

## HARA – BEYOND THE CONCEPT

### Tanden – temple of the divine



The Hara has played a major role in Oriental medicine and was recognized by the ancients who wrote of its importance in the classics. In this article the Hara refers to the lower abdomen, the 'koshi'. Between the top of the pubic bone and the navel, there lies the centre of awareness, which is called the seika tanden. It is located one and a half cun below the navel.

In Japan there are many expressions referring to the Hara:

*Harao watsute hanasu* – to speak openly from the heart, without hidden thoughts

*Haraguro* – 'a black hara', someone who is keeping secrets and doesn't show their true intention

*Haraga dekiteiru* - the Hara is stable and focused

*Harani osameru* - to persevere despite difficulties

*Hara de kangaeru* – to think with the belly

Ask any westerner where his thinking is centred and he will point to his head. And most people's sense of self is associated with their upper body and their intellect. *'Those who value only the head and endeavour to gather as much knowledge as possible, grow heads that become bigger and bigger, like a pyramid standing upside down.'* (Okada Torajiro)

Master Okada Torajiro describes the Hara as the 'temple of the divine'.

*'Those who regard the belly as the most important part, develop their minds as well as their bodies in the right way, where the divine can grow'.*

If you live from your Hara you are the captain of your own ship.



## **Soul Listening**

At school we are told that by learning a lot we become successful. Knowledge is power, but what does this have to do with our true nature?

Thinking outside of yourself – 'I don't know enough yet!' – is thinking from a short-coming, not from a fullness of being. In the re-membering, the knowing comes to the surface.

From my own experience, I see that most people have not found their way and are not in fulfilment of their own power.

Much too often we live the wishes of our parents or are influenced by the social and cultural collective of our time.

If, as a child, you don't get the chance to learn that you are responsible for yourself, how to connect your body and mind with the elements through experiences in nature; if you are not being confronted with your own limits and have not learned to survive according to the compass of your intuition then you'll have to find a way how to obtain these life lessons.

If we don't transform our conditioning, we'll always be in doubt.

What you already know may be trustworthy, but without giving you much added value and challenge, while living according to your inherent nature will give you enormous strength. Every person has an inexhaustible creative and innovative energy.

We can mobilize this energy in order to grow. I believe that every person has a certain task on this earth. With shiatsu as a therapy, you can find out what your natural talents are and you can give your hara a central role.

In Hara shiatsu we learn to sit in the right position, in seiza, allowing the chi to flow, and we can centre our awareness and breath into our Hara.

The yin hand has the function of connecting with the hara. The power of the yin hand gives the yang hand carte blanche, without activating the ego.

The role of the Hara in modern times is therefore a 'back to your roots', a call to man to rediscover himself, with a sense of his own centre, nature, intuition and inner connectedness.

## **Culture shock**

Before the Second World War, 80% of people worked in agriculture, without many machines. Today it's only 4%, which represents an enormous social, societal and economic change. Without being aware of it, it is a culture shock that we have underestimated physically, emotionally and spiritually.

Because we spend all day sitting at the desk, working towards deadlines, or begin stressed sitting in a car, this 'lifestyle collapse' has weakened the Hara in a short period of time and made it less active.

The Industrial Revolution has resulted in an evolutionary change for mankind, and we are therefore affected by vitality problems, insomnia, obesity, eating disorders, diabetes, anorexia, lack of concentration and psychological problems such as loss of orientation and identity.

Our condition is mirrored in our decaying intestines. Already 2000 years ago Hippocrates said: 'All disease starts in the intestines'.

The Hara is the gate of life where all the organ energies gather. The Hara provides us with a picture of the energetic state of the organs and the abdomen in general. A healthy belly is firm but not hard, soft and certainly not swollen! Out of 10 clients in my practice only one or two will have such an abdomen.

***Daoist saying: 'When you are 'sick', do not seek a cure. Find your centre (Hara) and you will be healed.'***



### **The development of the Hara**

The hara, seika tanden, is our first moving force. It is related to the kidney essence, where we re-member who we are and where we come from.

The development of the Hara, the solar plexus and one's instinct starts during a baby's crawling phase, which also mobilizes the peristaltic movement and the metabolism of the internal organs.

You can still clearly see a baby's abdominal breathing. The lungs connect with the water element (ren mai and chong mai) to become a source of security and confidence.

Man's will comes into contact with the universe and consciousness anchors itself in the Hara.

The heart and kidney organs are very closely connected, the fire and water element are essential to our existence.

In Japan they say 'Seishin', Sei means 'the spirit that is connected to the vital energy function of the kidney'. Shin is the spiritual entity.

On the heart meridian you will find the Shinmon, heartpoint nr.7, the gate of the spirit.

On the kidney meridian there are two points related to the heart, the Shinpo, kidney point 23, the seal of the spirit and kidney point 24, this point is called Reikyo, where the ghost or spirit is wandering.

When the Hara's tanden is stabilized, then the kidney and heart organs have also found a harmonious unity.

## **Coming home**

The Hara is the physical and spiritual power centre that allows every physical, psychological, emotional and spiritual experience to happen because 'I am already at home in my own home'.

The Hara feels whether it is right to put my decisiveness into a new idea and to take on any challenges.

The spirit of the Hara is such that the concept of time does not exist. It dissolves into the quiet spirit of the here and now, allowing me to listen to the voice of my heart.

The Hara is like the second brain that regulates intelligence and urges intuition to feel before thinking. The left hemisphere does not know the right hemisphere but the right one is connected to the heart centre and the tanden.

My 'Hara awareness' brings the soul, which became separated from its origin in the duality, back to the 'we'-feeling, the connection of all things and beings. I reclaim my place in the world and return to my authentic nature; knowing who I am without having to be someone else, in the richness of the realization that my strength can be completely free and devoid of any conditions.

Loving myself as I am, in the realization that I do not exist by grace or by my status, without having to prove myself in order to gain results.

The potential of this knowledge already exists within us. My daily meditations help me to mobilize this potential and to uncover my creative power every day.

## **Exercises**

### ***Hara breathing***

Practicing Hara breathing in seiza will help you to focus and become calmer.

With your mouth closed, breathe in, only using the muscles of your lower abdomen, gently pushing and breathing out.

With each inhalation feel your abdomen filling and expanding – like a balloon.

With each exhalation, never exhale all the air from your lungs, but keep just enough there to resist the impulse to begin a new inhalation with your abdomen.

Feel each exhalation as a flow in your lower abdomen.

Gradually slow down your breathing, allowing an ever-longer interval of time after each exhalation and before the next inhalation.

In this way try to reduce the number of breaths you need to take each minute, until you reach a point where it feels as if you barely need to breathe in any oxygen at all.

### ***Haragei – Grounding yourself***

Send the breath through the nose and down to the Hara, close the pelvic floor, bring your attention to the tanden. Do this when you work on your clients, during a walk in the woods, at breakfast or in the evening before going to bed.

A soft pulsating hara radiates the energy of CHI.

Massage your own Hara every day, lying or sitting, from the left to the right, and from the right to the left of the pubic bone to below the diaphragm, 10 minutes daily.

Put a warm stone on your belly button before going to bed, have your feet massaged by your partner. Make your Hara the centre of the world again.

