

The History of the Eighth Level and the School 1973-2017

By the Legacy Holders and the 8th Level Committee 2016-2017

Our school was founded by Patrick Watson, who was a student of Professor Cheng from 1960 until the Professor's death in 1975. In 1973, Patrick began working with Patty Gorman as his teaching assistant, documenting his teaching. After the Professor's death and the dissolution of Shr Jung, Patrick saw the need to create a new school, additionally recruiting Sherry Kent, Marilyn Graham, and Margaret Matsumoto, teaching weekdays at an Upper East Side playground, a Hunter College gymnasium, Arica facilities, and weekends in Boston, NYC and DC.

Patrick set up our School's teachings as a growing, evolving series of levels based on Professor Cheng's 9 levels of Tai Chi Chuan. Each level relaxes and energizes the body/mind in a different way and provides a step on the Path to the Tao. The spirit aspect of learning and teaching all levels of our Tai Chi School (Supreme Ultimate path) has the potential to both train our body and mind, and develop our Consciousness.

At the beginning, we were closely aligned with the Arica School. We were all practicing Aricans, teaching other Aricans as the Arica Tai Chi Association and all the early apprentices came from this group. Apprenticeships started in the spring of 1976. Also at this time, our school's levels of course work and the accompanying manuals emerged from Patty and Patrick's creative, collaborative work. We incorporated as the STCC in the US in June of 1976, in 1977 in Amsterdam, and in 1979 in London. The School expanded and evolved.

As this new tai chi school was forming, Patrick met with Oscar Ichazo, the founder of the Arica School, and was encouraged to continue training teachers and build a large organization. They envisioned both schools as travelling "on parallel tracks, side by side, up the mountain of enlightenment". The original requirement for the 8th level was to be in the 8th level of Arica, which was dropped within the first couple of years.

When Patrick's health started to fail, four of his senior NYC students started meeting out of concern for Patrick's well-being and the future of the School. Eventually Patrick officially passed on the responsibility and legacy of the School to eight of us: Patty Gorman, Margaret Matsumoto, Gerrie Sporken, Greg Woodson, Sherry Kent, Margaret Olmsted, Peggy Watson and Axel Schwolow. They form the Legacy Holder Council within the TCF and are known in the School as 'The Legacy Holders'.

Patrick also created a group called the 8th level, an invited group of Senior Teachers, to share that responsibility across a larger body of the school. Patrick's vision for the 8th level included two main goals:

1. First was to ensure the continuance of the teachings beyond his and our lifetimes, where each member of the 8th level would commit to learning and teaching each level of material from the Cheng Man-Ch'ing Tai Chi tradition. He wanted the school to be there for him in his next lifetime.
2. Second, he felt that this level needed to create a "transmutation of consciousness" in each participant, a permanent change wherein each member would "become Tai Chi" - it's living embodiment, in preparation for the 9th and final level.

In their preparatory discussions on the 8th level, Patrick told Patty that the end would come around to the beginning, that by learning and teaching each level, all would become embodied in each apprentice.

Patrick felt that the strength and spiritual unity of the school depended on this 8th Level, recognizing that we are here to attain enlightened consciousness, cultivate it in ourselves, pass it to others, and dedicate all in service to Humanity One.

After discussions with Patty Gorman and Margaret Matsumoto, Patrick Watson handpicked the members of the first group. They had to be of "straight character", Aricans engaged in the then-current advanced work, capable of self-observation and processing, and able and willing to carry on the school. These criteria were used evaluating each candidate "crossing" a Line, a method borrowed from Arica of jumping the level of a group by evaluating each person across specific issues or "tensions" that they needed to "pass" in order to be received into the group.

The Legacy Holders came up with a program and invited additional current PH 7 students. Everyone had to cross a line with the tensions: 1) Are you straight inside and out (physically, ethically, etc.), 2) will you build up the school if the roof caves in, and 3) will you take responsibility for the school. In Patrick's time we started our internal Tai Chi consciousness work in the summer trainings with early morning work and Arica meditations in the evenings. Over the next few years the Legacy Holders invited others to join, all of whom had to cross the Line to be admitted.

The 8th level was a huge infusion of energy in our school. Some people responded immediately and became responsible leaders of the School, others grew into their roles over time, while others remain somewhat adrift. Some did well with suggested "assignments," others found their own areas of engagement. Certain days at trainings were dedicated to meet and teach the advanced levels of PH to this new larger group, and new advanced PH teachers were trained to not only help pass advanced PH in their localities but also at trainings.

Patrick passed away in 1992 and is greatly missed by all of us. Our gratitude to him is immeasurable.

Then came Perch Lake (purchased in December 1994 as a permanent training location for the School in the USA), which revealed our weaknesses as a school in terms of cohesive leadership, handling large-scale under-financed projects, real estate ownership and management, and fund-raising. In the aftermath (finalized January, 2004), morale and finances were both low.

Nonetheless, out of that spiritual and financial brouhaha, the Tai Chi Foundation was brought to the fore, which has included many 8th level members and others. There emerged a clearer division of functions between the Legacy Holders safeguarding the quality and integrity of the teachings and the TCF Board assuming the business end of things such as policy making, governance, communication, and finances.

More recently:

In 2001 Patty revived the 8th level and we invited some new members. At first we met twice per year, and then once, always on Eastern Long Island, close to where Patty lives. Patty began to partner with Gerrie to continue to develop the 8th level work, which in each individual 8th level member can manifest as what we call All Consciousness or 9th level, using guidelines set by

Patrick, and to explore and test new work. Out of their work together came R&B QiGong and the beautiful R&B Qigong DVD. In addition we worked the Pole, Sensing Hands, the Sword Form and Fencing. We also explored the Five Excellences and the Classics, and revealed the path of consciousness within the form.

However active, alive, and productive the Long Island meetings were, they raised questions and opinions, inside and outside of the 8th Level, on the suitability and raison d'être of a separate, by invitation only, 8th level group. There were issues around exclusivity, aggrandizement of the ego, confusion for others about requirements, and on transparency and fairness in how eligibility was being determined. In 2006, Edna Brandt, supported by the 8th level, wrote in a letter to all apprentices that the purpose of the 8th level was "To sustain a group of people who work together and are responsive, supportive and accountable to one another in their growth in tai chi, the excellences, and the classics. Thus, to keep the spirit of the school alive and growing towards opening the gate to the ninth level of the tai chi path."

In 2013 we tried a new method of entry into the 8th level that included the participation of the 8th level. Instead of the Legacy Holders picking new members for the 8th level we had an election, with all of the 8th Level members nominating candidates and voting. Out of this process we elected new members but we also generated karma amongst ourselves and with those who were nominated but not elected. Our last Shelter Island training was in 2013 when we inducted the newly elected. Two more members were inducted at the European WT in 2015.

Since the ending of the Shelter Island Trainings, the 8th level meets separately before trainings and members participate in the 8th level tunings in the spring. Attendance of the 8th level at summer and winter trainings has increased, and that has brought much-appreciated energy to the trainings. Gerrie and Patty have continued to deepen Qigong and level 7 and 8 work and produce tunings for the whole school. Greg and others have concentrated on renewing all the PH's levels, while other legacy holders and advanced teachers alike generously contribute in many creative ways to the curriculum and the life and growth of our school.

To address the unresolved issues about the 8th level, a new 8th level admissions process has been developed. It is the result of discussions among the 8th level, the Legacy Holders and a committee of three 8th level apprentices.

Tai Chi is change. The history of the 8th level in our School is a living example of it. The world changes, we change, the School changes. Our adaptability will keep us soft and strong.

For now we have developed a clearer statement of the Function and Admission Criteria for this level as well as free application for any Apprentice that feels they meet the list of requirements to apply for entry.

Welcome to this new phase of growth and development!

We are One