



Circularity – featuring Around the Platter - Variation

By Amy Tyksinski (YouTube Video)

“T’ai Chi Chih is a physical cultivation, which is cultivating the Ultimate.” Said Justin Stone, “If more people realized what was going on with T’ai Chi Chih, I think they would take it more seriously.” I would hear these words, and get settled on a particular view point like: “Ah-ha! I will redouble my efforts. I will be more serious!” Justin could see where I was headed (after all, T’ai Chi Chih is also about “the effort of no effort,” and immediately throw out a seeming-curve ball: “When you’ve had a full day of laughter, then you know you are getting somewhere.” He’d say. Whoops, back to the drawing board. A few minutes later, Justin would seemingly shift the orientation again: “Eventually you’ll start seeing T’ai Chi Chih everywhere. Your whole life will be identified with the “chi.”

When I delve into one of the T’ai Chi Chih principles, “Circularity,” I begin to experience more richly the curved patterns of our T’ai Chi Chih movements when directly aided by the felt sensation in the wrists and waist via the hip swivel as these curves are traced with ever-more exquisite and refined attention. At teacher practice, Justin admonished us frequently “Don’t rush the back-swing” and “The circle is round!” To me, he was asking us to be as conscious of the second half of the movement as I was of the first half as well as to remember the importance of not cutting off part of the circle the wrists are tracing by accidentally making a “D” shape instead of an “o”.

Recently, I had a group of 8th grade students in my room for study hall. At one point, an 8th grade child showed up unexpectedly at the door. “I have a stomach ache,” they said. “Come in, come in,” I said. Another child asked kindly, “Are you feeling stressed out? I sometimes get stomach aches when I’m stressed.” “I don’t know,” said the first child. The second child continued in encouraging tones: “When I get a stomach ache, sometimes it helps me to lie on my left side and bring my legs up to my chest.” The first child agreed to try it. After a temporary dance of musical chairs as the kids rotated locations, the couch was free and the child lay down in the recommended position. A moment later he peaked his head up and said, “I feel like a fetus!” “You look like a fetus!” I smiled back at him. We all had a good laugh together, stomach ache forgotten. It is important to note, the child who was able to give such loving advice in this moment had only a week earlier ripped their math homework to shreds in a fit of frustration. At that time, he was on the receiving end of patient understanding. Step by step, moment by moment we learn to accord with this supportive “chi” as it moves through us enhanced by our awareness of circularity.

“Practically everything in life goes around something. The power of T’ai Chi Chih lies in its circularity. It is a controlled circularity.” Said Justin. This has caused me to wonder, “What is it that life is going around?”

Justin left us so many hints. ***Creativity and Taoism*** by Chang Chung-yuan is a book which Justin hailed as the most important book on his bookshelf. “If you were to read one book, this would be it,” said Justin) In this book, there is a quote from the ***Tao Te Ching*** by Lao Tzu:

“Thirty spokes joined at the hub.
From their nonbeing
Comes the function of the wheel.

Shape clay into a vessel.
From its nonbeing
Comes the function of the vessel” (Ch. XI)

Even in moments of apparent opposition, either externally or internally, when I am gripped to a spoke that seems so different from another spoke, or tugging on a rope, such that the hub or unifying center is obscured, somehow as I practice my t’ai chi chih and consciously feel with the wrists each moment of circularity, and allow the waist to turn fully as well as make the micro hip swivel in the side to side movements, the pulsing, flowing chi moves more effortlessly through me and through each situation. The individual gripping is loosened, and the seeming differences shift into a broader awareness of what anchors and fuels me. Those moments of painful separation dissolve.

In this “most important book”, Creativity and Taoism, Justin also wrote his own inscription on a page inside the front cover:

“Most important is to realize that the forces are cyclical (expansion and contraction) and that cause and effect is merely a secondary explanation. All things are in movement, and inflation is itself the seed of deflation, construction just one side of destruction.”

Said Justin, “Everything in the universe is circular, cyclical.” He also remarked “the Merry go-round, goes round,” and the golden ring as well comes past us many times. I always found myself relaxing when he reminded us of how generously we are supported by the nature of universe which we learn to accord with more consciously through our t’ai Chi chih practice.

And then one time Justin elaborated on what his own Zen teacher, who he called Roshi, shared: “Roshi said, ‘Think spherically.’” Justin Stone

In the T’ai Chi Chih photo textbook Justin says: “This feeling of swimming through very heavy air, with the resultant surge of energy and tingling in the fingers, will eventually bring us the firm conviction that this seemingly ‘empty’ universe is actually a vast continuum of intelligence

and energy....**At such times the energy appears to be flowing and we are just shaping it**" (16).
T'ai Chi Chih – Joy Thru Movement Photo Text by Justin Stone

With this reminder, I realize I can become more conscious, too, of the spherical nature of the shapes we experience in our TCC practice. How gently can I pick up or carry or circle around these spheres? How increasingly aware can I be of the substance between the palms and the connection known as polarity as we "shape the energy through each subsequent T'ai Chi Chih movement?"

As Justin has said, "T'ai Chi Chih allows you to be a part of, not prepare for, the Universal energy."

He also said, "You'll never plumb the depths of T'ai Chi Chih. It is an infinite practice."

This fills me with great delight.

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