



Being HERE! – Helpful Encouragement for Just Prior to Starting a T'ai Chi Chih Practice

by Amy Tyksinski (YouTube Video)

Justin Stone, the originator of the evidence-based mindfulness moving meditation practice T'ai Chi Chih, often used words in unusual ways to express his teachings. In my experience, the words he chose contain living invitations for our continued evolution when held with sincerity in our hearts, almost like puzzles impossible to solve with the mind, but ones that coax us towards an embodied wholeness.

“The attitude with which you start T'ai Chi Chih practice is all important,” Justin used to say often. He talked frequently about “attitude.”

Selecting a word like “attitude,” with its simple yet complex dimensions, much like our T'ai Chi Chih practice, can encourage a vital unfolding within. “The way you do T'ai Chi Chih corresponds to the way you think about T'ai Chi Chih, your feeling of “What is T'ai Chi Chih?” said Justin.

Over the years, the meaning of the word “attitude” has grown and changed for me. Early on, bursting with an inner sincerity tinged with an enormous amount of aggressive intensity, I pursued my TCC practice and placed exacting and impossible-to-reach standards on myself. This approach was as close to what I could understand a “good” “attitude” to be at the time.

Gradually, though, the blessed great subtraction began to occur. Layers of concepts and constructs began to wither and fall away. Justin would remind us, “Why identify with the leaves? Why not identify with the tree?”

The name T'ai Chi Chih means “Knowledge of the Supreme Ultimate.” As we practice T'ai Chi Chih, we are supported wordlessly in Realizing this Knowledge. Without needing to believe in anything, by flowing slow motion in a dream or swimming through very heavy air, the movements balance and circulate the body's natural energy or “chi.” We come to Know Who and What we are as this Knowledge begins to transform us at a cellular level.

Prior to beginning my T'ai Chi Chih practice, now, instead of outer directed ambition, I've learned to stand more reverently, open to a gentle receiving. The “chi” that is circulated and

balanced through the T'ai Chi Chih movements wants to Know me and be Known by me. "The most important thing is faith," Justin emphasized as one of the ingredients in "attitude." "If you don't want to have faith in God, have faith in yourself. That's really saying the same thing." And then he might add provocatively, "Impatience is the opposite of faith!" "Through our T'ai Chi Chih practice, we do not heal symptoms. We become 'whole'" (92). Justin Stone, *Spiritual Odyssey*.

So what have I learned are the ingredients in the "attitude" Justin sought to foster in us when starting our T'ai Chi chih practice?

Faith in the Self, inner sincerity, receptivity, not needing to strive externally towards that which is already within, letting go into a graced wholeness which needs only to be uncovered, with a dollop of patience thrown in for good measure. Well, in my case, more than a dollop of patience, but that is another story. And yet, there is one more element in cultivating a helpful "attitude" that Justin emphasized which has been essential for me.

"Have courage," he said, "the courage to doubt your own doubts."

Finally, and perhaps most importantly because in the end, T'ai Chi chih is NOT about words, the way all of these components express themselves for me prior to starting a T'ai Chi Chih movement includes an essential physical and sacred pause. "How do I Know I am here?" I check in with myself. Have I let go from the inside? I take a breath in and out. Can I let go of all the little muscles in the stomach? I take another complete, yet unforced, breath in and out. Have I directed my attention to the gentle pressure of the soles of the feet resting on the floor or the earth? Is there a feeling-awareness of having connected with the "bubbling spring" underneath the feet? I take another breath. Perhaps the breath is now able to enter and exit through the soles of the feet freely, effortlessly. If not, can I grow my feeling-awareness of this connection by encouraging a physically registered firmness in the bottoms of the feet as they grip the floor? "There is a reciprocal relationship between mind and 'chi'" Justin would say. I take another breath. Some days, before starting, I may need to let go of other, more subtle tensions, perhaps held in the wrists, the shoulders. The jaw. As this releasing happens through attention, I breathe again, at last more fully grounded with the focus stabilized in the bottoms of the feet.

What is the "chi," this energy sea, going to whisper to me through the T'ai Chi Chih movements today?

Soft yet strong. Receptive. Fully here. Listening. "I don't Know now, but I will Know. It will come to me," Justin buoyantly urged us to remember.

And thus, we begin.