

**2010 T'ai Chi
Chih
Teachers
Conference
Thursday,
August 12th
Through
Sunday,
August 15th
Nebraska
City
Nebraska**

*Sr. Antonia's Past
Newsletters
available on her
website ...*

www.TCCcommunity.net

IN THE ESSENCE

Dear T'ai Chi Chih Teachers and Students,
Recently at a check out counter I noticed a magazine I had never seen before. Its title *ESSENCE* perked my curiosity. The cover advertised some of the magazine articles that were inside *ESSENCE*, but none of them appealed to me. Spending five dollars on that kind of essence was not worth my money, nor was it the kind of Essence I am looking for. Instead I went home and settled into the practice of T'ai Chi Chih!

Once again I reflected about how this practice of ours proves to be somewhat counter-cultural. What most people view as essence -- or what is essential to life -- seems only to be things that touch what goes on in their every day existence or to things that sustain their physical life. What true essence means for most people is the accumulation of things; things that are passing away, things that are impermanent! We need better balance. We know that most people in first world countries focus on accumulating more, after all that is what all ads promote as what is necessary to be happy! Life is "*less than perfect*" if you don't have *this* or *that* new item. Is it any wonder that so many local 'self-storage' units have been built in the past 15 years?

We live with many tensions in our society -- polarities, if you will. On the other hand, the clear dichotomy shows that the simple movements of the T'ai Chi Chih practice -- as a way to obtain essential ESSENCE -- *is not* the way most people would readily choose... unless they happen to be searching for some deeper reality beyond themselves... a reality which truly fulfills... a reality closer to themselves than their own human nature or ego... a reality that they are not even aware of on a conscious level.

FORM AND ESSENCE

Do not confuse form with essence. We can have essence without form and we can have form without essence. One does not necessarily depend on the other. The form we are speaking of here, of course is T'ai Chi Chih. Essence means something different to each of us. Form leads to ESSENCE. Form can embody ESSENCE. But form alone is not ESSENCE.

When first learning T'ai Chi Chih students are mostly in their heads -- trying to get a sense of which side is right and which is left; what is straight and what is bent... substantial, insubstantial, open and closed. This is not essence; it is simply outward form.

Essence is *internal and universal*. It is a gift, one that can only be glimpsed... yet never fully realized. It is in these momentary glimpses that we experience T'ai Chi Chih *doing* T'ai Chi Chih. It can be the bliss we experience in meditation -- the Oneness and interconnectedness of all things. Essence of itself cannot be experienced for long because our beings are not able to contain it... it is too overwhelming and we may burst.

If one practices the T'ai Chi Chih form in a mindless, superficial way to perhaps just get one more thing done on a long *to-do list*, one is simply going through the motions, doing a shallow or hollow practice. Being with the Form, or practicing the Form with full attention as we enter into our practice, is the same as entering into it with awareness, of being present in the moment, of being mindful. We come to know -- as in CHIH - the essence in this frame of mind.

What is the ESSENCE? Justin continuously teaches and writes about Essence:

"Properly seen, every incident in life points to the unseen Essence. Right in the midst of the turmoil one must rest in the Essence, making the effortless effort while shouting, crying and feeling bitter and joyous in alternate periods."

Justin Stone ~ [Spiritual Odyssey](#) "Rest in the Essence"
pg 71

Who would have guessed! How can that be? In reflecting this quote, an experience came to mind that happened a few years ago. Another sister and I decided to go to see a lighthearted movie and chose: "Hairspray" ...we went incognito!

The highway we took was one of those fast moving, high volume roads for which the state of New Jersey is famous. When the entrance for the Cinema came up unexpectedly, I quickly put on my turn signal and barely made it over to the shoulder. Of course someone laid on their horn... and laid on their horn -- which seemed like it lasted for an eternity. So I, in the spirit of NJ retaliation, laid on mine!

We made it to the theater and after dropping off the other Sister, I went to park the car. All of a sudden, a red van pulled up along side of me and the driver, red-faced with anger, began to yell obscenities and scream that I could have caused a pile-up. When he took a breath, I looked at him and said: "Thank You." He then proceeded to tell me how there could have been a major accident with people dying or maimed because of the way I was driving... and this was interspersed with more choice words. Once again, I looked at him and said: "Thank You." Finally, his third reaction was: Oh you.... Oh, ah.... Ah..... and drove off.

If this man had a gun, I would not be writing these lines!

As I look back on the experience, I learned NOT to respond by laying down on the horn, a practice I don't recommend to anyone else either. In reflecting on how the ESSENCE of the practice takes hold of us on a daily basis, I am realizing that it was "ESSENCE" that was concretely felt in this encounter. It was this ESSENCE that enabled me to be with him in his anger and completely defuse it, although this was not a conscious decision in that moment. So we who practice TCC have

*Thought about
taking Seijaku?*

*Never been to
Conference?*

*Here's what
happened last
year!*

[In Our Own Words](#)

decision in that moment. So we who practice TCC have at our disposal this energy that is transformative for ourselves and for others, without being aware of being in the moment. It just is.

So, how are you in such situations? Can you face the "beast"? Can you, just by your being in the moment, by being present disarm and transform the beast, whether it is outside you, or within. In the non-martial practice of the T'ai Chi Chih form we have no outside opponents coming toward us -- except for time, distractions and any other thing that may get in the way of our mindfulness, just those from within -- such as in the case above with the reflex reaction to retaliate. Being in the moment lets us discover Essence is our Inner Strength.

You are invited to attend various T'ai Chi Chih events offered during the year -- just check out the [Events Calendar!](#)

TEACHERS -- the T'ai Chi Chih Annual Conference will be held August 12 -- 15, 2010 at Lied Lodge, Nebraska City, Nebraska. [\[Please click here for Conference Information.\]](#) It is my hope to see all of you there! Conference provides a unique opportunity to gather as a community and to reconnect with the Essence of the Form through group practices, discovering new ways of experiencing the movements, and enabling you to bring these discoveries to your students.

During this year's Conference there will be many opportunities to examine, feel and experience Essence in the workshops and practices. Why will we spend time in constantly correcting and adjusting the movements? Because the time spent doing so will enable us to deepen the practice... so that as we teach, as we enter into our daily practice, we will be more open to experience wholeness in reconnecting with our true natural essence. We don't know when, where or how our natural essence will be expressed. What is important is to "be in the Essence."

This topic will be continued in the July Newsletter.

Wishing you a wonderful summer -- may these warmer months with time off refresh you in mind, body and spirit.

Blessings in abundance,

Sr. Antonia Cooper, OSF

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