



Episode 320 – Mr. Paul Read | whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com



Jeremy Lesniak:

Hey everybody, thanks for coming by. This is whistlekick Martial Arts Radio episode 320. Today, I'm joined by my guest Mr. Paul Read, better known to some of you as The Teapot Monk. If you're new to the show, you can find the show notes at [whistlekick Martial Arts Radio](http://whistlekickMartialArtsRadio.com). You can find the full complement of our products and digital services at whistlekick.com. You can find our products on Amazon, too. For the most part, check out whistlekick first. You'll see everything there and then we drop some links and what's on Amazon, make it nice and easy for you. You know I haven't asked for reviews in quite a long time so if you like this show, wherever you're getting it from - if you get it from iTunes, if you get it from Stitcher - just drop on, leave us review. Help us grow. Help us, you know, find other people. Or if you don't want to do that, just share it with somebody, tell somebody about it. Tie him to a chair and make them listen... don't do that.

Let's talk about today's show. Mr. Paul Read is a Tai Chi instructor with quite a strong online presence. In fact, if you were to look up Tai Chi online, you would not have to look very far to find him. And because of that, because of his skill, because of his passion for sharing what he has learned, he has quite the following. And it was from one his online followers that we got an email and said hey, this guy deserves a place on the show. Now I was a little bit familiar with what he had going on but as you might imagine, we get so many suggestions that I often wait for a listener to reach out and say this is someone that belongs



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on the show, kind of a way letting others vet who our guest might be. But I reached out and I received a response fairly quickly and it was very clear from those initial emails that this was going to be an exceptional episode and it is. I had so much fun, I learned so much, and truth be told I suspect we could have gone much, much longer with great conversation. So I'll step back, I won't set it up any more than that and I want you to listen to my conversation with The Teapot Monk, Mr. Paul Read.

How are you, Mr. Read?

Paul Read:

I'm just assessing the situation had bear with me

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure, no worries.

Paul Read:

So you've been up a long time already of have you just stumbled out of bed five minutes ago.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I wish that was my lifestyle. No, I've been up, let's see, nearly five hours now.

Paul Read:

Well, I think you go out before I did then.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Quite possible.

Paul Read:

No, I'm joking. It's three o'clock in the afternoon here.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh, then certainly not.



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Paul Read:

03:16 but not today. So I think we're okay, are we? How sound are we doing stuff? Good, okay. So, how are you? Good, good. This is the first time I've used this microphone with a call, an audio call. So this is the microphone I used to use when I'm doing an audio book so it might be... I'm just hoping that it is going to be alright.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It sounds great.

Paul Read:

The other microphone I had was a... Does it sound okay?

Jeremy Lesniak:

It sounds great.

Paul Read:

Okay. Right, good. Okay. Enough of that. So you've been up a while, glad to hear it. So you're raring to get out presumably or -

Jeremy Lesniak:

I am.

Paul Read:

You are? Okay. If I remember correctly, the order of your previous shows, I mean I can't say I've listened to them all but there's a few I've definitely played through, you surprise your guests by saying hey, you know we're already rolling, don't you?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Quite often, I do that. And you know, I'll be really honest and I don't know that I've told... I think I've told this story once but what happened was we did an episode with a gentleman from Australia named Sensei David Hughes and we were 15 minutes into just kind of our preshow chat and I realized, this is really good stuff. The listeners would appreciate hearing this, I think. Because I try to put myself in the position of the listeners and we get so much good feedback on the episodes over the next few weeks where I did that. Then I said you



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know what, let's make it that more natural, that more conversational. I needed the structure early on. I had no interview experience. And as I become more comfortable, it's like anything in martial arts, right?

Paul Read:

More like just anything in life, really, Jeremy. I think it's, you know, initially you want structure, you want guidelines and then as you become more confident and more, I suppose confident in yourself rather than necessarily the medium in which you're using but you know, hopefully you get to that point in which you require less dependency on those props and more on your own sense and your own intuition. I like to think so, anyway.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure. I think that's really good lens to look at probably anything in life. I mean, as you said, that's life - the ability to look around. I mean if I think of children have all of these rules and of course, as we grow we learn that rules aren't necessarily made to be broken but they need to be broken because rules can't handle all conditions. I'm enjoying the synergy there.

Paul Read:

Okay. I'm aware that there's a time lapse between finishing and beginning which is going to be curious. Is this always the case? I presume it is when we're doing distant calls to the extent that we are, that there is a sense of you know, I'm not aware that you're necessarily finished. It could be that the microphone cable has just become dislodged a moment and there's that sense of just a momentary, just a microsecond or two, where you're thinking, has he nodded off?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'm actually not experiencing that.

Paul Read:

Oh, okay. That's because you're experienced interviewer, Jeremy.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Oh, is that it?

Paul Read:



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I'm just a humble English human being who's in awe of your interviewing skills.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well if you were brown-nosing for anything, I think you can ask it at this point. I think we're there.

Paul Read:

Okay, we're there.

Jeremy Lesniak:

But I've got to ask you. You have an interesting online moniker. Can you tell us about that - your alias, your stage name?

Paul Read:

Okay. Interestingly, you call it a stage name but I'd never thought of it in those terms before. Because a lot of what this character, The Teapot Monk, represents and has represented now for quite some time is someone who employs the postures of Tai Chi and interprets them in ways that he feels are useful in his life rather than the ways that they've traditionally been handed down and the interpretations that they've been given by schools and teachers in a more broader sense of taking into account the history and culture and background of the art. So Teapot Monk is one of these guys that, you know, who is it who said... I think it was someone like Picasso but it probably I've got it completely wrong. He's probably someone like [08:29](#) but someone said there are two sorts of artists in the world. One responds to the history of his art and the other one responds to life himself. Well I think I respond to the history but my online persona, Teapot Monk, he gets some more liberty and he has more license to respond to life. So in a way he's the person who looks at the world through the lens of Tai Chi but with a very strong foot in the 21st century. And the idea of using the description, Teapot Monk, really has its origins in when I first started learning Tai Chi which was way back in the 1980s in London during the time in which there was a hotbed of schools competing with one another in a relatively small area and each of them is liking each other off and denouncing each other as fraudulent and not following the guidelines and the wishes of the grandmasters of each separate school. And when I started learning Tai Chi, I was learning, I didn't tell my teachers at that time, I was doing three different styles at the same time until I got caught out. And then each of them refused to teach me again because they said I'm betraying the principles of the style because I shouldn't be learning the competition at the same time. It was silliness. So eventually, I stopped in one style and my teacher went back to the country of her origin and I took over from her. And I realized that when people started asking me about what style I was teaching



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and where my lineage was from and who taught me, etcetera, etcetera, I was like falling into the same game that everyone got into which was playing down others in order to boost your own particular path. And so I called it the Teapot Style just because I thought no one would take it seriously and no one did take it seriously. Whenever anyone said to me, you know, oh that that doesn't make any sense. I would say well, I live in a world that doesn't make much sense to me so to talk no sense makes perfect sense in a way. And the name sort of stuck and I've been using that name since. So it has this sort of playfulness about it. There is something that hopefully no one in their right mind would consider, you know me putting it forward, as a serious style or even myself as a serious player in that sense, in a sense of built, you're shackled to the past in some sense. Do you understand what I'm saying, Jeremy?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I do.

Paul Read:

Are you still there? If you nodded off...

Jeremy Lesniak:

I do. No, I'm here and I'm nodding along rather than nodding off.

Paul Read:

That's a relief.

Jeremy Lesniak:

But I'm curious. You know, I remember a time and I think I've talked about this a bit, back as a teenager I was bullied, I consider myself the school nerd, didn't have a lot of friends, etcetera, and I found solace in creating this alter ego as I started to use the internet. And in hindsight, that was an important part of my development, the realization that I could be someone else. Is there any resemblance of that for you with being the Teapot Monk? Is there a dramatic difference between the Teapot Monk and Paul Read?

Paul Read:

I think, perhaps, at one point there was. And yeah, this is a really great question because I think when we first started, I think like you, you've had a background in technologies, is that right, Jeremy? Yeah. I, too, took a degree in technology and I feel like I've always been



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there since the beginning in a sense. I do remember there was a point when the internet first started spreading like an epidemic that we embraced avatars, we used pseudonyms, many of us gave fake names or birth dates or put cartoon images of ourselves rather than real photographs and it hasn't been until a fairly recent period, I believe, particularly with social media, that there have been an insistence or must being much more honest about who we are. We can no longer get away with that so easily. So overtime the Teapot Monk as an online character fused with my real life persona. And at some point in the past, I wish I could put a date on it exactly but there was a period on which they seem to sort of blend it together. And I think the Teapot Monk lost some of his qualities and I became a bit more like him and he became a bit more like him, I think, over their course of time. So, yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Talk about that loss of quality. Not quite the right way to phrase it but you said the Teapot Monk lost some of his qualities. What's different?

Paul Read:

Right. Yeah, well, I think when he started off. When he started, he started as a reaction to things so there was this sense in which he played the game. The idea was that his existence was to really turn things upside down so without having any answers, without having any sense of anything better to offer, his purpose in his life was just be to sort of poke holes at things. And that took the form of laughing at a lot of structures that were there in the martial arts back in the 80s and 90s. But this took us off personal path for me because I've been coming from our series of our martial arts long before I go into Tai Chi and whilst I was still teaching Tai Chi, I was engaged in other forms of work to do with fitness training. And I was required in those fields to go through a number of certified courses in order to do that correctly. So on the one hand I had this very thorough practical examined history and on the other side, this long martial arts history in which I had been told so many things about the way the body works or the best ways of exercising or safest ways of doing this and then I had all these other information aside and I didn't quite know what to do with it. So the Teapot Monk had a role there to point out some of those holes. And over the course of time I think I became more confident and embraced some of that and he became less of that character whose only function was to point to the holes and became a little bit more responsible, which I like to think he is now, and plays a little bit more positive role in that and less walks around tripping people up in a sort of digital format. That makes any sense?

Jeremy Lesniak:

It does. All kinds of sense. I think we all have the experience whether it's something structured as being an online persona of what it's like to feel that we wear a mask, you



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know. I don't think that anyone portrays themselves exactly the same to any two people. I know that when I'm speaking with my friends or when I'm speaking with you or, you know, last night when I was teaching at a friend's Taekwondo school, I'm a slightly different person because the situation warrants that. But I think, you know, just kind of listening to the way you're articulating this, the fusion of these two major components of who you were, I think that that's an important part of growth. I think that that's something a lot of us in martial arts, whether we realize it or not, it's something that we're trying to do. We have this idea of who we want to be as a martial artist or as a human being that martial arts can help mold. And we're striving for that whether that's, you know, something as outward as losing weight or something as inwardly powerful as dealing with issues around anger or maybe abuse. And it can be such a beautiful tool.

Paul Read:

I like the word fusion. I think that's an interesting... it seems to keep popping up and it sometimes pops up in negative connotation way but people start saying ha, what you're teaching isn't Tai Chi. It's Tai Chi-Pilates or Yoga-Karate and in that sense, I guess, is what negative welcome but there's another sense in which I find that that movement from stance to another that may not necessarily always have followed but something you're exploring in the process of taking that path. That fusion is possibly the thing that I'm always in search of, you know. That idea of what is appropriate for this moment. When you described yourself teaching in this Taekwondo class last night and you become this other persona, you're responding to the elements that are there around you. You will hopefully, you're adaptable and flexible enough to be able to do that. You have a broad agenda and a fairly decent toolkit in which you can pluck out what you think are the appropriate exercises and drills for that class. That's what I hope, I would like to think, that we all are trying to do in our teachings and our martial arts and beyond that in life, that we're always looking to see what's appropriate in the moment, what's the most effective tool we can use at this particular point irrespective of what we have been trained to do. Hopefully, we have the confidence and the inner strength to be able to stride forward without necessarily having every step grievously ordained by the master to [19:57](#)

Jeremy Lesniak:

Now you mentioned a couple of times that you have martial arts experience outside of Tai Chi, prior to Tai Chi and I'm going to guess that those were not soft or internal art or however you choose to label them. Am I guessing correctly?

Paul Read:



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I think when we numerically balance out all the known variety of martial arts in world I would expect that what some people define as internal, some people define as soft, they certainly are the minority, I would have imagined.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I think so.

Paul Read:

These categories of hard and soft, and internal and external, I'm not sure I'm particularly subscribed to any of those but in order to answer your question in a short way then yeah, there was. I mean I started probably back when I was 10 or 11 years old. I just moved out of London and my parents had dumped us all off and we'd moved down to East Coast in Great Britain and just have another life down there doing I can't remember what at the time but we'd moved around a lot as a kid. My dad used to like moving us every year or two. I'm sure we were running away from debts but he never explained exactly why but every year or two, [21:20](#) we would again. Everything packed in the car and we turn up in another town. But as a kid, you know, I would go from school to school and [21:32](#) the outsider, always. You'd always feel as though you'll be the person outside of the norm. And so being quite small as well, I'm only 5'7" at most rather fragile structured to my body. I suppose I was always interested in working out how I was going to defend myself. This is common history, I suppose, amongst any many martial artists. But I do remember coming home regularly with my mum from the library and taking home stacks of books every week. I was a voracious reader. I just wanted to read everything. And at one point I remember bringing home a couple of really big hardback books. One of which, I think, was Mas Oyama's This is Karate that was this enormous great big coffee book, that coffee table book like a sort of telephone book. And it was full of all these black and white faded pictures of him doing these strange postures in this uniform that looked far too tight for his body. And I found this to be a great exotic world of which was such a contrast to mine. I thought it was a rather mundane existence. And so I searched out everything I could to find out more about this life because he seemed to make you offer a history, tradition, ritual, something that was sadly lacking in 1970s in the United Kingdom. So I remember stumbling across some books and this is probably where my martial arts began. I found a whole series of books by a guy called Bruce Tegner. Have you heard of this guy?

Jeremy Lesniak:

I haven't. I'm making a note.

Paul Read:



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Bruce Tegner, this guy, he must have released about 60 or 70 books in 1960s. I think he was in California, I can't remember. But they were all little paperbacks, like Bruce Tegner's Guide to Judo and Jiu Jitsu, Bruce Tegner's Guide to Kung Fu and Tai Chi, Bruce Tegner's Guide to... he had his own style of which he'll link to Judo and Aikido, I think it was Ju-Kaido or something. It's Bruce Tegner's Book of Aikido, Bruce Tegner's Book of... and it was the same form, they're exactly the same. It's about two thousand photographs of him inside doing these really static postures of you know, if someone grabs me around the back of the neck and what do I do? I sort of grab that person by the hair and I flip him over my back and elbow them in the solar plexus and that's it. And again, he was another guy who wore a Karate Gi that looked about five sizes too short for him. And when I was just about... I just loved these books. This is what got me into the martial arts probably just before I'd ever heard of Bruce Lee or anything like this and I just think you know, I've got this and it's fantastic. And I actually believed that these things were really practical so I would study there paperbacks. And then eventually, a couple of years later, I went to a... my dad kicked me into a... constantly [24:44](#) I need to learn some martial arts so he kicked me into this this Judo center around the corner and I was 13 probably about as high as the average person's thigh at that time and there was no classes, no kids' classes. It was just one adults' class and I went in there and I just got lobbed about. I couldn't possible throw anybody. I couldn't even reach their waist, let alone. So I certainly stuck that for a few weeks and then eventually found a Karate class in the next town. And I thought I just found a world that's been missing to me for my whole life up until that point. I found a camaraderie, a sense of belonging, a sense of discipline. I knew what to do, where to go, there was a hierarchy, a very strong hierarchy in terms of my gradings, respect, physical challenges. At that time, you know, I stayed in this class this class war until I was about 16 or 17, until I had to take my black belt. And during the grading of the black belt, this is another story of which I'll stop now but I didn't get the black belt. I failed in the black belt grading and I got completely beaten up in the freestyle section. And I learned something really interesting though but it was through that lost, that failure, that not achieving what I thought I was going to achieve that ultimately would turn out to be what probably the most important lesson. But at that time I felt really disillusioned and left the class. I went and joined a competitive class around the corner, another Shotokan class, got fed up with that one, joined the Taekwondo class, got fed up with that one, went back to another Karate class, stayed with them for a while. And then, you know, going to university, ditching the whole thing, coming out of university the other side, learning some Wing Chun later in life, loved the Chinese aspect of that, had some serious fights, lost some very badly in whole series street incidents, didn't like any of that, realized that Wing Chun may not be the answer. Decided that maybe the responses to the world that I've been searching for in terms of feasible force, maybe I needed to rethink that. Took up Aikido, thought maybe I would learn more about dialogue rather than force, got really beaten up in that, mostly through landing awkwardly and being thrown. Finally ended up in Tai Chi and realized that the answers to the world weren't in physical force or dialogue but possibly in learning to listen more, find it more balance and spontaneity, yielding, those sorts of things. And that became my journey in Tai Chi.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Your path bouncing around what... let's just say it for the sake of argument because it's easier to group things, your trials through harder arts leading you ultimately to two feet firmly planted on the softer side, it's certainly not a novel story and it's certainly one that we've heard here on the show a number of times. But I'm curious because I can hear you saying it in hindsight that you were very aware you were searching for something. Were you, at all, aware of that while it was happening?

Paul Read:

I think I was aware of it. I think there was this conscious side to everything here that I needed to satisfy certain physical demands, physical challenges, as a teenager. As you do, you need to do it, express yourself physically. And those skills that you were learning to do with balance and speed and force and strength and grounding, were being addressed by those external arts. But as time moved on, and I acquired those skills, the pursuit of those skills in themselves was no longer satisfying. And I knew that they had all of them, a deeper level to them, that I wasn't scratching away. I couldn't find that deeper level within those particular classes that I was attending with the instructors that I had. Not to say that you couldn't in other classes but in the classes that I were attending, it was very difficult to go beyond those relatively superficial levels and definitions of those concepts. And it wasn't until I started playing around with the more softer arts such as Aikido. Firstly, coming across it, I'm thinking the Wing Chun classes because they introduced me to a nonlinear approach to learning that the Japanese arts had very much always embraced. But coming across some of those more spiral, circular forms of energy and movement in Wing Chun that strangely are there, you know, there are a lot of the punching, is very straight line. But I found echoed in Aikido and ultimately in Tai Chi with the other layers of meaning there. So when I get to Tai Chi, balance is no longer anything to do with staying upright. It's about being able to relate if not share in the ideas and conclusions of others, you know. Rooting is not just about building a strong posture but feeling unthreatened by change by becoming voluntarily vulnerable to adaptation and movement and you know, that whole idea of the bamboo and the bamboo roots always searching out new ground. So yielding is no longer about talking about dealing with strength. It's about discourse and it's about finding alternative point of view, those sorts of things that come out very strongly from the principles of Tai Chi that I couldn't find in the other arts. So does that answer some of those questions?

Jeremy Lesniak:

It does. We're having a conversation. It's not you know... All of this is under the guise of you telling the story of who you are as a martial artist at this moment in time so there are no really wrong answers. I've asked questions before that were answered, if we were to term



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them right and wrong, were answered so completely wrong to the question that you would think I would go back and delete it. But at the same time, what came out was so beautiful, so beneficial to me, to the listeners, that how could we judge that as wrong?

Paul Read:

Sure.

Jeremy Lesniak:

I'm here to prompt you more than anything else.

Paul Read:

Okay, prompt. Prompt ahead, Jeremy. I might prompt back, though. Just be careful of that.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's quite alright. When you look back over your time as a martial artist in this journey, what do you think would have happened if you had found Tai Chi first? Instead of a Judo class, your father puts you in a Tai Chi class?

Paul Read:

Yes, I think the position would have just been more circular. I don't think I would have ended up in a Taekwondo class by my sort of 30s. I don't think that would have happened. I think that I would have then moved beyond, you know, beyond is probably too loaded a term, but I think I would have continued to explore those arts until I'd come back to where I started. I think it would have been a much more of a circular path. As it happened, it worked out this way and you know, this is nothing unusual. We generally tend to do and take those choices that are available to us given our ages and this is very often a path that comes up again and again. The people that come to my classes generally tend to come because of the age that they're at the moment and they're finding something within that 10 years previously they weren't even aware that they needed to look for. That's not to say younger people don't take Tai Chi. Clearly, you know, I've been doing it now for nearly 26, 27 years Tai Chi and I still find it interesting when people who are coming to my classes in their 20s and I'm curious as to what they're looking for. Most of the time, it's a balance thing. They're there because they're studying other martial arts and are looking to find a way of exploring aspects of them that they can't do within the art itself.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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As someone who is trained in a number of different arts, do you think that is something that is inherently necessary in the way those arts are presented? Or do you think there could be a way that you know, let's say we have a Taekwondo instructor listening and they know hey, I agree with the principles that come through in Tai Chi, I agree that this is necessary. Can they be integrated in a way that doesn't lessen the others? Can they be fused in a way that is wholly positive?

Paul Read:

You mean can you take the principles of something like Tai Chi and embrace them in more harder arts, more external arts? Is that what you're saying?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Yeah.

Paul Read:

Good question. I wish I knew the answer.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Me, too. I was hoping you could tell me.

Paul Read:

Well I think there's a number of uh... I don't know whether I'm still talking about just pure stereotypes now because it's been such a long time since I really studied the other arts. But recently, I mean I'm giving classes locally here at the moment and I've got a couple of guys that come in to it from a whole series of mixed martial arts and we play around with seeing where we can overlap different principles. And it's curious but I'm aware that I'm really dealing with someone who is 30 years younger than me and looking for something very different right now. So their understanding of the terms that I'm using and the applications that I'm showing them, the movements, are going to be partly determined by that and that's always going to be an issue. The other issues I find are someone might find it difficult if they have traditionally come through arts that are predominantly Korean or Japanese and would like to explore the concepts that arise in the Chinese martial arts, particularly the softer arts. There may be areas of overlap but there may well also be areas of conflict and I don't mean that necessarily in a bad sense. I do mean it in a sense if there would be another side to it that it's going to be more challenging to try and balance in some ways. I mean just on the pure basis, you know, there's a whole range of things that we do in Tai Chi, I suppose, that may be not conflicting but it may be something to do with... For example, there are no belts,



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there no uniforms, there are no gradings, there is nothing to determine when you walk into a class whether the person who is talking at that moment in time is the teacher or student like you who just happened to walk through the door two minutes before you did. Now there are some schools that have embraced belts and uniforms and gradings but they've done that for particular reasons appropriate to their school. Traditionally, there isn't that hierarchy. It's a very non-hierarchical structured form of martial arts. It has more of a horizontal structure, if that makes any sense, rather than a hierarchical structure. It's very difficult to be clear who's actually learning in that situation. I've taught, I believe, in the way that I'd like to see Tai Chi taught in, something that I try my best to try and do. You said quite in the very beginning of this, Jeremy, you said something about being on the stage. There's a posture in Tai Chi called Step Back to Repulse the Monkey and I love it because it's about teaching us to step down off the stage and it's something that I try my best to work with when giving classes - and that is to encourage as many of the people who are there to learn from each other and to teach me at the same time. So it becomes much more of a collective experience and less of a teacher-led experience. So going back to your original question, is it possible to bring these two sides together? Would it be possible to fuse Taekwondo and Tai Chi? There will be scores of Tai Chi that will probably love to do that, some of the more martially-inclined styles would probably say no problem. Personally, as someone who is more driven by the ideology and less why the manifestation of the moves, I would say that would be tricky.

Jeremy Lesniak:

An excellent diplomatic response, if I have heard one.

Paul Read:

Yes, diplomacy I think is important sometimes. Yes.

Jeremy Lesniak:

When you consider your time in martial arts, what's your favorite story?

Paul Read:

My story. There's been a lot and I think none of them are... I'm not someone who's ever won an award, I'm not someone who's ever won a competition. I've got no trophies, I've got no certificates, I haven't trained in China, on the Wudang Mountain. I haven't been on any pilgrimages, I've got no Gurus, I've never spent any time in caves with hermits. There's nothing I can brag about in terms of my martial arts history. But there are moments in which I believe I've been, epiphanies for me, they've been moments in which I felt like something has fundamentally shifted beneath my feet. And I recall... I remember telling you earlier that



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I went for my black belt and lost it because I got beaten up quite badly in the finals of the battle and that was one of the moments when I just thought okay, why am I doing this? For what reason? What is it that I like and what is it that I don't like about that? It took me many, many years to learn the answer to that but it was part of that process and that process continued as I went through other arts. And this constant sense of thinking I want something out of it and realizing that it was something else when I got close to it. And there was a moment, that's probably the moment of my life, when I was learning Wing Chun. I was living in East London and there was, let's say, a healthy night time lifestyle there in which clubs would go out looking to test out their training, late at night on weekends. And there was an atmosphere there of being okay to do that - different groups versus other groups. And I thought that I was training myself in the ability to... I laughed because I can't believe I ever thought of this but I did. So yeah, there I was, late 20 something like that, living in East London and thinking to myself yes, I'm street-credible. I can handle myself, I studied lots of different martial arts and I'm studying Wing Chun at the moment and I'm a formidable opponent despite my size. And I can remember coming out of a bar late at night and I could hear... I would cycle everywhere in London and I'd stuck my push bike up on these railings that were opposite this bar. And in order to get it off, I would have to unlock the lock, obviously, and then with both hands, lift the bike frame above my head in order to pick it up off the railings. Well it was a night in which unknown to me, not being a keen football fan, that England had just lost an International game to Germany, I remember. And as I was unlocking my bike, I could hear commotion on the street and a group of people coming down towards me. Thinking to myself, street survival technique number one is to completely ignore large, loud groups coming towards you, to avoid eye contact and carry on as though they're not there. So I employed that defensive technique and it served me well on previous occasions, proceeded to unlock my bike. And as I was lifting it over my head, I could hear a sort of increased pace of footwork and people running up close behind me and I thought well, you know, they're being chased by someone or chasing someone. I carry on as I am, proceeded to get the bike off the top of the railings. And at that moment, I felt something - streak of pain going across my neck, from ear to ear. And as I drop the bike and turned, I just managed to get a hand up to stop a second assailant with a knife going for the front of my throat. My back of my neck had been cut from ear to ear and a second guy was about to cut me across the front. I managed to somehow defend myself but in shock, vast amounts of blood going everywhere and the bike bouncing about in front of me. Managed to just stop the second knife. And someone else came up and was kicking me and it was all over in about three seconds or something. Ridiculous. But then I was on the floor and everyone had gone. And this whole group of other guys were laughing on the other side of the road. Eventually, someone came out the bar and they ran off and someone helped me back in. So I had about 30 stitches that night in the hospital and my head just about stayed on. And that was quite useful, really, because had my head fallen off obviously, I wouldn't be here talking to you now. And thankfully, my training enabled me to not ever... But I did, you know, the story -



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Jeremy Lesniak:

Can I interrupt? We dropped out at what sounded like a critical point. You said, thankfully my training enabled me to... and then I lost you for about five seconds.

Paul Read:

Are we back now?

Jeremy Lesniak:

We are back, yes.

Paul Read:

Okay. So yes, thankfully my, I wonder what happened anyway, my training, thankfully, you know, I managed to defend myself against the second assailant and I didn't die that evening. Close to it but I didn't. So as I was lying there that night, in emergency, and the doctor was saying to me, I remember, sorry but I've got to start stitching your back part because I can't wait for the anesthetic to take effect. You've lost too much blood and your head is nearly off so I'm gonna have to start stitching. And I remember lying there, on this bed, with my head and this little gap like this sort of massage table, I think. I see them stitching away and thinking okay, I've done Shotokan, I've done Taekwondo, I did a bit offense when I was in university, I've done Wing Chun. How is that after having spent so long in training, in all these arts, that I can't and I couldn't at that time, really assess what was really going on at that time in the street and take the necessary steps to avoid that happening? Why was I blinded to that? And secondly, I had this question to myself was the same as what happened when I failed the black belt. To what my point in my training because was it... If it was to do with defending myself, if it was to do with being able to defend myself, then you know, nothing would have helped that particular evening. I would have needed a webcam in the back of my head and a pair of good glasses on my neck and to be armed with a machine gun to have done anything about it. So if I'm not that prepared to walk around those weapons and that sort of technology embedded in my head, then why am I practicing the arts? Because it's not clearly just about being able to defend yourself under acts of random violence like this and acts of random violence do occur. So why am I training? For what point am I training? And it's at that point I think I started to decide that it wasn't so much about techniques, it wasn't so much about the strength of a punch or the speed of a roundhouse kick. It was going to be from that point on more ideological and so the tools that I would look for would be more principle-based rather than practical. Hello, are you still there?

Jeremy Lesniak:



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I am certainly still here.

Paul Read:

So yeah.

Jeremy Lesniak:

You're a great storyteller. It's easy for me to just kind of fade out, listen, and forget that I'm part of this conversation.

Paul Read:

Oh, sorry. I should be more engaging, in general.

Jeremy Lesniak:

No, no. Please don't. Take it however it feels appropriate.

Paul Read:

So how was that? Was that a story?

Jeremy Lesniak:

That was quite a story. It's a story that I... I'll confess, in listening to it, the emotion that comes across from you doesn't seem to add up to what happened.

Paul Read:

Right. It was a long time ago.

Jeremy Lesniak:

But even still. We're talking about a near death experience, an incredibly violent assault for so far beyond no reason. And there wasn't a bit of anger or frustration or even as you're telling a story and it's clear that you can recall so much of it so vividly, there seems to be no trace of fear or concern or even an elevated heart rate.

Paul Read:



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In the immediate aftermath, I can remember being visited by my Wing Chun teacher and his posse of more lethal students. And they've come to see me to say that they were putting a word out that they were looking for these people and they would find them. I remember spending a long time arguing with them not to do it and this was not going to satisfy either my needs or resolve the whole issue of random acts of violence on the streets of London of which continue to this day as part of that particular neighborhood. So part of it was even at that stage of recognizing that there was little about vengeance or some form of trying to get back something I'd lost. That clearly was not the story here. The story was what it was teaching me and what I needed to do at this particular point. I was certainly not immune to the consequences of that attack. For the next several years, I would freeze when I heard anyone running behind me. If I heard a footstep echo on a street behind me, I would physically shake for a while and start just not to just get sweat cause I was thinking that something was about to happen again. It wasn't a conscious thing; it was unconscious. It was only, I think, it was a time in which I was deciding whether or not having been born in London that I really needed to move away in order to put things back into perspective. I've been studying Spanish and I'd gone back to university to study Spanish and information technology that time. And I began a shift towards moving and working abroad and so that was where I was about to take the next stage for my life. And that was the only way I could break that muscle memory of what happened that night. It was so strong within me that I needed to physically remove myself from not only the immediate vicinity but the culture of that violence in which it was permissible to do and that people would take little steps to prevent and was so readily accepted in that part of London during the 80s, which I was 20 year old during that time. And so it required me to move out of the country, really, and to adopt another language and another culture and another history for the next 20 years, I suppose. And although I'm back in UK as of last year, I felt like I've finally cleansed myself of the whole process and partly that was to do with that distance, I believe.

Jeremy Lesniak:

How did that experience make you better?

Paul Read:

In the sense of other than recognizing what I wanted to do with my training, you mean?

Jeremy Lesniak:

However you want to answer it. I'll tell you why I'm asking the question.

Paul Read:

Go on. Go on, tell me.



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Jeremy Lesniak:

When guests come on and they talk about traumatic events like that, we tend to go there with them emotionally. And we haven't had, I haven't had that experience as you're talking about this. You come across very accepting, very neutral, to apply almost some religious tones to it the way a Buddhist might talk about this experience, from my experience with Buddhists. So I imagine that if you weren't dwelling on the negative side of it, it's possibly because there has been an equal amount of positive to come from it. And I'm curious if you've identified that, I guess if I'm even correct.

Paul Read:

I don't know, Jeremy. The answer is I, to be honest, I don't know. I am not a religious man. I am not a Buddhist, I'm not a Taoist. I don't have any structure of knowledge to fall back on and interpret these events in a way that's going to be more helpful and positive in the future. I've probably just, like most people who go through unpleasant event in life, having counted unpleasant events in life. And I've tried to move on with them but not to forget their importance and the role that they've played in assisting us in moving. And certainly, for me that you know, when you talk about what was positive, how did you get out, what made you able to not feel anger and resentment and fear, in that way. As I've explained, there was fear there, there was even anger and resentment but I didn't see how I could truthfully and positively channel that anywhere. So I remember the police coming around and saying to us yes, yes well I'm afraid this does happen. In fact, it happens about three times a week in different places of London. And one of my best friends, I can remember, about two weeks later that was attacked with a machete on the top of a bus going through East London, purely random stuff. And it was that sense of just sheer... It was almost like there was... go back to the idea of in a world where there was no sense. There is no rationality to deal with this. And so for me, at that particular mind, I'm just at that particular point I needed to distance myself from it in order to put it into some sort of context. Not like I could resolve it; I couldn't resolve it. I wasn't gonna resolve it by giving permission for my Wing Chun club to go and you know, search out any random English football fan on the street and take out some sort of punishment. So it was physically remove myself away and that was why I learned from it - the idea that I needed some distance and space and to rethink ideas about how people behave with each other. Because I had grown up in that environment and I reached the point in which you'd become intolerable for me to really stay in that environment. And it was beginning to pint the rest of the world from me. I didn't believe that there was goodness. I didn't believe that there was kindness on the streets. I believed there was always this undercurrent of potential violence everywhere. So for me, it was important to move away physically and experience a different concept of that - a different way of living and a different way of relating to people. And I managed to do that in another country, in another culture. And that restored, I believe, the things I needed to find again. And whether this has happened or not, those forces were still running underneath a lot of events that



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were going on in my life and probably this was the final tipping point and straw that would push me into another world. So that was the positive, you know. The other thing was that well, at the end of the day, physical violence is not that big a deal. Yes, you might die and you might not. You might think I still carry scars on my wrists where I managed to defend myself against the knife of the second assailant and those things are there to remind me everyday that we move on and they are not the most important things happening to our lives, that emotions and social culture, political relationships are far more important than the odd violent eruption.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Would you have become the Teapot Monk without that experience?

Paul Read:

I don't know, Jeremy. I don't know the answer to that one.

Jeremy Lesniak:

That's okay.

Paul Read:

I didn't hide it behind the Teapot Monk but he certainly did emerge soon afterwards. So you're probably drawing connections in the way that I haven't previously thought about. But it's possible he did emerge from that moment.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Tell us more about the Teapot Monk, about what you have going on online, your websites. I mean, you sent me quite a list. I mean you're active in quite a few places, you have product offerings. There's a lot there. We call this commercial time. Tell us what you've got going on online that the listeners might be interested in.

Paul Read:

Okay. Well when I moved away, I've been teaching in Spain for the local authority in an area just outside of a city called Granada. And teaching in Spanish which has been tremendous for my language and I'd been doing that up until year before last. And I decided that I needed to take my teaching in a different direction for a whole number of different reasons. I've been writing previous to that on the subject of Tai Chi and I've had published a few books dominantly around principles, ideas, practical applications not in the



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sense of hey this is a great defense against the front kick but more in the sense of how you might employ the ideas of Tai Chi in your life to make things easier and to improve your health or your attitudes towards things that you might find difficult. So I've been playing around with these ideas of what Tai Chi means in the 21st century and trying to divorce it from its past in order to give it this new, what I believe to be a refreshed, new brew of tea, if you like. So yeah, I've done that and through the books, a lot of people who had read my books said hey you know, you really ought to think about teaching. And I said well, you live in the States or you live in New Zealand or you live in Germany and you live in UK and I'm in Spain so unless you come to this very small town and this hot and dusty region of Andalusia, it's unlikely. And they began to say well why won't you do anything online? And I said because you can't learn online, don't be silly. It's just a fad, it'll pass. Go back and find a class nearer to where you're living. Eventually, I started exploring how well technology could handle this disruptive new approach to learning and teaching. So I did a year of classes online and over 12 months, I managed to get a lot of people who would follow me online to subscribe to doing a 12-month course with me. And over the course of those 12 months I moved from town to town for 12 different months, spanning three countries. And each month I would upload 20-25 videos about applications and exercises form, culture, language, meaning, interpretation, some of them was more documentary-based, some of them are more practical-based. And each of those students would be able to focus what they're particularly looking for. So if someone wanted applications, that was there. If they weren't interested in that, they were interested in the laws of the ideology, that was there. If they were interested in the exercises or the form that was there. I continued that for 12 months as an experiment and it went really well. I didn't certainly retire wealthy but it was a very interesting experience. So from that moment on, I decided that I was going to continue to travel, spend more time in movement because just one of these people who staged it a lot and find my stillness in movement, and continue to offer online courses backed up by different sorts of materials, audio files, podcasts, eBooks, and now, local classes that I run for free. So I use an app called MeetUp that you may be familiar with or your listeners hopefully familiar with in which you can meet up with other people who have got similar interests and want to learn and someone wants to share their skills. So I'm advertising that and I teach classes here locally here for free with the aim of trying to introduce people into the world of Tai Chi and encourage them to either do one of several things, either stick with me, go online if they can't find a class locally or preferably find a class locally and begin their practice from the town in which they live because a lot of people travel to the classes. So that's what I do and a lot of people say you can't teach online, it's not possible. How can you do that? Someone needs to be with you physically and move you around and do this and yes, that's true. It is supplementary tool. It's not a replacement for a local class. But for those people who... I know someone who's an ambulance driver and I know someone who's a nurse and I know someone who cannot possibly attend on regular class and the classes that they may be able to attend locally possible they don't get on with the teacher or they're too expensive or they're too far away or they don't like the style or for whatever reason, they can't see the teacher because there's 40 people in front of them and they never get a



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chance to see the posture or they've been on holiday and they will never catch up those postures again. So for those people, online tuition is a really useful thing and that's why I try and provide it. It's a sort of supplementary resource to books and local classes. And it's going on okay and people seem to like it and personally, if I was a long digital fairly competent teacher, I would be concerned how this is spreading quite extensively. And the technologies, they're not quite yet but it will become soon where it will be possible to offer or even arguably a better standard of tuition than [1:06:11](#) and I recommend other people, other teachers, look carefully at those sorts of development because it's happening very quickly and moving in lots of different territories that previously hasn't been into certainly if... Say for example, I was dealing with martial arts equipment. I might reconsider for a moment, to consider broadening my range of equipment include these sort of technological necessities for people to record and distribute classes online, Jeremy.

Jeremy Lesniak:

But that wasn't a suggestion. Lobbed at me with a bit of obtuseness or anything of the like, was it?

Paul Read:

You sell equipment? No.

Jeremy Lesniak:

No, no.

Paul Read:

It's fascinating, though, isn't it? I mean, this technology that's displacing everything from lawyers to doctors and teachers are not going to be immune to this.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Correct. And I'm excited for it because you know, one of the questions that we often ask is who would you love to train with. And in 10-20 years, that will be limited not by proximity, possibly even by who's alive but by a reasonable sum of money. The idea that you know, I could potentially take a class with you from my home and you could see me just as if I was physically in front of you and I could see you and we could have that experience, I think will be transformative for all learned skills. But I think martial arts may even benefit more because what we have required such hands-on, such attention to truly progress. That's exciting. I'm looking forward to it.



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Paul Read:

That's great. I often hear the opposite from teachers so it's very rewarding to hear someone say it.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Because they're scared. They're afraid. There are a great deal of martial arts instructors who teach based out of fear. The way they quite often will not permit students to train elsewhere because they're afraid. They're afraid that they might find a better teacher or a system that works better for them and they will earn however many dollars per month rather than becoming the instructor they can.

Paul Read:

Yeah. I mean something we probably all had contact with teachers that are concerned about. And I do think this gives an opportunity for us to think of ourselves as teachers as opposed to martial artists. And that's a big difference if you know how to communicate, you know how to convey what's important. If you're able to look at someone and say hey, you know, what I think's right for you is this as oppose to this is what I was taught and I'm gonna just pass it on. Then that's a different set of skills all together and I think for certainly online teachers, the emphasis is going to shift much more towards your teaching skills as much as it is towards your ability to flick out a quick roundhouse kick, you know, in less than half a second.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Sure. And of course, folks, if you're listening, you know there are a bunch of links, there are photos, there's a lot of things we're gonna drop over on the show notes. If you're new, that is whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. This has been great. This has been so much fun and I appreciate your time. And there's one more think I'd love to ask of you.

Paul Read:

Oh, go on.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Just one more. I want you to send us out. I want you to give us some eloquent, life transforming words.

Paul Read:



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Don't set me up like this. You've put me on the stage, Jeremy.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Absolutely.

Paul Read:

What can I say about stages?

Jeremy Lesniak:

Well you can repel the monkey as you see fit.

Paul Read:

Oh, okay.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Is that the correct term?

Paul Read:

Repulse. Repulse the Monkey.

Jeremy Lesniak:

So close.

Paul Read:

Step back to repulse the monkey.

Jeremy Lesniak:

There it is.

Paul Read:

So what was it that you wanted again?



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Jeremy Lesniak:

I'll let you close the conversation however you see fit. We always ask the guest to give us some parting words, something poignant.

Paul Read:

Ah, poignant.

Jeremy Lesniak:

But this whole conversation's been poignant so if you want to take it a different direction, this is your episode.

Paul Read:

All I've done is respond to you, Jeremy. You've directed me from behind the scenes in your director's chair. I'm just the actor in front of the screen. But I'll try to be poignant, I'll try. I'll do my best.

Jeremy Lesniak:

Okay.

Paul Read:

A big part of what I do online, if anyone's ever seen me on Instagram or anywhere else, I had this thing about don't study the art, play with it. And partly, hello, still there? I've had a...

Jeremy Lesniak:

Mm-hmm.

Paul Read:

Oh, good. Right. I just thought there was a funny sound. Anyway, so yeah, that idea of playing as opposed to studying has always been an integral part of my approach to teaching. And it's so much so that it reminds me very of this... you might have heard of it, it's impossible for us as human beings to frown and smile at the same time.

Jeremy Lesniak:



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Yes.

Paul Read:

So I do think sometimes in martial arts, we frown a lot. And we are very serious about what we do. And particularly, possible more so in Tai Chi where we have this obsession about details, about exact weight proportions, the angle of your eyebrow or your elbow in a certain posture, and we get all very serious about it. So my advice simply is that drop the serious nature of what you're doing. Don't frown too much. Tai Chi's when to enhance your life, not replace it. And embrace the differences, don't try to eliminate them. So I always end up saying play more and study less. There was this a brilliant philosopher called George Bernard Shaw who said, we don't ever stop playing because we grow old; we grow old because we stop playing. So my final words are something like loosen up, hum more songs, whistle while you kick, drink more tea. Okay, I think I should go now.

Jeremy Lesniak:

It's certainly not a new experience to have guests on the show let down their guard to talk about who they are, what makes them tick. But I think we've had very few, arguably if any, who are more open than our guest today, Mr. Read. I was honored, I was humbled by his words, by the things that we talked about after the show and just truly thankful that he was willing to share his time and his stories. I loved him so thank you sir for coming on the show.

If you want to find the show notes with links to websites, social media, everything that this busy man has going on, you can find them at our show notes, whistlekickmartialartsradio.com. If you want to find our products, those are at whistlekick.com, they're on Amazon, whole bunch of other places. Maybe they're even in your martial arts school. If they're not, we do have wholesale accounts. I want to thank everybody for their time, for their support, for the great conversation that comes after these episodes that floods my inbox, I love it. I have the best job so thank you for that opportunity. And that's all I have. So until next time. Train hard, smile, and have a great day.