

Expanding our Awareness of the Principles of T'ai Chi Chih's Movement

By JoEtta Heck – September 2022

As we continue to learn about the principles of softness and continuity, we experience several other principles of movement: flow from the center, yinning and yanging and focus on the soles of the feet.

When we **Integrate** the words, “flow from the center” into the practice, we allow the body to soften and move as if the air is heavy and thick. We feel the weight of substantial leg through the heaviness of our feet and the bend in the knee. As we allow the weight to release from this weighted, substantial leg (yang), we notice how it becomes distributed into both legs by feeling the heaviness on both feet while noticing the bend in both knees. Then, as we continue to flow from the center, we feel the weightless, insubstantial leg (yin) become the strong leg and bear all the weight. This leg is now heavy in the foot with a noticeable bend in the knee. This shift of weight is also known as yinning and yanging. The gradual continuous flow from the center allows us to be balanced with our movement. Feel this yinning and yanging and notice the movement's balance as it flows with each weight shift.



Often, I hear T'ai Chi Chih referred to as an exercise. The word “exercise” conjures images of effort, pain, the breaking down and tearing of muscles and breathlessness. T'ai Chi Chih is not an exercise. Justin Stone, originator of T'ai Chi Chih reminds us, “...effort is counter productive in T'ai Chi Chih.” T'ai Chi Chih is a practice that with some commitment softens the stickiness we have within our bodies and our minds. Through a regular practice we feel the connection of T'ai Chi Chih to our vital energy, our chi. Justin writes in his book *Spiritual Odyssey*, “The purpose of T'ai Chi Chih is to circulate and balance the Chi, and to do this, movement must be from the center of the body, not from the shoulders and arms.”¹

Notice your movement. Ask yourself, “Am I leading with my arms or my shoulders?”

As we can see in this abstract sculpture, the legs are both substantial when compared to the upper body. Make notice that the head with its mind is completely missing. T'ai Chi Chih is a practice that allows us to become connected with our body. This connection does not happen in our mind. This beautiful connection happens through a process of letting go and feeling our body as it flows through heavy air, softly and continuously.

This beautiful practice is where we will find “Joy through Movement”, **Together**.

Another principle of T'ai Chi Chih that is repeated frequently by teachers and in Justin's writings is the principle “focus in the soles of the feet.” As suggested by teacher trainer Daniel Pienciak in his May 2015 article in the *Vital Force Journal* titled, “Focus in the Soles of the Feet”, we imagine three coins placed on the bottom of the feet. Two coins are placed on the ball of each foot with one behind the big toe and the other behind the fourth and pinky toes. The third coin rests within the center of the heel. As we shift our weight, we notice the diameter of these coins on the bottom of our feet. We are focused and feel this slightly uncomfortable object through imagined awareness. As we continue with this imagery, we notice where the weight of the foot is distributed when the weight shift completes. Is the weight even? Is the weight more on the left or right side of the foot? Or is it more to the front (ball) or back (heel)? Daniel writes, “...if our feet are correctly placed, the pelvis will arrive directly over the foot at a center of gravity on the leg.”² At this moment, the weight feels even on all three imagined coins.

We might inquire, “What if the weight is uneven?” When this is noticed, we look to **Discover** the “root” of the problem, which is the positioning of the feet. What does our stance look like? Is it too long? Is it too short. Then, we consider the bend in the knee. We allow our awareness to feel the depth of the knee bend. We notice how it supports us moving to compete the weight shift without leaning or leading from the torso. Then, we play and adjust our body position, posture and foot placement. This practice of feeling, noticing and playing with our movement and posture **Empowers** our practice of awareness. And as quoted by its originator, “The root of T'ai Chi Chih is awareness.”³

May this writing help each of us to expand our awareness of the principles of T'ai Chi Chih's movement as we,

Discover the “root” of our weight shift problem, which is the positioning of the feet,

Integrate the words, “flow from the center” into our practice of T'ai Chi Chih,

Empower our practice of expanding awareness by feeling, noticing and playing, so

Together, we find, “Joy Through Movement.”



¹Stone, Justin F., *Spiritual Odyssey - Selected Writings: 1985-1997*, 2nd Edition. Albuquerque. Good Karma Publishing, 2010:104

²Pienciak, Daniel, “Focus in the Soles of the Feet”. *The Vital Force - Journal of T'ai Chi Chih® Community*. May 2015:7. Albuquerque. Good Karma Publishing. 2015

³Stone, Justin F., *Spiritual Odyssey - Selected Writings: 1985-1997*, 2nd Edition. Albuquerque. Good Karma Publishing, 2010:29