

The Vital Force

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for teachers & students

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Justin Stone: In His Words

From Justin Stone's *Climb the Joyous Mountain*
and available on www.justinstonetc.com

Who Am I?

Not all religious seekers find Ultimate answers. Some do, some don't. I'd like to deal with both here. Rabindranath Tagore, the great 20th century poet of India who often wrote in English, expressed bewilderment of those who don't find answers:

The first day's sun has asked
At the manifestation of new being –
Who are you?
No answer came.
Year after year went by.
The last sun of the day
The last question utters
On the western seashore
In the silent evening –
Who are you?
He gets no answer.

The question "Who am I?" repeats itself over and over to the introspective mind. If a man has not asked himself this question at some time, and has not even been concerned with the meaning of existence, he has not lived. Like an animal, he has eaten and slept, and perhaps procreated, but he has made no effort to rise to true human status. Zen monks have always tried to penetrate the meaning of birth and death. Where there is birth, there is always death.

To those few fortunate ones who have received their answer, it has not come in words. It is an experience that is not describable, and so cannot be transplanted to another.

Perhaps the greatest saint Japan has known was the 12th century Shinran, persecuted and exiled to remote corners of the islands. Married at a time when monks did not wed, he was laughed at by many, but he eventually found his way in the belief in the saving power of Amida, the Buddha of Infinite Light.

During many years spent in meditation at the Tendai Monastery on the



Justin on his 80th birthday
in his music room.

top of Mount Hiei (near Kyoto), Shinran found only despair. This was beautifully described by his grandson:

"Many moons passed as Shinran practiced contemplation on the moon of the three fold truth in the ten stage meditation. And the seasons' flowers renewed their fragrance many times as he disciplined himself in pondering on the truth of one hundred words with one thousand modes of thushness. Then he reflected on the problem of emancipation and thought, 'No matter how hard I try to calm the water of

meditation, waves of consciousness arise to disturb it. However hard I try to contemplate the moon of mind-nature, clouds of illusion overcast it.'"

This is the description of a dark night of the soul. But eventually Shinran stopped trying, stopped using the power of Shinran, and gave himself up to a greater power: Amida Buddha. Long ago, at a time without beginning, Amida was a bodhisattva, an enlightened being on the way to buddhahood. At that time Amida made a vow to save all sentient beings, no matter how numerous they might be. That vow is still in effect. Giving up the self-power that had failed, Shinran (through his teacher Honen) learned to give way to the other power of Amida. From then to the end of his life, he was serene in the faith that Amida's vow would surely save him. He died repeating the *Nembutsu* – the short *Namu Amida Butsu* (Hail to the Buddha of Infinite Light) – that simple believers say over and over each day, knowing that if they call on Amida and rest secure in his saving power, they will be taken to the Western Paradise. This is called *Eko* in Japanese, meaning that there is a merit transference from Amida, who endows us with merit power by crushing the egocentric and separative self of man. According to Jodo Shinshu Buddhism, constant repetition of the *Nembutsu*, said with firm faith, assures one of being reborn under ideal circumstances in the Pure Land, from where it will not be difficult (minus encumbrances) to reach complete Enlightenment.

CONTINUED ON P. 12

SOLIDIFYING

Something feels afoot with T'ai Chi Chih, and the image that comes to mind is a projectile in a slingshot. TCC feels ready to be propelled into the world with a force that would break apart if it wasn't fundamentally solidified. Hurlled out of a slingshot, it would disperse into pieces and fall to the earth. But it feels like TCC's core is strengthening – from the quality of new teachers and a broadened participation of existing teachers, to the resurrection of Justin's materials being available and the forthcoming www.taichichih.org with a prominent focus on students finding teachers and teachers marketing their classes. "Return to the Circle" and a focus on community at the Minnesota conference also reinforce this new strengthening; see page 16-17. Ready, aim, fire the *Chi*.

SUBMISSIONS FOR THIS ISSUE

With each passing issue in the last year especially, we receive more accolades about the quality of reflections published here. More teachers and students are contributing for the first time, or the first time in a long time. We're gratified that practitioners feel compelled to share

their experiences. The diversity of encounters with *Chi* bodes well for Justin's vision of TCC's impact in the world.

WWW.JUSTINSTONETCC.COM

The pent-up demand for Justin's teaching materials has been clear since his site launched in early March. It's heartening and I can feel Justin smiling that practitioners wanted to dig deeper and get closer to the source. On a personal level, Justin's presence has become more tangible through each call or email answered and every order packed and shipped.

Teachers: please email me for a discount code for ordering if you don't have it.

~ AS JUSTIN SAYS ~

**When the *Chi* flows freely and is balanced,
the Cosmic Rhythm begins to move us.**

~ With gratitude. Kim Grant, Albuquerque, NM

Table of Contents

Justin: In His Words 1
 May The Vital Force Be With You Trust 2
 Breakthrough 3
 Students Speak Out 4
 Guiding Thoughts 5
 Trainer Tips 6
 Continuity 7
 Experiences 8
 By Teachers, For All 9
 Event Experiences 10
 Justin Stone: Climb The Joyous Mountain 11
 Dispatch From Folsom Prison 12-13
 Experiences 14
 Community & Conference 2019 15
 Events 16-17
 TCC Teacher Accreditation 18, 21-23
 Community Calendar 19-20
 24

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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

What Does The Vital Force Do?

- Produces a quarterly journal by and for its members
- Creates and maintains taichichih.org for everyone
- Keeps up the extensive teacher database
- Extends its reach through a blog and e-newsletter
- Outreach for teachers and students about TCC through social media
- Provide free subscriptions when we have resources.

~ Submission Guidelines ~

Please send articles as Word documents, electronically, to kim@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 ~

Please consider a tax-deductible contribution to support The Vital Force's essential and vast outreach. Membership fees cover the journal; our other activities continue through the discretion and generous support of our giving base. They allow us to effectively reach hundreds of thousands of practitioners around the globe. Thanks to our supporters who:

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Trust – Reaching Into The Great Within

By Carmen L. Brocklehurst, Albuquerque, New Mexico

What part does trust by the student and also by the teacher play in learning the T'ai Chi Chih movements? Is the teacher instructing the students with *Teh* (the power of inner sincerity)? Is he or she following the principles that the movements impart? I heard a teacher tell Justin that he was going to leave out certain parts of the movement because he thought it was too hard for the students to learn, but perhaps it was also that he did not know how to do the movement properly, himself. Our students have come to us because the movements have called them to come and learn. It is important that we stay true to what was given to Justin, and what he so capably shared with us. Only by letting go of the surface and going to the heart of the movements can we begin to experience the depth of feeling that is possible when we reach the Great Within.

Trust also implies that we are willing to go beyond our comfort zone and to learn as much as we can about what the movements have to offer. Often, we feel that because we have explained the parts of the movement that the student is going to understand. Our explanation may be as clear as mud. Keep in mind that it is not only what we say but how we demonstrate the movements. If we say, "Move like slow motion in a dream," but then move very quickly through the movements we have given the student the wrong feeling. By releasing our own preferences, we can begin to feel what the movements really show and be a better example to the student.

If we move with integrity, we will find that the movements contain gems of harmony, freedom, joy, beauty, love and so much more. These gifts are not always obvious in the beginning, and it is possible that we do not have any idea how to get to the gems. It may only take 8 weeks to learn where to put hands and feet, but to get to depths of the Great Within will take patience, and attention to our intention of wanting to reach those depths. If it takes a lifetime, I would say it is a lifetime well spent. In the learning, we also are given a gift we didn't know was there. We learn to love and share the *Chi*. This is truly reaching into the Great Within.



Trust

By Janet L. Starr, Houston, Texas

I appreciate the truths that T'ai Chi Chih teaches me. I have been practicing TCC since 2004 and it has resonated through my life in so many wonderful ways.

One of my favorites is trust. That word simply feels relaxing doesn't it? It implies that we are in a safe place where we can allow ourselves to be led without our own efforts. In our community, we can trust that the mentors around us are making small adjustments to gain more significant release.

I enjoy hearing that Justin gave corrections to those he felt had potential. I focus on openness and delight to be mentored by the many teachers before me in T'ai Chi Chih. I hold onto their observations and play with these lessons to feel the truths as I continue to practice in renewed awareness. I trust the *Chi* to teach me the way.

We live in an era of constant change and demands for more effort. So much of my life I have strived to be self-reliant and for what sometimes felt like superhuman accomplishment. It has been a challenge for me to practice "Letting Go" of the sense of responsibility to depend on only myself alone. Yet allowing myself to be shown the way has been the greatest blessing.

When I see one of my students striving with effort, their shoulders leaning forward, I ask them to invite their shoulders to patiently trust the hips to carry them and allow the *tan t'ien* to lead the way.

Early in lessons my students might have heard me say that it might look like my fingers are lazy, which might imply they are not trying or have no intention. Actually, my fingers have the intention to trust my wrist to bring them back to the heart and *tan t'ien*. This helps so much with the "effort of no effort."

As I have gone through health issues that have changed my own capacity, the experience has affected what I can expect of myself and diminished confidence in myself too; so this idea of trust from one part of my body to another part of my body invokes a feeling of relaxation and safety thus rebuilding confidence in myself. What a gracious gift TCC is in my life.

A Breakthrough On Vernal Equinox: Was This Nirvikalpa Samadhi?

By Connie Shaw, Johnstown, Colorado

For the past nine hours of the Full Moon of the Spring Equinox, this body-mind-personality complex has been held in a thrall, an altered state, and now it is over. Earlier, as our T'ai Chi Chih class directed by Marie Dotts finished a silent series of movements, an unfamiliar process overcame me, like a tsunami of unaccustomed awareness.

The day's theme was stillness. **Marie said there are three stages of the journey to stillness: First we seek it, or make the journey to stillness. Then we make the journey with stillness. Then we become stillness, as stillness, as Being.**

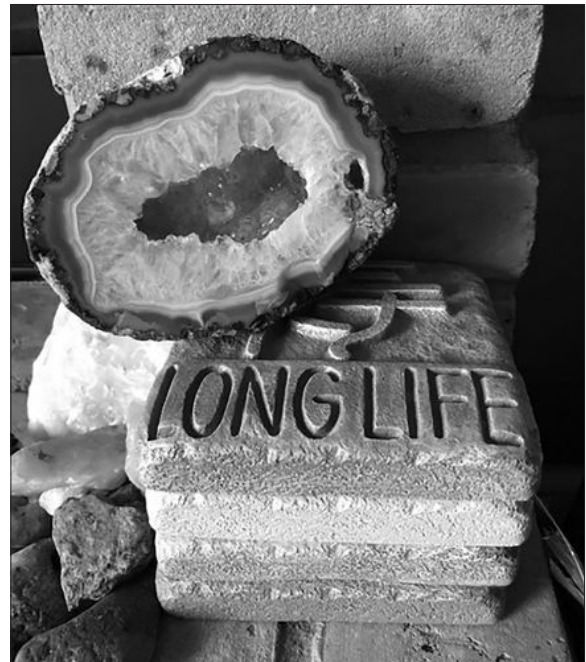
Marie invited us to sit in a circle after the silent practice. Various group members offered reflections on the practice, wherein we had formed a circle within a circle so that newer students stood behind an inner ring of more experienced students, and could easily observe their movements and follow the general flow.

When it became my turn to share, I was unaccountably weepy and mentioned that during this process of still practice, I felt fed, full, nurtured. I became aware of the great (detached) love that I have for each of my fellow practitioners; and that when they are not present, I miss them. I became aware that this (stillness) is the place where we are all the same, where I am you and you are me. No separation. This stillness is always there, inside, available to us, if we are available to it.

I could feel my heart center expanding, without my (egoic) permission and I couldn't stop it. An expansive oceanic warmth was coming over me, as if I might levitate off the chair, so I held onto the armrests. The class energy was drawing to a close. We sat in our chairs, in no rush to move, eyes closed. Marie tapped the cylindrical bell with its tiny mallet – ding, ding, ding – signifying its end. We arose, little clusters of students talked with each other and I wafted out the door.

Since the spring day was warm, Jim proposed we sit by Lake Windsor in our canvas lawn chairs. When we reached the lake twenty minutes later, tears were streaming down my face. A slight breeze chilled the tears coursing to my chin. Dozens of seagulls floated on the gray-blue waters and a fisherman paddled his small boat into the cove near us. It was a cloudless sky; few sounds were heard. The tears continued. I didn't feel sad or happy, but **felt that immense universal energy was throbbing and pulsing**, pushing through me from the inside, as if I were a doorway to this dimension, this so-called Reality.

After half an hour we drove home, marveling at the warmth of the air and the unusual stillness around us. Traffic was light. At home, a pro-



found sleepiness overtook me, and I needed to lie down for a while. I apparently slept quite soundly because when I next opened my eyes, Jim said, “You conked out as soon as you hit the pillow. I only napped for two hours but you slept for five and a half. I wonder what hit us so hard during the class that we had to recuperate beside the lake, then take deep naps.”

I replied, “That was a profound and eventful class. In fact, the entire past nine hours feels as if I have been radically altered. Even now, I feel I am an Aperture, as we all are, and that all of my life – and prior lifetimes – I have put maximal unconscious energy into preventing the universal energy of love from breaching the dam of my ego. It's as if I've been the little Dutch boy with his finger in the hole in the dyke, trying to save the town. But I've been trying to save the town/world from my Self, from the love that I am, that we each are, as Spirit, or *Atman*.

But today the dam broke; it's now impossible to wall off my love. This impersonal compassion is not grasping, clutching or sentimental. It accepts the human condition like an ancient watcher that witnesses suffering humanity, realizing that individuals cannot be fully and impactfully helped until they cease their own self-destructive tendencies.

My own self-nullifying proclivities seem to have evaporated. **An ancient separation has been erased, overwhelmed, nullified, submerged into nothingness.** I feel what Walt Whitman must have felt when he wrote his ecstatic poetry: open to all of life, as All That Is. Is this new state *Nirvikalpa Samadhi* that has stealthily crept into my consciousness and taken up residence, uninvited, like an opportunistic homeless woman who found the front door open and plunked herself down in a living room recliner? She's not leaving. That much is clear. I might as well welcome her home and fix her some tea.

The Benefits Are Cumulative

By Adabelle Rychtarik, Simpsonville, South Carolina

I asked my students from various locations where I teach in the Greenville, South Carolina area, to tell others why they like their T'ai Chi Chih practice and/or the benefits they receive. I teach mostly ongoing classes through the Greenville Library System, at senior and activity centers, and to the owner and employees at a local French creperie. Some students have practiced with me for four or more years while others only for a month or less. My students and I thank you, Justin, for originating TCC and the benefits one receives with practice.

"I've been a member of Adabelle's TCC class at the Mauldin Senior Center for a little over a year now and have grown to enjoy it very much. Being a full-time working mother of four, my life since the late 1960s has been one of being constantly on the move. Now that I'm retired, it's been hard to slow down. This class has enabled me to be silent and only concentrate on Adabelle's movements. She has a very calming effect on the class and is a wonderfully patient teacher."

– CAROL SWARTZ

"I have been taking TCC classes for four years. They have greatly improved my balance and helped strengthen the right side of my body, which underwent a hip replacement four years ago. Doing this in a group provides a calming energy. It is like meditation, but I am active and not sitting still. I can't recommend this enough." – SUSAN COOPER

"I have an essential tremor which effects balance, and the neurologist recommended T'ai Chi so I went to a couple of classes but it was very hard to follow the movements. Then the physical therapist working with me on balance learned about TCC and suggested I try it. I was excited and relieved after my first session with Adabelle. I would always be learning and knew that I felt peace of mind, body and spirit. While TCC will probably help me develop body-balance skills, its most important aspect is the mixing of energies. My acupuncturist has said that my *yin/yang* energies are out of balance with yang being dominant. The beauty of TCC with Adabelle is that we are encouraged to listen to our bodies and do only what works for us. I am grateful."

– BARBARA YARBROUGH

"Seven months into practicing TCC, I've overcome the awkwardness of coordinating hands and feet. My posture has improved greatly as has my balance and my state of mind. I feel more in touch with the present. I absolutely love this practice (usually done five days/week) and miss it terribly when I am unable to do it." – CHRISTINE LAWSON

"We have been practicing with Adabelle for a month, and enjoy the slow movements and calm atmosphere, which results in a feeling of wellbeing for the rest of the day. Adabelle's quotations for the day inspire reflection and are also greatly appreciated. We're planning to continue with the hope of improving our balance."

– DENNY AND FRAN BIANCHI

"I have been practicing for a year and one word sums it up: serenity.

S – slow movements
E – ease of movements
R – rocking movements
E – energizing movements
N – natural movements
I – imitating movements
T – thoughtful movements
Y – yielding movements"

– GESINE MANGIERI

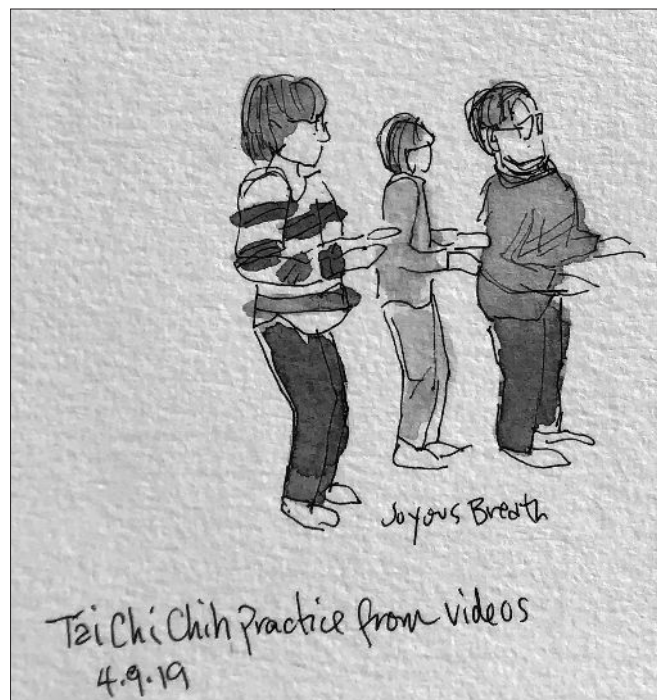
"TCC helps me be in the present and forces me (in a good way) to take my time while other things have to wait. I am in this bubble of energy that I create (and my friends around me create) which makes me feel good. It feels like the after effects of a good massage."

– DOMINIQUE GEORGAS

"TCC is the opposite of today's world:

Slow down ≠ Go faster
Focused/self ≠ Everybody else's needs
Grounded ≠ Butterfly going from one flower to the next one
Circle of friends ≠ Individual" – ANON

"I have gained so many benefits since beginning to practice. Some are emotional and others are physical, such as mood improvement, better sleep, balance improvement, reduced stress and improved focus." – LAILA ROBERTS



"A family friend told me about TCC. She knew I liked to exercise with the TV. I said no, several times, and then came to my first class. I felt so good after the practice that I thanked her for her persistence in getting me to attend. When I first began TCC, I was using a cane, my muscles were weak and I had poor balance. After practicing TCC, the cane is no longer needed. I have been attending an average of twice a week for several years and feel that TCC practice worked better for me than physical therapy."

– DOT BROWN

Closing Tradition

By Sandy McAlister, Hayward, California

Tradition is the handing down of statements or customs (a group pattern of habitual activity) from generation to generation by word of mouth or by practice. Do we have traditions in T'ai Chi Chih, specifically with regards to the end of our practice?

At the close of our TCC practice we hold the Cosmic Consciousness Pose and then return to the grounding position that Justin referred to as the graceful conclusion. That is the end of a TCC practice, period.

Over the years I have witnessed many additions to the end of a practice. Sometimes it is as simple as bringing the hands together in prayer pose and nodding a slight bow, to the extreme of everyone bowing to everyone else in the class; chanting; each person repeating the word Namaste; sitting meditation or a guided visualization. All this is done as if it is the final conclusion of a TCC practice.

So, I pose the questions, “Do we have a closing routine” or “Is there a finish to a TCC practice after graceful conclusion?” What did Justin teach us by words or example to do at the end of our practice as a way of closure or honoring the end of our TCC practice? **What, if any, is our tradition?**

One teaching of Justin's that has made an impression upon me is the importance he placed on gratitude. There were many times he talked and wrote about gratitude. In *Spiritual Odyssey*, I have noted at least five places he talks about gratitude. One quotation, **“A day of profound gratitude. When we are grateful, we are joyous. Gratitude does not mean rejoicing because some desire has been satisfied.”** And Justin was fond of repeating a quote from Paul Reps, “How grateful I am with no thing to be grateful for.” Both these quotations are about the essence of gratitude rather than about a tangible thing.

And at the end of our practice we often feel a sense of wellbeing and peacefulness that shines a light on the feeling of gratitude and how that manifests in our lives. So taking time at the end of our practice for acknowledgement and recognition of gratitude is in keeping with Justin's teachings. TCC fosters awareness of gratitude.

Sitting quietly. There is so much that speaks to us in silence, so much understanding of ourselves that happens through focused inward silence. Another quotation taken from *Spiritual Odyssey*, **“I like Paul Reps idea of sitting quietly for five minutes (better make it ten) each day and just allowing yourself to ‘receive’. No thinking, no technique, no mantra repetitions, no watching the breath, but just sitting quietly in a chair.”** Over time many of our group practices, especially at conferences, have been followed by a few minutes of sitting quietly – not in meditation – just sitting in silence.

So, I feel that *if* we were to say we had any “traditions” that have been handed down by Justin through his teachings that could follow a TCC practice it would be recognition of gratitude and sitting quietly.

I think the community has, by virtue of the definition of tradition, created another one, and that is the bringing together of the palms into what is known as the prayer position and executing a slight bow. I, as well as several other teachers who practiced with Justin often, remember that Justin occasionally, at the end of a practice, would bring his palms together and make a slight bow, quick, simple, without pomp or flare. I'm sure this was very natural for him with his deep affection and respect for the Japanese culture.

The prayer hands position has many meanings. Apart from a religious connotation, it is a sign of respect, of acknowledgment, of silent communication. Bringing the hands in close to the body and bowing the head draws the focus inward. It provides a moment to let the fruits of our practice blossom and be felt physically, emotionally, spiritually. Ending a practice this way can bring a feeling of closure, be a concrete way of acknowledging a shared experience, or give us a moment of stillness providing an opportunity to receive or just be.

Sitting quietly at the end of our practice and acknowledgement of gratitude are awareness gifts from Justin. The community has added palms together (prayer hands) with a slight bow. These seem to be our traditions. Traditions are not laws or rules but accepted practices followed, if they serve a purpose.

The end of our practice is a very personal and private time. We have each experienced our own journey as we practiced the form and we need to be free to express that closure in a way that serves us and acknowledges the journey within and without. **We need to be clear what is TCC and what is not and why we do what we do.** I would ask each practitioner of TCC to examine their “routine” at the end of a practice. Is it in keeping with TCC? Is it soft, simple, direct, egoless, purposeful? Let the closure of your practice enhance the experience of the practice whether it be a murmur of gratitude, sitting quietly for a few minutes, or a simple bow with inward focus, or ending with graceful conclusion. These are our traditions.

TCC: Retreat Or Intensive?

By Pam Towne, Oceanside, California

Students and teachers have asked me, “What is the difference between a retreat and an intensive?” The short answer is that an intensive is longer and, not surprisingly, more intense. But that doesn’t begin to scratch the surface. My first experience of T’ai Chi Chih was during a 5-day spiritual retreat at Asilomar on the Central California Coast in 1984; so it’s natural for me to associate TCC with retreats. I’ve found many rewards from them; it’s an enjoyable way to support one’s practice with a group of like-minded people from all across the country, and to make new friends.

A TCC retreat, usually three or four days at a peaceful retreat facility, offers ways to deepen your experience and understanding of TCC while refining and becoming more comfortable with the movements, especially the “Taffies.” It’s open to anyone who knows or wants to learn TCC. If space is available, you can bring along an adult guest who doesn’t do TCC and will do their own thing while you are doing TCC.

A retreat provides a time of deep relaxation, away from the usual responsibilities and distractions of daily life. It offers time for self-care and re-charging your physical, mental and spiritual batteries. The schedule is leisurely, with a TCC workshop in the morning and another in the afternoon, with a couple hours of free time after lunch. In the evenings there are discussions and light-hearted activities.

A TCC intensive is 4-1/2 days; participants arrive the day before for an orientation meeting that evening. It is also generally held at a retreat facility except in Albuquerque, where it is held at the TCC Center and participants stay at a local hotel. The intensive is open to TCC teachers, teacher candidates and serious students who have practiced TCC regularly for at least a year.

The focus is on how to move well for the greatest flow of *Chi*, embodying the principles of flowing from the center with softness and continuity, while shifting the weight correctly, focusing in the soles of the feet, and being aware of circularity and polarity in the movements. A lot of individual feedback is given. Teachers learn to develop a discerning eye for what corrections students need, as well as knowing how to better prepare candidates for accreditation.

Teacher candidates receive an important part of accreditation preparation and leave knowing what they still need to work on. Ideally, they will have two to six months to incorporate those changes before attending an accreditation course.

If you are considering one or the other, plan to attend a retreat first. If you are drawn to or recommended to do an intensive, don’t let its name keep you from an amazing experience.

Softness & What (?) In TCC Practice

By Daniel Pienciak, Howell, New Jersey

As Justin Stone wrote about T’ai Chi Chih practice: “It is more important to know *how to move* than what to move.” A big part of teaching of *how to move* is “with softness and continuity.”

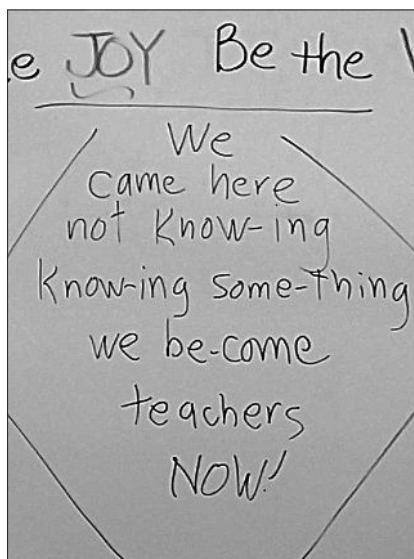
Softness, Justin said, is lack of tension. Wrists and arms are relaxed. Shoulders are “relaxed and drooping.” (See the **TCC Photo Text**: “Important Points on Moving Correctly.”) There is never any stiffness, *but neither is there limpness*. As a teacher for more than 20 years, there is a gentle and pliable shape to the movements: defined, but never rigid. Continuity might be more elusive. Several students this year have asked me to explain this concept/way of moving.

Continuity means that there are *no abrupt starts or stops in TCC*. There are also no slippery spots, as one teacher put it. Everything is gradual, smooth and even. As the front leg *gradually* bends, the back leg *gradually* straightens. This might not be as simple as it seems. Justin talked about “snapping back” in forward and back movements, meaning that some will suddenly bend the back leg quickly on the backward weight shift, coming back more quickly than they moved forward. I have had many students develop the habit in Daughter on the Mountaintop of lunging forward quickly (the hands rushing upward) and then returning backward slowly. This is not continuity.

Students might develop a slight pause each time they complete a repetition. Watch for this. When the hands return, completing a circle in Around the Platter or Bass Drum, there might be an almost imperceptible pause before beginning the next weight shift forward. Continuity means that one repetition flows right into the next, with no perceptible pause. We are not doing exercise repetitions.

In any TCC movement, the hands might suddenly rush (like hitting a patch of ice) instead of continuing at one, even, gradual pace. *Check the weight shift below* if you notice this. “Slippery spots” in hand movements are often caused by a faulty or uneven weight shift.

One teacher gave this analogy to aid in getting the feeling of a smooth, even weight shift (with no ripples or splashes): Imagine you are carrying a basin full of water on your pelvis. You need to move the basin (from the waist down) without having the water slosh all over yourself and the floor. **Developing a solid, smooth and strong base is invaluable in TCC practice.**



The Notion Of Continuity

By Richard Karasik, Saratoga, California

Justin's writings say that: "Softness and continuity are the essence of T'ai Chi Chih." Softness is mentioned in a few of his videos. Not much is said about continuity. In the few discussions I had with Justin he said, "Softness and continuity is the essence of T'ai Chi Chih." This seemingly small change opened up a new universe for me. Justin emphasized it like this: "Softness, **AND** continuity, **IS** the essence of T'ai Chi Chih."

For me, this is a totally different concept than the way it is often written. It was Justin's unvoiced challenge to me to explore softness and continuity stated this way. I also chose to focus a little more on my understanding of continuity because not much is written about it.

This statement points to a concept bigger than softness or continuity considered individually. In effect, Justin's way of stating it to me is like saying "you, me, us." Us is not you added to me. Softness is one thing, continuity another, but what shows up when these are taken together as a *gestalt*?

I felt Justin inviting me to explore softness, and continuity, and a third thing that wasn't simply softness-plus-continuity without a word associated with it. **Justin's statement also made me curious about continuity, and how I interpreted it.**

Tracing the outline of a circle with our finger, we can say it is continuous. If we pause every so often as we trace the circle, but keep our finger on the circle, have we lost continuity or just expanded our concept of what continuity could be? Is there a continuity of physical form, and a continuity in time, and energy, and perhaps in expectations?

We name parts of music – notes, rests, codas and others. These are all human-invented names to help us explore the notion of music with other people. When listening to music there are no parts, there is just music.

Is a piece of music with rests in it continuous? Is it continuous in the same way our journey around the circle punctuated by stops is continuous? The word *music* is a container for all of the things we call *parts* of music, yet greater than the sum of all the parts. It is the complete piece of music that is continuous – not just the parts with notes in it.

Symphony is a container word for a form of music with a very specific combination of notes, rests, movements, etc. As a structure, a symphony has integrity, and wholeness, and continuity even though we can



speak of many different parts. A symphony from beginning to end represents *structural* continuity. This expands my understanding/experience of continuity even further beyond *physical* continuity.

Concerto, scherzo, round, are all *container* names for forms of music. Each one brings different things to mind than simply thinking about notes and rests.

I perceive a TCC practice as continuous the way a symphony is continuous. I know there are names for parts (movement names, *tan t'ien*, arms, legs, etc.) but I prefer to hold them as a whole *symphony* called TCC – not just as a bunch of parts or movements added together. **I am more mindful of the symphony of TCC than of the**

parts. I call this mindfulness *spiritual* continuity.

I embrace the starting, the movement, the completion, the graceful conclusion, the construction going on across the street, my dog licking its paws, a shooting star... as the TCC symphony playing right now.

We are all connected to everything. You and I interact with the air, the earth's magnetic fields and the *Chi*. You and I are continuous in the same way that a punctuated circle is. Our practice of TCC is continuous with everything at all times even if it is not touching it in physical space. We act on the *Chi* and it acts on us. This is another form of spiritual continuity, perhaps like the difference between a scherzo and a symphony.

My most meaningful practices are when I hold TCC as all these understandings of continuity. The key element is the mind of the observer interacting with our universe. **Mindfulness is the entry point to everything I have been speaking to.**

Returning to the statement: Softness ... AND continuity ... IS the essence of Tai Chi Chih.

That collection of words is expressing ideas meant to be taken as a whole – a *gestalt* – a single nameless container holding softness and continuity. There is a brilliance in Justin in not providing a name for this. Our minds would just get stuck on the name and miss the experience.

The container is the essence not the individual parts, in the same way a symphony is not just a bunch notes and rests. The container operates at a higher level of mindfulness than any part individually. The number of containers one can perceive is almost endless. Play with it and see what comes up for you.

Great Loss Can Be A Gift

By Anna Vaith, Racine, Minnesota

Two days ago, I attended funeral visitation for Lane, the husband of one of my T'ai Chi Chih students. I contemplated the great loss my student, Karen, is going through. Karen has been so brave. She was her husband's primary caregiver as cancer slowly took over his body. I've admired Karen's choice to choose a positive attitude each day, despite adversity. I was inspired by Karen who continued to attend TCC and yoga even after spending part of her nights awake and caregiving. She modeled self-care, selflessness and a deep love for her family.

I am reminded that TCC helped me through my own greatest human loss – the sudden death of my grandmother. TCC was the only activity that took away the physical pain and emptiness inside my body. Each practice lessened the pain and gave me hope that I would recover from this great loss. Each practice brought me one step closer to peace and a return to wholeness.

I needed to practice TCC to heal. Understanding myself, I created the goal of attending a TCC teacher accreditation. It would help me improve my own practice and encourage me to practice something that was helping me heal from the inside out. Once I arrived at accreditation, my goal was met before the week started. Passing or failing was irrelevant. TCC had helped me recover from grief and the great loss of a loved one.

I did pass and became a TCC teacher in March 2005, which was 10 months after Grandma's passing. I did not intend to teach TCC after becoming a teacher; I thought I would teach during retirement in 33 years. By the end of the accreditation week, I still needed to practice TCC for my own benefit. I knew myself well and knew I needed a goal. Teaching would be a great way to keep practicing. I offered a beginning class through community education in the small town where I attended high school. The first class had 15 participants, many of whom continue to practice today. I have been teaching ever since.

At a recent practice, as I looked around the circle of faces while we moved, I was filled with gratitude for the opportunity to teach TCC. I am grateful even for my own grief over the loss of my Grandma, which helped bring the gift of teaching and practicing TCC into my life. Sometimes a great loss can bring your biggest and best gifts. My hope is for Karen and her family to receive many gifts through their loss. With time and patience, may the gifts come.

Daughter In The Valley: Green Trees

By Charles B. Cappel, Lake Charles, Louisiana

Daughter in the Valley reminds me of beautiful Louisiana oak trees. I often focus on nearby oak trees when practicing this movement in my yard or at the park, and envision their systems helping me to cultivate the *Chi* in myself and in my community. I see *Chi* gathered in the roots, extending up the trunk and shared in the canopy for the world to enjoy.

Daughter in the Valley traces the outline of a tree as the hands sweep up forming the opposing "J" motions. The hands/wrists drop from their high positions sweeping inward tracing the lines of the tree's root system, up the trunk and into the canopy as the hands separate and the *tan t'ien* retreats.

Daughter in the Valley also traces the energy system of the tree. As the hands approach each other, there is a growing appreciation of the *Chi* force as the polarity mounts. In the same manner, the tree's roots coalesce, in grander systems as they get closer to the trunk to sustain the tree's union with the heavens. Once the hands are close, the polarity of the *Chi* trembles the chords of freedom as the hands move upward along the trunk of the tree.

The tree erupts from mother earth in resolute embodiment of its freedom. At the apex of the movement, before our hands separate, there is a growing awareness in which we are invited to appreciate the majesty of the *Chi* and the tree, in all its strength and compassionate giving. We share in this wisdom and *Chi*, like the tree shares its beautiful boughs, branches and leaves with all of us. The shimmering *Chi* radiating from the palms reminds me of the amazing sunlit greens on display in the canopies, powered by the energy synthesis taking place in each leaf as it transforms light into matter.

Daughter in the Valley provides a clear metaphor of the liberation from the limitations we are ready to release, allowing us to transform ourselves with *Chi* into lighter beings. Paradoxically, as the daughter descends the mountain, she becomes increasingly aware of her appreciation of the *Chi* expressing

in the valley's biota and resonating from her *tan t'ien*. The descent from the mountain metaphorically represents her decision to depart from the precipice of untruth of the egoic state of awareness to the valley where fertile fields are free from the blockages of the unbending mountain and the limits of ego, allowing a flow of *Chi*. Here, she may cultivate the *Chi* in the soft, malleable soils of the mother and liberate her consciousness.

peace.

it does not mean to be in a place
where there is no noise, trouble
or hard work. it means to be in
the midst of those things and still
be calm in your heart.

(unknown)

Pulling Taffy Rock Stars

By Bev Chandley, Fort Myers, Florida

The big day had come: the day to teach Pulling Taffy to my current class at Shell Point Retirement Community. Since the class meets at 3:30pm, there was plenty of time to reflect on previous classes and to recall difficulties that seniors had experienced while learning “the Taffies.”

I have observed over nine years of teaching that many older students have a tendency to turn over the hand that begins palm up, ending with the high hand palm facing down rather than in the upward receiving position, so I was determined to think of a way to encourage them to keep their palms up during this movement.

I took a basket of polished stones to class and asked each student to select one. They could not wait to see what they were going to do with the earthy stones. We began working on the hand movements. They were instructed to place their stone in their left palm at their low waist with their right palm facing down hovering over it. Next, they were asked to move their hand containing the stone to their left until it was in the high hand “taffy” position, leaving the right hand where it was for now.

Not one of the 31 stones dropped. Not a sound. Every student had their hand in the correct position, proudly displaying their stone. They repeated the same movement a number of times. Not one hand turned over, not one stone dropped. Then they switched hands and placed their stones in their right hands to do the same. Again, no stones fell; they were having fun with no confusion. We eventually practically effortlessly, working into the rest of Pulling Taffy. I was practically giddy over how effective the simple stones were in overcoming that particular difficulty. **I dubbed the beaming group my “Pulling Taffy Rock Stars.”**

Some of these students had taken the class many times and prior to this class were sharing concerns about learning “the Taffies” again with other students. But the stones helped win over the skeptics. My hope is that this positive experience may help instructors ease their groups into being Pulling Taffy Rock Stars, too.



Moving Toward & Through The Center

By Carol Selby, San Luis Obispo, California

I experienced a small teaching epiphany while working with students with physical problems including Parkinson’s disease (which causes significant challenges with balance, coordination and strength). It has also helped other students avoid bad habits such as trying to make the practice “grand” by winding or grinding their arms or trying to push off with their back foot. Not being athletes or dancers, many people have no idea what moving from the center means, and it isn’t that easy to explain.

Lately I have begun to express the moving-from-the-center concept as seeking and recognizing the brief moments of secure neutral balance that happen when both feet are flat on the floor and our hands are passing in front of the body. Teaching people with poor balance to move *toward* that brief secure and peaceful moment, rather than focusing on moving away from it, has made a significant difference in their confidence and ability to enjoy the practice. It has also improved the form of my other students, some of them long-time practitioners.

By finding that safe place in the middle of each repetition of every move and enjoying moving toward then through it, we experience a stronger sense of balance and physical quiet which generates the energy for the next part of the movement and produces the feeling of mindful joy and contentment so many of us treasure in this practice.

Teaching this has been interesting. Some have recalled how it felt as a child on a playground swing, with movement then release followed by an opposing movement and another release as gravity brought them down. When swinging, the physical properties of the ropes define the shape and scope of each cycle. **In T’ai Chi Chih, our relaxed bodies and limbs define the shape and scope of each repetition of each movement.**

This way of looking at “centeredness” is really nothing new and just a way of thinking about what we all were taught from the beginning. I remember Justin Stone yelling at a group of experienced instructors: “Why are you waving your arms around?” Let TCC *do* TCC. Don’t fight it; Don’t *work* it. Less is more.

As we age, we become increasingly aware that **grace is found in the quiet places; savor them.** So, relax; the practice will use gravity to generate its own energy. **With this mild emphasis on seeking the middle of the movement rather than aiming for the edges,** students learn right away to *let* the whole body shift naturally, carrying the arms and hands, and at the last, letting their hands gracefully provide each move’s inherent expression while maintaining the new center of balance. Beautiful.

TCC Intensive with Sandy

Colorado Springs, Colorado, October 2018

By Connie Krumrai, Loveland, Colorado

Resting in a State of Becoming I have been blessed with several opportunities to attend T'ai Chi Chih workshops and retreats since my first class. In the beginning, with my ego mind, I confidently entered into these opportunities thinking I had the movements down correctly. Go ahead and chuckle; I do. This time was different. I knew in the months, weeks and days leading up to this intensive that I needed to come with an empty mind. I knew I would learn new ideas, techniques and sensations to deepen my practice. And of course I did.

It's taken me more than a month since the intensive to put words to what I experienced. For 3-1/2 days, I was free from anxiety, fear, sadness, judgment and self-criticism. I experienced feelings of strength, courage, joy, serenity, peace, faith, unity and community – with a dash of a laughter.

At my first TCC retreat two years ago, my teacher was guiding me in my forward/ backward weight shifts when she suggested to soften my knee and move from my *tan t'ien*, and it finally happened at the intensive. My back knee softened and I felt my tailbone lead the weight shift backward. It was an incredible, powerful feeling, like my entire pelvic girdle became unfrozen. **What else was released in that moment?**

Now I wait, like a spring bulb waits below the frozen soil, patiently. What am I waiting for? Transformation, subtle transformation. How do I know this? Because of experiences with other subtle transformations since embarking on this TCC journey. It will come in its own time; I do not know (or need to know) what will take root. This is one change that has taken place: One habit energy (control) wants to know what's going to happen and when.



Our lives revolve around Chronos time (chronological or sequence time). The *Chi*, in my opinion, moves in Kairos time. According to Merriam-Webster, kairos means, “a time when conditions are right for the accomplishment of a crucial action: the opportune and decisive moment.” I trust that the *Chi* will bring the transformation needed for my continued healing at the opportune time for me, and this brings me joy.

TCC Intensive with Sandy

Colorado Springs, Colorado, October 2018

By Adrienne Welch, St. Louis, Missouri

I was nervous, yet knew this experience was needed to take me to the next level in my TCC practice. I set my intention to be open to wherever this would take me. I am happy to report that I was generously rewarded. Our leader Sandy McAlister,

along with host Marie Dotts, created a joyful and supportive learning environment for each participant to further refine their individual TCC practice.

Many in the group were in the process of becoming accredited TCC teachers. I too am on that path. Participating in the intensive has enabled me to come closer to that goal. Not only did I receive personal guidance from Sandy on how to tweak my TCC practice, but I also received many valuable suggestions from other teachers attending the workshop, as well as from fellow students that resulted in several “aha” moments.

The practice of TCC has transformed my life in so many ways. Not only has it helped improve my balance and heal body's aches and pains, it has given me the opportunity to grow as a person. When I am stressed or overwhelmed, TCC calms and grounds me. **I have experienced inner joy and peace at a level I never thought possible.** My goal as an accredited teacher will be to share the possibilities that one can experience when TCC becomes a part of one's daily life. Perhaps most importantly, TCC has introduced me to a community of supportive and loving people from all walks of life open to sharing the joy of TCC.

CONTINUED FROM P. 1

This belief in the saving power of Amida is much like what we call Christ Consciousness. There is no doubt that such beliefs alter the level of consciousness, and it may be thought that the Pure Land (Western Paradise) represents this religious consciousness brought to a state of maturity.

In his writing, Jodo Wasan, Shinran graphically shows how he found his way and how the specter of doubt vanished from his life forever. He wrote simply and powerfully:

Unhindered like space in the light cloud,
Free from all impediments,
None is there unblessed by the light.
Take refuge in the Inconceivable One.

He also wrote: "Unequaled is the pure, clear light. When we meet and trust this light, all our Karmic bonds are renewed. Take refuge in the Ultimate Resort."

~ ~ ~

Twenty-five hundred years ago, Gautama (prince of the Sakya people in northeast India) left his future kingdom, wife and son to become a homeless mendicant. After wandering and almost starving for six years, he realized perfect Enlightenment and became the only Buddha of historic times. He was not a philosopher or a theoretician. In turning the wheel of karmic law, he tried to show the way for all beings to reach the enlightened state of the Buddha (*nirvana*) and to thereby end all suffering. His was a practical path of compassion, and much of what follows refers to his teaching, for he certainly was one who found Ultimate answers.

Many times we read accounts of fantastic psychic experiences of various seekers and saints. The uninitiated are fascinated with this razzle-dazzle, mistaking mental aberrations for Enlightenment. In truth, psychic experiences, no matter how desirable they seem, can be hindrances and represent the workings of a mind still bound by delusion. The Buddha told his monks that if one has total mindfulness of the breathing process, he will see that each simple breath has extension in time – a beginning, middle and end. After a while the turn to the next breath will become crystal clear. Then an experience of a simple mental image, like a star (usually blue) will show true absorption. Visions and images are indicative of a deluded mind. This will be disillusioning to many who want to read about or have lofty experiences. But it is important for the sincere meditator to remember. **The Buddha said there are five hindrances that interfere with meditation: sense desire, anger, sloth (torpor), agitation and worry and doubt.**

Meditation enables one to know the mind and knowing it, to shape the mind, which in turn leads to a freeing of the mind. When habit patterns are broken and tendencies burned to ashes, there is freedom and stillness. But not before then. Until this is done, we have a state of mind somewhat like Tagore's, where there are questions without answers. When the mind is mastered, whether through the self-disci-

pline of The Buddha or the complete surrender of Shinran, all doubts vanish and there are no more questions.

Mastering of the mind means mastery of the body. When the body is mastered, said The Buddha, the mind is mastered. The psycho-physical mechanism is one. Enlightenment can be approached through the physical side (as in Hatha Yoga or T'ai Chi Ch'uan) or through the mental (as in meditation or *Japa*). Both are valid. Each time there is a spiritual change, we have a physical change. **A man is literally what his Intrinsic Energy (*Prana*) is.** This Life Force changes as we cultivate ourselves – and as we cultivate ourselves, the Life Force changes.

~ ~ ~

Leading the meditative life, we begin to understand what is meant by the Lotus Sutra:

"From the State of Emptiness, each man's body is a body pervading the Universe, his voice is a voice filling the Universe, and his life is a life without limit."

Cultivating this emptiness (living and acting without clinging, without compulsion, and without a seeking heart) is, of course, the task of Zen practitioners.

The aim of Zen is to free oneself from all conditions – however pleasurable or painful – while living in the midst of conditions. To do this means living in the here and now while transcending the here and now.

Nowhere has the task of meditation been better spelled out than by the great 20th century sage Ramana Maharshi, as quoted in his ashram's fine journal, *Mountain Path*. Bhagavan Ramana said:

Better than spells of meditation
Is one continuous current,
Steady as a stream,
Or downward flow of oil.

Better than viewing Him as Other,
Indeed, the noblest attitude of all,
Is to hold Him as the "I" within,
The very "I."

Abidance in pure being,
Transcending thought through love intense,
Is the very essence
Of Supreme devotion.

Absorption in the heart of being,
Whence we sprang,
Is the path of action, of devotion,
Of union, and of knowledge.

Ramana goes on to give the following instruction to reach this end:

Holding the breath controls the mind,
A bird caught in a net.
Breath regulation helps
Absorption in the heart.

Mind and breath (as thought and action)
Fork out like two branches,
But both spring
From a single root.

Absorption is of two sorts:
Submergence and destruction.
Mind submerged rises again.
Dead, it revives no more.

We may ask, "How can we 'kill' the mind? How do we give 'ourselves' up?" Yet, Chan (Chinese Zen) says, "When nothing remains to give up, one has, indeed, reached the Source."

The principle practice of Zen is, of course, *zazen* or sitting meditation.

What is zazen?
Zazen is NOWNESS.

How does one realize this NOW?
By harmonizing mind and body.

How does one harmonize mind and body?
By forgetting mind and body.

In what way is the self realized?
By forgetting the self, the self is realized.

~ ~ ~

I'd like to close by quoting Professor Ogata's fine translation of the famous "*Song of Dhyana*" by the great Japanese Zen Master Hakuin Zenji. Dhyana is meditation, so this is the "*Song of Meditation*" from a Zen master. It never fails to knock me out whenever I hear it.

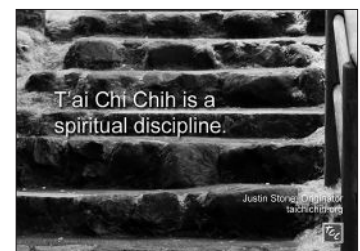
Song of Dhyana

All beings are primarily Buddhas. It is like water and ice:
There is no ice apart from water and there are no Buddhas
apart from beings.
Not knowing how close the truth is to them, beings seek for it
afar – what a pity.
They are like those who, being in the midst of water, cry out for
water, feeling thirst.
Those who, for once,
Listening to the Dharma,
In all humility,
Praise it and faithfully follow it,

Will be endowed with innumerable merits.
But how much more so
When you turn your eyes within yourselves
And have a glimpse into your self-nature.
The truth permits no idle sophistry.
For you then
Open the gate leading to the oneness of cause and effect:
Before you then
Lies a straight road of non-duality and non-trinity.

When you come to understand
That form is the form of the formless,
Your coming and going takes place nowhere else
But where you are.
When you understand
That thought is the thought of the thoughtless,
Your singing and dancing is no other than the
Voice of the Dharma.
How boundless is the sky of samadhi.
How refreshingly bright is the moon of the fourfold wisdom.
Being so, is there anything you lack?
As the absolute presents itself before you,
The place where you stand is the land of the lotus,
And your person, the body of the Buddha.

There is nothing to be added to this magnificent statement. Can there be any doubt that Hakuin Zenji (who said after his Enlightenment, "After that, seeing the things of the world was like viewing the back of my own hand") found his answer?



From Justin Stone's *Climb the Joyous Mountain*
and available on www.justinstonetcc.com

Folsom TCC Class At Relay For Life, Summer 2018

Compiled by Julie Heryet, El Dorado, California

For the first time since I've been teaching at Folsom State Prison, the men in the T'ai Chi Chih class approached me about entering Folsom's Annual Relay for Life to raise funds for Cancer. The TCC Foundation provided grant money to enter and we created two teams: T'ai Chi Chih – Circles of Light and Folsom Moving Meditation. We set up a table near the track to offer handouts describing the class and the benefits of TCC, articles about the class, quotations from my students and instructions on how to sign up.

My class had also been asked to perform a TCC demonstration. During the weeks before the event, the men shared their concerns, as we'd be on display like never before: "I know people are going to laugh" ... "I'm really, really, nervous about this" ... "I've never been this nervous in my entire life." I responded, "After all the scary stuff you guys have been through, in addition to living in a prison?" Heads nodded. I reminded them that through their TCC practice they had learned to stay grounded, breathe and act instead of react.

It is hard for outsiders to understand what one's image means in the prison environment. The gang tensions dominating many inner cities are prevalent in the prison system as well, and especially between races. This divided culture can make it very difficult for inmates to engage in self-improvement programs. To do TCC in front of peers – participating in a group of people of different racial, ethnic and religious backgrounds – was to take a big risk. Not just the risk of being laughed at ("Bird Flaps it's Wings" was definitely out), but the possibility of more serious consequences.

Leading up the event we focused on the movements we'd share: Rocking Motion, Bass Drum, Carry the Ball to the Side and Push Pull. We practiced one movement nine times in our large circle, and then the group turned and faced outward and did the movement nine more times without looking at anyone else. This process seemed to help them build self-confidence, self-reliance and block out distractions.

Then came the big day. Inmates came over to ask about the class and pick up our literature. The yard was very full and several of students stayed near the table with Mari and me. The demonstration went splendidly. We were all in sync and moved softly and slowly. Their relief at being done was short lived, though. Someone recording the day's events asked if we'd do it again so they could record it. Some students felt they'd just survived a harrowing experience, but what an honor and opportunity for our class – to be recorded in front of the general population. Everyone participated and they did beautifully again. A few onlookers made silly comments, but most guys reported that after the demo quite a few inmates asked about the class.



I'm kinda quiet. [The men smile; a few nod encouragingly.] But I really enjoy this class and the people in it. I enjoy the beautiful energy all around me while I'm here. It brings peace of mind and calm and serenity to my life. It helps me deal with being in prison and being away from my family. It's hard to describe in words but I do my best. I am fairly new to the class and still have a lot to learn, but I'm looking forward to carrying what I've learned back home to my family and community. Thank you for this wonderful teaching and practice.

– BRIAN R.

When we processed the experience, one inmate, who had been in an adult prison since the age of 16, said it was the hardest thing he'd ever done. But he was glad he'd done it. All were very proud to have overcome their fears and shared with the general population something that has been so transformative for them.

Weeks after the event, one student came into class grinning from ear-to-ear. "Guess what?" he shared, "The video of our TCC demo at the Relay for Life is being shown on the Prison TV channel several times a week!" Again, everyone had something to celebrate and be proud of.

What each of my students' experienced was priceless: the value of facing fears and overcoming them, a sense of self-respect and pride, and not only having their TCC demonstration recorded, but also shown to the entire prison population on TV. The students are grateful to T'ai Chi Chih for providing this experience and feel blessed to belong to a practice community that offers them an entirely different identity than that of an inmate. They are TCC students and practitioners.

TCC On The Mekong

By Shari Holmes, Albuquerque NM

I recently had the pleasure of visiting Cambodia and Vietnam as part of an organized cruise on the Mekong River. Two friends also on the cruise were students from my first T'ai Chi Chih class, taught right after the New Year. (I received my teacher's accreditation in November of last year.) These countries are fascinating, and the people, largely Buddhist, are beautiful. My friends and I looked forward to doing daily TCC together in this ambience.

Our tour was educational and busy. Excursions in 90-plus degree weather were offered twice daily. Finding time for 45 minutes of TCC together was not easy; usually we had to cut it short, but we did some TCC almost every day. Before we boarded the ship, we spent several days on land and enjoyed practicing in the cool mornings on our hotel room patio, surrounded by trees, birds and flowers.

Once onboard, I met the ship's vibrant and delightful Vietnamese wellness coach, who had learned her favorite discipline of yoga in India. I told her about TCC, and she was very interested and wanted me to show it to her. Alas, our schedules did not mesh. Hers was packed with classes, and mine with excursions to temples and villages. I did manage to attend two early-morning Qigong sessions, but we never had leisure to get together for TCC.

One day, my friends and I met on the top deck in the afternoon to do TCC in the fresh air. As we began TCC, two other passengers, who'd done some work in T'ai Chi Ch'uan, joined us. They followed us fairly seamlessly. As we parted, a voice behind me offered thanks. Two women in the swimming pool behind us had been following right along.

That was the only time the top deck was available as the cruise ship was a very busy place. But my partner and I managed to do TCC onboard daily, if only in our stateroom, big enough to accommodate our portable practice.



Even though I didn't get to practice TCC with our wellness coach, I piqued her curiosity, gave her my card with the TCC websites and shared how to access Carmen's YouTube demonstration. And I happily showed several other passengers the beauty and joy that is TCC.

Should Have Known

By Lauren Paitson, Sault Ste Marie, Michigan

It's been a long snowy winter in Sault Ste Marie (nicknamed "the Soo"), which borders Canada and the U.S. This season we received twelve feet of snowfall. As I write, the clocks have sprung forward, the calendar says Spring and Easter is around the corner. Yet three feet of snow remain on the ground.

Snow, which touches all aspects of life in Michigan's Upper Peninsula, affected me one early February morning when I was on a flight out of the Soo. What should have been an hour flight to Minneapolis took nine hours. Our plane made multiple attempts to land only to be diverted three times. The first time we were diverted to Des Moines in a blizzard and after we sat on the tarmac, re-fueled and de-iced, we were back in the air only to be vectored to Omaha. Unable to deplane, we were stranded for another few hours. Cramped in the last row next to the lavatory, bored after reading the only book I had, and having eaten and shared with a diabetic woman all my emergency snacks, it was time for a little T'ai Chi Chih. I thought the *Chi* would help get us safely back in the air to Minneapolis and in good cheer. So, there I was standing in an aisle practicing TCC on a plane in Omaha, encouraging the *Chi* to do its thing.

The captain eventually fueled up again, de-iced again and started onward to Minneapolis again. On the fourth attempt, after landing soundly, the pilots and flight attendant announced that they had never anticipated such a patient, calm and understanding group of passengers. TCC helped the whole energy of the flight and it certainly helped me realize that all would be well. By the way, the flight attendant's name was Carmen. I should have known all along that the journey would end well.

It Takes A Community

The Minnesota teachers have been busy preparing what we hope will be a great conference experience for you in late June. Just as we know that the *Chi* flows more powerfully when we practice together, it has been wonderful seeing what our combined energy and talents can manifest. It's been quite magical and we are so looking forward to have you all with us to share that magic and the warmth, generosity and creativity of this great team.

The theme of community has been important to us. As one of my students said recently, "Within the circle of my practice community, I feel accepted and connected.... I sense that together our energy is being healed and renewed." This year's conference will be a time not only of movement refinement, but also of inspiration. It will be about how we move, but also about why we move – and why we do it together.

Conference is right around the corner. Please register today. We look forward to welcoming all to "Return to the Circle" in Minnesota on June 27, 2019.

— LAURIE JACOBI, CO-CHAIR WITH LINDA ZELIG



What Does TCC Community Mean To Me?

By Laurie Jacobi, Minneapolis, Minnesota

I asked my students to write something about what our T'ai Chi Chih community means to them. Here are four responses:

FROM LORI GOTTSCHALK – The phrase 'Return to the Circle' captures the essence of the nature of the TCC community. While I truly honor and respect the practice of TCC, it has been the experience of the community of friends practicing together that has encouraged and motivated me year after year. On my own, I can easily fall into improper habits of movement that discourage a healthy practice. I need steady renewal and refreshment of the basics, which happens in a grace-filled atmosphere in the group. This experience of gentle support invites me to 'return to the circle.'

Within the circle of my practice community, I feel accepted and connected. The kind acceptance of the group enables me to relax and soften as I feel the sincerity and dedication of my teacher and colleagues. During our time together, I can let go of the worries of daily life as I am drawn into the warmth and calmness of our circle. I am reminded that this is a practice, which means there will always be opportunities for learning and growth. Coming together as a community dedicated to the principles of TCC, I sense that together our energy is being healed and renewed. Returning to the circle of the TCC community changes me, preparing me to embrace life outside the group with a deeper connection to myself and the world around me. I leave our

time together feeling centered, ready to re-enter life grounded and hopeful. With joy and gratitude, week after week, I look forward to being embraced within the caring circle of my TCC community.

FROM RAY ANDERSON – Our TCC practice as a group creates a strong feeling of peace and connection with the ineffable presence of the *Chi*.

ANON – I am with a community of people who are centered, non-judgmental and compassionate. I leave the practice feeling calmed and can lead my life more thoughtfully and with more inner peace and contentment. What a blessing.

FROM FRANK JANEZICH –

- Each of us is part of a group with common purpose: to learn and improve our TCC movements.
- We each help create a supportive, non-criticizing environment.
- Each time we come to the chapel where we practice, we enter a holy, sacred space.
- When we arrive at church, we leave our stress from the daily deluge of negative media at the door.
- Our teacher and this group care about me; we care about one another.
- As we practice our movements we feel the electro-magnetic field flowing through our bodies; this is *Chi*. We learn techniques and postures to help us notice the flow of *Chi*, which is energizing.
- There is a calming effect, similar to that experienced in meditation.
- The symmetry of motion in our TCC group when we practice in a circle is mesmerizing.

Look Forward To These Conference Presentations

TCC: The Brain & Beyond

Dr. David Parrish (Media, Pennsylvania) has been working in the field of psychology for 40 years. He holds two masters degrees, in Education and Psychology, and a doctorate degree in Psychology. David published his first book, *Enlightenment Made Easy* three years ago and is preparing the release of his second book, *Dying to Live*. According to current science, the brain is constantly changing, and mindfulness practices change the brain in positive ways. David will present some of the recent research on Qigong practices and emphasize that it is just a matter of time before T'ai Chi Chih is well known enough to have specific literature on this form. He will also focus on the evolution of consciousness as an essential aspect of the practice of TCC, something that Justin addressed in his spiritual talks. His intention is for teachers to consistently share that this practice is an evidence-based practice that changes the brain in ways which have a positive effect on patterns of negative thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.

Awakening The Energy Within: Making Connections Inside & Out

According to Sheila Leonard (St John's, NL, Canada), "Energy is alive, energy wants to move, energy wants to connect, to return us to the circle of oneness." This session will be a balance of movement and visualization going inside to awaken and move the abundant energy already there as we come back and come home to our bodies.

The Grounding-Healing Effect Of TCC: Applications To PTSD & Working With Veterans

Bruce Eisenmenger (Roseville, Minnesota) will share his experience teaching TCC to veterans. He will discuss how TCC affects the brain and central nervous system. Learn how to utilize three specific movement interventions for calming the nervous system as well as modifications and adaptations in working with veterans and in rehabilitation settings.

The Importance Of Community

Bruce will also discuss the importance of community in creating health and highlight the role that TCC can play in building community and impacting the health and well-being of a community.

TCC & Public Health

Dr. Edward Ehlinger (Roseville, Minnesota) is a public health metaphysician who has spent his professional career working in various settings to advance health equity and optimal health for all. He has integrated the values, practices and approaches of medical care, public health and community building. He serves as a coach for the National Leadership Academy for Public Health and consults and speaks on public health and community-building issues locally and nationally. The former Minnesota Commissioner of Health and Director of the University of Minnesota Boynton Health Service, Edward has been involved in the Minnesota TCC community for many years as his wife, Sally, was a TCC teacher.

More & More Presentations

Laurie Jacobi adds: Additional presentations will include "Grounding" and "Teaching with Props" as well as a discussion on "Witnessing the Changes: Our Practice as We Age." As always there will be plenty of opportunity to practice and time for movement refinements with Sandy, Pam and Dan. Be prepared to donate something or purchase something wonderful in the live and silent auctions to support the Teacher Conference scholarship fund. And, of course, there will be some pleasant surprises in store.

We are planning a true Minnesota experience for our guests that we hope you will enjoy. If you haven't already done so, please register for conference today.

The conference committee would like teachers to come to conference with **one burning question**. They will present them to the guides and look forward to an enlightening discussion. It can be about how to move or about anything else in TCC.

Wholeness Requires Community

By Lynn Porzig, Wilsonville, Oregon

Practicing T'ai Chi Chih with others, whether through classes, intensives, retreats, trainings and/or conference brings us back to why we continue to practice TCC. Why? Because being part of a group supports our growth as individuals and enriches our practice. Our life with TCC is richer than our life without it.

We know that practicing TCC helps us grow in wholeness. To me, that means recognizing God's loving presence in each and every person. Practicing with others helps us do this by giving us the opportunity to share our joys and struggles, to receive support and to grow in our practice. This growth in wholeness leads to a life-giving love.

Practicing with a group and as a community deepens our wholeness. We join others around the world while practicing TCC each day. Our TCC community keeps us focused as we seek to live centered lives. When we live in community, we learn to love by sharing our time, talents, energy and money with others. Thus, our growth in wholeness results from being part of community, practicing TCC in groups near and far, small and large.

Deepen Your Practice Reflections

Compiled by Connie Krumrai,
Loveland, Colorado

Some T'ai Chi Chih students who gathered on a beautiful January weekend had been practicing for 20-plus years, others only months. Yet all received value from the weekend with long-time teacher Carmen Brocklehurst. Comments below reveal that TCC meets each student exactly where they are, bringing what they need. **Justin states, "Awareness is the root of TCC, which is essentially inner-oriented."** Carmen asked us repeatedly what were we feeling and sensing, what we had become aware of.

REBECCA P: Carmen taught me a new term: spaciousness. Feeling the fullness of *Chi* in my hands when they are not facing each other is a gift.

BOB POLAND: Practice alone is not enough to master the awareness to fully appreciate TCC feelings.

LISA HERREN: I felt my body moving through/with the *Chi* and the *Chi* moving throughout my body. The biggest shift was giving up counting repetitions; it took me out of thinking and into awareness. I am more aware of letting the *Chi* guide me versus me guiding the *Chi*.

ELIZA FULTON: Especially poignant was focusing on feeling and being aware of being in the body and with the *Chi*. Perfection is not the purpose; being present, open and connecting with each other is the purpose.

JEANNETTE FRANEK: Carmen and others have helped me be aware of energy movement in my body and that small changes in position can make a significant difference.

As Justin says about letting go in *Spiritual Odyssey*: "Self-interest is being preoccupied with something temporary. When it is overly strong, it can bring great suffering."

GT: I am slowly but surely learning to let go. Surrendering to what is, is both sweet

and powerful. Carmen talked about releasing to move forward. What a gift.

As Justin says about truth in *Spiritual Odyssey*: "To live in a straightforward manner, to speak in a truthful manner (not as easy as it sounds) is enough."

MARIE: The love and goodness of Life is here inside and all around me, patiently waiting for me to open and see the truth of who I am. TCC teaches me to open the door and stand in the Truth. I am so humbled by the beauty and vastness that I am discovering.

As Justin says about healing in *Spiritual Odyssey*: "All healing, in the end, is self-healing."

TERRY: It is possible to heal my body. I can visualize my cells and use my *Chi* to make repairs. TCC should be done daily. You cannot remove the hunger if you don't eat every day. Nourish your body.

As Justin says about connectedness in *The Vital Force* (Spring 1985): "When the *Chi* circulates and is in balance, we can approach Oneness (Unity). Is it possible to attain Oneness? Yes. The very nature of Reality is Joy."

JJ: We have great *Chi* flowing through group practices, but this weekend was on a whole different level. The combination of feeling what was happening, and tweaking mechanics to prevent the *Chi* from being blocked was indescribable.

MEG: A great horned owl sat on the light pole as I left the first day. We had called it in. Seeing the owl is confirmation I'm doing something right, getting out of my mind and into my nature, Nature.

BONNIE SCHOWALTER: Carmen went deeper into each move. Showing us how our *Chi* connects each member of our body, a way of re-membering. How each of us are connected, a way of re-membering.

IRMA CRUMP: I love being brought back to attentiveness, to a particular way of paying attention while doing TCC. Carmen guides us to be aware now, and now and now. I gently train my attention on the unfolding dynamic of the movement. Like a spark that ignites, the attention spreads inside and out. How energized, present and alive in the experience I feel, connected with the *Chi*, myself, others, the greater world.

MEG G: Our true nature is quietness. Take joy in little things. Open yourself to what is happening. TCC helps our brain's two hemispheres work together. Truth makes us light inside. TCC is natural to us. Bring energy from the most distant star into the middle finger; it goes straight to the heart. Move out of the mind into feeling; this allows intuition to work. The more you enlist your healing nature the healthier you will be. There is only one body to the Universe, and when that body is healed the Universe is healed.



TCC Accreditation

Colorado Springs, Colorado, April 2019

By Marie Dotts, Loveland, Colorado

Justin knew the incredible transformative power of the *Chi*, which is why T'ai Chi Chih came to him. He wanted us know it too. I have experienced it in my own life but there is something miraculous that happens during accreditation week that opens my heart and mind to an even greater appreciation for what these simple movements can do. The transformations I have seen this week shatter any limits my mind has imposed on Life. There are no limits to who and what we are. The essence of each of us is so unique, beautiful and totally unlimited. This loving and healing practice breaks the shackles created by our habit energies that have kept our light from shining out into this world. When we wake up to the essence of who we really we are, it is such sweet joy. We recognize that this is **who I really am, and it is who I have always been**, and it is so freeing. Justin says, "Joy is always there, it only has to be uncovered." What an honor and privilege it is to share such a powerful and transformative practice.

RICK DAVIS: I was reminded of the importance of moving well – finishing the weight shift, using the knees, completing the turn, not overreaching, moving softly and consistently, and sinking into the feet as you move from your center. Yet, I was also wonderfully reminded of the importance of a strong, caring and supportive community to encourage you. We have the words of Justin preserved to encourage and assist, and we have the encouragement of others who supportively partner with us along the way. Because of others' encouragement, I found safety and permission to risk striving (without striving) to lean into the movements and into the warmth of the TCC community. Because of that, my teacher in Tulsa (Mary Cameris) and I are exploring how to create a stronger TCC network.

ANON: Each person brought his/her Real self, and we all reinforced for each other how rich that makes it for us all. Every presentation gave its own delightful dimensions to the whole.

ROBERT POLAND: I would have never believed that my presentation could be so much fun. I left truly excited and a little afraid of what the future will bring.

DEBBY MCLISTER: This accreditation was my first introduction into the general community. I found it warm, accepting and inclusive. There is no hierarchy except of knowledge and experience but certainly not of position. It made me wonder how we can bring TCC to communities that could use this love and inclusion: perhaps to people in poverty or teenagers.

STEPHANIE COPELAND: Every auditing teacher would go into their *tan t'ien* before offering us guidance. What a wonderful model that was. TCC brings me home in a strong way. As soon as I returned to my day-to-day life I was ready to stop trying to do everything. I have already found it easy to begin letting go of the habit of searching in so many directions.

KYUNG SOOK LEE: Now I understand what touched my whole being when I accidentally stepped into my first TCC class 2-1/2 years ago. Daniel, our guide and trainer, gave us all he had embodied. He showed a road map to discover our own authentic sharing from the heart. Marie, our devotional host extended all she had to offer. The timeless sharing by auditing teachers was invaluable. My fellow candidates made the learning effortless and joyous.



S. BECKY SHINAS, OP: All there is ... is love. Being accredited means I am a certified Teacher of Oneness, Harmony and Love. The words *Chi* and energy have no meaning to me other than Love. I cannot love unless I am loved. Each morning my TCC prayer is about receiving and sending out into the cosmos the "One Love" we all are. As a teacher of Kindly Love, I will teach from a centered, clear, reconciled space. Thus, the only instruction I will consider for my TCC growth is that given with kindly love. For me to be a TCC teacher is to believe, know and feel the One Love within me and then to offer another an illuminated, tender space from which they may rise in their own unique way.

L to R seated: Becky Shinas, Dan Pienciak, Bob Poland, Rick Davis. L to R standing: Marie Dotts (host), Connie Krumrai, Charlotte Garrett, Meg Gilbert, Stephanie Copeland, Debby McLister, Walker Lee.

Accreditation Transformation

By Charlotte Garrett, Copley, Ohio

My transformation happened when I did what Daniel wrote on the wall the first day. He never read the words to us; he just put them up there. Two days later I read the whole thing and I took it to heart. I felt the energy move through a joint in my body and I recognized it as fear being released by the flow of the *Chi*. I realized at that moment that I no longer had to be afraid of my own power. And I learned that week, from an observant teacher, to fully ground in that power.

I “just noticed” how nervous I was about the presentation, to the point of being frozen from writing an outline and choosing movements to demonstrate. I knew it would come from my heart and still I was fearful. Of what? A habit energy. Years of making formal presentations didn’t matter; the few failures had stuck in me and this was my most important audience ever. We love TCC, what it means to us and what we wish to share, so it will ripple out. I knew the presentation would be what it needed to be. I had to be there. I have to share the TCC practice. There is no other choice. My first teacher, Marie, told me we follow the *Chi*. Haha, and with joy I now follow the *Chi*.

I knew I had to teach. Still, I did not have confidence that I would make it through another intense week like the October intensive. I was afraid it would be too physical, mental and emotional. The fourth day (after my presentation was done), I awoke feeling the cosmic rhythm. What was this luxurious way to lie in bed for a few moments, not craving coffee, feeling alive, powerful, not overly energized, only loving that I am life and watching how calmly I am getting ready for a 7am practice? Daniel’s writing on the wall made it so simple when I just did it.

My teachers, so fully living *teh*, prepared me well, even when I did not see it. Marie helped me learn and refine, refine, refine, and she told me about the accreditation process a long time ago. Parker’s class was a wonderful place to practice, and he set me up with a class upon returning so there was no choice. Roseanne taught me to make it fit my size. They all encouraged me; they knew I had no choice. My candidate-mates all supported one another. Auditing teachers came to ensure we got it. I feel so much love and gratitude for this community and for my teacher trainer, and I can barely wait to see the ripples we new teachers create.

LET GO!
SURRENDER
the weight
to the
FEET
TRUST



Cracked Seeds At Accreditation

By Connie Krumrai, Loveland, Colorado

Reflecting upon the teacher accreditation week, I am speechless. So I keep writing until I find words to express what I experienced. The loving kindness was of the richest kind. My previous experience in other TCC workshops, retreats, intensives and even when mentoring one-on-one was that my practice would break down when trying to incorporate what I had learned. This time though, I experienced a breakthrough. I felt my practice deepen all week. I became aware of how well prepared I was. I learned from eight different teachers and learned something new from each one.

Stories about Justin and watching the DVD of him speaking at Folsom Prison painted a picture of him and his inner landscape that I’d never known before. Candidates were given the opportunity to lead movements, watch for areas that students may need correction in and (attempt) to correct them – with laughter, since auditing teachers took our words literally, showing us in their movements what we were saying. Despite my anxiety, the feedback on my presentation was invaluable.

Daniel reminded us to be aware of the adjustments we made: “remember you’re creating new habit energies.” How refreshing to be choosing my habit energies. When Amy Tyksinski moved next to me during practice, I was immediately wrapped in a softness, like a soft billowing cloud, that I’d never experienced before.

Upon arising on the final day, I read from “The Book of Awakening” by Mark Nepo:

All the buried seeds
Crack open in the dark
The instant they surrender
To a process they can’t see.

The *Chi* and loving kindness washes over my cracked buried seeds, softening their hulls, so that the Essence of who I am can grow and blossom. In surrendering, I feel a reawakening; and Joy is the first blossom to bloom.

To the teacher candidates, auditing teachers, our host Marie Dotts, teacher trainer Daniel Pienciak, and to those who held us in their hearts and *Chi* from a distance, abundant gratitude for your unconditional love and support. Moving forward with intention that I may share with others the gifts you have given to me.

Seijaku Retreat March 2019

Participant comments compiled by
Janet Starr, Houston, Texas

“Doing 50 Fast Track Rocking Motion you learn to let go. You have to let go or you will not be able to continue. Learning Fast Track this way keeps all the principles of TCC involved. Silence is a great way to assist with clarity. Being with friends is a relaxing and stimulating way to spend a weekend. – J. VEERKAMP

“Learning to let go is a lifelong process and I feel like I made more progress through Seijaku. I also have a better understanding of the process and goal of toning. As always, I learned important tweaks in the T'ai Chi Chih basic movements that helped improve the flow of *Chi*. This experience – complete with camaraderie, networking and lots of laughter – gave me the inspiration to make Seijaku part of my regular daily practice. I have set specific goals to work on and I have the confidence to keep moving toward accreditation

in Seijaku, so that I can share Justin’s gift to us.” – L.M.

“These days offered the opportunity to move into the next steps of gentle movement, Seijaku. While this was new to some of us, with Carmen’s help and guidance, we were guided gracefully from TCC into Seijaku. Her astute observation of the many talents of Justin Stone enabled us to almost feel Justin’s presence.” – SR. CARLOTTA LACOUR

“This retreat has given me an opportunity to let go, be present and laugh; to connect with loveliness of others in authenticity and self-acceptance; and to learn Seijaku again as a newborn.” – TERRY JENNINGS

“This retreat has brought more joy to my heart. Practicing silence has widened my perceptions. What has meant the most to me has been the connection with the Chi, and with new and old friends.” – LEYA

“Seijaku is powerful and wise, ever full of life’s surprises, and always calling for order and making things right.” – DORA WIEMANN

“This retreat has lifted me out of the melancholy inhibiting my outlook. The silence fine-tuned my focus on being here now. What meant the most is the love and support of each person involved. My body released the physical stress and pain stored in my back and heart. I feel renewed.” – FARREL ZEEMAN



Front: Linda Jaffe, Janet Starr, Judy Hendricks. Seated: Jean Marie Tade, Jeanette Stotts, Robert Montés de Oca, Patty Waddington, Mary White. Middle: Shari Holmes, Terry Jennings, Sandra Lawson, Benjamin Brisjar, St. Carletta Lacour, Caroline Guilott, Veronica Fleming, Linda Meisner, Carmen and Brock. Last: Farrell Zeeman, Mary Ruiz, Joyce Veerkamp, Leya Cragin, Dora Wieman, Kim Grant, Bill Wheeler.

Pyramid Poems

still
i breathe
in and out
in front of all
they love me
even
so

– STEPHANIE COPELAND

to
make a
way for the
chi to engage
is to be
silent
now

– BONNIE SCHOWALTER

one
day soon
is today
right here right now
coming to
gather
now

– LISA STROYAN

sink
deeper
‘til you sense
warm soft caress
of the chi
stillpoint
love

– CMK

fine
feelings
strong and yet
soft as a cloud
so relax
enjoy
self

– J.J.

when
you hear
the calling
for joyful truth
open your
heart to
chi

– CAROLINE G.

my
mission
is to learn
to recognize
my inner
self and
heal

– TERRY

deep
moments
of insight
visit briefly
as i seek
lasting
bliss

– IRMA CRUMP

ssshh
listen
t'ai chi chih
is calling me
to become
aware
be

– CMK

let
the chi
flow thru your
body, unfold
the path to
wisdom
in

– CAROLINE G.

this
moment
is filled with
joy in movement
feeling the
flow of
chi

– LEYA

move
sideways
heel, nose, arm
laughter comes easy
smile, energy, peace
grounded
heart

– PAM

grace
i am
inviting
relationship
with you now
open
heart

– MARIE DOTTS

wow
today
i felt the
love of the chi
once again
life is
good

– SR

a
deeper
way for chi
remembering
is a way
for us
still

– BONNIE SCHOWALTER

TCC Workshop

Hosted by Northern California TCC Teachers, March 2019

Notes by Linda Braga, Castro Valley, California

Every year the Northern California T'ai Chi Chih teachers host a daylong workshop for students and their teachers in the greater Bay Area. This year, the workshop "Learning Together" encouraged everyone to connect with others while exploring the form.

The hosting team decided to focus on three aspects: the polarity principle, the continuity principle, and pauses and stillness in TCC. Three movements were used for each principle, so that all participants could make *adjustments in how they move*.

The teaching strategy: Sandy McAlister would first talk about the principle (*show and tell*), then lead everyone in feeling that principle in the actual movement (*guided practice*) and then use partner practice to go deeper (*feeling awareness and self-correction*).

All three of these strategies are student-centered best practices, techniques that are the most efficient and effective way to learn skills and concepts.

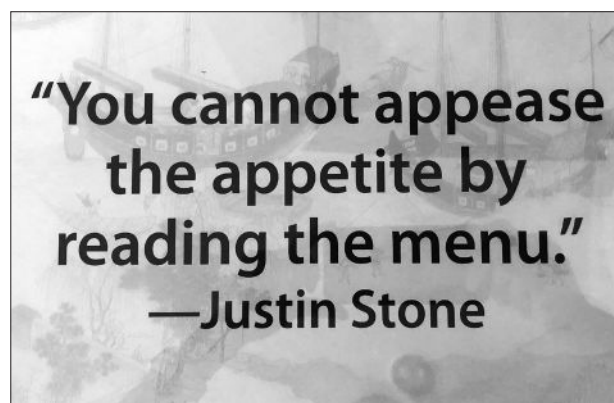
Using partner practice, participants paired up, and began to move together, side-by-side while exploring the movement. They were encouraged to talk about the details of the principle and how it applied to this movement. Together they discovered what needed to be changed, adjusted and shifted so that the movement was not too big or too small, not too high or too low. But "just right." This exploration of three movements gave each person the opportunity to share what they knew, to ask questions, to notice that something needed adjustment and to *make those adjustments themselves* while moving with their partner.

During partner practice students connect energetically and are influenced by the Chi field of both persons. That field can assist in helping the students to relax, to move correctly in perfect sync with the other person. Many students in class often remark that during partner practice, "they felt the *Chi* for the first time, and that they don't know how it happened, but "they were moving in perfect timing with no effort."

Another benefit of partner practice is that spontaneous joy arises when a person discovers how to move effortlessly. Partners begin to smile more and even hug their partner when done. Indeed this is "joy thru movement."

PARTNER PRACTICE: Moving Side by Side

- 1. Pair up and introduce self.** Stand side by side. The person on the left side leads first, when the left foot is forward; the person on the right leads when the right foot is forward. Select a TCC movement to explore.
- 2. When moving, give positive feedback.** Begin to move in unison,



together as one. The leader compliments the other person on how they are moving, encouraging them to stay with the pace and flow.

3. Make adjustments if needed. Leader makes gentle suggestions to other person so that they are moving together, in unity. Continue to talk if needed, but don't stop moving. Eventually you will move together in silence.

4. Close with rest pose and debrief. Describe how it felt to move with a partner, what you noticed, what you learned. Thank your partner.

It is okay to disagree with the feedback you get from a partner, and to both check with the teacher for the correct way to move.

In closing the workshop, this handout was offered as a shared reading, done by four people before the final TCC practice.

The self must know stillness before it can discover its true song.

~ RALPH BLUM

Concentration

While physical stillness is relatively easy to achieve, mental stillness is far more challenging. Our minds are used to having something to cling to. Usually that thought is random; we jump from topic to topic depending on external influences. Concentration meditation changes that, by providing a single topic on which we focus for a period of time. As we advance, the topic becomes increasingly narrow – and our focus becomes increasingly deep.

Quieting the Mind

When we are silent, our minds still may be full of worry and doubt. In quieting the mind we remove all the distractions of worry and doubt. We practice unhooking from them, detaching for a short period. This proves useful in daily life, too. Quieting the mind works in concert with concentration. Because it is very difficult to stop thoughts by force, we use concentration to guide them instead.

T'ai Chi Chih - Joy Thru Movement

TCC practiced with concentration – *focused awareness on the soles of the feet* – and quieting the mind, letting go, relaxing and moving in slow motion. Through the regular practice of focused awareness and flowing circular movements and then rest, one eventually experiences oneness, connection with all things and no thing.

Santa Barbara Teacher Retreat March 2019

Compiled by Pam Towne, host; event led by Sandy McAlister

Turning into the driveway at Mt. Calvary Monastery & Retreat House feels like coming home. Even though I am working, I also feel on retreat. This year's retreat was exceptional in the depth and quality of sharing. Here's what some shared on our last morning:

"Often a small correction would provide a significant increase in the flow of energy. I reveled in the diversity of ways we experience the spiritual practice of TCC and marveled at the respect each held for one another's experience. We could see why Justin called teachers "the jewel of TCC," because each one seemed to sparkle with creativity and love." – KAREN GORAN, ANAHEIM, CALIFORNIA

"My movements have become smaller, done more with hands and wrists than arms. I'm always amazed that I can be so frank and close with people I know a little, a lot and not at all. To feel safe enough to open up is a gift, and many of us felt that here."
– SUZANNE ROADY-ROSS, SEAL BEACH, CALIFORNIA

"Retreats are my favorite opportunity to learn more. I got insights on movements I need to modify and appreciated the joy and understanding each person expressed about their own teaching. I enjoyed getting to know the trainers and teachers from all over the country."
– JUDY HUBBELL, SAN FRANCISCO, CALIFORNIA

"I come annually to reconnect with the TCC Community from my remote home. I appreciate the wealth of knowledge, advice and teaching tips from more seasoned teachers." – LINDA JONES, BENNETTSVILLE, SOUTH CAROLINA

"This was a opportunity to hear about everyone's TCC journey and the many varied gifts they bring to our community. TCC is a lifelong journey."
– CATHY FEDEWA, DES PLAINES, ILLINOIS

"This has given me more conviction and direction in my teaching. I feel energized and enthused about taking what I've learned back to my students and bringing new dimensions to my classes."
– LARRY SAVA, LUBBOCK, TEXAS

"The highlights are always the corrections. Getting to work with Sandy and Pam together is a bonus."
– ELIZABETH EBRAHIMZADEH, SACRAMENTO, CALIFORNIA

"I appreciated the deep sharing here, especially on TCC as a spiritual practice. I feel very inspired and am taking home lots to share with my students." – JULIE ANONGOS, MONTEREY, CALIFORNIA

"I opened up even more than last year and gained new insights. It opened my heart." – FLORENCE ST. PETER, LONG BEACH, CALIFORNIA

Santa Barbara Student & Teacher Retreat March 2019

Compiled by Linda Jones, Bennettsville, South Carolina

Ten students and teachers joined Sandy and Pam at the Mount Calvary Monastery for an inspiring retreat, which included one new student with no previous exposure to T'ai Chi Chih. It was my ninth year in a row attending retreats here.



Steve Geer said the retreat exceeded his expectations. Excellent teaching and feedback greatly improved his movements and enhanced beyond prior experiences the benefits to his body, mind and spirit. He achieved a greater understanding of the principles that will allow him to more quickly integrate the practice into daily life.

Melody Nielsen decompressed and let go of worldly cares. On the second day, an old sprained ankle injury flared up. At the end of the day it burned and hurt in a circular motion around the ankle, and after 30 minutes, it has bothered her no more.

George Nielsen's right leg previously damaged by a stroke started to get stronger.

For another participant, learning more about Justin and his philosophies during our circle gatherings provided a better understanding of the history and benefits of TCC.

Another retreatant appreciated time to immerse herself in TCC, the beauty of nature and peacefulness of the monastery.



L to R front: Sandy McAlister, Wendy Hoyt, Judy Hubbell, Linda Jones. L to R back: Pam Towne, Sue Johnson, George Nielson, Melody Nielson, Linda Cook, Cindy Pedersen, Anne Eli Kershner, Steve Geer.

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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

- May 9-12 | TCC Retreat w/ Pam | Prescott, AZ | Linda Worlton | 602-617-0983
- May 31-Jun 6 | TCC Teacher Accreditation w/ Sandy | Aston, PA | April Leffler | 610-809-7523
- Jun 14-16 | TCC Retreat w/ Daniel | New Jersey Shore, NJ | Daniel Pienciak | 732-988-5573
- Jun 27-30 | TCC Teachers' Conference | Minnetonka, MN | www.taichichih.org/conference-2019
- Jun 30-Jul 2 | Seijaku Accreditation w/Pam | Minnetonka, MN | Bonnie Sololov | 507-250-3360
- Jun 30-Jul 2 | Seijaku Basics Course w/Daniel | Minnetonka, MN | Bonnie Sololov | 507-250-3360
- Jul 3-7 | TCC Intensive w/ Daniel | Santa Barbara, CA | Marie Dotts | 970-412-9955
- Jul 29-Aug 1 | Seijaku Retreat w/Daniel | Aston, PA | Daniel Pienciak | 732-988-5573
- Aug 20-23 | TCC Teachers Symposium w/ Sandy | Aston, PA | April Leffler | 610-809-7523
- Sep 24-27 | TCC Retreat w/ Pam | Santa Barbara, CA | Pam Towne | 442-222-8332
- Oct 4-6 | TCC Retreat w/Daniel | New Jersey Shore, NJ | Daniel Pienciak | 732-988-5573
- Oct 6-10 | TCC Intensive w/ Pam | Aston, PA | April Leffler | 610-809-7523
- Nov 19-24 | TCC Teacher Accreditation w/ Pam | Santa Barbara, CA | Marie Dotts | 970-412-9955
- Aug 20-23 | TCC Teachers Symposium w/ Sandy | Aston, PA | April Leffler | 610-809-7523
- Sep 24-27 | TCC Retreat w/ Pam | Santa Barbara, CA | Pam Towne | 442-222-8332

~ MORE WORKSHOPS & RETREATS ~

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

- Sep 13-15 | TCC Workshop w/ Caroline Guillott | Glenwood Springs, CO | Eliza Fulton | 970-945-8586
- Sep 26-29 | TCC Retreat w/ Carmen Brocklehurst | Albuquerque, NM | Judy Hendricks | 505-573-0820

2020

- Mar 23-27 | TCC & Meditation Retreat w/ Amy Tyksinski | Aston, PA | Kathleen McAlister | 610-308-4846

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