

The *Vital Force*

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Justin's Words

Bringing T'ai Chi Chih into The Future BY JUSTIN STONE

Recently Sister Antonia and I met in Albuquerque and agreed that I should write an article for *The Vital Force* that would answer some of the questions being asked about the future. First, we agreed that T'ai Chi Chih is a service to mankind and that all politicking should be avoided as not in the make-up of T'ai Chi Chih.

Quite a few teachers have questioned us about certain statements in the recent *Vital Force*. There were questions about what will happen to T'ai Chi Chih when I pass away. No much, really. Sister Antonia will go on doing her excellent work as "Guide of T'ai Chi Chih," and Sandy and Pam will continue to teach the Teachers' Training courses and conduct the Intensives that have helped improve performance so much as be to noticeable at the recent conference. Pam and Sandy are the only two authorized to teach Intensives. Other teachers may teach Retreats, etcetera, and these will be announced in the T'ai Chi Chih Community Calendar. There will be two boxes (sections): one will be for events scheduled by Sister Antonia and Pam and Sandy and the other for events scheduled by teachers.

Any teacher can attend an Intensive, but Teachers' Training candidates are there primarily to prepare for the intensive training. Because this will place an additional financial burden on the candidates, we are discussing the feasibility of having a scholarship fund, much as we do with the summer conference. I have pledged a certain amount to this fund and we hope other teachers will do likewise.

Kim Grant will continue her excellent work as Editor of *The Vital Force*, and we hope teachers will continue to submit letters and articles to the journal.

Sister wants me to assure teachers that I have appointed no one to succeed Sister as policy maker for T'ai Chi Chih. She also wants me to assure teachers that Pam and Sandy have permission to make revisions to the Teachers' Training manual. When a Board has been chosen for *The Vital Force*, it will be announced in *The Vital Force*.

I am trying to fulfill Sister's wishes in this article. I certainly did not appoint Sister as Guide to oppose her, and I feel that by fulfilling her wishes, the future of T'ai Chi Chih is assured.



Five Important but Unrelated Mentions

Web Site: Our community site, www.taichichih.org, exists under the aegis of *The Vital Force*. I am in the process of “branding” it and making it more reflective of www.gkpub.com. Now (through early December) is the time for your feedback. The new site should be ready to unveil in the next edition of *The Vital Force*.

Intention: It is my hope and expectation that this newsletter will be in every reporter’s hands who writes about wellness, healing practices, and the like. It is also my hope and expectation that it will be in every hospital waiting room in the country. Please join me in affirming many, many more outreach venues.

Wikipedia.com and YouTube.com: Welcome to the 21st century: I have recently posted entries about T’ai Chi Chih and Justin Stone on www.wikipedia.com. And I have uploaded a video clip of Justin Stone teaching Bird Flaps its Wings on www.YouTube.com. Even more people will now be exposed to the pearls of T’ai Chi Chih.

To All Subscribers & Teachers: Thank you for your outreach donations for *The Vital Force*. From \$5 to \$150, your generous contributions enable us to cast a wider net spreading the word about TCC. You have large hearts.

If you are teaching somewhere and think it would be beneficial to have an additional subscription to leave where you are teaching,

please let us know. Or, as Donna McElhose suggests, consider buying an extra subscription that you can circulate among your students.

KIM GRANT, ALBUQUERQUE, NM

GOOGLE ALERTS: What? How? A Google Alert is a means of creating a do-it-yourself customized Internet clipping service for the subject of your choice. I created two alerts for Tai Chi Chih (without the apostrophe) and T’ai Chi Chih so that any news story which appears virtually anywhere in the world will be relayed to me via email. It may relate to medical news, classes, intensives being offered, or a new research project.

To sign up, follow these instructions: Go to <http://www.google.com/alerts>. Enter the topic you wish to monitor. Under search terms, write Tai Chi Chih. Under type, select News or Comprehensive. Under how often, choose once a day, once a week, or as it happens. Then fill in your email address. Press the Create Alert. Then repeat the process and create a second alert using the correct variation of T’ai Chi Chih. You will then get an email from Google with a link to confirm that these are alerts you wish to receive. You must follow through with this last piece.

KEN GRAY, NEW YORK, NY

Submission Guidelines

When thinking about submissions, it’s good to keep in mind that a 1/4 page in this newsletter is about 200 words and a 1/2 page is 400 words. Please send articles as Word documents, electronically, to tcc@kimgrant.com. Look at the page headings and tailor your submission to a particular section. The newsletter will hang together better that way.

We are always in need of photos and artwork. Please send as high resolution jpgs as your camera takes. The Editor will crop and edit them. If you have 8-12 pieces of related artwork – calligraphy, drawings, photographs, or something that will reproduce well in black and white – please submit them. They might be featured in an entire issue.

The Vital Force reserves the right to edit submission for length and clarity.

Deadlines & Ideas

SUBMISSION DEADLINE	PUBLICATION DATE	THEME	MOVEMENT (TEACHING TIPS)
Jan 1	Early Feb	Openness	Around the Platter Variation
April 1	Early May	Release (Abandon Hope)	Brass Drum
July 1	Early Aug	Freedom	Daughter on the Mountaintop
Oct 1	Early Nov	Sharing	Daughter in the Valley

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Around The Platter: Within Reach & Pizza Plates

BY ALICE HOLDEN, CCVI, SAN ANTONIO, TX

Each morning, after a brief stretch-prayer to honor the Trinity, I begin my usual practice of TCC. Rocking Motion and Bird Flaps Its Wings set the stage and prepare the system. Then I am ready to begin the whole series with Around the Platter.

From the grounding position my left foot moves forward – heel touching the floor as my hands, cupped and subtle, rise to the center of my chest. Slowly and with intention, I shift my weight to the left foot as my hands move along the rim of an imaginary platter. When my weight is fully on the left foot, my hands have come to the outer rim of the circle. As the weight shift begins to flow to the back right foot, the hands follow along the right rim of the platter back to the center. Immediately, the process continues, forward and back, around the platter until, after nine circles, my

*attend to
what is
within
reach*

hands, feet, and concentration come to the rest position. I stay in the rest position for a few moments, concentrating on the soles of the feet.

The right foot then goes forward, resting its heel gently on the floor, a good stride ahead of where it had been. Simultaneously, the hands again rise to the chest. Gently, they move to the right around the rim of the platter, as the weight shift moves completely to the front. At full weight, the hands continue to move around the platter, wrists turning gently as the fingertips touch the left rim of the platter, following the weight shift from the right front foot to the left back foot. After nine soft, subtle circles to the right, the body again comes to the rest position with concentration on the soles of the feet.

Recently, while teaching this movement, I mentioned that it was like having a pizza plate in front of me. One of the students brought a cardboard pizza dish to the next class; it was just the right size. Students took turns holding the plate in front of each other and discovered the art of flexible wrists, as well as the temptation to over-reach. For me, this movement often speaks of my need to accept my own limitations, to mind to my own responsibilities, and to attend to what is within reach. May this article help you in some way to enjoy the Chi more fully while going Around the Platter.



Around The Platter: Weight Shift

BY ANNA GUNDERSON, RACINE, MN

First we introduce the forward/backward or yin/yang weight shift. Students start from the resting pose with feet in a natural stance, knees slightly bent. Step straight out with the left foot, allowing the heel to land with the toes pointing straight forward. Allow the weight to shift forward from the T'an T'ien. As the weight slowly shifts forward to the left foot, allow the back leg to straighten. When the weight is fully shifted forward (i.e. when it's evenly distributed to the entire sole of the foot) allow the back heel to come off the ground slightly. Slowly shift the weight back to the right foot, allowing the front leg to straighten. Let the weight shift gradually pick the left toes up off the ground.

*the spine
is a string
of pearls
suspended
from the
clouds*

The entire weight shift should be done at the same level. Think of the spine as a string of pearls suspended from clouds; this way, the spine stays straight throughout the entire weight shift.

Once a student learns the forward/backward weight shift, we add the arm movement. Bring your hands (with palms facing the earth) up to heart level. The hands are relaxed and slightly cupped and will travel together throughout the movement. Allow the hands to trace a circle at heart level, as the weight is gently shifted forward and back.

The size of the circle depends upon the student's body size and shape. Encourage the student to create a circle large enough to completely fill the space they are moving through but to avoid overextending the arms. The hands return to the heart area before starting the next circle. Allow the weight shift to move the arms through the circle. The circle is the same distance from the ground at all time (i.e. it is not a roller coaster). When the left leg is forward, the arms create a circle in a clock-wise direction.

When the right leg is forward, the arms circle around in a counter-clockwise motion. Another way to think about it is this: if the left leg is forward, the hands pass the left shoulder first. If the right leg is forward, move past the right shoulder first.

After completing the movement with the left leg forward, then the right leg forward, you will return to resting pose.

Around The Platter: First Intro to Yinning & Yanging

By PAT FLYNN, GLENVILLE, PA

This is the first movement where we learn the yin/yang step: “Watch me bring a foot forward and then back to the resting position. Now gently shift your weight onto the gently relaxed right knee. Then slowly bring your left foot forward as if testing a tub of very hot water with only the heel. Then gently bring your left foot back to resting position and evenly distribute your weight onto both feet.” (We do this several times on both sides until I see that the students understand that the torso does not move forward and the foot is placed in a comfortable forward position.) Throughout this process, I have the opportunity to explain anticipation of the movement when a student’s torso moves with the foot, why concentrating on the soles of the feet is very important. It gives the mind and body a place to concentrate so it quits anticipating the next move.

The next step is actual yinning and yanging: “Watch me yin and yang. The torso does not lean forward or backward or to the side. Watch my knees.” (I change my position so the students see the movement from the front, back, and side.) Once in position with one foot forward: “Gently relax the front knee and move forward over the toes. Is your right knee straightened? Is

your heel lifted off the floor? Relax the back knee and roll backward on your hip to the beginning position.” We do this several times on both sides.

After yinning and yanging, I demonstrate the full movement. After three repetitions, I bring my forward foot back to resting position but continue the arm movements. This shows students that TCC is truly not an exercise. There is no over-extension in the arms and no need for the upper body to lean into the movement. I ask students to try the arm movements while the lower body stays in the resting position.

Then we put the movement together: “The hands weightlessly float

upward to chest height as the left foot gently moves forward to test the hot bath water. As we move forward onto the left foot, the hands flow toward the left and complete half of the circular platter. As we move gently back, the hands continue to flow around the right side of the circular platter to the beginning position.”



This method seems to work well. However, the biggest asset I have is the actual TCC practice. By practicing regularly, I find most of my students simply flow with the Chi.

*the biggest asset
is actually the TCC practice*

Editor’s Note: The most important resource for T’ai Chi Chih teaching tips comes straight from Justin Stone. Period. Watch and listen to him on his instructional DVD. And read about and inspect his movements in the Photo Textbook.

Both are available from Good Karma Publishing.

His words are also available in the essential booklet, T’ai Chi Chih Teaching Tips, available through the New Mexico T’ai Chi Chih Association for a small fee (www.taichichihassociation.org and 505-299-2095.)

Teaching Around The Platter to Beginning & Advanced Students

By AMY TYKSINSKI, ALBUQUERQUE, NM

The Legs

How does one step out without simultaneously shifting the weight forward? I encourage students to put a hand on the T'an T'ien. If the T'an T'ien has not moved and the student has truly sunk into the back leg, then the extension of the front foot should be appropriate in finding a good length of stance. Can the student step out, gently placing the heel as if stepping onto an ice-covered pond, without breaking the ice?

How, and from where, does one initiate flowing forward? With beginning students, because it is easier for them to focus on the soles of the feet, I encourage them to soften the front knee to initiate the weight shift forward and to soften or release the back knee to initiate the weight shift backward. This approach seems to reinforce a deep stance and one in which the weight shift is flowing into bent knees, not stiff ones. With intermediate students, we play with focusing on the T'an T'ien as the initiator of the movement.

How does one encourage the back heel not to rise to high off the ground? To begin, we shift our weight forward through various points along the journey. To begin, the students find the "double weighted" point where the weight feels equal in both feet. Then we shift forward a bit more, just until the back heel is light but has not come off the ground. Has the upper torso begun to lean? Straighten up at the waist. Then we proceed further, ever mindfully, until the weight shift has pulled the back heel up. We experiment with "counter examples" (things not to do). What happens to the back heel when we push with the back toes? What happens to the front toes when we shift too far forward, or find ourselves leaning in the torso?

The Arms

Students create a circular shape with their arms in a plane parallel to the floor. This circle is the path the hands will travel around. Note that the circle is not much wider than the width of the body. I also ask them to imagine the circle as a clock. The near point and far point serve to help students synchronize their arms and legs as they are beginning to learn the form, helping them reference whether the arms are getting ahead of the legs or vice-versa.

The hands rise to the level of the breastbone, elbows hang gently by the side of the body, completely supported by gravity. Be aware of the hands floating higher by accident. Let thumbs be at the same level as the hands.

Carmen Brocklehurst suggested the following in her recent workshop:

Notice what happens to the attention if the thumbs have dropped.

(Has the attention dropped as well?) Note the position of the hands.

Let the hands begin with a

slight angle upward, lifted up by the Chi. Note the ability to feel the Chi more strongly as the hands move intentionally through it. And then, for example, in flowing forward with the right foot extended, the right hand curves around the circle and the left hand points slightly

into the right hand. At the "far point,"

where the weight is shifted as far forward as it is meant to and the hands are farthest from the body, the hands are equal and thumbs are never more than an inch apart the entire time. (Use the same example from above with right foot out.)

Carmen continued:

With more advanced students one can go further. Did the T'an T'ien initiate moving forward or did something else initiate (for example: the chest region? the shoulders?) Knowing whether the T'an T'ien initiated the movement is a felt sense in the body and it *can* be felt! Pay attention to the ball of the back foot – placing the attention in the ball helps encourage the heel not to come up too high. The circle you are tracing is the entire universe, a universe that is right here in your body. It's not happening out there! The Chi is well-distributed throughout the limbs.

*the circle you
are tracing
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a universe
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your body*



Bamboo – Strength & Surrender

By Sr. Antonia Cooper, OSF, North Plainfield, NJ



The bamboo tree inspired this design,
for it holds within itself the reality of
both polarities – strength and surrender.
Being aware of these “pulls” within my life
as I had experienced them,
a sense of peacefulness and groundedness
has somewhat calmed the tugs between the two.

The lesson the bamboo has been teaching me
is to embrace both within.
The yang of strength complements
the yin of surrender.
Strength is so need to be able to surrender
and in the surrendering,
I experience my center of strength.
They are not opposites at all, they co-exist,
harmonize, balance and give life to one another,
and to the persons who welcome them
with an embrace.

Outreach

Benefit from Other Teachers’ Experience

By Lorraine Lepine, Prairie Village, KS

Teacher Resource List

An online list has been created with information volunteered by teachers in the 2005 Teacher Survey and updated with teachers’ input during the 2007 Teachers Conference. Its purpose is to assist teachers teaching specific populations and in different settings. This compilation is for use by TCC teachers only – in order to share information about how to teach people with special needs (arthritis, diabetes, fibromyalgia) or in particular settings (schools, senior centers, jails).

For example, if you are teaching a class of students with Multiple Sclerosis (MS), check the Resource List to see whom else has taught TCC to this population. Then contact them through the Teacher Directory.

The Resource List will be updated once a year after the annual conference. Contact Lorraine to have your name added or removed before then.

Access to this list is through a hidden link on the www.taichichih.org website. Any teacher who has not received an email with the hidden link may request it from the TCC Outreach Coordinator.

Student Questionnaire

The purpose of the questionnaire is to document physical, mental, or emotional changes that our TCC students experience during classes. This collection of uniform data could impact a larger study and help attract research funds and interest in the effects of TCC.

The survey allows teachers to speak of changes with more authority. A researcher or writer can describe changes in terms of percentages of students that experience certain changes after six to eight weeks of practice. Teachers can also use the survey results for marketing.

The 12 questions relating to physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual areas are designed to be a quick survey taken prior to the first class and again during the last class. It only takes two minutes to complete. This questionnaire is now being piloted by 14 TCC teachers. If you would like to participate, contact Lorraine Lepine. It is important to receive the instructional protocol and be added to the list for follow up.

Guidelines for Teaching Special Populations and Settings

We are also developing guidelines to teach TCC to specialized populations under categories listed in the Teacher Resource List. Some “resource teachers” are presently working on guidelines for seated TCC, COPD, HIV, Parkinson’s, kids at school, cancer, and Lyme disease. If you wish to participate because you have experience in any of these categories, contact Lorraine.

More & More Gifts

By PAM TOWNE, OCEANSIDE, CA

Reflecting over 23 years of T'ai Chi Chih (TCC) practice, I am so grateful for the abundant gifts it has brought me.

Physically, there have been many manifestations of improved balance in my body. These include the ability to balance on one foot (which generally deteriorates with age) and standing with my weight equal on both feet.

Roller skating has been my favorite athletic activity since I was a child, yet balance and coordination were a problem for me. Returning to skating at age 47 after not doing it for ten years (most of which time I had been doing TCC), my balance was better than ever before. Climbing trees was another childhood favorite. Not only could I still climb at age 53, I could do Bass Drum seven feet off the ground.

When I began TCC, I had chronic low blood pressure and would start to black out when I stood up from stooping down. Within six months of beginning TCC, my blood pressure came up to normal and has remained so. At a time when so many 60 year olds are taking blood pressure medication, this, too, is a great gift.

TCC has also balanced my metabolism from borderline hypothyroid and hypoglycemic to normal. This helped balance activity and rest, shifting my body from lethargic to energetic. I am more productive at (almost) 62 years of age than I was in my 30's. Bringing hormonal balance as well, TCC made menopause quite easy for me.

Emotionally as well as physically, I have enjoyed greater balance. Life's ups and downs are more like the swells of the ocean rather than huge crashing waves. TCC has been of tremendous value in dealing with grief after the death of my parents and after the divorce from my husband of 15 years.

Mentally, TCC has brought balance – possibly through better communication between the two sides of the brain. The results have been greater mental focus, heightened awareness, increased intuition, and creativity.

Spiritually, TCC's gentle moving meditation has been instrumental in cultivating my inner life. It has helped open my heart and brought more balance between head-understanding and heart-knowing of who I am.

Thank you, Justin, for the gift of balance through TCC.



Obtaining A Second Signature

By SANDY McALISTER, HAYWARD, CA

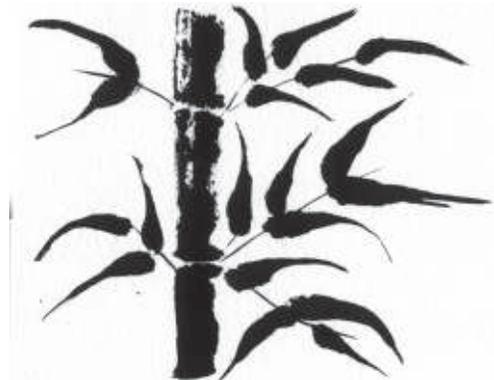
It's often remarked that the T'ai Chi Chih Teachers' Training Course turns out to be one of the most important experiences of a person's life. The second signature referral process was put in place to further ensure that a candidate headed to the course has had a well-rounded and thorough preparation that should enhance their experience.

The two teachers who sign a candidate's referral form are both responsible for working with the candidate. Using the Preparation Guidelines (found on www.taichichih.org), both teachers work with the candidate to ensure that all aspects of preparation set forth in the guidelines are met.

On several occasions students working toward accreditation have come to events (such as retreats and intensives) hoping to receive a second signature. This assumption is understandable if there is only one teacher in their area, and they have not been able to work with another teacher. But the point of a second signature is for the student to be able to work with at least two teachers: to get a variety of feedback, to experience different teaching styles, to be evaluated by more than one person. All this takes place over a period of time.

There is a certain amount of learning and growing that takes place as a student moves into the teacher candidate roll. It is essential to have a close working relationship during this time of going deeper into the "doing and understanding" of T'ai Chi Chih. Knowing a candidate's character and ability is also necessary if recommending her or him to become a T'ai Chi Chih teacher. This process cannot be done by setting aside a few hours during an event or receiving an evaluation at the end of an event.

While a second signature should not be expected at an intensive, the candidate will receive valuable input regarding his or her T'ai Chi Chih form, and he or she will deepen their understanding and experience with T'ai Chi Chih.



Harmonic Healing

By Renza Baker, San Antonio, TX

My search for spiritual fulfillment started many years before my long bout with cancer. In the end the disease that had ravaged my body and robbed me of physical strength was powerless against my greatest fight for my life and so I won. But now my body was disconnected from the inner me; meditation alone was not enough. I needed help. I was again looking for the connection between my body, my mind, and my spiritual side – so I could become whole again.

One evening, when going to hear some Buddhist monks at the Center for Spirituality and the Arts, I saw a sign for T'ai Chi Chih classes. I knew very little about T'ai Chi and yet I was attracted to this discipline. The next day, eager to know something about this form, I made an appointment to see the teacher.

Since the first few weeks of lessons and after reading one of many books written by the origination of TCC, Justin Stone, I was certain that this was what I was looking for. I had only one major problem: my legs were too weak to allow me to do the movements. In order to compensate for the lack of strength, and afraid of losing my balance, I would keep my knees quite rigid. This, of course, stopped the flow

of energy throughout my body. Time and time again I was told to keep my knees soft; it took me several years before I could.

I understood the principles of the movements, and I was trying to do my best while all the time remembering Justin Stone's words, "T'ai Chi Chih will do T'ai Chi Chih." It was one of the most exciting and important moments when it finally happened – T'ai Chi Chih was doing T'ai Chi Chih. Suddenly the yining and yanging occurred in my legs without effort. The balancing of these opposite forces brought healing and harmony to my body. Finally: the connection of mind, body, and soul – that which had been the foundation of my life – was happening again after so long. My very being, once more, was in total harmony.

My deepest thanks to Justin Stone for sharing all that he has learned and for leading me through my long journey into total healing.

*my very being,
once more,
was in total
harmony*

A Reflection on Harmony

By BECKY WATKINS, ALEXANDRIA, LA

Music thrills me and I have always enjoyed listening to it, singing it, learning to play piano and guitar, and making all kinds of music. I love harmony and listening to groups and choirs whose harmony is so sweet and pure; it gives me goose bumps and sometimes moves me to tears.

*TCC practice
immerses
us in the
vibration
of the
universe*



harmonious relationships with family and friends. It may be why we seek contemplative practices.

One of my favorite contemplative practices is TCC. It is where I find harmony and balance. It is where I connect with my deep core truths with compassion. It has helped me grow with grace to flow through my days with a sense of calm purpose. Our beautiful TCC practice immerses us in the vibration of the universe. We are in harmony with all that is.

Can you feel it? Can you feel the humming vibrations at a cellular level that interconnects us to the vibrations in rocks and trees and stars? Scientists tell us we are all vibrating at different levels along with everything else in the universe. Jesus and Buddha were vibrating at a higher level, as are many of our great spiritual teachers.

Because of TCC, we are better able to connect with our own harmonic vibrations and those of others. Sensitivity to divine vibration and energy fields may produce in us a greater serenity and a pure sense of joy in being part of the whole.

Once we fit into the grand harmony, then peace, happiness, and tranquility are ours.

I have a rain stick, teng shaw bells, drums, and a big gong in my bedroom. When I get up in the mornings, I strike the gong to hear the deep pure vibrations. It is my sound for waking up, literally and symbolically.

When I teach T'ai Chi Chih, I begin each class by striking a little brass bowl with a small wooden stick to produce a sound bath in the room and help quiet the mind chatter. It is the harmonious sound of present moment awareness, the sound of mindfulness.

I believe there is a deep need in all of us for harmony. We want

Harmony (Or The Promise of It)

By NANCY WERNER-AZARSKI, MINNEAPOLIS, MN

When I was asked to write about harmony, I thought, how does [she] know that harmony is a problem for me...is it that obvious? I see many inconsistencies between what I believe and how I behave. I cherish harmony but do not display it very often. When I first started teaching the T'ai Chi Chih practice at my workplace, I had a very large group from my unit sign up for a class. In my first class I asked folks to introduce themselves and then tell us why they were there. Basically, every one of my colleagues said that since I was less angry and anxious at work, they really wanted to try this TCC stuff! It was quite a humbling experience and it was the beginning of a journey that continues today.

*it made me
hold
my breath
for an
instant*

I looked up harmony in the dictionary and the definition I liked was a “pleasing arrangement of parts.” That arrangement of parts could be notes – how the workflow went that day – or it could be all the parts of our lives. At the recent conference, I saw and felt harmony. When we broke into three groups and worked on separate movements, I glanced up and saw the other two groups moving, doing two separate moves. The thought that went through my head was “so that’s what it looks like.” I wasn’t thinking about the form but I was thinking about the embodiment of harmony, the experience of harmony. They weren’t doing the same thing; they weren’t moving together. But it made me hold my breath for an instant, and it made me realize that the promise of harmony can be found in the practice of TCC. I know that what is in the form will become part of my life. This promise of harmony brings joy to me, especially on the days when I have been displaying less than harmonious behavior. The “parts” will be different and going in different directions, but I know with certainty that harmony in my life and in my TCC practice will be present – the promise is there.



Retreatants' Responses

Retreat with Carmen Brocklehurst in Albuquerque, NM; September 27-30 COMPILED BY AMY TYKSINSKI, RETREATANT

"You can't receive without giving. Regardless of where we come from individually, in essence, we come from one creator."

"The retreat has rekindled the flame of TCC in me. For the first time during the resting pose, I felt myself completely let go – it was the movement of no movement."

"I felt I had more time this weekend to do TCC below the waist. I felt more awareness of my body and connection to everybody. I feel I've grown immensely and opened more to people. Someone said "Welcome to the family!" to me the first night, and at the time, I kind of dismissed it, but now I feel a part of the family."

"When I arrived on Thursday night I was so stressed, and now it's all gone in just two days. When I sunk down into my knees just a little more, everything started working better. And I finally felt the swiveling of the hips."

"This was my first introduction to the TCC community and it was wonderful. It hasn't scared me off."

"My yin side finally started to participate. In the close, my hands were jumping around, but Carmen suggested to "close deeper," and when I did, the hands quieted immediately."

"I gained the ability to trust again in what I know but don't always know I know. To feel TCC all the way from the beginning to the end of a movement was very powerful."

"Finally, I had the realization that if I let go, I wouldn't explode."

Part of the reason we're sharing is because it's good to know what is possible. It can be really helpful to hear what other people are feeling. And the bottom line is: if it's possible for one person, it's possible for everyone. -- CARMEN

Seijaku Training

With Pam Towne at Xavier Retreat Center, NJ; August 13-15 COMPILED BY JUDY MIRCZAK, HOST

My practice now feels like it truly belongs in my life rather than being something I have to think about and work at. I'm now saying things from a heart-centered place without thinking. Another big change is clarity: I know what I need to do next, what to eliminate. About a week after I arrived home, I awoke with full awareness of a new direction towards a lifetime dream. And everything is unfolding to make it happen. ... It's as though locked doors swung open with new insights; life directions suddenly became very apparent. No other variable in my life could have been the cause. – DONNA TIROLY

Justin has said that we can remake ourselves through the practice of Seijaku – that we are the product of the Chi, our Life Force – and if you change the quality of the Chi, you will change. By practicing Seijaku we become more available for the Chi to work and flow through us. We become larger vessels for the Chi. – JUDY MIRCZAK

I'd been looking forward to learning Seijaku for four years after being introduced to it in an intermediate class. Thanks to Bonnie Sokolov for being such a wonderful teacher. I have incorporated Seijaku movements into my T'ai Chi Chih practice recently and am enjoying increased energy and joyfulness. – ANNA GUNDERSON

I learned techniques that I either hadn't heard in my earlier Seijaku accreditation or that more emphasis was placed there this time.

– JERRY BUMBALOUGH

Just as your T'ai Chi Chih practice
helps the mind-body
to move better outside of T'ai Chi Chih practice,
Seijaku practice
informs the mind-body
as to how it can move better
within the T'ai Chi Chih practice itself.

– STEPHEN THOMPSON

The Seijaku training opened a whole new world to me. I'm finding that Seijaku practice is taking me even deeper into myself and that I am learning who I really am. I cannot imagine *not* having Seijaku in my life. I am amazed at how Seijaku makes me feel the Chi even stronger than with my T'ai Chi Chih practice. – VICKI SCHROEDER

Did we really want to audit this Seijaku accreditation training, we mused. We finally decided that since we were there for the conference, why not? It was one of the best decisions we've made. We were first certified to teach Seijaku in 2002. Afterward, we practiced Seijaku for several weeks and dropped the habit. We then audited a Seijaku course and again only practiced for a few weeks. This time, we're still practicing Seijaku almost daily and we even have a Seijaku class scheduled. We were concerned that taking Seijaku immediately following the TCC conference would be too intense. Not true; instead it was a wonderful way to complete our TCC. – BOBBIE AND ANDY ANDERSON

Breaking Down & Rebuilding: Preparing for Teacher Accreditation

BY KATHY HUBBLE, CAROL STREAM, IL

Preparing for teacher accreditation was not the most stressful thing that I've ever done. But, it was up there.

I had been preparing pretty intensively for some months, each one of which became more intense than the previous one. Class times increased from three to five hours each. Notes turned into notebooks. Movements were dissected. What I thought to be the most spiritual thing I'd ever done turned into total chaos. I was confused about what was right, what was wrong. I only felt discomfort. What was so gentle and non-muscular was now hard, tight, and unenjoyable. It was more work than I had bargained for. I had lost my connection to T'ai Chi Chih, to myself, to this entire wonderful universe. Six weeks before accreditation, I considered giving up the whole thing – this thing I had grown to love over the last six years, the only thing I have ever stayed with so long. At that point, the experience was very unrewarding. I was at a crossroads.

Luckily the universe handed me the perfect opportunity and environment to make the right choice. I was scheduled to attend a workshop lead by Antonia in Warrenville that "choosing" weekend. Without that workshop at that moment, I'm not sure which direction my decision would have gone. But it was there that I renewed my passion and continued my training.

I want to express great thanks and gratitude to the dedicated teachers who gave so freely of their time to help me. I will carry their teachings close to my heart. I am a better person, and I will be a better teacher, because of them. My T'ai Chi Chih practice is deeper because of them. I went into the week of accreditation truly prepared; I came out a different person. I am humbled. I view the world very differently now. What I went through is part of the process of breaking down and rebuilding.

The week of accreditation was still stressful. My muscles were aching; my mind was uncertain. I'm not sure if I would ever want to go through this experience again. But I am grateful to have gone through it this time. I am honored to be part of this large community. Thank you to Justin and to all those who followed for allowing me this opportunity of great growth and love.



Bridge of Hope at Training

Teacher Training in Warrenville, IL; July 16-21

BY DIANA WELSH DURKIN, CO-HOST

Entry to the Cenacle Center, a secluded retreat and spirituality center that served as our teacher training location, requires walking across a bridge.



The invitation to cross this Bridge of Hope promises that hearts will be "... renewed and inflamed ..." and in leaving that "... they go forth serving others with love."

In preparation for the teacher training, co-host Donna McElhose and I asked the teacher candidates to keep an informal record of their thoughts for four weeks prior to the training, to write about feelings and other considerations that their TCC practice provided. Frustrations and discontentment with solo or community practices seemed more pronounced three and four weeks out from training. With two weeks to go, even with the pressures of leaving families and professional responsibilities, those experiencing breakdowns in their practices were recognizing the breakthroughs of letting go. One week prior training, a more positive power emerged from prior frustrations. One candidate shared: "One week to go: Much better. Concentrated in the soles of the feet (Duh!) Friday's practice was the best in some time."

Another candidate reflected: "Next week's training will be a demanding but wonderful time. I will definitely learn to be a good TCC teacher to my future students. Even more importantly, I will have a chance to really deepen my TCC practice, to let go and let TCC do TCC, and to flow effortlessly with the waves of Chi in the energy sea."

We all crossed this Bridge of Hope – 12 candidates, 8 auditors, 2 co-hosts, and 1 Teacher Trainer – to begin, as predicted, "a week of amazing transformation." This held true for all who crossed that bridge. As the initial anxiety and intensity of the first two days yielded to flowing softness, it brought to mind the words of Thomas Merton: "Happiness is not a matter of intensity but of balance and order and rhythm and harmony." As we crossed the Bridge of Hope a final time – as 23 accredited TCC teachers – our hearts were renewed and inflamed, ready to serve with love. We were in harmony with one another and this mysterious practice called T'ai Chi Chih. Congratulations to the new teachers. Thank you, Pam Towne, for empowering us. Thank you, Justin Stone, for gifting us again and again.

Heightened Awareness (& Why The Need for It & Justin's Book)

Bare attention, of "Mindfulness," is the first step in gaining a heightened awareness, but by itself, it is not enough, this bare attention to progress to a deeper awareness.

"Bare attention," by itself, means that every action is performed mindfully, in full conscious awareness ...

To know that we have placed our shoes under the bed – to know it and not assume it – is a great step forward in achieving "bare attention" and the beginning of the way to a heightened awareness.

In truth there is no such thing as "Higher" Consciousness. There is only Consciousness. But in individuals, the pure Consciousness is usually blocked to various degrees, so we speak of "higher" or "lower" States of Consciousness.

The "Choiceless Awareness" that Krishnamurti speaks of is a good example of Consciousness shining without obscuration – "Choiceless" meaning the obscuring energies are not operating. Normally we operate in a "pleasure-pain" continuum, seeking those things that are pleasant to us and avoiding what is painful. This is the opposite of "Choiceless Awareness" and is the result of self-clinging.

Heightened awareness always begins on the inside, not being merely a matter of tactile or sensory occurrence. We begin to be aware of the vast ocean of Consciousness in which we swim ("live and breath and have our being").

If we sincerely work toward heightened awareness, we will eventually be startled to recognize that our periods of concentration last less than a second, being constantly renewed. We had thought that these periods lasted for a considerable time and were not aware that concentration has to be constantly renewed.

Are we aware of breathing? If we think about it, it is the one thing absolutely vital to our existence, yet we simply take it for granted. In effect, we are breathed – that is all. To one truly interested in deeper awareness, [s/he] might study the trilogy of breath, blood, and spirit. Also, the Chinese speak of "Ching Chi Shen" – Essence (or semen), Energy, and Spirit. Eventually we may find that Wisdom and Energy come from the same Source.

As the nervous system is purified, as the Chi circulation is accelerated and balanced, we should see things more clearly, have more energy, become less self-centered, and, possibly, live longer. Heightened awareness is a worthwhile goal in every respect, but the reader must practice faithfully to attain this goal; it cannot be given to him by anybody. And we never stop progressing; we never relax and say, "We're here." To those who persevere and succeed, great Joy (Ananda) should be in store.

From the Foreword and Introduction of Heightened Awareness, ©1988
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The Best Reason to Practice

BY JUSTIN STONE [REPRINTED FROM *THE VITAL FORCE*]

Karma is an important and frequently used word, so it is important to understand what it means. In the Sanskrit language Karma means “action” – that and no more. So when we glibly speak of “our Karma,” we really mean the fruit of our action, not the action itself. Even this is not totally correct. The motivation behind our action is what establishes our Karma – which is a result and not blind destiny. Usually the motivation that causes us to act is the result of our established Habit Patterns (“Vashanas” in Sanskrit). This is cause and effect. We establish patterns of thought and reaction and these, formed by ourselves, coerce us into acting in certain ways. So we have created the very force that molds us. Should we not be careful in our thoughts and the habits we create?

There is always a result, neither “good” nor ‘bad’ (which can be seen as “favorable” or “unfavorable” from a personal viewpoint), that is appropriate to the action. When a gun is fired, there is recoil commensurate with the force of the shot. This adequately explains Karma for us.

*‘burning
Karmic
seeds’ ...
is the best
reason
I know
to practice
T’ai Chi
Chih*

People usually believe not what is logical but what they want to believe. Thus their actions are rationalized. This has no effect on the inexorable Karma, which is not concerned with sentiment or rationalization.

As one practices T’ai Chi Chih, the quality of the Chi definitely changes. So many say, “I really can’t remember what I was like before T’ai Chi Chih.” As the

Chi is circulated and balanced, habit energies tend to fade and one no longer feels compelled to follow dubious paths of action. One now feels more in control of (and responsible for) his or her actions. This is “burning the Karmic seeds.” It is the best reason I know to practice T’ai Chi Chih, aside from the joyful feeling such practice brings. The serenity and better health are the results of this balancing and circulation. And it is so easy to accomplish!



Editor’s Note:

Many of you have said you want “more Justin” in the newsletter.

In recognition of the fact that many subscribers are new(ish), and that Justin has written compelling articles for *The Vital Force* since its inception, *The Vital Force* will be reprinting an older article for each of our newer editions.

Besides, some things are timeless.

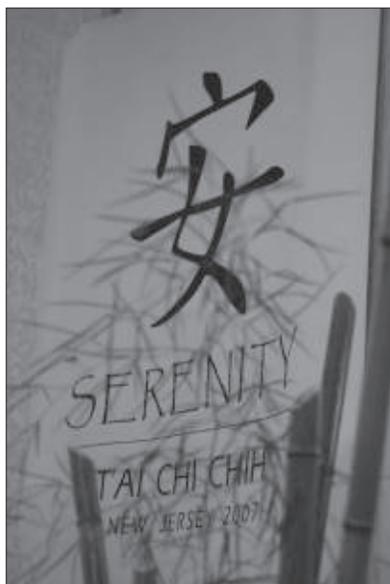
A Different Perspective on Working Hard

By DIANA BAHN, NEW YORK, NY

Because I was on the planning committee with Alba and Janet and all the other dedicated teachers who volunteered this past year, my perception of the conference may differ from conference attendees.

From the moment I arrived in Woodcliff Lake until I drove away with my fellow New Yorkers back to the Big Apple, I felt swept up in a big friendly ocean of excitement, movement, and responsibility. Alba and Janet set the form and many of us on the committee worked with it as best we could – albeit moving within our own idiosyncratic rhythm. I have never been at a conference where I had so little time to myself, and yet that made this conference especially dear to me. Ultimately, I really didn't need that "special" time because every moment I was at the conference was vital and jam-packed.

I especially enjoyed the group practices and feel that the movement tips from Pam, Sandy, and Antonia were so clear and correct that I have material to work with over the next year. The flow and tone of the conference – starting with the harpist and progressing to Rafael's heavenly inspirations, a "folksy" community practice on Saturday afternoon, and the final outdoor practice accompanied by a fire alarm (and my ultimate ability to incorporate it in the moving meditation) – was quite a sequence the universe presented to really get the message across of "serenity in the midst of activity."



Maybe my perception has been colored by my conditioning. I was brought up to believe that if you work hard at something you get something back. This often backfires when I do my T'ai Chi Chih practice, as I rely too much on the work part and forget to reap the reward.

I recall walking the halls of the Hilton on the conference's last day. I ran into some younger hotel guests, one of whom jeered about my name tag, "Oh, sure, serenity!" – like he couldn't believe there could be such a thing. I didn't get angry (which would have been my usual reaction to something like this), but I did feel somewhat removed, distanced, and almost "nun-like" – as though I understood where he was coming from but couldn't be pulled down by his ignorance. It was worth the effort to assist Janet and Alba in their pure intention.



Serenity Defined

By ALICE HOLDEN, CCVI, SAN ANTONIO, TX

What a delightful gift my T'ai Chi Chih practice has been to my spirit over the past seventeen years. In many ways, it has contributed to transforming a Type A personality into a woman aware of the need for contemplative prayer and mindful action. That is a great contribution to my sanity and sanctity, one I do not take lightly. I thank Justin Stone and all the teachers and friends of the practice whom I have known along the way for improving my practice by their gentle observations and excellent modeling.

Each year I think, "This is as good as it gets," and I can't imagine that the next conference could possibly be any better. Then, each year I am pleasantly surprised. What was special about this year's conference?

Its focus was serenity. Webster defines it as "marked by or suggestive of calm, clear and free of storms, unruffled repose or quietude." All aspects of the conference emanated serenity – from the violin accompaniment at the first practice and the beach-inspired centerpieces in the dining room, and on through the DVD of Justin Stone and the final blessing of Antonia Cooper.

At one point, as in real life, the serenity was challenged. Someone penned a question that could have been offensive. The response? Humor wrapped in loving kindness. Now, that is serenity in action – the

fruit of faithful practice of T'ai Chi Chih and a credit to its originator and leadership. A special thank you to all involved.

A Confession

By KRISTIN ORWICK, EAST BERLIN, PA

I am ashamed to say that this year was my first time to attend a T'ai Chi Chih Teacher Conference – even though I've been an instructor for almost four years (and practicing for six years). I always had a wonderful time with my friends and those I meet at events and retreats, but somehow I was “conveniently” busy when teacher conference came around. Why do I say conveniently busy? Funny you should ask.



If you have ever taken personality tests, such as Myers Briggs Type Indicator Test®, I can explain to you what type of person I am in 4 letters: ENFP. What does that mean? I am an Extroverted, Intuitive, Feeling, and Perceiving type of person. At least that's what the test said I was. ENFPs have what some call a “silly switch.” They can be intellectual, serene, serious, and hard-nose business types for a while, but whenever they get a chance, they flip the switch and become “captain wild child.” Sometimes they may even appear inebriated while and when the change is flipped.

So back to why I was conveniently busy to attend any previous teacher conferences: I was afraid that the conference was going to be too serene and focused on T'ai Chi Chih, not allowing my neotonous self to come out on occasions (loud dance or rock music, constant giggling, and joking around with friends, etc). My fear was that either I would be bored at the conference or I might embarrass myself by not acting like stereotypical T'ai Chi Chih instructor – calm and collected.

When I arrived, the image that lived in my head for so long quickly dissipated. I had a blast! I was greeted by so many new and familiar, friendly faces. Yes, there were times of being serene and “in-the-moment,” which I thoroughly enjoyed and needed. But, I was given many opportunities to change gears and let my hair down. Meals and down times were excellent places to surround myself with like-spirited people. Seeing my good 'ol teacher training buddies was heart-warming. It was better than any high school reunion I'd ever attended. I thank those who made the event possible. I had an awesome time!

Now that I've been, I think that the teacher conference is a great place to reconnect with your practice, teaching skills, old friends, and your self – all in one weekend.



With You in Spirit

By LINDA RISKA WILLIAMS, CAMARILLO, CA

I didn't make it to the conference this year; it was my first absence since becoming a teacher in 1997. Why am I writing then? ... Every summer as the conference nears, excitement bubbles within me. I wonder what my lessons will be for the coming year. I think about what I need to learn, but the lessons I receive during the conference are never what I expected; some times they aren't pleasing – like when I realized how judgmental I could be. Other times they are more gentle though no less challenging – like when, because of my hip and lower back problems, I had to be more aware of my weight shifting.

In 2006 my lesson arrived during the last hours of the conference. My attention had been drawn to my 59-year-old sister, who was in the hospital and dying. Carmen Brocklehurst, who had noticed that I wasn't “letting go of the Chi but holding on to it,” delivered my lesson. When I questioned letting it go, Carmen reassured me that it would come back many times over. She confidently stated two other things before offering a warm hug and walking off. For the past year I have reflected on these words often but was not sure, as this year's conference approached, if I had truly practiced the lessons and opened myself fully to its truth. The sentences were “You are more powerful than you know” and “No more: I can't.”

En route to the conference, my connecting flight to Newark, NJ, was cancelled. Listening to many frustrated stories while waiting in line to rebook a flight, I reflected on the conference theme of “serenity.” As I inched my way to the counter, cancelled flights were blinking red, and the haggard airline employee said flights out were not assured. He was surprised when I asked to book a flight back home. He chuckled and agreed when I said, “Sometimes it is easier to go against traffic.” Later, I realized I had made a more cosmic shift.

Last year's lesson resonated as I began my airport practice. I was aware of the Chi existing in all places and in all time. I slipped into its rhythm and joined my fellow teachers for the opening practice at 5pm on Thursday. Throughout the weekend I stepped again and again into the cosmic rhythm with them to find added serenity in the shared space. I have a new awareness of what “I'll be there in spirit” means.

My lesson this year, I believe, is to sink more deeply into the gifted lesson of last year and now, more aware, be more mindful of its truth on a daily basis.

What A Difference A Few Days Make

By STEPHEN THOMPSON, TUPELO, MS

We teachers often keep thoughts about one another's form to ourselves. And as a new teacher, I should have known better than to voice my opinion. Even with two conferences under my belt, I'm not sure I'm entitled to even have an opinion. But for better or worse, my reaction to my very first practice at the 2006 conference was blunt: "Oh my God! These people are teachers?"

Before you come down too hard on me, please realize that in 2006 I'd only been teaching for a few weeks. Still, some of the individual forms I'd seen during were discouraging to my new teacher eyes. But by the last practice of the 2006 conference, I was singing quite a different tune. The words were the same, but this time they had a nice ring to them: "Oh my God!" I thought proudly, "These people are teachers!"

So the moral of this little story, if there is one, is that our individual forms are refined and renewed by attending teacher's conference. We owe it to our students to attend but mostly, we owe it to ourselves.

The time we spend reviewing movements at each conference – with Pam, Sandy, or Antonia – is always time well spent. Over a year's time it is easy to let our individual forms slip a bit. It often happens without us even realizing it. I know. It's happened to me. And I bet it's happened to you, too.

By the way, everyone at the 2007 conference was saying that the individual forms shown this year were much smoother than in 2006. See you in 2008?

Opening Hearts & Minds

By CARMEN L. BROCKLEHURST, ALBUQUERQUE, NM

It was a beautiful summer night when we finally arrived at the TCC Conference in New Jersey. We were very grateful to be there since there had been a storm in New York that had caused our plane to be several hours late.

We were warmly greeted by Alba, who was looking forward to the TCC community's arrival and working late at night on one more detail. So much planning; so many people helping; so many teachers and students bringing planning to life. There was a wonderful feeling of anticipation in the air. The next three days would unfold as a well-executed program full of T'ai Chi Chih, lovely accommodations, yummy food, and much more. The 2007 Conference was under way.

All the planning, meetings, and arrangements were for us, the T'ai Chi Chih teachers who came from North, South, East, and West ready to share. There were many old friends and many new ones, including 17 first-timers. Our community is always growing.

The theme of the conference was "Serenity" and everything had been prepared so that we could try serenity on for size and take it home as a memory (when things might not be so serene in our lives).

It's always good to attend a conference – not just because the advance team plans such good ones – but because we teachers are the ones who benefit so much from the heightened awareness of Chi. It is this creation of Chi that goes out into the world and helps many – regardless of whether

they have ever heard of T'ai Chi Chih or not. The Chi will be there for them.

It's also good to attend because attendance opens our hearts and minds, and it strengthens our bodies in ways we don't even know now. But the most important reason is that it helps us to love and share the Chi. Thank you to the New Jersey teachers for this gift.



Can't Miss It

By NANCY WERNER-AZARSKI, MINNEAPOLIS, MN

Wow! What a great conference: I learned so much and really enjoyed the movement feedback and refinement sessions. This conference has given me at least five things that I need to incorporate into my TCC practice and teaching. I went to the conference *this* year thinking that I couldn't make it *next* year because of my work schedule. But people, as the conference continued, I realized that I simply couldn't miss the conference in 2008. How else could I get this kind of feedback? How else could I interact with teachers from all over? How else could I see Sandy, Pam, and Antonia all at one time? How else could I learn so much about my TCC practice? The New Jersey folks did a great job with the conference and they made me realize again the importance of the annual conference. So I'm going again next year. I just can't afford to miss it. And you?

Tie, Dry & Pie T'ai Chi Chih

By BECKY WATKINS, ALEXANDRIA, LA

On the flight from Dallas to New Jersey, a beautiful and wise woman next to me took one look at my T'ai Chi Chih shirt and said with an Italian accent, "Oh, you are going to my conference!" We were excited to find one another. The flight flew by as Renza and Sister Alice (traveling from San Antonio) and I shared our life stories. Renza knew Maria Montessori, one of my heroes, and Sister Alice sang to us and taught us how to sign and sing while moving forward and backward. Upon arrival, Janet, Alba, and Dorene met



us at the door; guest rooms were beautiful; the food was plentiful. But community is always the best part of a conference. I have never met more loving, supportive, and compassionate people than T'ai Chi Chih teachers.

I really enjoyed the bells used to call us into awareness and herd us into the right room. Our Friday entertainment was a spiritual experience and a feast for the senses. Rafael Dejarano made an altar on the ballroom floor and played instruments from indigenous peoples around the world including the Australian didgeridoo. He was mesmerizing, playing the didgeridoo into our heart space from inches away from each of us. It felt sacramental and transformative as he embodied unconditional love. Many thanks

to April Leffler and the New Jersey community for bringing him.

On Saturday night, after a royal banquet, the talent show included a couple from Manhattan who

did a skit about Tie T'ai Chi Chih, Dry T'ai Chi Chih, and Pie T'ai Chi Chih. I laughed until I cried and then I laughed some more. Toward the end, a willowy woman with a lovely Irish brogue sang haunting songs that gave me chills. It was late but you could have heard a pin drop during her acapella performance. It was another blessing at the end of a blessed day.

On Sunday we walked a labyrinth during morning group practice. The contemplative experience included Antonia offering each person a special gift she had made. Since Antonia is a gift, I was moved by her generosity.

Thank you, New Jersey, for a conference etched in our collective psyche and for helping us with true serenity. We are forever grateful.

Soft Hands, Powerful Hands

By CAROLINE GUILLOTT, LAKE CHARLES, LA

How do we get across the idea of softness in the hands without the fingers collapsing on themselves or the hand closing in on itself? In preparing to demonstrate and explain this at the conference, I took time to feel it and to find examples of how we approach life with a soft hand. I realized that we have such a hand when we care about someone. Here are a few examples that might help:

- When a friend is in need and we put a gentle hand on her shoulder, we have a soft hand. It is empty enough not to hurt and strong enough to give support.
- When a small child is about to take her first step, instinctively we open our arms and hands to receive her. Or we watch from behind, staying close with our hand open in case she falls back. Again, the hand is empty enough not to interfere but powerful enough to help.
- This last example is probably something we do not do very often, but we would be more inclined to do to someone we love. Cup your face (your cheeks and chin) softly between your two hands and feel your hands open. Leave them that way as you bring them out in front of you. See how soft and open they are? Open to receive. Open to give. Soft hands. Powerful hands. It might feel strange to bring back your hands to such openness at first, but try it for a week and see what happens.



Why Teach *Heightened Awareness*

By ANN RUTHERFORD, ALBUQUERQUE, NM

Justin often says, “Never do T’ai Chi Chih carelessly.” I use Justin’s *Heightened Awareness* to elevate the students’ attention to their TCC movements. Because awareness is such an integral component to correct TCC practice, I consider *Heightened Awareness* to be just as essential for the teaching of TCC as the movement DVD or the TCC textbook.

Heightened Awareness provides a series of practical exercises centering on the cultivation of awareness of objects of the senses: thoughts, sight, sound, touch, smell, and breath. Of equal importance is the cultivation of awareness of our reactions to the above. The end result of this growing bare attention is that the student begins to gain the state of one pointed mind – a condition essential for the moving meditation TCC. As Justin says, “By registering our reactions, we take away a tendency to mentally drift.” By becoming aware of muscle tension, you can let it go; by becoming aware of mental distraction, you can return the mind to the soles of the feet.

Justin always tells his teachers, “First, teach your student how to move, not what to move.” The movements themselves are simple. The greatest challenge for the teacher is how to inspire the student to let go and flow. I have found that enhancing their awareness of their mind- and body-senses builds a growing realization that they are not their body or mind. Once they realize this, they develop mastery over their senses rather than allow their senses to rule them, thus impeding their TCC progress.

“Never do TCC carelessly,” Justin admonishes – to which I would add, “Never do life carelessly.” Teaching our students *Heightened Awareness* also enhances their heart-mind. On page 58, Justin says, “Awareness is the mark by which we can judge the degree of progress one has made. Heightened awareness gradually becomes Universal Consciousness, and we begin to get away from the self-centered concentration. Release from self-clinging is as great a reward as we can want, as self-clinging is the root of suffering. The Buddha’s admonition that ending hatred (envy, jealousy, antagonism) is the road to happiness says the same thing; hatred is the result of self-clinging. When one can say he no longer hates, resents, or even

*the student begins to gain
the state of one pointed mind
– a condition essential for
the moving meditation TCC*

dislikes anyone, he can be said to be on his way to Sage-hood. That is why the writer feels that the teaching of heightened awareness is so important.”

Using *Justin Stone Speaks on T’ai Chi Chih*

By CARMEN BROCKLEHURST, ALBUQUERQUE, NM

Students love this CD. I call it the “Everything You Ever Wanted To Know About T’ai Chi Chih But Were Afraid To Ask – or Didn’t Know to Ask” CD. Often I play it as students are arriving for a Beginner Class. And then I play more of it during the discussion time of an Intermediate Class. The students end up arriving earlier just to be able to hear it; and they often decide to take a copy home afterward. One repeat comment is, “His voice is so soothing. I especially like listening to it on my way to an appointment. I always arrive feeling more relaxed and alert, ready for the meeting.” One student remarked that it had been ages since she had felt so peaceful.

*‘Words
will not do it.
It takes actual
practice.
You must do it
yourself.’*

During the Intermediate Class, I ask students about specific points covered in the CD, like “Why is it necessary to keep your concentration in the soles of the feet while doing T’ai Chi Chih?” (By this time, I’ve stated the answer to this question often: Because it balances us and keeps our attention focused.) After hearing the question and answer on the CD, students always start out by saying, “Justin says ...” And then they repeat what he’s said. I appreciate this, since Justin is the best authority on T’ai Chi Chih, and, of course, I first learned this from him too. But it became *real* after I experienced it. It is wonderful that what our teacher tells us can really be experienced, that we don’t have to just take it on faith. Often I find that my students have many experiences sooner than I did when I was at their stage. This is a good sign as it shows that the intuitive ability of the T’ai Chi Chih community is growing as we, the teachers, go deeper into the practice.

When working with a Teacher’s Preparation class, I ask students to listen to the CD at least 10 minutes a day and to write down the most important statement they heard that week. When they return seven days later, they’ve listened to the whole CD. After doing this for eight weeks, they are quite familiar with Justin’s words. This information will be the basis for what they will share with their students after they become T’ai Chi Chih teachers. It is always amazing how their answers seem to follow the same theme. It shows that they are beginning to think and feel in T’ai Chi Chih.

One prime statement usually pulled out by the students in the Teacher Preparation class is, “Words will not do it. It takes actual practice. You must do it yourself.” How important it is for us to learn to love and share the Chi.

Utilizing Justin's *Spiritual Odyssey*

By DAN PIENCIAR, OCEAN GROVE, NJ

Using Justin's works has a two-pronged purpose. First, they remind me what I need to teach and keep me focused on the important elements of TCC practice. Secondly, the frequent review of these articles helps me focus on what to look for in my student's movements, so that I can correct them or teach differently.

In "Why/Why Not?" (page 37), Justin makes reference to how trees lose their leaves this time of year and then grow new ones in the spring. His questions for me are, "Why identify with the leaves? Why not identify with the tree?" These undoubtedly have deep philosophical inferences, but they also reveal an outstanding point about our TCC movements. Flowing from the center with an upright torso is like a tree remaining solid on its base, rooted deeply in the earth while the branches and leaves (arms and hands) simply flow gently with the breeze.

I remember learning from a Polish speaker that the first part of my surname "p-i-e-n" refers to that part of the tree where the trunk joins the roots. This image has had significant meaning in my TCC practice – to flow from the base of the tree (waist) and not from the branches and leaves (shoulders, arms, and hands).

In "Don't Neglect the Essence for the Form" (pages 53-55), we are reminded that in practicing TCC we are not merely trying to move the Chi around as if manipulating something apart from ourselves. But rather Chi is something that is inherently there and which has a reciprocal character (i.e. the state of mind influences the Chi and the Chi influences the state of mind). In this vein, Justin affirms his hope that T'ai Chi Chih teaching will not simply be about something merely physical.

As a teacher, this drives home the importance of what I feel as I move, and it presents the question of who and what I am (as I move) rather than what do I look like as I move. The sinking, centeredness, and grounding in the soles of feet help us realize the true essence of the Chi.

In "Teaching Tips for T'ai Chi Chih Teachers" (pages 116-117), we are reminded that to be a good teacher we must be able to detect the faults of the students. How humbling is that! As Justin says, "Through his or her own practice, the teacher must have come to more than a shallow understanding of TCC movements. Teaching is more than just showing where to put the hands and feet."

So where am I, and who am I (as a teacher), if I don't practice faithfully and pay attention to my own faults, shortcomings, and areas of improvement? Only then can I begin to understand what is a "fault" in the movements of my students.

Most humbling of all is the reminder that our students will imitate what and how we move. I must also be able to correct movements through my own example. If I see my students doing something that doesn't seem like T'ai Chi Chih, it behooves me to ask, "What am I doing or not doing" that my students are copying or misinterpreting?

Lastly, many simple but outstanding reminders for our TCC practice flood *Spiritual Odyssey* – things as basic but all-important as the knees not remaining stiff. Words are just words, but if they remind us how to move correctly so that we feel the flow of the Chi, such reminders will certainly do the same for our students.

Read and digest *Spiritual Odyssey* over and over again. The depths of T'ai Chi Chih can never be entirely realized, so we have nothing to lose and everything to gain in our practice and in our teaching.

*'Why identify with the leaves?
Why not identify with the tree?'*



What Is It That Resists?

Intensive with Sandy in Albuquerque, NM;
May 31 – June 3 By ANN RUTHERFORD, CO-HOST

As always happens during Intensives, many participants were surprised by its depth. Intensives require tremendous commitment and concentration. Sandy and Justin sought to re-mold some aspects of the participants' practice that were inhibiting the flow of Chi. Deepening the understanding of TCC can be a painful process. Sandy said, "Know that this process can be uncomfortable and filled with tears and emotion. It's all part of letting go."

*'divinely
guided
practice'*

Justin and Sandy stressed the need to move from a state of emptiness, openness, and fluidity: mentally, emotionally, and physically. The invitation to let go was difficult for most participants. Habit patterns – whether mental, emotional, or physical – are stubborn. Letting go of patterns inhibiting the circulation and balancing of the Chi is the essential core of TCC practice. Others, who came with an attitude of playfulness, let go easily. As I watched, I asked myself, "What/Who is it that resists the letting go?"

When I went through teacher training in 1998, there were no Intensives, so I had to go through the re-molding process during the training. I resisted. I arrived thinking, "I already know the moves, *what are we going to do for five days?*" Then on the second day, my ego loomed before me, like Jabba the Hutt in Star Wars. It was big and ugly. So *this* was what was keeping me from being open and receptive to change. It was so shocking, that I went up to Ed Altman, the [then] teacher trainer, and said, "I don't belong here." He said, "Yes, you do because now you've had the breakthrough that you needed to have to understand TCC." I stayed.

Some participants encountered deeply repressed fears, to which Sandy said, "Moving the Chi gets you in touch with your deeper core. It will let you see yourself. Once you see it, you can let it go. There's no need for analysis."

The most common source of resistance sprang from muscle tension, caused by participants trying to think their way through the movements. Justin said, "There's a line of differentiation between knowing the movements mentally and knowing them from the heart." He stressed over and over: "The most important element is how to move, not what to move. Do it softly with the feeling of flowing. The weight shift is moving the hands."

Many Intensive participants had never met Justin. I imagine they will remember his words concerning the origin of TCC: "I feel TCC was given to me as a divinely guided practice." Seen in this light, *there truly is nothing to resist.*

Tip of The Iceberg

Retreat in June; Renewal in July with Dan Pienciak
in Newfoundland By SHEILA LEONARD, PBVM, ST. JOHN'S, CANADA

My favorite t-shirt reads "T'ai Chi Chih In Harmony with Nature" and pictures a yin yang mirror reflection of a tree, with birds hovering where the two dots would be. It speaks of how T'ai Chi Chih brings us into deeper harmony with Nature and with our own nature.

Our June Retreat on Virginia Lake was the perfect venue for a wonder-full day. Feelings of serenity, calm, gratitude, awe, and blessedness bound us together. Amidst joy and wonder we celebrated our oneness with the world T'ai Chi Chih Community and with all that exists. All came eager and then longed to stay ... simply to delight in the Chi and in one another.

*harmony
within
and without*

We returned in July to sink into the essence of T'ai Chi Chih and Seijaku with Dan. It allowed the Chi to take us to new depths of our true essence through practice. For Dan, the hospitality, warmth and friendliness of the students was a welcome embrace. Their dedication to T'ai Chi Chih was apparent, and their enthusiasm and desire to learn was an inspiration. Sheila spread the great "secret of life" and planted seeds for more new teachers. One student spoke for all when she wrote of Dan as "a blessing; I am grateful for his coming, for his presence has shown what it means to live in the essence."



Participants described their experience as wonderful, exhilarating, amazing, healing, transforming, pivotal, deeply spiritual. They

went away feeling awed, enriched, hungry for more. One noted, "My world was rich before but now it is exquisite for I have found serenity within." For another it was "an experience in humility in seeing that I have a distance to go, but I am willing." Another added, "Blessings and wonders keep coming; I have begun to trust the Universe at last." We touched what TCC is all about.

We are just touching the tip of the iceberg with T'ai Chi Chih in Newfoundland and Labrador – more "new-found-land" awaits our discovery. Thank you, Justin!

Direct Transmission from The Master

KIM GRANT, ALBUQUERQUE, NM

How many of *you* have met Justin Stone? How many of *your students* have met Justin Stone? How many of *your student's students* have met Justin Stone?

As time passes, fewer and fewer among us will have ever interacted with Justin in person. (And even many who *have* interacted with him have not plumbed the depths of his writings.) Materials by Justin Stone offer a window into, a direct link to, the originator of T'ai Chi Chih. It could be said that you can't know T'ai Chi Chih without knowing about Justin's life and experiences. His works encourage you to do the work for yourself.

Ask yourself: do you owe it to yourself, your students, and the practice to know the entire oeuvre of Justin Stone? Do you owe it to yourself to work with his instructional dvd on a continuing basis? Do your students – in order to get the most out of T'ai Chi Chih – deserve to receive a direct transmission through his DVD? (Yes, this is a strong pitch to staying firmly connected to the originator.)

Web Site: www.gkpub.com

As hopefully you know, the new Good Karma Publishing web site is up and running. It includes a complete e-commerce section for ordering DVDs, books, CDs, audio tapes, and Justin's poster. (The first time that teachers log in to create an account, the site will verify that you are indeed a teacher.

During the check out process, your order will reflect the teacher discount.)

You may also request a catalog or download an order form.

promotional postcards, like the one inserted in this issue of The Vital Force, are free for the asking

The web site contains many more elements, too. Choice morsels include two video clips from Justin's instructional DVD; transcriptions of talks given at conferences over the years (also available as free downloads); press clippings; previously published articles by Justin from *The Vital Force* and the *New Mexico T'ai Chi Chih News*; and wallpaper graphics. There are also informational sections on T'ai Chi Chih, Justin Stone, Good Karma Publishing, and *The Vital Force*.

Feedback is quite welcome and encouraged.

Events

Q & A Between Teacher & Student

Workshop with Sr. Antonia Cooper in St. Paul, MN; July 13-14
WITH SUE BITNEY (TEACHER, RICHFIELD, MN) AND KATHY SULLIVAN (STUDENT, ROCHESTER, MN)

(SUE) WHY DID YOU ATTEND THE TRAINING?

(Kathleen) I wanted to find out if I'd been told all I needed to know to practice T'ai Chi Chih correctly and to see if I had good understanding of what I heard.

(S) WHAT DID YOU HOPE TO LEARN – OR GET OUT OF – THE TRAINING?

(K) I anticipated practicing with the guidance of a respected teacher and hoped it would change my life in some healthful way. I planned to stay attentive and open to the experience, whatever course it took. I hoped this practice would be another step on a path that would change the world for the better, one person at a time, beginning with me.

(S) HOW WAS THE EXPERIENCE FOR YOU?

(K) It was all I had hoped for. We seemed to be living in the moment. The TCC was alive and evolving through us. Antonia was humorous, pleasant, responsive, and instructive. The training unfolded with respect and harmony.

(S) WHAT WAS SOMETHING YOU LEARNED ABOUT T'AI CHI CHIH?

(K) Teachers and students are on the same path – to deepen their practice. While individuals complemented the whole group and received the benefits of personal experiences shared by others, it is the T'ai Chi Chih that is evolving in the movements with softness and continuity, flowing from the center, yinling and yangling, focusing on the soles of the feet, circularity and polarity. In other words, I learned the principles of T'ai Chi Chih.

(S) WHAT DID YOU LEARN ABOUT YOURSELF FROM THE EXPERIENCE?

(K) I'm confident yet forgetful in these graceful movements. Having received quality instructions from caring and competent teachers has shown me I need more practice.



T'AI CHI CHIH COMMUNITY CALENDAR

DATE	WHAT & WITH WHOM	WHERE	CONTACT
Nov. 11-16	Teacher Training w/ Pam	Albuquerque, NM TCC Center	Ann Rutherford ruthergary@aol.com
Nov. 17 All day	Celebration of Justin Stone's Life	Albuquerque, NM Asbury Methodist Church	Ann Rutherford ruthergary@aol.com
Nov. 29 - Dec. 2	TCC Intensive w/ Sandy	San Antonio, TX	Sr. Alice Holden sparks-1@sbcglobal.net
2008			
Jan. 25-27	Seijaku Renewal w/ Pam	Albuquerque, NM TCC Center	Ann Rutherford ruthergary@aol.com
Feb. 12-15	Student Retreat w/ Sr. Antonia	Santa Barbara, CA Mt. Calvary Retreat	Pam Towne pamtowne@sbcglobal.net
Feb. 19-22	Teacher Retreat w/ Sr. Antonia	Santa Barbara, CA Mt. Calvary Retreat	Pam Towne 877-982-4244
Mar. 1	Teacher Renewal w/ Sandy	Ringwood, NJ Franciscan Center	Dan Pienciak wakeupdaniel@aol.com
Mar. 2-7	Teacher Training w/ Sandy	Ringwood, NJ Franciscan Center	Dan Pienciak 732-919-0872
Mar. 27-30	TCC Intensive w/ Sandy	St. John's, NF Canada	Sheila Leonard sheilaleonard@nf.sympatico.ca
Apr. 3-6	CC Retreat w/ Sr. Antonia	Albuquerque, NM Madonna Center	Ann Rutherford ruthergary@aol.com
Apr. 5 or 6	Teacher Renewal w/ Pam	St. Paul, MN Benedictine Center	Carol Mockovak caroledith@usfamily.net
Apr. 7-12	Teacher Training w/ Pam	St. Paul, MN Benedictine Center	Carol Mockovak 612-729-9040
July 17-20	Teacher Conference	San Mateo, CA San Mateo Marriott conference@taichichih-norcal.org, www.taichichihnorcal.org/conference.htm	Lisa Thorburn & Athene Mantle
July 21-22	Seijaku Renewal w/ Pam	San Mateo, CA	Athene Mantle seijaku@taichichih-norcal.org

MORE WORKSHOPS & RETREATS
(Open to all teachers offering events that are wholly devoted to TCC)

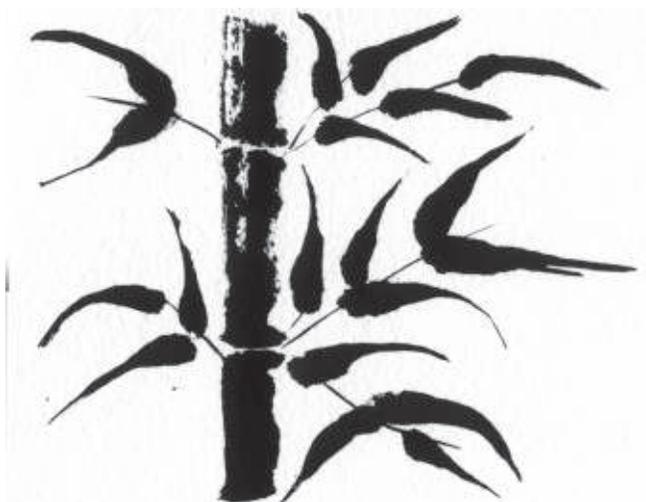
Mar. 13-16 2008	TCC Retreat w/ Carmen Brocklehurst	Albuquerque, NM Spiritual Renewal Center	Judy Hendricks JudyHendricks@comcast.net 505-897-3810
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*Come and connect with your
Tai Chi Chih community*

T'ai Chi Chih Conference 2008
July 17-20, San Francisco Bay Area, California

- ☉ Help gather and focus the energy of the Tai Chi Chih community
- ☉ Gain inspiration and support from being with other Tai Chi Chih teachers
- ☉ Discover for yourself new levels of softness in The Essence

Look for the CONFERENCE REGISTRATION FORM in this Vital Force



Why Have I Come?

(Reflections on the Intensive with Antonia & Pam)

Ringwood, NJ; October By DORENE KRAUSE, MIDLAND PARK, NJ

And again I return to this peaceful place of new beginnings
where my journey began.

The mountains and the trees are as I remember them,
a constant for me,
and I am filled with a sense of coming home.

But much is different for me this time.

There are few familiar faces,
Old friends nowhere around.

I notice this and my mind speaks:

Why have I come?

But in my heart I already know the answer.

For this is where I began to grow,
where my small inner voice dared to speak
and another me emerged.

It is where I learned to fly.

I became my own loving mirror and
smiled at my reflection.

You all remind me of my early steps on a new pathway,
and I am grateful for the reminder . . .

To be embraced by the chi . . .

To trust the process of becoming . . .

And to continue the journey now with new friends
And a heightened awareness.

soft
not shy
confident
not too stubborn
effortless
gliding
free
– PETE GREGORY

dust
only
mirror and
you won't mirror
and mirror
only
dust
– PETE GREGORY

rock
paper
or scissors?
want the secret?
the water
always
wins
– PETE GREGORY

the
fire
in me burns
with passion deep
of dreams I
hope to
keep
– JASON KISSER,
STUDENT OF SHARON SIRKIS

Chi
teacher
brought me to
a foreign land
Newfoundland
now it's
home
– DAN PIENCIAK,
AFTER THE JULY 2007
NEWFOUNDLAND WEEKEND

what
a group ...
translating
unspoken words
into soft
movements
now
– ALICE HOLDEN

calm
water
light and dark
flowing always
constant whole
exist
Life
– LIAM MILLER,
STUDENT OF DONNA McELHOSE

search
no more
for it comes
from within to
light the way
for true
peace
– STACEY MOORE,
STUDENT OF HOPE SPANGLER

with
yin - yang
T'ai Chi Chih
soft-slow-strong-sirm
and feel it
lift you
up
– BETTY ROBERSON,
STUDENT OF HOPE SPANGLER

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