The 100-Day Foundation

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You are always accumulating something

Tai Chi is built at home, not in class. Class shows you what to practice; daily practice is where it becomes yours.

Most students know this and still struggle to practice. The usual reason is not laziness. It is that progress is invisible day to day, so a session that "did nothing" feels like wasted time, and we stop.

The old teachers had an answer: every session adds something, whether you can see it or not. Small accumulations become great results. This paper invites you to test that for yourself over 100 days.

What the old teachers said

The Japanese call it **積小為大 (sekishō idai)**: accumulate the small to make the great. The phrase comes from Ninomiya Sontoku (1787–1856), a farmer who rebuilt ruined villages one field at a time. The Chinese tradition said the same thing much earlier, and our own Tai Chi classics say it directly.

Meaning	Source	Chinese (pinyin)
The tree too wide to embrace grows from a tiny sprout. The nine-story tower rises from piled earth. The thousand-mile journey begins beneath your feet.	Laozi, *Daodejing* ch. 64	合抱之木，生於毫末；九層之臺，起於累土；千里之行，始於足下 (hé bào zhī mù, shēng yú háo mò; jiǔ céng zhī tái, qǐ yú lěi tǔ; qiān lǐ zhī xíng, shǐ yú zú xià)
Without accumulating half-steps, you cannot reach a thousand miles.	Xunzi, *Encouraging Learning*	不積跬步，無以至千里 (bù jī kuǐ bù, wú yǐ zhì qiān lǐ)
Dripping water wears through stone.	Common saying	滴水穿石 (dī shuǐ chuān shí)
Little by little becomes much.	Common saying	積少成多 (jī shǎo chéng duō)

Meaning	Source	Chinese (pinyin)
Without long, sustained effort, you cannot suddenly break through to understanding.	Wang Zongyue, *Taiji Classic*	非用力之久，不能豁然貫通焉 (fēi yòng lì zhī jiǔ, bù néng huò rán guàn tōng yān)
Practice the form a thousand times and its principles reveal themselves.	Tai Chi saying	拳打千遍，其理自現 (quán dǎ qiān biàn, qí lǐ zì xiàn)
A day practiced is a day of gongfu; a day skipped is ten days lost.	Tai Chi saying	一日練一日功，一日不練十日空 (yī rì liàn yī rì gōng, yī rì bù liàn shí rì kōng)
One hundred days to build the foundation.	Neidan / qigong tradition	百日築基 (bǎi rì zhù jī)

Notice what Wang Zongyue says: the effort is long, but the breakthrough is *sudden*. Accumulation is quiet, and then one day it shows you what it has built.

Even the word **功夫 (gongfu)** means this. It is not "martial arts." It is skill earned through time and effort, the kind that can only be accumulated.

The 100-day challenge

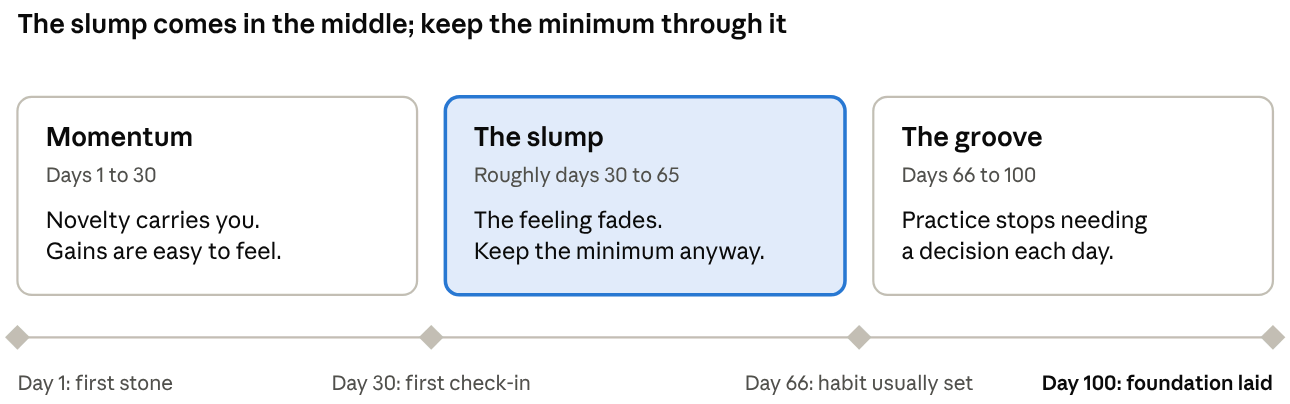
The goal is not to get better each day. The goal is to not break the chain.

1. **Pick your minimum.** Choose one small practice you can do on your worst day. Examples:
   - One pass of the first section of the form
   - Five minutes of standing (zhan zhuang)
   - Ten slow repetitions of one movement
2. **Do the minimum every day.** More is welcome. But only the minimum counts, so a short day is still a full day.
3. **Give it your whole attention.** Five minutes fully present beats thirty minutes half there. Phone away; nothing else at the same time.
4. **Same time, same place, if you can.** Attach it to something you already do, like after morning coffee or before dinner.
5. **Place a stone.** Keep a jar where you'll see it. After each session, drop in one pebble.

The jar matters more than it sounds. You cannot feel 40 days of practice, but you can see 40 stones. It is the accumulation made visible.

What to expect

The hardest part is the middle, and knowing that in advance is half the battle.



the 100 days · three phases, four markers

Momentum (days 1–30). Starting feels good. You notice small improvements and the newness keeps you going. Enjoy it, but don't mistake it for the whole journey.

The slump (roughly days 30–65). At some point the wanting simply disappears. Nothing has gone wrong; the easy fuel is used up. This is where most people quit. Do your minimum, place your stone, and let that be enough. The Japanese call this ganbaru: continuing when continuing offers nothing in the moment.

The groove (days 66–100). In a study of how habits form (Lally et al., University College London, 2009), a new daily behavior took a median of 66 days to become automatic. The range was wide, 18 to 254 days, so be patient if yours takes longer. What comes back after the slump isn't the early excitement. It's something quieter and steadier: you practice because that's what you do.

Day 100. You won't be a master. You will have proof that you are someone who continues, and that changes everything after.

When you miss a day

You will miss a day. That's fine. The same habit study found that missing one day did not meaningfully set people back.

The old saying that a skipped day costs ten is good motivation, but don't let it become a reason to quit. The real danger is the second missed day, because two becomes a week and a week becomes "I used to practice."

So the rule is simple: **never miss twice.** If you miss a day, do your minimum the next day, even if it's late and even if it's only five minutes. Then place your stone.

Begin with one stone

Tomorrow, before you practice, put a jar somewhere you'll see it every day. Do your minimum. Drop in the first stone.

Then ask yourself one question before each session: *Is what I'm about to do worth accumulating?* You are always accumulating something. For the next 100 days, let it be this.