

Introduction

There are seven movements in the T'ai Chi for balance exercise sequence. They may be done individually, or connected into a series of movements. Each movement must be repeated at least three times. Try to extend to your full limits when performing each movement. Each movement must be completely relaxed. Never force or use tension to perform a movement. Practice the following four basic principles of mind and body coordination and use them in your daily activities.

In the subsequent material we will refer, from time to time, to a concept called "Chi" (also sometimes spelled as "Ki" or "Qi"). You can think of this as a synonym for "life energy". We sometimes ask you to attempt to extend your "Chi". What we mean is that we want you to imagine or visualize this energy, as an aid to concentration and movement.

Practice the *four basic principles* of mind and body coordination and use them in your daily activities.

- 1) Keep one point -- focus your mind at your center of mass.
- 2) Relax completely.
- 3) Keep weight underside -- don't fight gravity and let your weight follow its natural course.
- 4) Extend Chi.

Similarly, in practice and in daily activities, maintain the *five bows*. Keep the arms slightly bent, keep the knees slightly bent, and keep the spine straight but flexible.

MOVEMENT 1 PREPARATION & HOLDING THE BALL

The beginning of every T'ai Chi system is the posture called Preparation. We can think of this posture as a separated movement although the aim of the posture is stillness, relaxing the whole body, and calming the mind. Stand with your feet together and hands at the side. See Figure 1. Maintain the following principles of posture throughout the seven T'ai Chi movements:

- 1) Suppose your head is suspended above by a string.
- 2) Look forward.
- 3) Close the mouth.
- 4) Touch your tongue to the roof of your mouth.
- 5) Breathe through your nose, naturally.
- 6) Relax mind and body.
- 7) Keep the head and spine straight.
- 8) Keep the weight of your shoulders and elbows down.

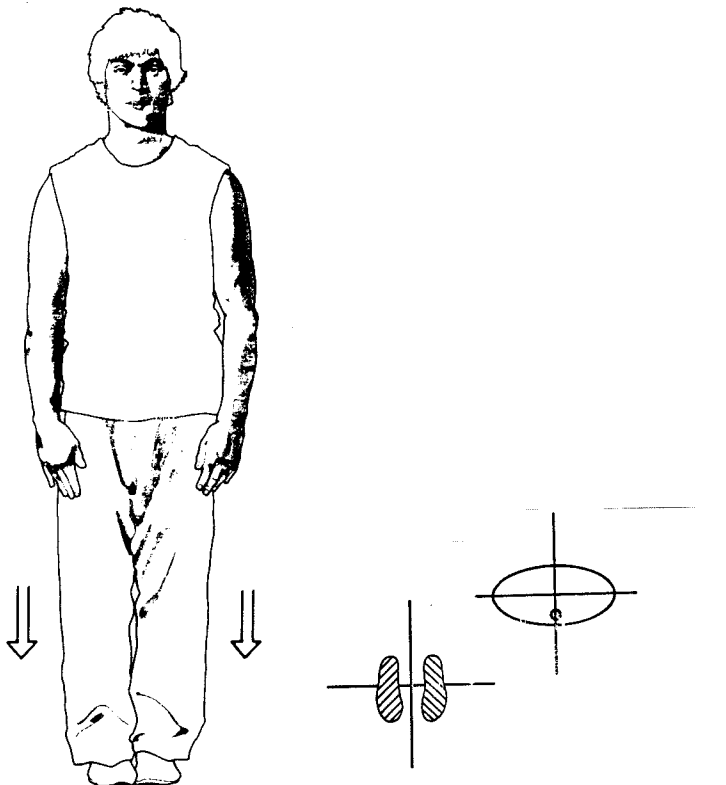


Figure 1, Preparation

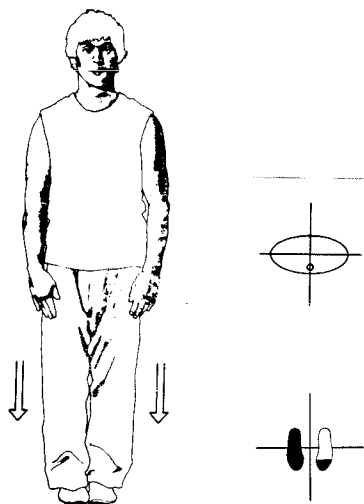
To begin the movement, Holding the Ball, start from Figure 1:

- 1) Bend your knees slightly, shifting the weight to the right foot and lift the left heel as in Figure 2.

Figure 2, lift heel

From the Preparation, sit a little by slightly bending both knees.

Place all your weight on the right foot and lift the left heel.

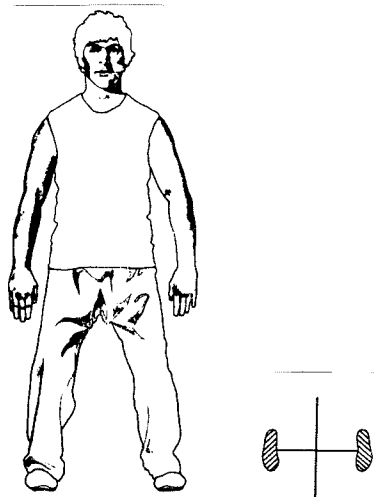


- 2) Step slowly a shoulder's distance to the left, keeping the feet parallel, and gradually distribute the weight evenly to both feet. The arms extend out slightly as in Figure 3.

Figure 3

Gradually touch the whole foot to the floor; distribute your weight evenly on both feet. Your hands are still at your sides, but your palms are turned back.

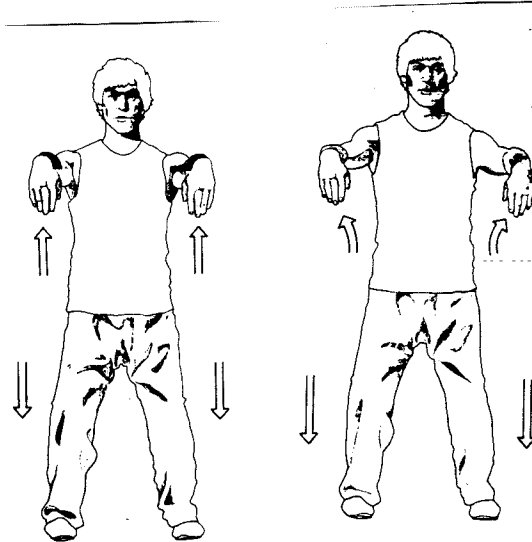
The feet should be parallel, shoulder-width apart, knees slightly bent, but not extending over the toes. The toes point straight ahead and on one line. Your hands are at your side.



- 3) Sit back a little by bending your knees and "tucking" the coccyx in to align with the rest of the spine. At the same time lift the arms up slowly, palms down, shoulder's width apart as in Figure 4.

Figure 4

With the head and spine straight, sit a little, very slowly raising and extending the arms with the palms down; the wrists, shoulders, and elbows are relaxed.



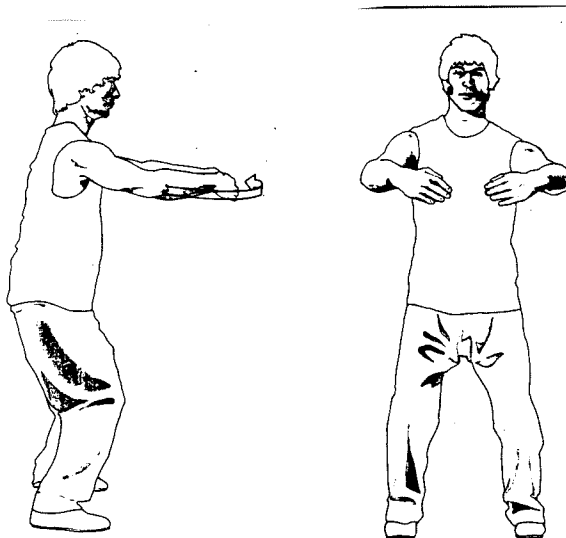
As you bend the knees slightly, very slowly raise the arms to the height of your shoulders, parallel to the ground and apart one shoulder-width. Be sure to keep the shoulders and elbows relaxed.

- 4) Sit a little more and make a big circle with your arms as if you were holding a big ball. Palms inward, feet parallel as in Figure 5.

Figure 5, Holding the Ball

Sit deeper. Tuck in your hips until your head and spine make a straight line that is perpendicular to the ground.

Maintain your posture as if suspended by a string. Gradually make a big circle with your arms, turning the palms inward. The arms stay parallel to the ground, but the weight of the shoulders and elbows is kept down. Your fingertips may be from one to three inches apart. Your hands should not hang down, but the weight of the shoulders and elbows should be downside.



After some practice you may begin to feel the Chi hold up your arms. For some experienced practitioners, the Chi force becomes so strong, they feel like their arms are lying on a table.

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: Take a walk outdoors maintaining the five bows as you walk and keeping weight underside. You may need to concentrate at first, but after a while your walking will be more stable, smooth, and effortless.

MOVEMENT 2

TURNING THE WHEEL

The second movement in the T'ai Chi for balance sequence teaches us how to move from our center of mass. Depending on one's body structure, the center of mass is situated about one to three inches below the navel. Initiate all your T'ai Chi movements from your center of mass, also called the one point. After some practice, you will be able to move from your one point without thinking about it and do so in your daily activities.

Maintain the four basic principles of mind and body coordination and the principles of posture from the first lesson in all the T'ai Chi movements. Use the five bows for added stability. Although it takes a little practice, incorporate the T'ai Chi principles of movement given below.

- 1) **Complete Relaxation:** Calm the mind, relax every muscle, and breathe naturally. Never tense or force the movement.
- 2) **Absolute Softness:** Execute each motion gently and smoothly. Eliminate stiffness.
- 3) **Harmonize:** Integrate all parts of the body into a single unit. Coordinate the parts into the whole.
- 4) **Differentiate:** The weight bearing leg is termed positive or yang while the leg bearing little or no weight is termed negative or yin. When shifting weight from one leg to the other, stabilize your body weight over the positive leg before you step.
- 5) **Slowness:** Each movement must be done slowly, deliberately, and with concentration.
- 6) **Sinking:** Keep your body weight down, lowering your center of gravity. Feel anchored to the ground as you move.
- 7) **Centering:** Maintain central equilibrium and move from your one point. Focus and concentrate your mind at the one point as you move.
- 8) **Circularity:** All T'ai Chi movements are in the form of circles, arcs, or spirals to structurally strengthen your motion.
- 9) **Continuity:** Make each motion continuous without abrupt stops or jerky movement.
- 10) **Completeness:** Finish each motion by extending to your natural limits. Extend each movement to its end before beginning the next one.

Turning the wheel contains the actions of sit back and push forward. We are learning how to shift our body weight forward and back from the center of mass, our one point. We will first execute the movement on the right side, with the right leg forward, and then on the left. Perform each motion as slowly as possible without tension, at least three times on each side.

This movement, as all others, may be done individually, singularly, or in sequence with the previous posture.

- 1) From the previous posture, Holding the Ball, Figure 5, slowly shift your weight to the left leg and lift the right heel. Turn from your one point 45° to the right as in Figure 6.

Figure 6



- 2) From Figure 6, keep focused and move from your one point, touching the right heel down and shifting your weight to the right front leg. The arms are shoulder's width apart, palms in as in Figure 7.

Figure 7



- 3) From Figure 7, move from your one point and sit back shifting the weight onto your left rear leg. The arms move circularly down slightly, as in Figure 8.

Figure 8



- 4) From Figure 8, move from your one point, and shift your weight forward again onto the right forward leg, as in Figure 7. The arms push circularly forward so while you shift your weight forward and back they give the feeling of turning a wheel. Repeat the forward and back weight shifts of Figures 7 & 8 at least three times. Then sit back making a circle with your arms as in Holding the Ball, lift the right heel, and turn the body forward into the Holding the Ball posture of Figure 5.

- 5) From Figure 5, do the same movement on the left side. Now lift the left heel and turn the body 45° to the left, as in Figure 9.

Figure 9



- 6) From Figure 9, put the left heel down, shift the weight onto the left forward leg, extending the arms, palms in as in Figure 10.

Figure 10



- 7) From Figure 10, move from your one point and sit back, shifting the weight onto the right rear leg, the hands move circularly down slightly as in Figure 11.

Figure 11



- 8) From Figure 11, move from your one point, shifting your weight forward again, as in Figure 10, turning the wheel as you did before. Repeat the motion on the left side at least three times.

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: Every time you sit or stand, concentrate on your one point. Stand by moving from your one point. Sit by moving from your one point. Practice this a few times slowly as in the T'ai - Chi movements. You may find that sitting and standing slowly is more difficult. This practice will make sitting and standing at normal speed easier and effortless.

MOVEMENT 3

BRUSH THE KNEE AND TWIST STEP

The third movement in the Tai - Chi for balance sequence uses what we have learned in the previous lessons. We will apply the idea of moving from our center of mass to stepping forward. In Tai - Chi forward steps, like everyday walking, the heel of the foot touches down first. Since we are using Tai Chi principles in our movements, this forward stepping will be done slowly and softly, with the weight underside. In addition we will coordinate the arms and legs by moving from our one point.

- 1) From the previous posture, Figure 11, still facing 45° to the left, put the arms down to your sides and sit back onto your rear right leg as in Figure 12.

Figure 11



Figure 12



- 2) Moving from your one point, change weight onto your forward left leg and step forward as in Figures 13 and 14.

Figure 13



Figure 14



- 3) Keeping your feet on a 45° base, face your upper body forward and circle both arms on your left side as in Figure 15.

Figure 15



- 4) Step forward with your right foot, as the right arm circles down to brush the left knee and the left arm circles up near your left ear, as in Figure 16. Change weight onto the right front leg, bend both knees, pushing the left hand forward and the right hand down as in Figure 17.

Figure 16

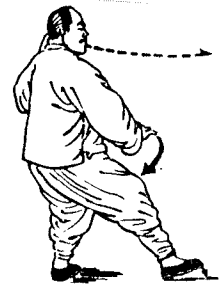


Figure 17



- 5) Put the arms down to your side as you shift weight back onto your left rear leg turning the right front foot 45° to the right for the solid base of support, as in Figure 18.

Figure 18



- 6) Shift your weight onto the right front leg and step up as in Figure 19.

Figure 19



- 7) Circle the arms to the right side and step forward with the left leg, heel first, as in Fig.20.

Figure 20



- 8) Shift weight onto the front left leg, bending both knees, the left hand brushes the left knee

Figure 21



- 9) Put the arms down at your sides and sit back on the right rear leg again as in Figure 12.
- 10) Repeat the process from Figures 13-21.

NOTE: You may repeat the brush knee and twist step sequence as time allows, but less movements done slowly is preferable to many done quickly.

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: Take a walk in the park, the lake shore, or the woods. Walk at your normal pace and stop. Put your hands down at your sides and practice only the stepping routine from the Brush Knee and Twist Step Movement you have learned. Walk again at your normal pace, then stop and practice your steps again. A few repetitions of the practice steps will make your regular walking stable and effortless.

MOVEMENT 4

STEP BACK TO REPULSE THE MONKEY

The fourth movement in the T'ai Chi for Balance sequence incorporates what you have learned in the previous movements. In Preparation and Holding the Ball we learned the Principles of Posture maintained in all T'ai Chi movements. In Turning the Wheel and Brush Knee and Twist Step we concentrated on the Principles of Movement. In all cases we focus on the Basic Principles for Mind and Body Coordination. The third movement emphasized walking, coordinating arms and legs, and stepping forward. In the fourth movement we will practice our steps backwards. In natural everyday walking forward steps have the heel touch down first, but in stepping back we will naturally touch the toe down first. This will be easy if you use the ideas of moving from the one point and extending Ki.

*Remember that in practice it is preferable and more effective if you move slowly and smoothly. Maintain the **five bows** for greater stability. Look forward as you move forward and back as you move backward, but do not look at your feet unless you feel it necessary. Differentiate the weight bearing leg clearly from the leg with little or no weight on it before you take any step in T'ai Chi practice. This stability training will automatically transfer to your daily movement.*

- 1) From the previous posture, Figure 21, sit back on your right rear leg, moving from your one point, arms down at your sides as in Figure 22.

Figure 21



Figure 22



- 2) Step forward moving from your one point, turning the front foot 45° to the left as in Figure 23. Step up as in Figure 24.

Figure 23



Figure 24



- 3) From Figure 24, swing your right hand forward and left hand behind you, palms up, as in Figure 25. From Figure 25, step backwards, toe touches down first, bringing the left arm slightly forward, palm down, as in Figure 26.

Figure 25



Figure 26



- 4) Shift weight onto your _____ right rear leg and push the left palm out, right arm in front of you as in Figure 27. Swing your right arm back and left arm forward palms up, as in Figure 28.

Figure 27



Figure 28



- 5) Step back toe touches first bringing the right arm slightly forward palm down as in Figure 29. Shift weight onto the left rear leg and push the left palm out as in Figure 30.

Figure 29



Figure 30



- 6) Repeat the movements as shown in Figures 25-30.

NOTE: Repeat the backward steps as many times as you like. Try not to look down at your feet but either look forward or backwards as you step. It may help to just simply watch your hands as you step back but try to concentrate on moving from your one point in any case. Keeping weight underside is a useful tool for backward steps.

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: The next time you go grocery shopping walk through the aisles, moving from your one point. Go a little past the shelf that you may be looking for, then take a few steps backwards. After a week of practice, your back steps will be more stable.

MOVEMENT 5 WALKING THE CIRCLE

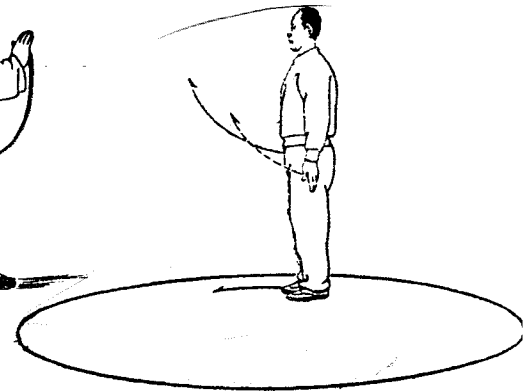
The fifth movement in the T'ai Chi for Balance sequence is taken from a sister system of T'ai Chi called Pa - Kua Chang. The entire Pa - Kua sequence, of which there are many styles, is always done in a circle. The basic form of all Pa - Kua styles is called Walking the Circle. From the previous lessons we have concentrated on correct posture in Movement 1, moving from our center of mass in Movement 2, walking forward from our center of mass in Movement 3, and walking backwards from our center of mass in Movement 4. Now we will combine what we have learned and moving from our one point, we will walk in a circle.

- 1) From the previous posture, Figure 30, draw back the left foot so that it is even with the right foot. At the same time bring both arms down to their respective sides with the palms pushing down flat. Both feet point 45° to the right. See Figure 31.

Figure 30

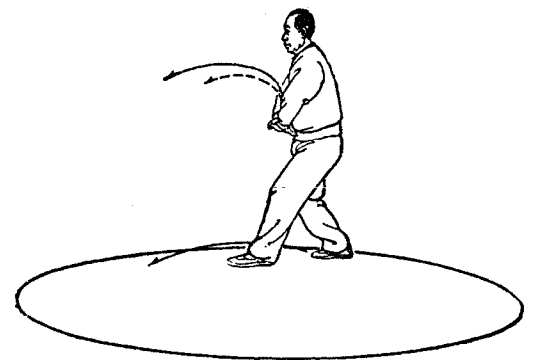


Figure 31



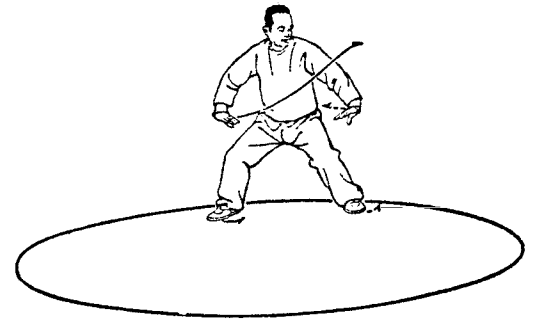
- 2) Imagine a circle in front of you whose diameter is about equal to your own height. Keeping the palms pushing down, weight underside, and the feet together, bend your knees slightly and maintain the five bows. Lift your left foot a few inches off the ground, slowly and smoothly, keeping the sole parallel to the ground. Step on the rim of the circle as in Figure 32.

Figure 32



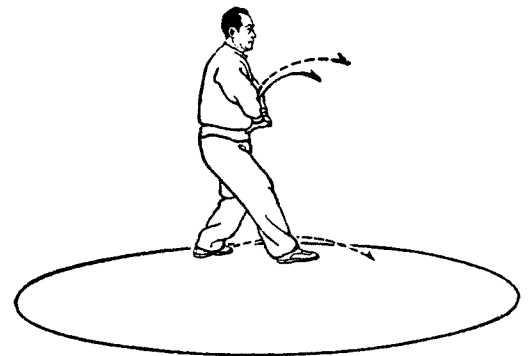
- 3) Walk slowly on the rim of the circle, keeping palms and soles parallel to the ground. As you step remember that the heel touches down first, but in this movement let the heel touch down just slightly before the rest of the foot. Walk the circle all the way around to where you started. After your final step, turn the front foot around to change directions as in Figure 33.

Figure 33



- 4) Bring your feet together and palms down as in Figure 31, but this time you are facing the opposite direction on the circle. Now step forward as before but with the right foot as in Figure 34. Walk the Circle in the opposite direction with the palm and foot parallel as before and letting the heel touch down just slightly before the rest of the foot. Walk all the way around as before.

Figure 34



Remember that all the principles of mind and body coordination, posture and movement are used in the walking the circle exercise. Walking the circle is far more difficult than walking a line, as we usually do in our daily activities, therefore, walking in a perfect circle is a challenging exercise, even to well conditioned athletes.

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: Traditional Chinese medicine recommends that everyone should take at least three hundred steps, (about an eighth of a mile), after eating a meal. It is of course best to go outdoors, but if you can't, try finding enough space where you are to walk the circle twice each way a few minutes after your meal.

MOVEMENT 6

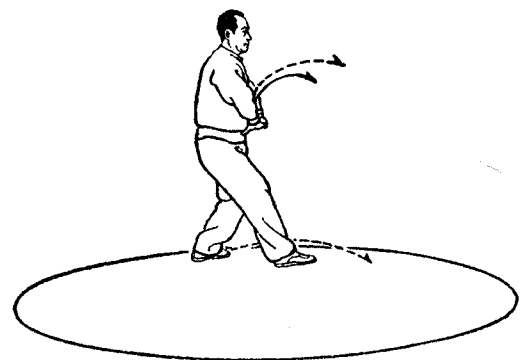
KICK HEEL OUT TO LEFT AND RIGHT

The sixth movement in the T'ai Chi for Balance sequence is difficult whether or not one has problems with balance. Athletes and in particular dancers, often find themselves having to balance on one leg. In T'ai Chi, as we have seen in our Mind and Body Coordination tests, balance is only a component of the centering principle, that we have termed keeping one point. In this movement we will concentrate on keeping our center of mass still and immovable.

Historically, the first movement is taken from the oldest known system of T'ai Chi, compiled during the Ming Dynasty, circa 1300 A.D., and taught only to select family members of the Chen and Yang families in northern China. All T'ai Chi systems are derivatives of that oldest system. The second, third, and fourth movements are middle nineteenth century forms taken from the Yang family school of T'ai Chi. This system is the most widely practiced sequence of T'ai Chi, with tens of millions of practitioners. The fifth movement is taken from the system of Pa - Kua, which in principle belongs to the same category of physical culture as T'ai Chi. The sixth movement is taken from a late nineteenth century school developed from Ming Dynasty manuscripts by the Wu and Hao clans of northern China. The seventh movement will be from the Wu family, originally from Manchuria, and widely practiced throughout China. In any case, all these different styles have origins that date back thousands of years with emphases on preventive and traditional Chinese medical applications. Ironically, they all exhibit an aspect of combative skill development for protection and self preservation.

- 1) From the last position, Figure 34, step forward with your left leg and point your left foot 45° to the left of the position you began walking the circle.

FIGURE 34



- 2) Draw the right heel back to the left heel so the right toe points right 45° as in Figure 35. You are now facing forward from where you been walking the circle.

FIGURE 35



- 3) Shift your weight onto the left leg, sink from your one point, bending both knees. Maintain the Five Bows and the Principles of Posture, paying particular attention to keeping your head hung from a string and the head and spine straight. Lift your arms up, palms out as in Figure 36. Circle the arms, palms up slowly extending to their respective sides.

FIGURE 36



- 4) Keeping your attention focused at your one point, slowly kick the right heel out, 45° right as in Figure 37. Slowly bring the leg and arms down as in Figure 35.

FIGURE 37



- 5) Shift your weight onto the right leg, sink from your one point as before, bending both knees and maintaining the Five Bows, with your head and spine erect. Lift your arms up slowly, palms out as in Figure 38. Extend the arms out slowly, palms out as before

FIGURE 38



- 6) Keeping one point and still, slowly kick the left heel out to the left 45° as in Figure 39. Slowly, bring the arms and leg down and return to Figure 35.

FIGURE 39



- 7) Repeat the movements kicking the heel out left and right at least three times on each side.

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: Whenever you are standing and waiting, be it for a bus, in line, or at home, practice shifting weight onto one leg as we did in this exercise and lift the other leg as long as you can without straining. Maintaining the Five Bows will give you greater stability. As a result of practicing standing on one leg, you will find it easier to stand stable on two.

MOVEMENT 7

THE PARTITION OF THE WILD HORSE'S MANE

The seventh movement in the T'ai Chi for Balance sequence is called the Partition of the Wild Horse's Mane. In this movement we initiate our motion as before from our one point, but it may be helpful to use the principle of extending Ki, since in the final movement of the sequence we will step forward as far as we can without tensing. As in all T'ai Chi movements, we do not allow the knee to extend beyond the line of the toe.

- 1) From the previous posture, Figure 35, bend both knees slightly, shifting weight onto your left leg. Cross your arms in front of you, right arm inside of the left arm as in Figure 40.

FIGURE 35



- 2) Step from your one point, extending the right leg forward as the right arm extends forward, palm up, and the left arm behind you, palm down. Shift weight onto your front leg as in Figure 41. Turn your head left to look behind you as far as you can. Remember in stepping forward, the heel touches down first.

FIGURE 40



- 3) Moving from your one point, shift weight back onto the rear leg, lift the front toe and draw back the arms and legs to the initial position, Figure 35. Now shift weight onto the right foot, bending both knees, cross arms again, this time the left arm is inside the right .

FIGURE 41

- 4) Step forward with the left heel, extending the left arm forward and right arm back, shifting weight onto the front leg. Look behind you, turning your head left as far back as you can, as in Figure 42. Draw the arms and legs back as before.

FIGURE 42

- 5) Repeat the movement at least three times on each side. When you have completed the sequence stand quietly in Figure 35 for a minute or so.

THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: It is important that you spend a few minutes each and every day doing the T'ai Chi movements, not only for better balance, but improved health. The key to success in T'ai Chi is to do at least a little every day. Enjoy it. It feels good.