

When All Else Fails

While visiting our four sisters in a local Nursing Home, I told them about preparing this talk on LETTING GO. Asking for any insights, Sr. Anthony, 90 years old said:

“Just tell them not to get attached in the first place,
then they won’t have to let go.”

So there you have it. And she doesn’t even know anything about ZEN! Perhaps 70 years of meditation brought her to this insight.

So, where to begin?

N O W H E R E

How do you read this?

N O W H E R E

The Sisters in South Africa said the same thing. This word was part of a 5 day Retreat on Silence. In preparing the information for them to Sit in Silence, teaching a Meditative stance, I wondered if it would be relevant in this inter-generational group with ages spanning from 20 to 86. Can they grasp the concept of Stillness, Emptiness within? And how would they do with the practice of T’ai Chi Chih classes each day!

I needed to let go of all my interior questionings and simply Trust the Process.

Now look at the NO WHERE letters again:

N O W H E R E

N O W H E R E – brings us immediately into the present moment – Focused in the awareness of NOW. This is how we come to our TCC Practice. Letting go of time, schedule, whatever.

REST POSE

As we know, the Rest Pose is meant to bring us in the Soles of our Feet. Scanning our body, we observe places of tension, whether in mind or body and once aware, we LET GO, soften and relax into the moment.

We come into the present moment as we are.

In one particular class as a new teacher, we were at the point of beginning Rocking Motion. Talking through the movement, their tempo suddenly picked up. I found myself caught up in their pace... It didn't take long before they once again moved faster – we could have levitated!

LET GO

Realizing this I needed to bring them back into their feet, to return them to the NOW HERE moment, reminding them they are no longer on the free-way: inviting them to slow down, to release the concerns of the day, soften and LET GO of the tension, return to the soles of the feet.

Presenting the invitation to allow their individual pace to melt into the flow of the group will enable all to move as ONE and tune into the CHI of the group.

I am reminded over and over to remain in the NOW HERE moment, whether teaching or in my own practice. This includes: Grounding the CHI, releasing the pent-up energy, distractions of worry or anxiety, whatever is in the way of the NOW HERE moment.

Focus in the Soles of the Feet

We live life from the ears up. T'ai Chi Chih invites us to move from the ears down, embodying the form.



Our fast-paced society is constantly pulling us forward in all different directions, demanding our attention. It could be distractions of getting the latest gadget to make life more simple, or the latest fashion or Label; having to see the movie everyone is talking about. Fitting in all the “to-do’s”, sometimes micro managing then multi tasking – we are forever on the go.

Practicing T'ai Chi Chih is like taking a mini-vacation from all the craziness of life, as we settle into our bodies while Focusing in the Soles of the Feet – the point of *Schu – the Bubbling Spring*.



In giving this invitation in a class for Seniors, I realize that some are always focusing there, only in their experience pain or numbness.

As they imagine roots or cords extending into the earth, much like an ancient Oak or Red Wood, they are invited to LET GO of the pain, releasing it into the earth through those roots. “Energy follows thought!” Inviting students to Release their pain or anything that may be preventing them from total freedom, such as mental anguish, physical discomfort or any spiritual dilemma, allows for a deeper, focused presence. We come as we are, we bring who we are – taking a mini vacation into a place where we are grounded in the present moment, LETTING GO, leaving us refreshed and quiet within.

“29”

Within each full TCC practice, we have 29 opportunities to REST: to ground, to be connected, to release, to LET GO and to return to focusing solely in the Soles of the Feet. Make the most of each opportunity to “Come home to yourself,” while inviting your students to:

| | | |
|---------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Come back to Rest | Ground the Chi | Return to the quiet |
| Sink into the earth | Be in your Center | Be refreshed in the Bubbling Spring |

It is through our feet that we return to connect with the YIN energy of Mother Earth. It is through our feet that we can also connect with all peoples of the world.

Yinning and Yanging

In considering Yinning and Yanging, we are talking about Proper and complete or full weight shift, which creates the CHI to Circulate and Balance. We know T'ai Chi Chih practice is done primarily from below the waist. Walking in one's body is almost a lost art, with so many distractions, especially cell phones as they can create a sense of being NO WHERE. The T'ai Chi Chih form invites us to a different kind of focus and greater body awareness. In the process of Yinning and Yanging, we become aware of slowly relaxing the knees, transferring the weight into one leg, placing the opposite heel forward, and finally feeling the weight slowly shift from the substantial leg to the insubstantial leg, then back again, during many of the repetitive movements.

"279"

It was a goal of mine to someday – when I had time – to actually count the number of weight shifts in a regular T'ai Chi Chih practice! Oh, by the way, it is two hundred and seventy nine! The shift could be as simple as from the back to the front of each foot in Rocking Motion, and sometimes as complicated as the side to side movements. We are ever more aware that the "leg straightens" to allow the heel to rise, as in forward and backward movements. The only exception, of course, is Bird Flaps its Wings, when the knees bend, allowing the weight to shift to the ball of each foot as the heels rise.

Benefits of Letting Go

Growth in Certainty, getting to know who and what you are: It has been my experience that flowing through the TCC Form while applying all the principles, especially flowing from the Center – tan t'ien, helps us to get in touch with our True Self – our Truth. The more we let go of ego, the clearer our truth will emerge.

I once met a Priest who said to me: "You know, Sister, it's been a long time since I've seen someone in a habit."

My response: "You know, Father, it's been a long time since I've seen someone in a habit as well."

No Judgment – Inner Freedom!

Perfect · Good · Faithful · Loving

For me, this journey of awakening went through a series of stages, beginning when I was a 19 year old Novice. Well meaning, our directress suggested that we choose a quote from scripture to live by. My first thought was that's easy: Be perfect as your heavenly Father is Perfect! Growing up in a German family and moving into a German Religious Community was an easy transition.

I wanted to be a "Perfect Sister." Well, needless to say that didn't last too long! So, being a "Good Sister" seemed like a reachable goal. Until one day our oldest member said to me: "Sr. Antonia, you are a good Sister." I knew something was up because anytime we got a complement it was always preceded with: "I don't want you to get proud, but..." So I asked her, what makes me a good sister? She said, you wear a long habit, and your hair is straight back. ***That was all I needed to hear***, when I immediately shortened my habits and cut my hair, thinking if that is what makes me 'good', then that is not what I want. All this was prior to 1990 and learning the T'ai Chi Chih form.

The circulation and balancing of the CHI while practicing the T'ai Chi Chih form led me to a deeper sense of understanding, to be more Faithful to my inner being, wisdom and truth. Finally, this matured into desiring to be a more loving person. So you see there is a 'growth process' that takes place beyond anything we could do by ourselves.

Integrity · Transparency

Along with this growth, comes Integrity and Transparency, being true to who you are. Choosing the highest response or action all the time, whether or not anyone is around to observe it; speaking your truth no matter who will approve or disapprove is born of freedom and conviction. Being true to who you are, being true to your word.

In 1986, while taking a course to become a Spiritual Director, I had an opportunity to volunteer for a year at Covenant House, NYC, a crisis center for run-away or homeless youth. After training, I was a Youth Counselor working on the floor for young men, ages 18 to 21. Observing the male counselors when a gay youth came on the floor, I was angered at the degrading remarks or looks that were made, but I had "no voice" at the time to express it.

Several years later when our Chaplain and another Franciscan Priest joined the Sisters for meals, their conversation sometimes led to degrading remarks about the gay and lesbian population. I challenged them to imitate St. Francis who embraced the leper – the person who didn't fit into the society of his day – to imitate his inclusivity and to embrace those who they are judging to be the lepers of our time.

Years later this conversation led to my writing a proposal for our Regional Chapter on examining who we are as a Franciscan Community of Women, whose mission is for women in need and how we view women who are Lesbian or express their sexual orientation differently.

I received an insight from one of our Sisters who was on our General Leadership team, who was attending that Chapter. She said that this topic would never be brought up in Germany, which was probably a compliment to us, but ***that is all I needed to hear!***

So being the Regional Minister for the Sisters in America, I automatically attended the General Chapter. (Minister, by the way is a Franciscan term we adapted years ago replacing the title Superior)

So guess what Proposal I wrote for this International Meeting: How do we, as Franciscan Servants, embracing Gospel values, uphold the dignity of all people, especially those who express themselves as GLBTQ?

A chapter is a decision making process that considers topics of interest and importance from the grass roots level of membership for continued change.

One of the topics on the agenda for our Pre Chapter meetings was to discuss Proposals. When this one came up, I was asked to consider withdrawing it, based on the concern/fear that the entire community may not be ready for it. My response was that we then needed it to help everyone to better understand and widen our scope of inclusivity. It was then accepted as a proposal and put on the agenda. There was a great deal of discussion during our deliberations over the implications such a statement would have for our Congregation in ministry and witness to those working with us as well. At this same time the Diocese of Wurzburg wanted Congregations to agree to ‘release employees who identify themselves as gay or lesbian, or Catholics who are divorced and remarried, which is not in conformity with the Teaching of the Church.’ The younger sisters engaged the others in many levels of conversation around these issues, as the facilitator provided recent studies of the human and realistic side of the issue. When it was put to a vote, the Sisters overwhelmingly agreed that it would be accepted as a Statement in our Closing Document. These Statements formed the basis for our discussions and prayer during these six years. It has been the policy of our leadership not to dismiss employees based on their sexual orientation or marital status. We align our view with Pope Francis who is often quoted as saying: Who am I to Judge. Eventually the Diocese changed this mandate.

Do you think I could ever have written such a proposal had I focused on being a perfect or good sister? But I believe from those experiences at Covenant House, the conversation at dinner with the priests, and the practice of TCC leading to a

deeper ‘growth in certainty’ as expressed as a faithful and loving person, from a place of inner freedom and conviction.

To complete the story of the Chapter decision, Sisters thanked me for bringing the topic into the open, for now they had a place to openly share their pain and compassion for friends, family, co-workers and others who are suffering due to a lack of acceptance of their sexual orientation.

Take a moment to reflect:

*In what ways have you grown in
Certainty - Integrity - Transparency?
In being true to who you are?*

Share

We know from Justin that T'ai Chi Chih is an evolving form. What does this mean? How do 19 movements and 1 pose evolve, that were created in 1974? The answer may be rooted in the statement made by so many who have taken on T'ai Chi Chih on as a regular practice:

“I can't remember what I was like before T'ai Chi Chih!”

We evolve doing the same movements from Rocking Motion to the Cosmic Consciousness Pose. We evolve with our clearer understanding and ability to release and let go, noticing how we move, change, apply, flow, in the process of letting go! “Change your CHI and change your life.”

You are invited to do a little reminiscing... looking at how you have changed from then to now. Think back to:

*Learning
Experiencing Chi
Deciding
Preparing
Attending
Teaching
Mentoring*

Learning T'ai Chi Chih for the first time – why did you want to learn it?
Experiencing the flow of Chi for the first time – what was that like?

Deciding to become a TCC Teacher – what lead to your decision to want to teach it?

Preparing for Accreditation – who mentored you, what was that journey like?

Attending your Teacher Training Course – who was your trainer, where, when?

Teaching your first class – where did you teach your first class – what was that experience?

Mentoring your first student for Teacher Training, and how you are mentoring now?

Comparing all that with your practice and teaching now, you can clearly see how you are evolving and so is your form, which further evolves you.

“You change and so does your world.”

Spiritual Odyssey



It was around 1996, probably five years after Accreditation that one of the sisters I lived with asked that I drive her and Mary, a resident of our Nursing Home, to visit her son Bill who was recuperating from surgery. When we arrived I spotted a vase of Honey Suckle that filled the room with its sweet fragrance. Inquiring from where it came, Bill responded that it grew in the back yard, adding “my wife is returning home and I wanted to surprise her with one of her favorite flowers.” Immediately I thought – “There’s no one in my life that knows I like Honey Suckle, feeling quite lonely and sorry for myself!”



The following afternoon, while doing a Practice outside, I felt the warm Spring sun on my body as one movement flowed into the next. A refreshing breeze picked up and all of a sudden I realized the strong sweet fragrant smell of that wild flower, only then remembering that it grew in abundance along the fence that edged our property. Yes, there was *Someone* in my life who provided it for me.

Evolution Intended or not

So, what did you LET GO of to get to this point, to the teacher you are today? My sense is it happened through the accumulation of CHI through your regular practice, your refinements of the form that helped shape your inner and outer world.

This balancing also touches into the left and right lobe of the brain, the Anima and Animus – the feminine and masculine aspects of our psyche; Yin / Yang balancing of our being. Letting Go, Flowing from your Center in one synchronized flow, with Softness and Continuity, Circulating and Balancing the Chi, renewing us in ways we never thought possible.

What is your evolution?

CIRCULARITY



In looking at this spiral, consider the quality of Completion and Presence. This staircase is from a 12c Benedictine Monastery in Austria. It speaks of motion from a well established base, rising step by step as it appears to narrow toward the top. It is regal in color and appearance, knowing from whence it came... rising beyond its beginnings

New Photo from spiral book

Growth in many ways can be like a spiral. We begin at a point, journey along the way and return to the same point only to “know ourselves again, for the first time,” on a new level, perhaps with new eyes. In our T’ai Chi Chih Practice we call this a “breakthrough.” For a time we may feel complete, coming full circle, yet are invited, once again to leave the now familiar, and begin anew because newness awaits.

In this process something has to die in order to be re-birthered. Letting go once again of our ego self, entering into a new spiral of discovery, of presence, quietly being present to give way to a deeper, richer life.

Polarity

The energy of Balance

Photo of Bamboo

Bamboo – Strength and Surrender

The bamboo inspired this reflection for it holds within itself the reality of

both polarities – strength and surrender.
 Being aware of these “pulls” within my life
 as I had experienced them,
 a sense of peacefulness and groundedness
 has somewhat calmed the tugs between the two.

The lesson the bamboo has been teaching me
 is to embrace both within.
 The yang of strength complements
 the yin of surrender.
 Strength is so needed to be able to surrender
 and in the surrendering,
 I experience my center of strength.
 They are not opposites at all, they co-exist,
 harmonize, balance and give life to one another,
 and to the persons who welcome them
 with an embrace.

Softness and Continuity

Awareness in motion

Softness and Continuity invites us into the process of Letting go of tension, smoothing out the rough edges of the form and in life, settling into an even tempo, noticing transitions.

Practicing softness with presence can touch into our attitudes, our choices, our deepest soul space. Ego falls away, our false self transitions into our true self and we realize and come to know “the face we had before we were born.”

Return to your original goodness

Live in full freedom

Come as you are – whole, holy, holistic, mystic

The Mystery of it all

“No one is doing anything - T'ai Chi Chih is doing T'ai Chi Chih.” Our vocabulary is so limited when it comes to these spiritual experiences. Justin experienced this as he practiced in a Japanese Garden. With ‘no one doing anything’ – Ego is out of the way!

Justin wrote that the T'ai Chi Chih form was “Divinely inspired.” *(Photo Text)* It was beyond him – no words, concepts or any former experience beyond the realm of understanding. He was simply open to receive it and be the conduit through which it came into the world.

Nothing we do can ‘create’ something like this. It is something that is ‘done unto us.’

It is the energy that dwells intimately within, stemming from the same source that created and continues to create all that is. This is pure gift – It cannot be contained, only experienced with a deep bow of gratitude.

Love Energy is the Fruit

Emerging as a more compassionate human being,
I come as I am – honestly, evolving along the way.

With or without my awareness,
Becoming more whole, holy, holistic, mystic
... “I cannot remember what I was like before TCC”
“I cannot remember who I was before TCC.”

The mystery of CHI birthing me,
Emerging into new life in
Authenticity and Integrity
To love and accept what is in me as me
And what is in others as them,
Allowing for change
Open to growth,
Transformation in letting go of self while
Dwelling in the REAL.

Final point:

Letting Go

When all else Fails

Become who you ARE

(everyone else is taken)

Your comments or insights are welcome.

When All Else Fails

N O W H E R E

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R E S T P O S E

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L E T G O

Focus in the Soles of the Feet





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Yinning and Yanging

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New Photo from spiral book or Shell

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