

Life on a Windswept Hill

by Jinjer Stanton

Balance is an interesting phenomenon. Think of Balance Rock in Arches National Park, Utah. In an area of constant, powerful wind; in the midst of views that go on forever an enormous boulder rests, poised on a sandstone pedestal. Since the first prehistoric wanderers the sight has inspired belief in the supernatural or the divine. How else to explain something so perfectly at rest and eternal (at least compared to the span of human life) in such a precarious situation?

Imagination suggests that a human spirit residing within the stone might have turned inward so deeply that all the drama and energy outside is only distantly sensed. The spirit has let go of both yesterday and tomorrow and resides in the eternal now, centered and at peace. Perhaps that is the nature of the soul of stone. To achieve some measure of that peace, we humans who breathe need to look for an example a bit easier to identify with — a tree perhaps.

The tree is a classic balance pose in yoga, but there are several poses that contain tree in their names (including the palm tree and a hand stand) so I've chosen to refer to this pose as the pine tree because it calls to my mind the sloping branches of the pine and I love pine trees.

Stand strong, feet about shoulder width apart with your shoulders relaxed and your chest high. Take a deep, full breath just to get centered. Lift your toes up off the floor and spread them as far apart as possible. Plant your toes back down spread apart like tree roots.

Focus on something straight ahead of you that doesn't move (this is a good time to make use of that window with a great view or a beautiful piece of art). Shift your weight over onto one foot. Turn

the other foot 90° to the front and draw it back toward the weight-bearing leg. Lift that foot until it rests against your ankle (if your balance is poor), calf, knee, or thigh. If this is easy for you, you can rest your foot in front of your thigh as high up as it will go without pulling your body out of alignment.

Make an effort to keep your bent knee pointing off to the side. This is where strong muscles in your lateral rotator group in your hip pay off.

Bring your hands together, finger tips touching and palms facing one another, in front of your heart. This is a hand position (mudra) that helps balance the energies of the body. It supports this balance pose and helps you concentrate.

If you have to touch your foot to the floor, that's okay. Just refocus and bring it back into position. Breathe deeply and slowly.

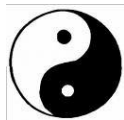
Repeat while standing on the other leg.

Be gentle with yourself. We can measure how balanced we are by how easily we are able to maintain a balance pose. Conversely, as our balance pose improves, our lives become more stable as well. Balance poses also develop our powers of concentration and tone the leg muscles.

Even if you are unable to stand you can approach the spirit of the pose by sitting a little forward in your chair with your feet positioned so that you can sit upright with your back straight, your shoulders relaxed and your chin parallel to the floor. As when standing, bring your hands together at heart level and focus on something that doesn't move. Breathe deeply and slowly.

Whether sitting or standing, let go of yesterday and tomorrow and be poised in this eternal now.

The spirit in me salutes the spirit in you.
We're all in bodies together.



Tai Chi — Qi Gong: The Fluid Meditation

by Ellen Wahl

The history of Tai Chi is sketchy, but it is said that a Taoist monk, Chang San Fung, in the 14th Century watched a fight between a snake and a bird. The bird was attacking the snake with its beak. Through yielding and soft counter movements the snake was able to overcome the bird's forceful strikes and snare the bird in its coils. The names of tai chi postures often have animal actions associated with them. For example students will hear postures such as Stork Cools It's Wings, Snake Creeps Down, Grasp Swallow's Tail, etc. More information about the specific history of Kuang Ping Tai Chi Chuan, which is the Chen style of Tai Chi Chuan that I teach, can be found in the book *Wave Hands Like Clouds* by Lipo and Ananda.

The martial arts was something foreign to me in the early 1980's. I worked with a woman who was

studying a form of martial arts. I was surprised by this since she had a gentle spirit. I thought martial arts was for "tough guys". Even though she was not doing tai chi at the time, her study was spiritually connecting for her. This led me to visit a few martial arts schools, but on an energetic level nothing appealed to my spirit. After moving to Minnesota in 1986 I saw a poster advertising tai chi at the Tilopa Tai Chi Center. After 22 years of tai chi practice I am witnessing the healing and centering that has occurred within myself and continues to occur as I devote time to my practice. Tai chi is a way of life for me. As a friend said, "It is woven into your being." For this reason I love to share tai chi with others.

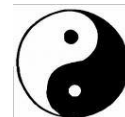
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Jinjer Stanton's Yoga Classes

7 to 8:30 Monday evenings at Holy Trinity Lutheran Church <http://www.htlcmpls.org/> (generally in the Mary/Martha room). Call 612/722-9703 for more information about this class.

If daytime or weekend classes work better for you, Contact **Hiawatha Lake Park** (612/370-4930) for classes Saturday mornings from 11:15 am to 12:30 pm or for the Monday afternoon class that goes from 2 to 3:15 pm.



Yoga Bytes:

Yoga Bytes is a message intended to bring yoga to your consciousness regularly by suggesting a little something you can work on right now. For more information and additional Yoga Bytes go to www.jinjerstanton.com. *Yoga Bytes is published in cooperation with Lake Hiawatha Park.*