeed!

While much of this knowledge is reserved traditionally for the advanced levels of our system, some understanding of this topic at the outset will benefit all practitioners of our art, beginner and advanced, child and adult alike.

## **Around the Wu Guan**

### **New Schedule Announcement:**

Watch for our new, expanded training schedule. This new training schedule will take effect September 1<sup>st</sup>, and will include more classes covering more subjects. Classes will be selected by the student and each class will run independent of the other subjects, allowing each student to choose a unique learning track at potentially lower tuition levels. Registration for these new classes will begin August 1<sup>st</sup>, with enrollment priority given to existing students.

### **Classifieds**

**Massage Therapy** — Tao of Massage (Laoshih Mark) 631-294-5261

**Acupuncture** — Therapeutic Alternatives (Don Carey-Shaw) 631-654-3438

**Flute and Bassoon Lessons** — (Sijie Andrea) Sijie@NotKarate.com

**Web Design** — (Paul DeStefano) GeosphereMusic@Aol.com

**Fine Dining** — Trio at the Holbrook Country Club (Kevin Stahl) www.TrioFineFood.com

**Chiropractic** — North Shore Alternative Health Center (Dr. Ronald Kaufmann) 631-209-0050

### **Sash Testing**

As always, stripe testing for the kids classes will be held every first and third Monday of each month. The Next Sash Testing will be held either the end of July, or the beginning of August. Keep an eye on the info board in the waiting area.