



## **Flying Blind – ZOOM T'ai Chi Chih Classes in the time of COVID 19**

By Amy Tyksinski

Yesterday I taught my very first Zoom T'ai Chi Chih class to families at my school. Having attended a fair amount of Zoom meetings by now, I figured the participants would show up and I would be able to see them in the little Zoom tiles through Gallery View (shared screen) even if they had me on Speaker View (full screen). How wrong I was! Instead, the “people” (possibly ranging in age from 6<sup>th</sup> grade-adult) all joined the class with just their name plates instead of a live view. Who was in my class?

Onward! I taught the class pretending I was Mr. Rodgers. I caught myself offering encouragement as I often do: “Wow, you’re doing great!” and then would self-edit aloud, “Even though I can’t see you!” and then surprised myself as these words flew out, “But actually, I can feel you!” Mortified at that utterance, my internal dialog shared as well: “This must sound crazy to a brand new practitioner to the form, especially some of the highly intellectual parents we have at our school!” Because I had no idea who was there, I couldn’t adjust appropriately the languaging of my teaching to a known audience. I couldn’t read faces to discern confusion. I couldn’t observe bodies to offer refinements in service to better “chi” flow. And yet, I started to feel some awareness of the group so that appropriate T'ai Chi Chih teaching came through and learning was invited.

What I have discovered so far in these early days is that the most important aspect is feeling my own groundedness during the practice. I need to not be afraid to “listen” and “receive” information as it comes internally rather than through other senses. So far, in talking with other T'ai Chi Chih teachers who have been offering Zoom practice sessions, I’ve learned the following tips:

- It is helpful to have some of your own “observer” friends on your Zoom TCC Class along with your students. They can offer you explicit feedback after the class. What worked well? What didn’t? Before starting, if you CAN see your students, ask them to give a thumbs up or down as to whether they can hear you. Then ask everyone to please MUTE their audio and put their screen on Speaker View, so that the screen doesn’t flip back and forth to whatever noise might pass through a student’s screen.

- In general, we know it is important never to fixate our gaze in T'ai Chi Chih. Rather it is best to encourage students to blink their eyes and look around a bit as they do the movements. This awareness is even more important in Zoom classes. Students should be encouraged to listen more to the words (so teachers need to be able to be even more explicit and clear in their explanation of the movements) and use the visual on the screen as a support. We need to be aware of the tone of our voice, too. If it is soft and whispery, we can know that we are not properly grounded in a helpful way for our students. The voice should be strong and well-projected. Once students get familiar enough with the movement by watching, they should be encouraged once again to look up, around, etc. This will help them feel the flow of the energy much better. (Thank you, Judy Hendricks and Dora Wiemann for your wisdom in observing this.)
- It is difficult to see the foot placement and the weight shift properly if you are facing the camera. Consider wearing socks that are a different color than your pants and even roll up your pants so ankles are visible. Be aware of whether the floor is dark or light and chose pants of a contrasting color. Make sure also to turn to the side to demonstrate movements because this also allows viewers to see that the back heel comes up slightly on the forward weight-shift as the back leg straightens, etc.

There is an element of trust that accompanies this new model of seemingly blind teaching. The trust comes first to our own felt sense of connection. If the connection to the bottoms of our feet feels strong within ourselves, and awareness of “swimming through very heavy air” is experienced in ourselves as teachers, I believe we can tune in to our “virtual” students effectively. If you are considering on-line teaching, please trust you will find your way. The teaching will come through and the gift of T'ai Chi Chih will continue to provide healing-wholeness support to our fellow humans in such great need of comfort right now.