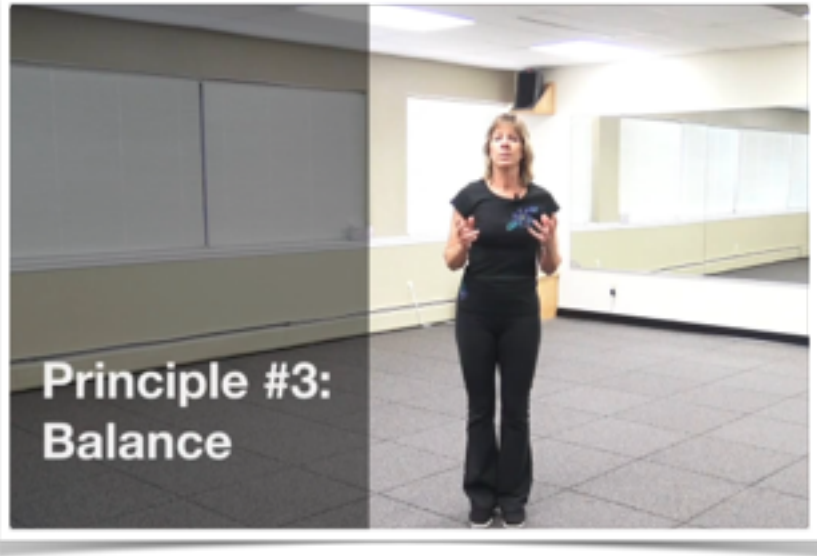




Principle #3 Balance

The idea of substantial and insubstantial

Balance is a concern for every maturing adult. In fact, falls are the most common reason for heading to the emergency room in the US! The reality is that if you don't train your balance, you lose it. And when you lose it, you are at risk for falling and injuring yourself. Balance is a key component in T'ai Chi. In order to create balance in your movement, you must learn to shift your weight appropriately. The supporting leg is always bent – not locked - and you should focus on keeping strong through the hips. Your eyes should be focused on the horizon and not on the ground. Eventually you will be able to feel the inner balance through the dan tian.

All of Tai Chi is a 1-legged event. You must understand the concept of substantial and insubstantial. Your weight will shift from one side to the other. You must shift your weight to the substantial side . . . the belly button does not stay in the center. As you move, you decide when to put the foot down. Like a plane landing, you must make your feet move and own the landing.

Again, think of the Tai Chi symbol with Yin and Yang moving from one to the other. It is a smooth flow, like water. One leg will always be substantial and will be your balance point. The other leg will be insubstantial, but ready to move or to strike if needed. You balance and control your movement through the dan tian.

Class #7

Focus: Balance/ Weight Shift

Postures 1-11

Teaching points:

Shifting your weight from side to side and forward and back is basic to every movement in the form. Shifting the weight should feel as if water is flowing from one side to the next. One side empties before it moves. This is the concept of substantial and insubstantial. The weight bearing side is substantial and the non-weight bearing side, or the empty side, is insubstantial. Mastering this concept is key to balance.

If you are to maintain good balance, the knee of the substantial leg should always be slightly bent. If you allow this knee to lock out causing the leg to be completely straight, you create an imbalance through your hips and there is no way for you to be in control of placing the other leg where you want it to be. You have also effectively created an energy block, so your chi cannot flow properly. Think about delicate lady's wrists and how you should not clench your fists at any time in the form. By keeping your wrists loose, you allow the chi to flow throughout your body. Likewise, you need to keep your lower body loose to keep the chi flowing. Locking your knees blocks the chi just like clenching your fists.

Warm-ups: 25 Minutes - In each exercise think about how your balance shifts- side-to-side, front to back.

- Holding the ball, side to side
- Pushing Chi
- Step side to side and lift knee
- Chi Walking
- Part the Wild Horse's Mane
- Brush Knee
- Repulse the Monkey
- Ward off sequence
- Wave Hands like Clouds - practice stepping to the left first, then add the hands

Form practice: 15 minutes

Using the first half of the form (postures 1-11), practice this sequence focusing on weight shift and keeping the substantial knee slightly bent.

Cool-downs: 5 minutes

- Pushing Chi
- Parting the clouds
- Rolling the ball

Homework:

Chi walking Notice daily walking and note weight shift when waiting in line. Notice weight shift necessary when entering and exiting your car. Try to move from the dan tian.

Class #8

Focus: Balance/ One-legged events
Postures 12-24

Teaching points:

Your weight shift should center and flow from the dan tian which is 2 inches in from your belly button and 2 inches down. Move from the dan tian and keep your hips strong, as opposed to moving from your shoulders or your feet. This focus helps to maintain your columns and your posture.

Your posture must be relaxed and in alignment, as if you are suspended from the ceiling. Your eyes should focus on the horizon and not on your feet. Your columns must be straight and intact.

Tai Chi is a series of one legged events. At any one time, one leg is substantial and the other is insubstantial. You should actually be able to lift the insubstantial leg off of the ground and keep your balance. Think about real life. Walking is essentially a one-legged event. Research shows that approximately 80% of the time, you only have one foot on the ground at a time when you are walking. In this same way, we can look at running as controlled falling. As you propel yourself forward, your foot comes forward and "breaks your fall."

In Tai Chi, we purposefully eliminate this controlled falling by focusing on balance and the concept of insubstantial and substantial in our one-legged events. As we step forward, we carefully place our leg down when we choose to put it down . . . and then we move shift our weight forward from the dan tian, keeping our columns intact. Imagine an airplane landing very smoothly. It doesn't just hover and land straight down. It glides forward and touches down just at the right moment.

Warm-ups: 25 minutes

- Holding the ball, side to side
- Step side to side and lift knee
- Step side to side and kick
- Chi Walking
- Kick, Smash, Box the Ears
- Snake Creeps, Pheasant Stands
- Deflect, Intercept and Punch
- Fair Lady works the Shuttle
- Return the Tiger to the Mountain

Form practice: 15 minutes

Using the last half of the form (postures 12-24) practice this sequence focusing on one-legged balance and moving from the dan tian.

Cool-downs: 5 minutes

- Pushing Chi
- Parting the clouds
- Rolling the ball

Homework:

Chi walking Notice posture when walking and try to move from the dan tian. Stand on one leg while brushing your teeth!

Class #9

Focus: Putting all together with Balance
Postures 1-24

Teaching points:

Weight Shift: Shifting the weight as if water is flowing from one side to the next. One side empties before it moves. This is the concept of substantial and insubstantial. The weight bearing side is substantial and the non-weight bearing side, or the empty side, is insubstantial. Mastering this concept is key to balance.

If you are to maintain good balance, the knee of the substantial leg should always be slightly bent. If you allow this knee to lock out causing the leg to be completely straight, you create an imbalance through your hips and there is no way for you to be in control of placing the other leg where you want it to be. You have also effectively created an energy block, so your chi cannot flow properly. This is very similar to clenching your fists.

Your weight shift should center and flow from the dan tian which is 2 inches in from your belly button and 2 inches down. Move from the dan tian and keep your hips strong. This focus helps to maintain your columns and your posture.

Your posture must be relaxed and in alignment, as if you are suspended from the ceiling. Your eyes should focus on the horizon and not on your feet. Your columns must be straight and intact.

Tai Chi is a series of one legged events. At any one time, one leg is substantial and the other is insubstantial. You should actually be able to lift the insubstantial leg off of the ground and keep your balance. Think about real life. Walking is essentially a one-legged event. Research shows that approximately 80% of the time, you only have one foot on the ground at a time when you are walking. In this same way, we can look at running as controlled falling. As you propel yourself forward, your foot comes forward and "breaks your fall." In Tai Chi, we purposefully eliminate this controlled falling by focusing on balance and the concept of insubstantial and substantial in our one-legged events. As we step forward, we carefully place our leg down when we choose to put it down . . . and then we move shift our weight forward from the dan tian, keeping our columns intact.

Warm-ups: 20 minutes

- Holding the ball, side to side
- Pushing Chi
- Step side to side and lift knee
- Wave Hands like Clouds
- Chi Walking
- Part the Wild Horse's Mane
- Brush Knee
- Fair Lady works the shuttle
- Kick, Smash, Box the Ears
- Snake Creeps, Pheasant Stands
- Repulse the Monkey
- Ward off sequence

Form practice: 20 minutes

Practice the entire form 4 times. Focus on weight shift the first time through. Focus on posture and keeping the knees bent the second time through. Focus on 1-legged events and moving from the dan tian the third time. Exaggerate the one-legged focus by picking the insubstantial leg up off of the ground before you move to the next posture. Try to put it all together into Balance during the fourth time through the form.

Cool-downs: 5 minutes

- Pushing Chi
- Parting the clouds
- Rolling the ball

Homework:

Continue to practice standing on one leg as you wait in line, or watch a commercial, or brush your teeth. Consciously think about your balance each time you stand up and start moving. Practice "kick, smash and box the ears" placing your foot carefully each time.