

The Vital Force

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for teachers & students

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Justin Stone: In His Words

Justin Stone Speaks

By Justin F. Stone

GROUNDING

Why it's necessary to keep the concentration in the soles of the feet while doing T'ai Chi Chih?

Actually there are three reasons. **First**, having a point of concentration keeps the mind from wandering and from having extraneous thoughts.

Second, the *t'an tien*, the spot two inches below the navel, is the all-important place *Chi* is stored. It is the seed of intuition and the most important spot from the Chinese standpoint. In T'ai Chi Ch'uan the student is asked to keep his concentration in the *t'an tien*, but this is very difficult and often interferes with breathing. The Tu Mu meridian channel that comes down the front goes thru the *t'an tien* and reaches the soles of the feet, called the *Chu* or bubbling spring.

Therefore by concentrating in the soles of the feet, we serve the same purpose – bringing the *Chi* down to the *t'an tien* by bringing it down to the soles of the feet. The Buddha once said that, “He who keeps his concentration in the soles of his feet while walking, while sitting, and while lying down can heal a thousand illnesses.”

Third and most important from a health standpoint, we want to bring the heart fire, that is the *Yang* of the heart down, instead of letting the *Yin* of the kidneys rise. The great Japanese Zen Master Hakuin Zenji



commented on this when he said, “The essential of the molding of the outer form consists in allowing the inward spirit and vital force, that is the *Chi*, to penetrate into the space below the navel.

Where the inward spirit is concentrated, that is when the elixir of life is made. When this elixir is thus made the outer form becomes firm, and when the outer form becomes firm, the inner spirit becomes perfected. When the inward spirit is perfected long life ensues. This is the secret. It is entirely a matter of the heart fire descending into the space below the navel.”

This gives us a pretty good idea of the importance to health of this practice. And it also graphically demonstrates that T'ai Chi Chih goes much deeper than merely helping us to be healthy. Incidentally, Hakuin made his own breakthrough to enlightenment and totally cured his ailing health by following these principles. After his enlightenment he said, “After this, seeing the things of the world was like observing the back of my own hand.”



From *Justin Stone Speaks on T'ai Chi Chih*, a transcription of a taped lecture, excerpted and reprinted with permission from Good Karma Publishing.

What is the karma I hear so much about?

The Sanskrit word Karma means action, but we generally use it in the sense of the fruits of Karma, the results of action. When we say, “As you make your bed, so shall you lie in it.” We are giving an accurate description of Karma. From the Indian standpoint your deeds will bring about a like reaction. Though it may be over the course of many lives, you will be paid back every farthing for what you have done. And this is in accord with science, which says, “That every action must have an equal reaction.” You cannot fire a gun without having a recoil. So we are governed by the fruits of our actions, and that is Karma.

This Issue & The Conference

The Boulder conference in mid-June was nothing short of stellar, amazing and impressive. The ramifications for, and influences upon, teachers and students will be far-reaching. Among other things, it demonstrated to all in attendance that the community is thriving, coalescing and expanding.

Although many of this issue's articles are drawn from conference talks and demonstrations, they are directly applicable to students of all levels. These include articles by Dora, Caroline, Amy and Dorene on "Feeling the Chi" (pages 3, 9 and 14) and by Pam and Carmen on "Grounding" (pages 7 and 8). We are saving others for the November issue.

A Thousand Points of Light

The Sunday morning conference session, where teachers shared news of projects and ongoing community initiatives, was particularly inspirational. Dozens of teachers stood to briefly mention ways they are sharing T'ai Chi Chih. It was so heartening to see Justin's oft-professed wish, that each teacher pursue his/her own path, was taking hold. Teachers were not waiting to be told what to do; they were taking the reigns to shape their teaching lives. There was cross-pollination and camaraderie; there were supportive groups and spontaneous connections.

That TCC lacks an institutional organization, espoused by Justin since

the beginning, is what allows and nurtures a "flat" structure where each of us is empowered to lead. Nothing could control or corral the energy popping up that morning.

Onward

It's an exciting time to be a practitioner, a new teacher and/or an experienced teacher. Justin – pictured on page one with his friend and teacher Roshi from the Bodhi Manda Zen Center in Jemez, New Mexico, towards the end of both of their lives – would be pleased at the abundance of inner sincerity.

I'm sure everyone attending the 2017 conference is eager for this year's gravitas, grounding, playfulness and lightness to be taken to the next level in 2018 in the Philadelphia area. (No pressure to April Leffler and Kathleen McAllister!) *The Vital Force* will do everything in its power, in print and through social media, to support their efforts. Starting making plans now.

If you are a serious student thinking of becoming a teacher, there's no better time to register for a training course – so that you can play with us next summer.

~ WITH GRATITUDE. KIM GRANT,
ALBUQUERQUE, NM

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The Vital Force

~ Web Site Updates ~

The on-line database (for www.taichichih.org) will be updated within a week of the following deadlines: January 15, March 1, April 15, June 1, July 15, September 1, October 15, & December 1.

~ Submission Deadlines ~

January 1 for the February issue
April 1 for the May issue
July 1 for the August issue
October 1 for the November issue

~ Submission Guidelines ~

Please send articles as Word documents, electronically, to tcc@kimgrant.com. A 1/4 page in this newsletter runs about 200 words; a 1/2 page is 400 words. We are always in need of photos and artwork. Please send high resolution jpgs, which the Editor will crop and edit. If you have 10-12 pieces of related artwork – calligraphy, drawings, photographs, or something that will reproduce well in B/W – please submit them for consideration in an entire issue. The Vital Force reserves the right to edit submission for length and clarity.

~ Giving ~

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A Conference Talk In Boulder

By Dora Wiemann, Albuquerque, New Mexico

What does it mean to feel the *Chi*? As we practice we are grateful to our teacher, and perhaps, our teacher's teachers and to Justin Stone, and perhaps his teachers. This awareness of the ones who came before us – and our gratitude to them – is integral to the practice of T'ai Chi Chih. We're not just placing hands and feet; we're experiencing the glory of creation with all those who are currently practicing and all those who have come before us.



We must be home and be grounded to experience the wisdom and magnitude of the changes these simple movements bring about. Where are we when we practice? Are we 108,000 miles away? Or are we present, here and now? Are we clear and solid or just going through the motions, getting it done? Remember, there's more! There's always more, but we have to be present to get the goodies. When we're present we can feel. Can we feel the bottoms of our feet? Can we feel *the tan t'ien*? Can we feel anything? We must start where we are and go from there. Build on the past experiences of ourselves and our teachers, to know more and to grow.

As we continue to be present and practice, we become aware. Aware of what's happening on the inside, in that internal "happy space." And then, even greater, we become aware of what's happening on the outside, as well. This awareness brings incredible depth and clarity to our practice. As we perform the movements we gain insight into what's happening in our own world and how the movements gently balance our tendencies. What's happening when we pick up the ball in Around the Platter Variation? Are we picking up something, creating something new, allowing it to build, and then what are we letting go of? The answers are all in the movements; we just have to pay attention.

As we practice we become stronger and our awareness grows greater than before. With that awareness comes responsibility, or rather the ability to respond, in a way that's best for all and with gratitude. I am grateful to Justin, who will always be near and dear to my heart. He exemplified this awareness and gratitude. He was clear that TCC is for everyone. He often expressed the statement, "if enough people do TCC, maybe there will be peace in the world."



Conference Rededication Ceremony

By Marie Dotts, Loveland, Colorado

[Editor's Note: Although this is Marie's talk to and for teachers, I believe it's valuable and applicable to all serious practitioners of TCC.]

We now come to the part of the conference when we re-dedicate ourselves as teachers to T'ai Chi Chih and to *teh*. Justin Stone never initiated a recertification policy because he believed in *teh*, the inner sincerity of the teachers. **I would like to share some words from Justin on *teh* before we begin:**

"It is the power of Inner Sincerity, as exemplified by TCC teachers, that has been responsible for the rapid growth of TCC... There isn't the slightest doubt in my mind of the future of TCC; there are reasons why you are here, and there are reasons why you, the teacher, have been brought to it. It is not by accident that you are teaching TCC, and you have a responsibility to keep the practice pure and to be completely honest in your dealings with your students."

"Please never stop trying to improve your practice; this is the responsibility of being a teacher."

"The great treasure of TCC lies in the sincere and capable teachers. TCC's brilliant future depends upon them. This is why I have never taken a cent from a teacher; what I want from them is not money. When I see hospitals, prisons, senior citizen clubs, etc latching on to TCC, that is the greatest reward. It is nice to see people entering the Cosmic Rhythm by learning and doing TCC."

So with Justin's words in our hearts let us begin... You are holding two cups of sand. The black/*yin* sand represents feeling the *Chi* and the white/*yang* sand represents sharing the *Chi*.

Feeling the Chi

Bring your awareness to the cup of black/

yin sand. This sand represents your own personal journey and growth with TCC. I invite you to go back to your very first TCC class or your first introduction to TCC. Take a minute and let yourself connect to the person you were back then. Maybe remember what first brought you to TCC or what you might have been looking for. You did not really know it at the time but that day was the beginning of an amazing journey – a journey of awakening to your own inner love and light. The journey was not always easy. In fact at times it may have been very painful and challenging. But, the journey brought you many gifts; one of which is wisdom. Imagine that you are able to share some of this wisdom with your younger self, beginning on his/her journey with TCC. What words of support and encouragement would you share? Let your heart quietly share them now.

We know our journey is never over for we are always in a state of becoming. I would like you now to imagine who you have become much farther down the path on this journey. Through your dedication to your practice and to your growth you have become an even more powerful force of love and light. Imagine this future self, standing right next to you wanting to share some wisdom and guidance with you. What words of support and encouragement do you most need to hear right now? Let your heart hear and receive them.

The purpose of our journey is joy. Justin said, *"No one ever reaches perfection in TCC – indeed no two will ever perform it in exactly the same way, as it is a living evolving practice – and the joy lies in the journey itself."* Take a minute now and quietly give thanks to TCC and its gifts of growth and transformation in your life. Give thanks to Justin Stone and his willingness to bring forth this powerful and loving practice. Lastly, give thanks to all your teachers and their part they played in supporting your journey.

Sharing the Chi

Bring your awareness to the cup of white/*yang* sand. This sand represents our journey as teachers, sharing the *Chi*. Not every TCC practitioner is called to become a teacher. Do you remember the moment you first felt the call to become a teacher? What did it feel like? How did you know? Some of us knew it the moment we stepped into our first TCC class. Some of

us were more hesitant or reluctant. In fact our teachers may have known it before we did. It does not matter. You are here. You responded to the call to be a force of love on this planet through the spreading and sharing of TCC. That is to be celebrated. And I thank each of you for being here and for becoming teachers.

The February 2009 *Vital Force* focused on sharing and Sky Young-Wick wrote a beautiful article in it titled, *Sharing, a Leadership Quality*. I am going to ask Sky to read her words to us now.

"As a TCC teacher you may have not thought of yourself as a leader, but I think you are. ...One of the things that leaders do best is sharing. They share wisdom and compassion, life's lessons, their time and attention. They may be the one person who really listens to us. Sometimes that includes honest and difficult feedback when we need it, and at other times, it takes the form of gentle encouragement. Most importantly, I believe leaders share their hearts. Their sharing is done without ego because true leaders have humility; they live in gratitude."

I believe this level of leadership is rare. Yet, the spiritual essence of TCC naturally attracts teachers who exude these very qualities. As TCC teachers we are sharing this wonderful gift that our teacher shared with us. We give this gift to ourselves in the form of a daily practice, and then we share it with our students. We share our time, attention, honesty, and encouragement. We are filled with gratitude for this gift to share. Can you embrace yourself as a leader as well as a TCC teacher? In my mind you are all leaders. The world needs this leadership and our willingness to share the gift of TCC. As teachers we are planting seeds, and one seed can start a garden. Sharing is the key."

Our sharing is unique to each of us. And as we have talked about at this conference it also can change over time. How do we know what to share? We feel it! The *Chi* guides us through inspirations, a gentle tug in our hearts but mostly through joy. Sharing what we are uniquely called to share gives us joy! It is so simple and so beautiful.

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CONTINUED FROM P. 4

TCC will spread throughout this world through the *teh* of its teachers. Take a minute now and contemplate what you might personally be called to share or contribute to help the growth of TCC.

Ceremony

I love that every front page of the *Vital Force* states the intention of TCC. And that is, “TCC is a service to humanity. It is a form of love.” The *Chi* has a plan and mission for TCC in this world and I believe that it is bigger than any of us can imagine. This large Tao symbol represents the *Chi's* plan for TCC in this world. We each are needed for this plan and play an important part – a part that no one else can play.

When you feel called, please come up to the center and pour your sand into the large Tao symbol. Let the pouring of your *yin* sand be a symbol of your re-dedication to your personal TCC practice and growth. Let the pouring of your *yang* sand be a symbol of your re-dedication to sharing TCC with the world as a service to humanity, as a form of love.



We Are Grateful; We Give Thanks

By Lisa Otero, Port Hueneme, California

Planning and hosting our annual T'ai Chi Chih Teacher Conference is a love offering to the community. A group of teachers volunteer to work together throughout the year to bring to fruition an event that will strengthen and enrich us as individuals and as teachers, in keeping with Justin Stone's expansive vision of TCC as a service to humanity.

We express our deep appreciation to the Core Planning Committee for the 2017 Teacher Conference in Boulder, Colorado: Marie Dotts (conference coordinator), Leya Cragin (registrar), Lisa VV (venue/hospitality), and Lisa Otero (program/outreach). The core was supported by the gracious, dynamic and generous TCC Community of Northern Colorado: Sandy Roerig, Lisa Stoyen, JoEtta Heck, Holly Trenary, Doriane Tippet, Rebecca Paulson, Bonnie Schowalter, and Eliza Fulton, and of course, Caroline Guilott of Louisiana.

As we do each year at conference, we raised funds to support our teacher scholarship fund, which helps teachers attend conferences and other continuing education opportunities. Special thanks to Lucinda Kutsko, Cathy Fedewa, and Lynne Roberts for their organizing skills and tireless effort. Jim Eagle, Laurie Thomas, Elissa McGuire, and Janet Knapp Starr volunteered their winning personalities and surely sold more raffle tickets than have ever been sold at conference. Bonnie Schowalter served as auctioneer at one of the most delightful vocal auctions we have ever had. Thanks to all who participated and donated so generously.

Mary Ruiz and Kim Grant (*The Vital Force*) and Stephen Thompson (tcccommunity.net) supported our outreach efforts throughout the year.

And thank you, thank you, thank you to teachers who prepared such rich, lively and thought-provoking presentations: Dr. David Parrish, Carmen Brocklehurst, Pam Towne, Marie Dotts, Sandy McAlister, Caroline Guilott, Dora Wiemann, Amy Tyksinski, Jessica Lewis, Donna McElhose, Dorene Krause, Lisa Otero, Daniel Pienciak, and Darlene Karasik. This *Vital Force* brims with their contributions.

Much appreciation to Neal Roy and April Leffler for hosting our talent and storytelling evening and for all of those who took the stage to share their delightful gifts. (And more articles are forthcoming for the November issue.)

Our rededication ceremony was affirming and deeply touching. Thank you to Marie Dotts and to Pam Towne and Stephen Thompson for bringing us together and reigniting our commitment to our practice, our teaching, and to each other in such a beautiful way.

Thank you to Linda Jones and David Parrish for helping us capture the spirit of our conference and the beauty of our practice in video recordings to share with the world via the Internet.

Attending conference is a gift you give to yourself; a commitment to ongoing education and growth for you and your students; and an opportunity to honor and express appreciation to Justin Stone by celebrating and strengthening community ties.

TCC: A Mindfulness Based Practice

By Sandy McAlister, Hayward, California

A presentation given at conference this year by David Parrish, *The Science of Well Being – The Brain on T'ai Chi Chih*, made for lively discussions in my TCC classes. The heart of what he talked about are the research studies concluding that through mindfulness based practices positive changes in the brain can be seen through magnetic resonance images.

For years most TCC teachers have touted the benefits of TCC practice in physical gains and changes, also noting the relaxation effect of the practice and how beneficial that can be for peace of mind and calm emotions and reducing stress. Many studies over the years have shown that T'ai Chi practices have many physical benefits. TCC has specifically been used for some of those studies.

But what about considering TCC a mindfulness practice? I asked my students if they thought of TCC as a mindfulness practice and if so in what way. The general consensus was yes, but the value of the discussion was not the conclusion but the discussion itself and offering them an opportunity to explore the way they think about TCC.

One of the core principles of our practice is to ground the energy. This cannot be done with a wandering inattentive mind. Practitioners not only work to master the physical movements but an important part of the practice is working with and training the mind. We are taught to keep our concentration focused on the soles of the feet or the *tan t'ien*. If we find the mind wandering we gently nudge it back to the present moment being mindful of feeling every inch of our movement through every moment. It becomes a feeling awareness practice. We are mindfully present without processing.

Justin said, never do a careless TCC practice, and, never go on automatic. Both these statements imply that we are to be mindfully present as we move. I would conclude that TCC is very much a mindfulness practice.

Is TCC a mindfulness meditation practice? In Justin's book, *Meditation for Healing*, he has a chapter titled, "Moving Meditation," in which he writes about TCC specifically as a moving meditation and includes instruction on a few of the movements.

In *Spiritual Odyssey*, he writes about Zen practice training the mind, then goes on to write, "T'ai Chi Chih works from the other end, not from Mind but from the *Chi*, which affects the Mind, just as the Mind affects the *Chi*. But T'ai Chi Chih also affects the health, through circulation and balancing of the *Chi* = this is the great bonus."

Justin recognized the power and value of the practice to influence the mind and considered TCC a moving meditation.

Often in my classes, after we have concluded a full practice, we sit in silence for a few minutes. I do not call it meditation. I ask that students be present with the moment, aware of now, sensations, breathing, state of mind. It is simply mindful sitting.

I know of one teacher that has to label her class as a Moving Meditation class because it would not be accepted at a particular facility as a TCC class because of the martial arts connotation regardless of her explanation to them. On the door to one of my classes I had a sign, "Quite Please, TCC Class in Session." We still had people walking through the room and talking. When I changed the sign to, "Moving Meditation Class in Session," the interruptions nearly ceased. Then there are places that will not allow TCC to be taught there if it is called a meditation. Regardless of the label, it is a powerful practice that brings about physical and mental changes.

TCC is a valuable tool for health and wellbeing but not of much use if people don't know about it. I am not at all suggesting that we change the name of TCC. But I think we can consider TCC a moving meditation practice and a mindfulness practice. Talking about it in those terms may interest more people, should that be appropriate for your audience, especially by pointing out the evidenced-based studies that show the value of those types of practices in affecting the brain.



Conference Perspective & Grounding

By Pam Towne, Oceanside, California

This year's T'ai Chi Chih conference may have been the best yet.

Why? A gorgeous location along Boulder Creek at the base of the mountains, the 120 teachers (many at conference for the first time and others returning after years away), the practices, the well-planned program, and the spirit of unity and harmony.

If you are a teacher, set your intention now to attend next summer's conference. Make it a priority and plan ahead to attend.

Carmen and I were asked to give our perspectives on grounding. Here's a summary of my talk:

Grounding in TCC Practice

The purpose of coming back to rest in between the movements is to allow the *Yin* and *Yang Chi* (which have separated and been circulating during movement) to flow back together and to be stored in the bones and *tan t'ien*. Thus we become whole. Or perhaps better said, **we return to our natural state of wholeness.**

The *Chi* is like electricity, with a positive and negative element. On an electrical plug there is a grounding wire. When we come to rest in TCC, we are plugging into the earth, grounding ourselves. (In Seijaku be sure to ground a little longer between movements.) How do I know I am grounded? I wait at rest until I feel the *Chi* has settled and my body is ready to move again.

We not only ground at rest, but also when moving, by focusing in the soles of the feet or *tan t'ien*. I recommend feeling your weight shifting *very slowly and gradually* from one foot to the other, like grains of sand falling in an hourglass. This helps to move with softness and continuity while maintaining our focus in the soles of the feet.

As a teacher, it is useful to count the number of repetitions we are doing. I count in the soles of my feet. As I shift forward I think to myself "one." As I shift back I think "and"... "two" (forward) ... "and" (back) ... "three"... and so forth. It keeps me grounded while teaching.

Being grounded leads to gratitude. I am grateful for this beautiful earth that supports us; grateful for my TCC and Seijaku practice and teaching; grateful for all my TCC friends; grateful for my life.



Some Conference Notes On Moving

By Daniel Pienciak, Howell, New Jersey

Many teachers have asked for opportunities at conferences for movement refinement/correction from the trainers, so we (Sandy, Pam and I) placed special focus on movement in at least one group practice, with the intention of afterward giving individual comment for refinement/correction. It might be helpful to note some common pitfalls/areas where self-study and refinement is valuable for all of us.

In Rocking Motion, many do not "release" their knees as they should. The legs should become *straight without locking* when forward on the "balls" of the feet (heels slightly up) *and* when back on the heels (toes slightly up).

In forward and backward weight shifts, when shifting backward, the back leg needs to bend *continuously* (to "soften") *as much as the front leg* does when shifting forward. If not, there is an incomplete weight shift onto the back leg. (Perhaps the front heel is out too far?). *The back leg must straighten when we have fully shifted forward.*

In side-to-side weight shifts, *if the legs do not bend smoothly and equally*, the weight shift will not be complete and the movement will be "top heavy" (and may cause leaning to the side). It helps to *feel as though* the knee is *leading* the weight shift, so that we remain low throughout the weight shift.

Having/feeling a "swivel" in side-to-side movements does *not* mean that either hip rises when shifting to the side. Some folks pick up the left hip at the end of shift to the left, and pick up the right hip when shifting to the right. The side-to-side shift should feel as though you are seated on the edge of a flat surface behind you (like the edge of a table), and that *you remain seated and upright* as you shift and the waist turns a bit to the side.

When the weight shift completes to the left (with the right leg straight), the lower abdomen may feel that it has dropped down, and *visa versa* for the right side. However, the hips do not "swing" from side to side, with left hip higher than the right, or right hip higher than the left. I hope these tips help.

Grounding: Our Favorite Term

By Carmen L. Brocklehurst, Albuquerque, New Mexico

When Justin visited New Mexico, I volunteered to drive him around. On one occasion, we went to the laundry to pick up his clothes. It was an ordinary, everyday experience. But on this day, as I sat in the car and watched him walk toward the car holding his small bundle of clothes, I saw Joy walking towards me. He wasn't doing anything unusual, but he was unusual. Because he was grounded, he embodied the essence of T'ai Chi Chih, Joy Thru Movement.

Justin says in his writings and in *Justin Stone Speaks*, "The *Chi* affects us, but we affect the *Chi*." Being ungrounded during TCC practice leads to being ungrounded in our life and vice versa; being ungrounded in our lives leads to being ungrounded in our practice. Yes, there is help.

It is amazing how fear comes into play in our lives in so many ways, as Dr. David Parrish says in his book. One student going through chemotherapy had not been practicing regularly so I went with him to his therapy and we did TCC/Seijaku/Fast Track while he had his treatment. By the time therapy was over, he was soft and conscious of the bottoms of his feet. He texted later that "concluding my TCC – body and mind filled with peace, freedom from fear, and now there is comfort. I give thanks for TCC, Justin, my teachers and the *Chi*." You will know you are grounding when you have a feeling of gratitude.

A student asked, "My thoughts are not wandering away from TCC, but I have so many moving parts that I'm thinking about, trying to do correctly, that I often forget to focus on the soles of my feet. If I focus only on the soles of my feet will the rest of it fall into place?" Yes, staying in the bottoms of our feet makes us more conscious of what we are doing. We don't *think* about the movement; *we feel* the *Chi* moving through us, through the movement.

Let's work with some movements: Bass Drum and Carry the Ball and Pulling in the Energy.

Check your practice; look for these signs:

- Know where you are; feel the heel, arch and ball of the foot.
- Are you leading with the hip rather than with your *tan t'ien*?
- Is your foot twisting? (The only movement with foot twisting or swiveling is Working the Pulley.)
- Ground emotions; feel what you are doing. Don't go to your head for answers; stay in the *tan t'ien*.
- Justin used to say to us, "Don't you feel anything? The truth was that I didn't, but I **thought** I did. I

thinking rather than feeling.

For sure, we must stay in the soles of our feet. (Some people spell it *souls* of our feet.) We know the movements. We have done them many times. We must do what we know. If we find that we are **not** turning our waist during the hip swivel, or shifting our weight, then we simply do it. It is not enough to think that we are doing it. Feel it; we must feel the circles we are making. Be confident in that. Now we must stay in the bottoms of our feet. Not just when we are doing our practice, but as we go through our daily lives. Do we find that we're *not feeling* the bottoms of our feet? Then in this moment let's **feel them**.

We notice that the more we stay in the bottoms of our feet, reminders about how to do the movements correctly flow out of our wisdom center (the *tan t'ien*), and our bodies respond easily – more easily than when the reminder comes from our guilt ridden mental memories of how we are not enough. We are the product of the *Chi*. We are enough. We are learning to Love and Share the *Chi*.

What is our experience with staying in our feet?

- I think I am staying there, but am I? How do I know? As we say at the TCC Center in Albuquerque, "Feel your feet on the carpet." What does it feel like to our body?
- **Trying** is replaced with flowing, not floating. Some people like floating; let it go. **When we are floating we don't feel like ourselves; it feels strange, otherworldly. We came to be in this world.**
- Begin to feel the *Chi* as pervasive – everywhere present – including in ourselves.
- What does it feel like to be grounded and connected to the *Chi*? We feel connected, free, soft; we feel light but we continue to feel. The thought "how simple" often comes to us.
- We feel plugged in. We are no longer looking to do the movements correctly; we are feeling them and that's what does them correctly.
- Avoid thinking words, and use feeling words instead. Use "it feels so simple" rather than "but I thought I was doing it right."



Teacher Carmen Brocklehurst meets Fort Collins student Trudi at the community practice. Trudi had been practicing with Carmen's YouTube video ever since Trudi read the AAPR article.

Feel The Chi?

By Caroline Guillot, Lake Charles, Louisiana

Why? Because it is T'ai Chi Chih. Because it is scrumptiously delicious. Because it is all, because it is love, because it is life inside you and me.

How can we feel the *Chi*?

- by letting go;
- by slowing down;
- by paying attention to all the nuances in the body;
- by being strong, rooted in the feet and light in the body, soft and powerful all at once, flowing from the *tan t'ien*;
- by opening and relaxing the wrists to encounter the air;
- by letting go completely.

For my conference presentation, I chose three movements: Rocking Motion, Daughter in the Valley and Pulling Taffy.

Before the start of the movement, we **surrender** to the place where we stand; we **let go** totally; the shoulders drop, the arms and hands hang along the body and we breathe; we get quiet; we **drop in the body** and we **notice**, so we can start to feel. We get ready to start moving and we release again allowing the *tan t'ien* to take us in its flow. And the minute we end the movement, we let go, standing tall, rooted, aligned and free to just be. Totally **delicious**, scrumptious.

Feeling the *Chi* means understanding all the principles that Justin gave us about how to move. With those, TCC can teach us TCC. That first glimpse of feeling it in the body will show you the way... if you pay attention and **listen** closely. We all can do this since we know how to move and because we know the principles of how to move. **Those are the secrets. So there are no secrets.** We want to focus and **flow** from the *tan t'ien*, to allow the waist, wrists and hands to be relaxed and opened, to **release** stress from the body by letting go of tension, to move with softness and continuity, to be **aware** of the polarity and circularity... and to be **patient** while we move and with ourselves.

When there is polarity, let's make sure there is polarity. Let's not miss it. When palms of the hands face one another, can we feel their energetic connection? Can we feel the polarity even when they pass each other so quickly in Pulling Taffy? Yes. We bring our attention immediately into the palms of the hands; we slow down a smidgen, still flowing. We feel it for sure, we feel our **feet strong** and **rooted** on the floor and we let it flow inside. We become mindful, not thinking, **light** in the body. Delicious!

From the beginning, we become aware of that heavy air and our wrists and palms moving through it. We become aware of the connection between the hands, the connection of the feet with the floor; we make it **count**, we **notice**. And we let go more and more.

TCC is an “exercise” in letting go – letting go even of the idea of how it should be.

We are aligned, we move slowly, we are aware of our feet that support us, we flow from the *tan t'ien*, **allowing** the movements to be **full** before they turn into their opposite, *yinning* and *yanging* without hurrying. We let the movement unfold with softness and power, with strength and grace, and we become aware of every little nuance, freeing ourselves from trying too hard, from reaching too far or not enough; we listen inside and let each movement come alive all the way to the fingertips and the toes. Alive inside and outside, we become aware of our own self. That is love.

What an amazing practice! Thank you, Justin, for this gift.



My Experiences Sharing The Chi

By Jessica Lewis, Claymont, Delaware

When I became accredited in 2015, I was the only teacher in Delaware.

I often felt like I was scratching away at a boulder with one fingernail, somehow expecting to make a dent. As time has passed, however, I'm increasingly grateful for the *Chi*, which continually generates bursts of creativity unlike anything I've experienced. **Today my life is filled with a sense of mission, excitement, and fun in ways I never imagined possible.**

The following are suggestions on ways to brand yourself, generate free press, and stir your own pot as much as possible. The ideas are based on my experience, coupled with an almost constant stream of *Chi*-inspired brainstorm.

- Pick or create a logo; if you like lotuses, use a lotus. Use it everywhere: business cards, letterheads, class flyers, or build a website with a big lotus on the homepage. If you're not comfortable designing your own, head to a local office supply store. All have graphic artists on staff who'll design a complete package. Or visit vistaprint.com to buy 500 business cards for about \$10.
- Having a website (or Facebook page) lends credibility. Wordpress makes designing slick websites a breeze, but if that seems overwhelming, take advantage of the wealth of knowledge in our community. (Lisa Otero, Kim Grant, and Janet Knapp-Starr have all been so helpful to me.)
- Leverage free press: I put together an hour-long introductory workshop, then called the health editor at the newspaper and they were happy to cover the event. If you aren't sure what to say, there are resources on both TCC websites. The really good news is that your local newspaper will often give you photos or sometimes even a short video that you can use for self-promotion. Also, at your local office supply store, pay a couple dollars to enlarge onto poster-sized engineering paper any articles you're featured in. Hang them on the wall at future presentations; they (and you) will look great.
- Contact anyone you think might be open to a free 15-30 minute presentation; free presentations can easily lead to regular gigs. I've presented at athletic clothing stores, gyms of all sizes, holistic health centers, community Christian churches/spiritual centers, rotary clubs, business networking groups, parks and recreation centers, even craft fairs. At the very least these events will provide publicity for existing classes.
- Contact doctors willing to speak with you, especially Functional or Integrative Medicine practitioners, plus Chiropractors, Osteopaths, Homeopaths, and Naturopaths. We now know that "T'ai Chi Chih is an evidence-based mindfulness practice which irrefutably enhances the wellbeing of any regular practitioner." Use that language *liberally* or contact Dr David Parrish or Anita Vestal for more info on how to discuss TCC confidently in any medical setting.
- Contact community colleges and universities; ask to be added to the curriculum of any Mind-Body Major and Minor. Or ask schools to add TCC to their PE curriculums; a model syllabus is already available on both TCC websites, compliments of April Leffler's longstanding class at Widener University. Amy Tyksinski's TEDx talk (on www.taichichih.org and YouTube) is a great resource for discussing the benefits of teaching students of all ages.
- Contact TV stations in your area including community and Christian stations (the FCC requires religious networks to run a certain amount of "God neutral programming.") A year ago, an opportunity to be interviewed for 15 minutes on a community talk show, which runs daily on a local Christian station, fell into my lap – another example the *Chi* running the show whether we know it or not. The interview process felt exciting rather than nerve-wracking: kind of like the teacher accreditation presentation on steroids. Both the video and a list of questions they provided prior to the shoot are available on both TCC websites; feel free to use them as preparation for your own adventures in TV-land. The larger world is waiting to hear from all of us.

Remember that all things are possible with the *Chi*. Just because something hasn't happened yet doesn't mean it won't. Your website and Facebook posts, and simply your very different way of being in the world, spread the *Chi* more than you can imagine. So, get out there any way you can – and don't be surprised when you begin attracting students almost by accident.



The Brain On TCC

Neuroscience, Neuroplasticity, Meditation and Moving Meditation

Dr. David Parrish, Media, Pennsylvania



Over the last decade, scientific research has clearly determined that the brain changes consistently over the entire lifetime. Prior to this new evidence based on brain imaging technology, it was believed that after early adulthood the brain did not continue to change or develop. This discovery is revolutionary in many ways. It means that we can change how our brains function and the quality of our life.

According to leading scientists, development depends on whether we practice the specific ways of experiencing and behaving that change the existing neuro patterns in a desired direction. Dr. Richard Davidson, a leading brain scientist, has asserted that given that we now know that we can take responsibility for our minds and brains in terms of actively engaging in practices that change the brain in positive ways, we can intentionally produce a state of well-being (see “The

World We Make” on YouTube, March 10, 2016). He further stated that, “we can see in our research the influence of certain kinds of meditative practices on the cultivation of key skills that are essential aspects of well-being.”



Research has shown that meditation practices that involve the practice of attention, resilience, positive outlook, and generosity have a significant influence on the structure and functioning of the brain. Based on this research, Davidson concludes that if we practice specific forms of meditation that change the brain and produce an experience of well-being, then well-being is a skill that can be acquired.

The implication of this revolution in brain research and specifically the finding that certain meditative practices have significant influence on changing neuropatterns, is that the practice of T'ai Chi Chih, as a powerful form of active meditation, can change the brain and produce a state of well-being. **Therefore, when we practice TCC, we are practicing specific aspects of well-being.**

In TCC we practice focusing and directing attention to various areas of the body and aspects of moving, such as softness, continuity, circularity, and moving from the center. As we focus attention on these areas and aspects, we are training the brain to integrate these aspects of movement into our physical movement and into our movement in life.

Resilience is another powerful aspect of our practice of TCC. When we practice “letting go,” letting go of tension, letting go of the past and future, and letting go of thinking, we are practicing resilience. This practice trains our brain to let go of negativity and let go of the past, and thus recover more quickly from the adversities of life.

Positive outlook and generosity are qualities that arise out of the practice of TCC, and thus further train the brain to integrate aspects of well-being.

The practice of TCC constitutes a practice of well-being. This means that TCC is an evidenced based mindfulness practice that changes the mind and brain and produces an experience of well-being.

The fact that TCC is an evidence based mindfulness practice means that based on current science, TCC is a practice that can have a significant positive impact on brain development. It is especially valuable for teens to learn TCC given the fact that this practice enhances the brain for learning and helps reduce anxiety. With this scientific base, it is a potentially important practice to introduce in a curriculum of basic life education in schools.

Justin Stone Speaks

By Justin F. Stone

From *Justin Stone Speaks on T'ai Chi Chih*, a transcription of a taped lecture, excerpted and reprinted with permission from Good Karma Publishing.

A Chinese monk once said, "When the mind is transparent and pure as if reflected on the mirror-like surface of the water there is nothing in the world you would dislike. When it is serene as the light breeze in the sunshine there will be no one whom you would like to forget." Such serenity is rare in these hectic days. Nevertheless it is possible.

The Japanese speak of *Seijaku*, serenity in the midst of activity. Not escaping from the world to some mountaintop, as is taught in the Indian teachings. But finding the real meaning, fulfillment, energy and wisdom in the midst of everyday hustle and bustle. Building a silent and imperturbable center while active in the disappointments and triumphs of our busy lives, this is real fulfillment.

“ It takes actual practice. You must do it yourself.

Words will not do it, no matter how reassuring or clever. Passive listening as in hearing well-meaning sermons is a waste of time no matter how good the speaker makes you feel and how clever his theories. It takes actual practice. You must do it yourself.

The quality of the *Prana*, which the Chinese call *Chi* must be changed. The Vital Force that flows through you sometimes called the intrinsic energy must be helped to flow freely and to be balanced. It is this energy that makes you what you are. And when it circulates with hindrance there is a feeling of well-being.

When the negative and positive aspects, the *Yin* and the *Yang* are balanced, impediments seem to drop away. The mind body continuum works to adjust to its maximum potential and the aqueous excess tends to dry up and there is easy weight control. We must remember that the body is about 70% fluid, and too much fluid is decidedly *Yin* or negative.

It is no surprise of such circumstance that we experience good health and peace of mind – and that we find creativity effortlessly flowing. To one who understands the underlying unity of life it is not surprising that our outer activity is changed as easily as our inner being.

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**There are really two ways to bring about these changes.** What must be changed is this life force, this intrinsic energy. And this can be affected by working thru the mind, which is difficult to do, or by working thru the *Chi*, the Vital Force, which can be relatively easy. Both ways are effective.

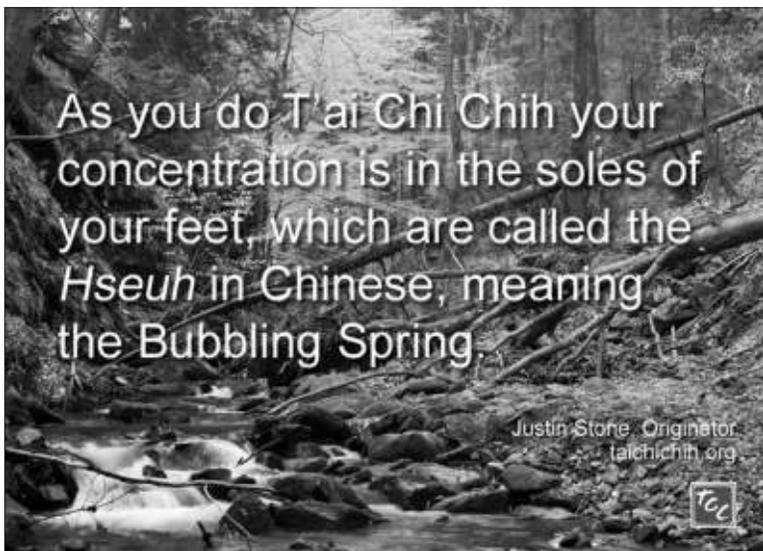
The practices of Zen and Indian deep meditation work with the mind. And mind control can be painful. Indeed living a busy life it is almost impossible to fully succeed in these efforts because the mind is always restless and sometimes troubled. Nevertheless conscientious practice of Zen and Zen meditation will definitely have an effect on the *Chi*, the Vital Force. And bring about deep changes in us.

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There are few who are prepared to make the sacrifices necessary for this type of practice, which is best served if we retreat from the world. It is much easier and more suitable for our way of life to work from the other side, to directly cultivate the *Chi* itself, to free it so it circulates easily – and to balance the negative and positive aspects of this Vital Force, the *Yin* and *Yang Chi*.

Looking from the other end we will find that such practice automatically influences the mind and brings about the desired results. Practice of Hatha Yoga if successful will have the effect. But there are few true teachers in the West and there are dangers to the strenuous practice and Hatha Yoga is not an end in itself, but a preliminary Yoga leading to concentration, meditation and Samadhi.

The Chinese thousands of years ago cultivated the science of *Yin* and *Yang*. In Chinese cosmology, from the reality without aspect that they call the Tao, comes first manifestations, the *Yin Chi* and the *Yang Chi*.



One negative and positive energy. The Tao itself is also called the great T'ai Chi; they are synonyms. And [they are] sometimes translated as supreme ultimate.

From the unity of the supreme ultimate, the un-carved block, we get the division into the *Yin Chi* and the *Yang Chi*. And this takes place before heaven, earth and man appear. Heaven results from the accumulation of the *Yang Chi* and earth comes from the accumulation of the *Yin Chi*. Man comes about as the result of the so-called wedding of heaven and earth. This is why Japanese flower arrangement is always three pointed. Heaven on top, the earth below and man in the middle. So, man and with his excess, the individual is actually the product of the *Yin Chi* and *Yang Chi*. This corresponds perfectly with the findings of science, which reduces so called matter to energy, sometimes with unfortunate results.



What is the relationship between Karma and the *Chi* we have been talking about?

That is about the deepest question [a person] could ask. And to answer it properly I'm going to have to go into some weighty matters – including the part of habit and habit energy weighs in our lives.

When the brain orders a particular action a move is made called *Vritti* in the Indian language. Faint at first, this groove becomes deeper as we repeat and repeat the same action. Let's say I have a disappointment and take a few drinks afterward. It seems to make me feel better, so the next time I am depressed I drink again. Soon drinking becomes a habitual action in response to disappointment. Now, the *Vritti*, the habit move, has been made so deep, that it becomes what the Indians call *Vashana*, literally habit energy.

We are molded by habit energies, perhaps through many lives. It is true that in meditation and in T'ai Chi practice we are building habits and they are constructive ones. The *Vashanas*, the habit energies, contribute to our lives. When these habit energies, may they be the constructive or destructive, become overly strong they develop into lasting tendencies that may endure through many lifetimes. These tendencies are called *Samskaras*. It is the reason why many of us do things we really don't want to do. Actions we don't understand, such as the habitual drinking of the drunkard, which he seems powerless to oppose. Only by 'burning the seeds of Karma' that is erasing the beginnings of these *Vashanas*, the habit energies, can we change, and that is truly Yoga. Without going back and erasing the causes we are powerless.

Now, when we do deep meditation these grooves are smoothed out and the strength of the *Vashanas* are clinging, gradually lessens. To do this erasure through deep meditation is difficult.

To do it through T'ai Chi practice is easy. As the *Chi*, the vital force, begins to flow more freely and the blockage disappears, our whole make-up changes. We are not thinking as we practice just keeping our concentration in the soles of the feet. So, we have all the advantages of meditation plus those of exercise and spiritual cultivation.

Just as the flow of the *Chi* can help us lose unwanted pounds, so can this flow erase unwanted habits. Many smokers seem to give up cigarettes naturally without effort once the *Chi* begins flowing. Others find their characteristic moves become more joyous. Remember what we think and feel influences the *Chi*, but the *Chi* also influences what we think and feel. **We are no longer solely creatures of habit, as the free flowing *Chi* seems to break our bounds. T'ai Chi Chih appears to be the easiest and perhaps the best way to erase the seeds of Karma.** Isn't this the direction in which freedom lies?

“ as the *Chi*,
the vital force,
begins to flow more
freely and the
blockage disappears,
our whole
make-up changes

Wrist Vitality: Feeling The Chi

By Amy Tyksinski, Albuquerque, New Mexico

When practicing T'ai Chi Chih, one of the essential elements to enhance *Chi* circulation in my experience is found within the wrists and knowing how to engage them in various movements. For example, while practicing Around the Platter, take a look at the hand position when the hands are closest to the body at the center of the chest.

Do the fingers droop downward? If so, lift them to neutral, where the hand is in line with the forearm. Feel into this shift. Then (*and this is the critical piece*), hinging from the wrists, lift the palms ever more slightly upward. You might notice a slight tug in the wrists.

Try Around the Platter and see what you feel with palms slightly lifted (no more than roughly 20-30% from neutral depending on your wrists.) **The opening in the wrists cultivated by lifting the hands slightly is what I like to refer to as “vitality” in the wrists.** This slight muscular engagement opens the meridian channels in the wrists and invites the *Chi* to flow much more strongly through the system.



To expand further on the power of the wrists and the importance of their engagement or vitality in our TCC practice, let's look at another movement, Push Pull. First, again take a look at the starting position. With the palms at the shoulders open to the wall in front of you, hinging from the wrists tilt the palms backward slightly so that you again feel a tiny tug in the wrists. Now, with an awareness of an openness in the wrists (though not forgetting the 60-40 emphasis in the *yang* hand to balance which ever foot has stepped out), allow the *tan t'ien* to compel you forward.

What do you feel as the wrists (rather than the palms or fingertips) trace the underside of the slightly downward-pointing elliptical shape? For me, I feel a much **greater sense of aliveness in the body and flow of energy** when my wrists are engaged in this way as opposed to when flowing from the *tan t'ien* with a more neutral wrist.

Breakout Session: Energy

By Dorene Krause, Midland Park, New Jersey

“Energy is rooted in the feet, transmitted through the legs, controlled by the waist and manifested in the hands.” – T'ai Chi Ch'uan Classics

I first heard this quotation in 2001 when I was a fairly new student attending monthly Saturday Prep Classes with Dan Pieniac at Antonia's. I always took copious notes, so I wrote it down. The next month I heard the same phrase and wrote it down again. Mind you, I had no idea what it meant but figured it must be important because I kept hearing it over and over again. Because I was a quiet observer then with little confidence and barely a voice of my own, I never thought to ask. Years into my teaching I began to understand and apply these words to my own practice and eventually brought it into my teaching. I also had the opportunity at the 2017 conference to lead a breakout session and share with some of the teachers there.

When doing vertical (up and down) movements such as Rocking Motion; the beginning of Pulling Taffy, Variation #2, Wrist Circles; Light at the Top of the Head/Light at the Temple; and even Joyous Breath, **I started to visualize the energy “rooted in the feet” travelling up the legs (helping them straighten) and then to the t'an tien and finally into my arms and hands.** Eureka! I began to notice that the rise up onto the balls of the feet was actually coming from the *tan t'ien*. The arms began to move weightlessly with no effort. This one concept changes the way these “up and down” movements feel: less doing and less effort... more softness, continuity and balance.

I share this with students, and they are amazed at the physical balance it brings to a movement such as Rocking Motion. They begin to feel steadier in the movement while not rising high up onto the toes or shifting the weight so far back into the heel that they become wobbly. Because they are more grounded in their feet, and aware that the *tan t'ien* is guiding the body, the arms are not working so hard to keep steady.

Rocky Mountain High

By JoEtta Heck (Windsor, Colorado) and Eliza Fulton (Glenwood Springs, Colorado)

These are lyrics to our parody of John Denver's Rocky Mountain High performed at the conference. It really tells the story of Marie Dotts bringing the Chi to Colorado.

Chi was born in the summer of nineteen seventy four
Coming home to a place it'd never been before
It left our worries behind us, you might say it softened some
You might say it found love at every door...

When it first came to the mountains, its essence was far away
In the air... just waiting to come down
The *tan t'ien* is ready... for the *Chi* to settle there
But it keeps circulating... throughout the town.

Yes, the Colorado Rocky Mountain high
We've seen the *Chi* up high in the sky
Its shadow from the starlight... is softer than a lullabye...
Rocky mountain high... - Colorado
Rocky mountain high... - Colorado.

Chi climbed cathedral mountains, and saw many friends below
It welcomed all willing to receive...
And they say that it got crazy once and it tried to reach us all
In Boulder... it finally did succeed.

It walks in quiet solitude... the forest and the streams
Seeking grace... in every step it takes
The *Chi* has turned inside of us to try and understand
The serenity... of a clear blue mountain lake.

And the Colorado Rocky Mountain high
We've seen the *Chi* up in high the sky
You can chat with friends [*fasi*] and listen to the wisdom in their
reply
Rocky Mountain high... - Colorado
Rocky mountain high... - Colorado.

Now our lives are full of softness and our hearts are letting go
Our hope is for peace around the world
We know you feel the *Chi* and wish to share it some more
With friends and strangers across the land.

And the Colorado Rocky Mountain high
We've seen the *Chi* up high in the sky
We're glad you've made this journey... to share with us some
time...

Rocky Mountain high [*do not draw out so long NO Colorado*]
It's a Colorado Rocky Mountain "Hi"
We've seen the *Chi* up high in the sky

Friends around the *Chi* circle and everybody's high...

Rocky mountain high... - Colorado
Rocky mountain high... [hold up sign and shout "Welcome to"] -
Colorado
Rocky mountain high... [hold up sign and shout "Glad you're
here"] - Colorado
Rocky mountain high... [hold up sign and shout "Have some fun"]
- Colorado
Rocky mountain high... [hold up sign and shout "Make new
friends"] - Colorado Rocky mountain high... [hold up sign and
shout "Welcome to"] - Colorado



*The Northern Colorado Conference Committee
(with one interloper and Lisa Otero behind the camera).*

Take Me Home, Chi-Full Roads

By Meg Scinto, Ringwood, New Jersey

After the wonderful *Feel the Chi, Share the Chi* conference, I drove to the airport. The drive floated seamlessly (which is not typical for some Colorado highways), the beautiful Flatirons on my right bidding me farewell as the “sunshine made me smile.”

When I reached my row on the plane, a friendly-faced gentleman from Colorado Springs offered to take my backpack and stood up while I entered the row for my window seat. Kindness. There was no middle seat passenger, which afforded us the opportunity to chat and more space to breathe. Grateful.

We engaged in light conversation and I mentioned my reason for visiting. He seemed very interested, telling me his wife works in a holistic practice. As the conversation flowed, I shared my interest in bringing this practice to veteran’s centers and VFWs to assist veterans with health issues like PTSD and more. (This was the topic I chose for the Saturday lunchtime breakout discussions.) To my surprise he had just discussed with his congressman the need for more support/relief for veterans, specifically on reorienting them to life after service. His reason was personal; his 25-year-old nephew from Ft. Collins took his life shortly after returning from Afghanistan. My heart sank for him, his nephew and his parents, and the veterans who struggle today. Hearing this story – combined with Dr. David Parrish’s presentation on evidence-based scientific research that T’ai Chi Chih, as a form of meditation, can positively change the brain – served to strengthen my motivation to establish a local class for veterans.



The next morning I taught the last class of an 8-week session for seniors. With only 5 hours of sleep I arrived anxious to share conference moments with the students and to conduct a peaceful, joyful final class. There was time for a quick glimpse of Saturday’s live feed practice before beginning Rocking Motion.

The class seemed to flow. While reviewing “the taffies,” I utilized the practical tips I learned from “Demystifying Teaching the Taffies” workshop, taught by Amy Tyksinski and Donna McElhose. The students’ movements appeared more cohesive with less effort. There were certainly fewer puzzled faces. They may have not yet completely embodied Perpetual Motion Taffy but Passing Clouds looked amazingly in sync and beautiful. Were they grounding more because I may have been grounding more? Were they feeling the *Chi* more than in previous

classes? Did my perception shift as a result of the cumulative *Chi* from the conference and the many group practices with 125 practitioners? My legs felt strong, not weak; I was filled with energy and not jet lagged; my heart knew I was in the right place. I am grateful for attending and for the practice. Thank you, Sandy, Pam and Dan; NOCO Conference Committee. And always, Justin.

Bathrooms & TCC

By Nancy Jo Bleier, Sitka, Alaska

I’m home thinking about the fantastic T’ai Chi Chih teacher conference in Boulder. What are my memories? Hugs and laughter! Did I get muscle and joint pain? You betcha! Did I get tired? You betcha! Did my ankles swell? You betcha! Did I have challenges finding a bathroom? You betcha!

I was at a higher elevation than my usual sea level; it was hot and the “must of the day” was drink lots of water. So that’s what I did. Between lots of movement, sitting during wonderful presentations from our peers and lots of eating, bathroom breaks were needed.

This hotel will go down in the memory as the most interesting

place – especially to find toilets for taller folks, those who’d undergone hip surgeries, and for toilet paper holders jutting into your shoulder. Finally after traveling around the building for several days I found the ground floor women’s bathroom satisfactory (rather than the handicap bathroom). Yeah!

Some of you may think this subject is over the top but I want to say “no way.” When I’m in the present and being mindful of everything around me, even a bathroom can be an adventure for smiling or groaning.

Thanks for all the memories this conference created. Thanks for all the strong people I practiced next to. Thanks for the *Chi* and laughter.

A Key To Grounding

By Judy Hendricks, Albuquerque, New Mexico

I enjoyed connecting with T'ai Chi Chih teachers at the conference. We heard so many wonderful demonstrations and presentations from such a wide range of teachers. My practice was invigorated; **I'm inspired about TCC's future.** With so many sincere teachers it will lead to a future that embraces TCC as a service to humanity.

Another teacher and I noticed that the community practice was very grounded. (In the past, it's sometimes been hard to ground at conferences. With over hundred teachers practicing, a lot of energy flows.) One difference between the community practice and teacher practices was that Sandy announced the movements and said, "last one." This is the format we used at the weekly teachers practice in Albuquerque with Justin. For me, it is easier to ground when someone announces the movement and, "last one."

In *Justin Stone Speaks on TCC* Justin said there are three reasons why we keep our attention in the soles of the feet. The first is to keep the mind from wandering to extraneous thoughts. When someone announces the movement, I focus awareness on the movements and my feet. Justin knew wandering minds would

be an issue. Justin says that by focusing in the soles of the feet we are connecting meridian channels to the *tan t'ien*, and that *Chi* is stored in the *tan t'ien*. He also says keeping the heart fire in the *tan t'ien* and the *yin* of the kidneys from rising is the secret to a long, healthy life.

Justin had a purpose behind everything he did. Grounding is very important. One has to feel their feet on the ground to be aware of everyone in the room. It is not a floaty feeling; it's a solid state. It's strong and flowing. I felt the connectedness of everyone in the room; I felt the flow. We need to be well grounded to feel that flow, that universal connection. Justin taught us how to flow by being grounded. During the conference rededication, it was truly joyful to be with 125 teachers who felt gratitude to Justin Stone for this gift of the TCC practice.



A River Runs Through It

By Diana Bahn, New York, New York

After conference, my husband and I went to Estes Park, the eastern edge of Rocky Mountain National Park. As in Boulder, we encountered beating arteries of water, cool lakes reaching deep into the earth, and we sighted snow-capped mountains, the source of water for this Western paradise. It had been a long year, so diversion with Nature was a relief.

We don't hike a lot these days but we did go on a few short hikes, one to Bear Lake where we ran into Kim Grant and Lisa Otero. Kim was cooling her face after a rigorous day of hiking and Lisa was soaking her feet. They were communing with Nature, and though I didn't recognize Lisa at first (no longer holding a mic and leading us through much of the conference), the scene felt right – that these ladies would seek a calm *yin* environment after the soaring energy in Boulder.

At the conference, we were on the go a lot,

in a good way, sharpening our awareness of the principles, with movement refinement led by Sandy, and many other clear mirrors like Marie Dotts, our Boulder host; Carolyn Guilott, master of softness; Dora Derzon, a clear light who told us to "go bigger" in our connection with the world. There were so many great teachings by so many amazing teachers; look at the schedule conveniently included in the May *Vital Force*.

I've felt better since coming home, and my students are soaking up my conference *Chi*. When I announced at a New York State "T'ai Chi for Arthritis" class that I would be doing a five-week TCC class, eight people snatched up a flyer (and we made a copy for another). **I sense this is a sign that people really want to heal, practice, and evolve. It's a great time to be alive.**

All this goes back to the Big Thompson River in Estes Park, which flowed by our B&B. It was a Satori experience; I felt my stillness, or center, and yet felt the healing, strong currents passing through and soothing some deep intangible suffering. Being in the present moment, not doing anything, can get the job done. **So I sat there.**

My mind recalled a terrifying book about an aberrant Great White Shark at the Jersey Shore that killed many humans in the early 1920s. Eventually "she" was destroyed but I was shocked that a creature of such pure destruction could be a female. It occurred to me that even female energy can get out of balance if we are away from Nature, stressed out, caretaking others, staying away from TCC practice.

At the Big Thompson I imagined negativity, stress, fears, and suffering released to the speedy strong waters flowing to the big ocean where scary sharks live. I visualized that crazy adolescent shark taking away all the yucky stuff no longer serving me. I recalled Justin saying there is no difference between good and bad *Chi*; it's just all *Chi*. **The more we practice, the more we don't differentiate.**

The river continues on the East Coast, in tap water, in the Hudson, in the bays of Long Island Sound, down to Jersey. And it keeps traveling, perpetually, continually. Let's be part of that and practice our TCC so we are ready for what's next.

Relinquishing “Attack” Thoughts

By Hannah Hedrick, Fern Forest, Big Island, Hawaii

My current focus in on harmony and relinquishing even the perception of attack thoughts in myself/others. I’m recognizing that even my impatience is an attack thought.

For increasing awareness (I prefer this word to “growth”) of my ability to relinquish attack thoughts, I am being grateful for “therapeutic irritations.” Can I suspend my perception of my intention or the intentions of others and “hear” the fear or the call for peace behind the words or thoughts?

With regard to receiving corrections in T’ai Chi Chih, I have never received a correction for which I was not grateful. Even if I did not agree with the correction, I welcomed it as an opportunity to discuss it with the Guide or trainer or in a group.

Because Daryl, Steve, Don, and I were primarily “self taught” when we traveled to California to be accredited, we felt privileged to have our movements “refined” by Justin, Steve, Ed, Antonia, Pam, Sandy, and Dan. I treasure the many corrections Justin suggested: “Don’t be like a wise, Hannah!” (Joyous Breath) “What happened to the hand passing under the elbow?” (Passing Clouds) “60% awareness in the hand behind the body.” (Working the Pulley) “When the weight moves backward, turn the torso *only* sharply in the direction of the front foot.” (Working the Pulley)

Because most of my students have extreme physical (nursing home residents) or emotional (transitioning from homelessness; recently released offenders) challenges, I seldom make corrections unless they are doing something that could compromise their knees, back, etc. With continuing students who do TCC regularly, I use Sandy’s method of “try to do it larger/smaller, slower/faster, higher/lower and see how that feels.”

At the Boulder Conference, I invited new teachers to practice making corrections on me to build up their confidence. I look forward to continuing to “explore our differences in a way that honors what is alive and true and evolving in each of us” instead of being one of those “therapeutic irritations.”



Learning During Accreditation Remians Valuable

By Adabelle Rychtarik, Simpsonville, South Carolina

During our teacher accreditation in Albuquerque in November 2013, we were provided with some practical trade tools for teaching from a presentation that Lisa Otero gave at the 2013 Minnesota conference. Five items were especially helpful to the newly accredited teachers:

- Obtaining insurance coverage;
- Drafting and using liability waivers;
- Tax and financial record keeping;
- Ensuring that the TCC trademark and copyright are properly utilized and respected, and respecting other people’s original work;
- Publicity and advertising; respecting your students’ privacy.

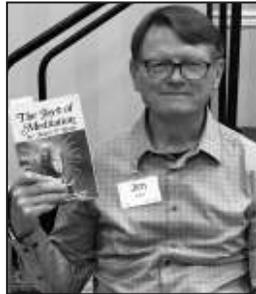
When I returned to South Carolina, my teacher, Vicki Schroeder, provided the name of the insurance company she used and a copy of the waiver form. The waivers are needed when I teach for the Library System and at the senior, sports and activity centers. In addition, I’ve found it helpful to obtain CPR and AED training.

When teaching in any center or location you also need knowledge of their emergency procedures. This became apparent recently when a student came in at the last minute for her first practice in an ongoing class. Generally, there is only one hour for TCC practice, because other classes precede and follow it. I prefer new (seated) students to be seated in front of me so that I can ensure they safely learn the movements. I noticed that this student’s movements were slowing down; when her eyes closed and head dropped, I knew she needed help. I called her name, checked her breathing and pulse, and ensured that she had an open airway, while asking another student to call 911 and notify the senior center director. The un-well student’s breathing became shallow and her pulse slowed down dramatically. She was given oxygen by the emergency team and transferred to a local emergency room. I later discovered she needed a pacemaker to regulate her heart.

My students range in age from 55 to 94 and several do a seated practice. On any given day, I may have one to five new students. Some begin seated and then progress to a standing practice, while most prefer standing. I continue to grow in learning how to teach aging students and the challenges of aging. I am grateful for the opportunity to share my practice and grow with them. Thank you, Justin.



T'ai Chi Chih
Boulder 2017



Conference 2018

Next year's conference will be held near Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, in the summertime and hosted by April Leffler and Kathleen McAllister. Stay tuned for specifics on the place and date. Please plan to join us.



Where in the World
April Leffler and Caroline Guilott doing Light at the Top of the Head/Temples in front of the Flatirons in Boulder, Colorado

After Accreditation, Now What? A New Teacher's Story

By Kent Jarratt, Asbury Park, New Jersey

After the simple and heartfelt graduation at the teacher accreditation in April in Aston, Pennsylvania, I linger a bit to say my goodbyes; place the single white rose each has been given by Alba in the side pocket of my computer bag; and make my way back to Philadelphia to board a local bus that will take me home to Asbury Park, New Jersey.

By car, the trip is 90 minutes. The bus takes a whopping four hours. I love this ride because it keeps the experience of the accreditation with me awhile longer.

At each small New Jersey town, the bus becomes the town's local bus, as it detours to the shopping mall, hospital (including a Veteran's Administration site), a military base, and Fort Dix; twice, the bus loops around nearby community colleges.

I'm keenly interested in who boards, and this day I see each passenger as a prospective T'ai Chi Chih student. A mother gets on with two children, but before they climb aboard, she deftly opens the cargo hold, herself, and lifts in a child's red wagon, with a huge laundry bag affixed to it. Fifteen minutes later, she does this in reverse, as one of her little girls waves goodbye to the entire bus. Wouldn't a mother living in a rural town without a car and two kids in tow, be well served by the moving meditation that is TCC?

At both community colleges, only one or two students get on, textbooks still open in their hands. I wonder if it could be possible to visit both colleges in a single day? At a drug and alcohol rehab, a man and woman (whom I'm certain look much older than they should), laugh hysterically trying to stand up as the bus pulls to the side of the road. They are drunk. The wom-

an falls onto the seat next to me, and I grab the rose out of my bag, just in time to keep it from being crushed, then watch in amazement as they make it off the bus without mishap. I'm thinking now about a TCC group at the rehab centers not far from the bus route. You can see where I'm headed; **no doubt you recognize the eagerness of a new teacher.**

For the entire trip, there is always somebody sitting up front talking to the bus driver, and when that passenger gets off at their stop, another passenger immediately moves to the front seat and begins a conversation with the driver. I empathize; it's like my own therapy office. This happens without fail at every stop, through towns with names like Mt. Laurel, Brick, and Point Pleasant Beach, seventeen stops in all. Twenty minutes before our final destination, I've pinned my hopes on the bus driver, and I dutifully take my turn on the seat next to him.

I learn that he's been driving this route for ten years, and that he has a twenty-minute break before heading back to Philadelphia. I imagine the two of us standing outside the Asbury Park Transportation Center, doing Bird Flaps Its Wings, and wondering how the other drivers might react, and I picture a group of drivers in a circle following along, while their buses idle nearby. A long line of passengers breaks into a beautifully choreographed set of Working the Pulley.

Three weeks go by. I'm surprised and dismayed that my enthusiasm begins to wane. It's fear. Plain and simple. Each morning practice seems to bring up the question: **"Where and when are you going to teach?"**

It is now nearly two months after the accreditation. I find myself chatting with my barber, while he cuts my hair. He is the owner of this busiest and hippest barbershop in town, and, I find myself turning the conversation to TCC. A thriving community gathers regularly at the shop. Like him, a lot of them are surfers.

A couple of weeks later, and my barber is now a weekly student. As I hoped a surfer would be, he's a natural, and his weight shifts are wonderful to behold. I'm picturing a shop full of barbers doing their TCC practice, first thing in the morning, before opening for business, and there's me at the front, with my new group of passengers, heading out on a new journey.



Seijaku, Post-Conference

June 2017, Boulder, Colorado

By Nan Nelson, Roseville, Minnesota

The sun fell and rose on a beautiful garden painted with the variety, color, and essence of what would become a circle of friends with a shared experience. We gathered for a combination of Seijaku accreditation, audit, and basics course taught by Pam Towne. We moved from a garden of strangers, each bringing a unique spirit to what became a shared synchronicity and familiarity with each other.

Seijaku is described as *energized or active calm, solitude, tranquility*. The question is how to carry this *energized calm* and serenity outside the Japanese Zen garden, into the midst of daily activity. To this end, Seijaku powerfully creates an energized calm in all we do. I sensed that garden in each of us.

As it is said on *Justin Stone Speaks on T'ai Chi Chih*: "The Japanese speak of Seijaku as serenity in the midst of activity. Not escaping from the world to some mountaintop as is taught in the Indian teachings. But finding the real meaning, fulfillment, energy and wisdom in the midst of everyday hustle and bustle – building a silent and imperturbable center while active in the disappointments and triumphs of our busy lives. This is real fulfillment."

Eight were accredited to teach Seijaku; six Seijaku teachers audited; four attended for basics. On our last morning together we discussed our experiences. It became obvious we had tapped into Justin Stone's intention for this advanced form of TCC. We found the garden within – that energized calm. Mario di Gesu shared a poem about the joy and mystery he found in Seijaku teaching him Seijaku. Parker Reynolds talked about making friends with the *Chi*.

Bobbie Anderson referred to it as an adventure. Leya Cragin talked about joy and energy. Laurie Thomas spoke of finding familiarity with *Prajna*, which she felt as the medium that allows for the Divine. Sandy Roerig called it a spiritual practice. Tom Rothenberger and Holly Trenary found Seijaku to help with posture and grounding/rooting. Lisa Stroyan spoke about Seijaku helping her focus on softness, letting go of hardness. Adrienne McKenzie shared that after learning Seijaku from Justin's video, the course answered a lot of questions. Darlene Karasik talked about her experience of using her intention more effectively.

Pam shared that intention lies in the realm of being, not in doing. We came together briefly in that realm of being, that intention set for us by Justin Stone. I imagined him stepping from a Japanese Zen garden in another time and place from which he set this intention – rooted in the essence of the garden and now planted in us. We blossomed and will carry this intention in our hearts and lives.



The combined Seijaku class of basic, accreditation and auditor students.

Chi By The Sea

(May 2017, New Jersey)

By Dorene Krause, Midland Park, New Jersey

A wonderful opportunity was shared by all at our T'ai Chi Chih Shore Retreat...

a time to disconnect from everyday responsibilities and have to's, to reconnect with other teachers and reflect on the truth of who we are.

A weekend retreat by the sea...

to breathe in the energy exploding into the air with each crashing wave, to become empowered with its resounding release, to feel our own letting go into the wind and the water, and to find an inner peace in sync with the ocean's rhythm.

A weekend retreat with the *Chi*... more **feeling** and less **doing** in our practice,

to allow the *tan t'ien* to carry us through each movement, to trust the *Chi* in our lives, rely on our inner wisdom and to feel a strong sense of community through sharing.

Thank you to Dan Pienciak for leading us, to Lonnie for welcoming us into her lovely Silver Beach home again and for the delicious meals prepared by Lonnie and Sky.

Seijaku Retreat April 2017, Albuquerque, New Mexico

By Lisa Stroyen, Fort Collins, Colorado

I was grateful to attend Carmen Brocklehurst's *Learn Seijaku* retreat in the Spring. This was my second road trip with other teachers to Albuquerque, and I enjoyed the warm welcome of the community with whom I had connected previously at a T'ai Chi Chih retreat: our local hosts, as well as attendees from California, Colorado, Texas, and Louisiana.

The themes for the weekend were *Chi* and *Chih* (knowledge of), i.e., feeling the *Chi* deepen and becoming more aware; finding the gifts the movements offer; and accessing the power and wisdom available from the *tan t'ien*. Carmen pointed out that Seijaku is not just about staying grounded but also sharing the *Chi*, by staying present in **this** world. "Just being doesn't mean being nothing or disappearing; it means feeling yourself be," she explained.

Love, respect, and gratitude for Justin were at the forefront of all our learning, discussions, and movements. Carmen encouraged us come with an "empty cup," and also challenged us to go a level deeper. We expressed ourselves through pyramid poetry and had opportunities for self-reflection, learning, connecting, and practice.

Carmen had so much knowledge to share that I could hardly write fast enough, but what I loved most this visit was her encouragement to challenge myself to deepen my connection to the *Chi*, to fine-tune my movements and get the most out of them. "How much energy do you want?" she asked once when my circles had become rote and small in Pulling in the Energy. "Do you want this much," she asked, holding thumb and finger close together, "Or do you want all of it?" she said, and spread her arms wide. "Don't miss it!"

A touching part of the weekend was a lunchtime dedicated to sharing Justin stories. I heard of a humble, joyful, even playful side of Justin. I shared that although I had never met Justin, I was impacted by the video from Folsom Prison.

I received the most powerful evidence from the weekend, though, from my own body. We practiced the preliminaries quite a lot and I discovered that they, along with the rest of Seijaku, feel very healing to my chronic health issues. I walked in with a headache or sore joints, and I could feel the pain melting away as I focused on breathing into my *tan t'ien* and feeling my feet as suction cups on the floor.



TCC Retreat May 2017, Prescott, Arizona

By Linda Worlton

Chapel Rock was the perfect retreat center for our annual retreat. Our host extraordinaire, Dana Diller, took meticulous care of all our comforts so we could relax and immerse ourselves in the retreat experience.

As Sandy Breach described the surroundings: "The place is peaceful and lends so much to the meditative atmosphere." There were opportunities for private walks and places for reflection among the trees and rocks, allowing a deepening of the spiritual aspect of our TCC experience. Joann Clark commented on the opportunity for "alone time to turn off the rest of the world and relax; I'm loving the silence." A sense of personal renewal was evident by the entire group in our circle discussions each day.

The practice sessions, led by Pam Towne, demonstrated her gifts as an excellent teacher. Many participants commented on her gentle and loving approach to making corrections. Teacher Lovena Warren commented that she came to the retreat, "to help undo a few bad habits. My time and practice here have helped me go deeper into my own practice, which will make me a better teacher." Other participants commented:

"This allowed me to increase my awareness of my body and how I practice." – SANDY BREACH

"I became more aware of grounding and moving my wrists in a more open and circular way, which allowed me to slow down the movements, reduce the tension in my body, and soften my hands and wrists." – MARSHA DAVIES

"This year my glide returned after not being able to do it for two years because of knee problems. It was like greeting an old friend."

– DANA DILLER

"Pam helped correct an error in my stance that was causing my balance to be compromised. This in turn allowed me to relax more into the movements and experience the moving meditation." – LINDA WORLTON

"The retreat is a wonderful way to meet other like-minded people, and to share experiences on how TCC has benefitted one's life physically, mentally, and spiritually." – ADRIENNE WELCH

*Above: Prescott, Arizona Retreat
Below: Albuquerque, New Mexico Retreat*

TCC Intensive

May 2017, Buffalo, Minnesota

Compiled by Ev Hanson-Florin (St Paul) and
Nancy Werner-Azarski (Minneapolis), Minnesota

What does one envision when thinking of an Intensive? Here are thoughts from some of the recent attendees: teacher candidates, serious students, and teachers from California, Minnesota, Wisconsin, and Ontario, Canada. We arrived as individuals and, through Sandy's leadership, left as members of the T'ai Chi Chih family.

"The intensive was all of these: from exhausting to exhilarating; from frustrating attention on pieces to liberating emergence of the whole; from my own awkwardly formed questions to insightful observations by others; from stiffly pushing with my thoughts to softly flowing from the center; from arriving as strangers to departing as friends."

– DICK DYE

"I went to the TCC Intensive thinking that it may be too intense, but instead it was informative and affirmative. Sandy "broke down" each movement in a clear and concise way, had us practice the individual parts, and then put the movements back into a "whole." This made it possible to experience improvement and have a better understanding of each movement at the end of the process."

– TERRY SONIER



"Besides meeting wonderful people and having a fantastic time, I took away many nuggets of wisdom to incorporate into my practice and share with my TCC community. I benefited not only from personal instruction, but also from hearing Sandy's attention to detail in every move as we worked as a group. The most impactful nugget was for Bird Flaps Its Wings. Sandy got me to look at moving from flat feet to the balls of my feet as a weight shift. Seeing it this way allowed me to flow in a smoother motion."

– TRACY IMMORDINO

Annual picnic of TCC students and teachers in Dalastown, Pennsylvania. Front: Jack Weaver, Suzann Zinn, Mary Golden, Diana Martin, Jean Markey, Barb Clouser; Back: Sarah Ruberg, Ken Golden, Craig Kopp.

"The sensation of stillness, that's what I felt during our practices. What I loved the most were the people – such a lovable, eclectic, loving and supportive community. Everyone was helping everyone to grow and learn. I want to thank Sandy for her guidance, love and laughter. Thanks also to Ev and Nancy for encouragement, support, and hosting."

– DEE RUSHENBERG

"After a 10-year lapse in my practice, I wanted to revive it. I considered taking a class, but never moved forward on that. When the flyer for this Intensive came out, I knew instinctively I should sign up. It quickly reacquainted me with the movements and the benefits of balancing my *Chi*. Sandy's creative analogies helped to lock a concept in my head. I also appreciated her tactful, but honest feedback."

– JEANNE HAMLIN

"The Intensive has given me a deeper sense of the movements. Analyzing each movement from start to close, and then reconstructing and synchronizing each move to wholeness, allowed me to ground with a deep quietude, instinctively feel from my center, and be in the moment flowing in the *Chi*."

– JAMIE ERICKSON

The Lighter Side

The Lighter Side

By Sharon Sirkis, Columbia, Maryland

Whenever I teach the Six Healing Sounds, I go over the sounds first. I pronounce each sound loudly and clearly as if talking normally, and then have my students repeat the sounds. One time after teaching all of the sounds, I asked Stephanie, a repeat student, "What's the caveat?" Expecting her to say something about how we aspirate the sound instead of speaking it aloud, she surprised me and said, "You didn't teach us the caveats, you only taught us the variations!"

For one of my TCC classes at the retirement community, I have to submit a list of the names of class attendees. I usually write them down so I don't forget. However, this particular day I only had two students, Margaret and Ann, so I assumed I would be able to remember their names. However, to make sure I didn't forget, I came up with Ann Margaret (the actress and the dancer). Simple to remember now.

When I taught Working the Pulley, I concentrated on one hand at a time. During one class, as I slowly pushed out the top hand, I asked the class, "What does this remind you of?" Instead of hearing the usual response, Push Pull, one lady stretched her hand further and said, "STOP," and I immediately started singing the Supremes song... "In the Name of Love." The whole class cracked up.

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Community Calendar

For the most up-to-date info and event PDFs, see www.taichichih.org/events

DATE / WHAT & WHERE / CONTACT

- Aug 22-25 | Seijaku/Meditation Retreat w/ Daniel | Aston, PA | Daniel Pienciak | 732-988-5573
- Sep 14-18 | TCC Intensive w/ Daniel | Aston, PA | April Leffler | 610-809-7523
- Sep 26-29 | TCC Retreat w/ Pam | Santa Barbara, CA | Pam Towne | 760-421-7589
- Oct 13-15 | Seijaku Accreditation w/ Pam | Rochester, MN | Bonnie Sokolov | 507-529-9515
- Oct 15-21 | TCC Teacher Accreditation w/ Pam | Rochester, MN | Bonnie Sokolov | 507-529-9515
- Nov 2-5 | TCC Retreat w/ Pam | San Antonio, TX | Alice Holden | 210-585-1232
- Nov 16-19 | TCC Intensive w/ Daniel | Albuquerque, NM | Mark Kwasman | 505-358-5371

~ MORE WORKSHOPS & RETREATS ~

Postings here are open to all teachers offering events wholly devoted to TCC.

- Aug 17-20 | TCC Retreat w/ Carmen Brocklehurst | Albuquerque, NM | Judy Hendricks | 505-573-0820
- Sep 19 | TCC & Heightened Awareness Workshop w/ April Leffler | Aston, PA | Sr Pat Hamill | 610-558-6152
- Oct 18-20 | Prajna Workshop w/ April Leffler | Tupelo, MS | Ron Richardardson | 662-844-6473
- Oct 20-22 | TCC Workshop w/ April Leffler | Tupelo, MS | Ron Richardardson | 662-844-6473
- Nov 10-12 | TCC & Heightened Awareness Retreat w/ April Leffler | Aston, PA | April Leffler | 610-809-7523

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