



SPIRIT

BY JOANNA AND KOJI YAMAMOTO

BETTER LOVING THROUGH EXERCISE

Yoga and martial arts have introduced the Oriental concept of hara to the Occidental world. Hara refers to abdomen, or more casually belly, and is considered a vital support of breath and movement. Centered in the depths of the hara is a spiritual point known as *tanden*, which Oriental people consider the fulcrum of life. *Tanden* is the center of a human being's power and vitality. Although energy is fluid and can flow anywhere in the body, it is at its optimum strength when focused in *tanden*. To have one's energy in *tanden* is to be in control of one's breathing, balanced in mind and body, and ready for anything.

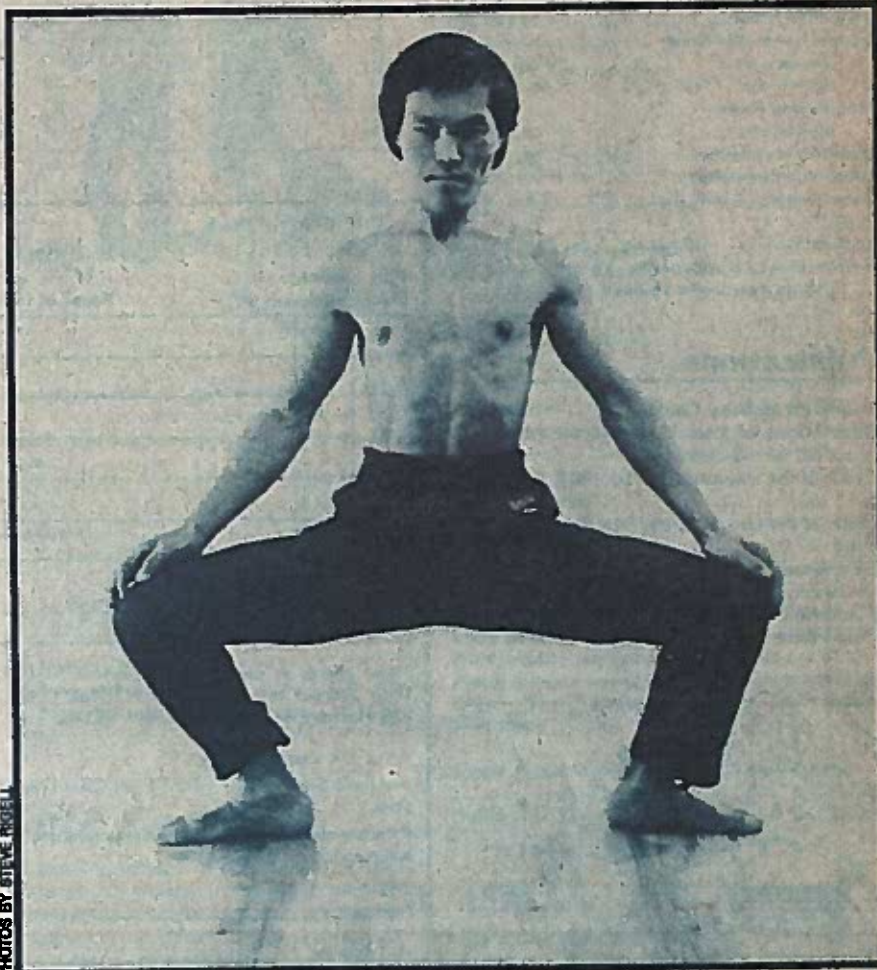
The trick, then, is to keep the power where it belongs. For that, the whole hara needs to be strong. If the hara is weak, any situation that creates an emotional reaction will lift the power out of *tanden*, causing the breath to be shallow and laborious, rather than long, deep, and full. The health of a person's *tanden* is revealed in his or her breathing: abdominally sick people, for example, breathe from the middle of the ribs; nervous people breathe from the upper chest; while neurotic people breathe from the shoulders. These abnormal breathing patterns show that one's vital energy has risen too high. Such weaknesses originate in daily life through poor posture, movement, diet, and attitude. If the mind is generally glad, the breathing will be long and warm; if the mind is peaceful, the breathing will be strong. In anger, however, the breathing is quick and hot, while in fear the breath becomes shallow with short exhalation. When the power is habitually allowed to leave *tanden*, tension creeps into the upper back, shoulders, neck, jaw, and face,

distorting the posture, expression, thinking, and action. The shoulders, for example, might become the focus of one's energy, leaving the lower body weak and cold, and the head agitated. But if the hara is strong, even when under stress, surprise, or a sudden unnerving situation, a deep, full exhalation can immediately send one's energy back down to *tanden*, allowing the upper body to remain relaxed, the head cool, and lower body warm and firm. For that advantage, thought, action, and feeling are under control.

To make *tanden* the seat of power is the major purpose of yoga. In Japan the prerequisite for natural life or *satori* is to possess *ki-kai-tanden*, which means *tanden* is the ocean of energy or *ki*. The

connotation is spiritual, even religious, for all creation is breathed forth from the *ki* in *tanden* just as God breathed the soul into humanity. *Tanden* is the resting-place of God.

In order to test the quality and power of your *tanden*, please lie down on your back and push your fingers into the very center of your abdomen. If the abdomen springs back like a rubber ball, you not only have your power in the right place but also probably have an abundance of *ki*. *Ki* is happiest and fullest when it can live in *tanden*, from whence it gives you size, no matter how tall or wide you are. Movie stars have a lot of *ki*, also political leaders, and charismatic people—anyone who seems bigger than his or her body. *Ki* cannot



PHOTOS BY STEVE RIGGELL

Koji and Joanna Yamamoto trained at the dojo of Masahiro Oki and teach Zen Yoga in this country and Japan. This spring there will be an opportunity to study with Master Oki at the Sixth International Yoga Teachers' and First World Zen Yoga Congress in Kyoto, Japan. For information write: Zen Yoga Arts, 88 Seaverns Avenue, Jamaica Plain, MA 02130.

Stand with legs open, knees and toes out, big toes pushing into floor. Keeping spine straight, inhale and raise up a bit; exhale, pushing straight down.

Preparation for the exercises:

1. Wait at least two hours after eating.
2. Go to the toilet.
3. Relax your mind and body.
4. Do 10-20 minutes of warming-up movement.

While doing the exercises:

1. Breathe out with each movement, making the exhalation long and strong.
2. Concentrate your mind on the part being stimulated: pelvis, lower back, etc.
3. Relax 30-60 seconds after performing each exercise. When in the relaxed pose, tell yourself you are putting your power into tanden. Breathe deeply from our haru while relaxing.
4. Smile.



Stand, arms in front, thumbs and fingers touching in a circle. Inhale while bringing arms back. Raise up on toes. Focus on a point on floor 3 feet in front.

Exhale making the sound HA-UM AH-UM while bringing arms forward and bending knees. Keep point of focus and stay on toes.



Stoop down, palms on floor, heels up. Round spine, becoming as small as possible. Inhale.

While exhaling, spring onto palms, spread legs behind, land on toes and arch back toward floor.

Lie on the floor with legs bent completely back and arms held straight up with palms turned out. Inhale and hold breath and power in haru.

Exhale slowly while sitting up.



Lie with arms outstretched, palms down and heels near buttocks. Inhale.

Standing on toes, exhale and push lower back up. Hold.



Lie flat, arms out to sides, legs spread as wide as hips, eyes closed, lips parted, palms up, chin slightly up.

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... LOVING

be seen, it is felt. It is the mind/body energy that makes and keeps every living thing most alive—a dead body has no ki. It is the energy to love and attract love and also the energy of sex. If you find your tanden hard or mushy, your hara organs are tired, tight, or weak, and your tanden vacuous. You are not as great as you could be; you might have problems in loving others and are certainly not fulfilling your sexual potential.

Sexual energy is a normal expression of the life force. This force is given by nature as insurance that we and the animals will reproduce. In human beings sexual energy is used physically to continue the spiritual integrity of our ancestors by making children. It is also a way to make balance by discharging internal energy and a means of relaxation. Sexual energy need not, of course, be used for sex alone, but if human beings are to keep fit mentally and physically, this energy must be used. Hard work or training is a sure way to deplete sexual energy. If your lifestyle involves much sitting and little physical activity, your excess sexual energy will certainly make trouble. Teenagers, for example, have high energy. If this energy isn't used for sports or hard work, it could go into unnecessary sex, fighting, violence, graffiti, shouting, driving fast, dancing wildly, or wearing a radio on the head. The same applies to older people who do not have regular, satisfying sex and do not use their energy to exhaustion: in order to relax they overdrink, overeat, overtalk, and overbuy. And if they don't do these things and still keep the energy within, their insides become hard, cold, and most likely sick.

Many people have recently become aware of the glaring deficiencies and dangers of the modern industrial diet. Yet when they first eliminate meat, sugar, drugs, and dairy food from their menus they experience a loss of sexual vitality. Such a change is nothing to be alarmed at. These changes are actually a demonstration of the body's wisdom. Organs that were damaged by a modern diet begin to heal themselves once that diet is changed, and ki energy naturally is diverted to their recovery. This means less energy is available for the sexual organs, and consequently our desire for sex diminishes for a time.

When regular menstruation, erections, and sexual desire return, they are an indication that healing is well under-

way. For the sake of our health it is then imperative to take on much more active, outwardly oriented work. It is also time to give love.

If the tanden is weak, the sexual organs are weak. If those organs are weak, other organs are weak also. Any method for increasing sexual vitality should also serve to heal our abdominal region. What follows are fundamental ways to concentrate ki in tanden. If you practice these techniques and the accompanying exercises along with prayer (a sense of gratitude and appreciation), you can discover the right way to channel your new-found sexual energy and to realize your dream. You will realize the energy to do whatever you wish to do, whether it's becoming a star, saint, or great lover or a better spouse, parent, or friend. In Japan there is a proverb: "Don't lend money to a man who can't make a tent in the morning." This means that if a man's *chin-chin* doesn't make the sheet stand up when he awakens from sleep, he doesn't have the energy to earn the money to pay you back. Sex power is life power. You should be full of it. A fuller life lies ahead in every way.

TECHNIQUES TO STRENGTHEN THE INTERNAL ORGANS, ELIMINATE CONSTIPATION, AND MAKE THE MUSCLES FLEXIBLE.

- Do not overeat. Overeating makes the abdomen tired and the muscles tight. When the abdomen is tired, the whole body is tired; when tense, the power raises to the upper body, exciting the nervous system.
- Eat natural, whole, vegetable-quality foods. Because it is difficult to digest, animal food tires the abdominal organs. Because it has much waste, it makes the blood sluggish, circulation difficult, and muscles hard. Whole foods, such as brown rice, are stronger than refined foods, such as white rice. Whole foods are alive. Fresh food is preferable to refrigerated food, and wild food is stronger than garden-grown vegetables. Roots are stronger than leaves, and sautéing is a stronger cooking method than boiling. Specific foods for stamina are barley, beans, seaweed, soba, sesame, mochi, and miso.
- Practice yoga *asanas* to stretch the abdomen.

TECHNIQUES TO STRENGTHEN THE BIG TOES, INSIDES OF FEET, AND LEGS.

- Stand, walk, jog, and run. By pushing the big toes into the ground, the earth power will come up the insides of the legs, circling into the pelvis and lower back.
- Practice the inverted yoga *asanas*, e.g., shoulder stand and head stand. By elevating the legs and torso, blood circulation will be improved, especially in the lower body.

TECHNIQUES TO STRENGTHEN THE SPINE

- Keep the posture tall and the chin pulled straight back. By pulling the chin in, the neck will stretch and head balance correctly, allowing the power of heaven to enter the top spiral and circle down into hara.
- Practice yoga *asanas* to stretch the spine.

TECHNIQUES TO STRENGTHEN THE CONTRACTIVE POWER OF THE ANUS

- Practice holding the breath. After breathing in, hold the breath and close the anus, keeping it closed during the exhalation. Anus contractive power is directly proportional to hara power.

TECHNIQUES TO STRENGTHEN BREATHING

- Breathe long, full, and deep from hara, making the exhalation longer than the inhalation. Long breathing improves the opening and closing ability of the rib cage, which directly relates to pelvis flexibility.

TECHNIQUES TO STRENGTHEN MENTAL CONCENTRATION

- Whatever you do, do only that and do it fully. When you are driving, just drive; studying, just study; running, just run. Concentration will enable you to control your ki.
- Practice right posture sitting meditation. Sit with the knees touching the floor, spine straight, and chin tucked in. The posture and single-mindedness of meditation will send the energy into tanden. ■



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