



PUPPETS HUNG FROM A STRING

Lynn Zelmer continues his notes on tai chi with some tips on improving your balance.

Balance and relaxation are two of the main objectives of our tai chi practice. Relaxation leads to a general loosening of the body, reducing the effects of stress and ensuring that balance is easier to achieve.

Humans maintain their upright balance through feedback from their feet on the floor and a complicated interaction with the fluid in one's inner ear. Standing on your toes reduces the potential feedback and makes it harder to maintain balance.

Stand in the 'horse riding stance': feet flat on the floor, a shoulder-width apart, and weight equally distributed. Unlock your knees and sink slightly. Relax your shoulders, let them round a bit, and breath easily through your nose.

Transfer your weight from side to side, keep your body upright and bend your knees, rather than bending from your waist. Bend one knee as you unbend the other and you can transfer your weight from side to side without your head bouncing up and down. Keep your head upright and the eyes level as you shift your weight from side to side.

Think of your body being loosely held upright by a string fastened to the top of your head, just as you might hold a puppet. As you shift your weight from side to side (or backwards and forwards if you are in a bow stance) the attachment point for the string should never go beyond the centre of your leading foot to maintain your balance.

Visualise yourself as a loosely hanging puppet and remaining upright will soon become second nature. And your balance should improve enormously.