

Makino Sensei's Exercises for Cultivating the use of Hara

The basis of these exercises is to build up the physical use of the hara. Each of the following exercises is to be used with the following sequence of breathing and pelvic movements.

1. With the tail bone vertical start breathing in using reverse abdominal breathing (ie stomach is pulled in as diaphragm is pulled down);
2. As the breath in continues the tail bone comes up and forward slightly but with the muscles of the pelvis and buttocks relaxed;
3. At the completion of the breath in the tail bone is rotated back and up as far as possible with the muscles of the pelvis and buttocks and diaphragm relaxed;
4. The breathing out begins with a very small exhalation where the tail bone is then brought back down to the vertical with a slight tensioning of the pelvic muscles, buttocks and the air in the lungs is pushed down into the hara area, then;
5. The breathing out continues with an increasing rotation of the tail bone up and forward combined with an increasing of the tension in the muscles of the pelvis and buttocks and stomach muscles along with an increasing feeling of compressing the air with the diaphragm.

The Following Sequence of Exercises should be done daily

The exercises are done lightly concentrating on the stance and posture and are designed to increase leg strength and to relax the shoulders.

1. With a bokken, or sword, do kiritsuke in horse stance with the main breathing exercise above. Furikamuri is timed naturally to be with the breathing in and the cut is to be done after the short forward movement of the tail bone at 4 above. You should do this about 20 times.
Take the sword/bokken out of your obi and place on the floor beside you before you continue.
2. Again in horse stance with the arms relaxed in front of you level with the hara breathe in as you raise your arms in a relaxed manner with the weight "on the under side of the arms" to a position level or just above head height, the movement is lead with the wrists flexed palms down, fingers relaxed. As you raise your arms raise your stance slightly. Then the tail bone is brought forward, as in 4 above, then the arms are slapped down lead by the wrists extended again with weight under side and fingers relaxed. Done properly the hands bounce as the arms are brought to a position level with the hara and at the same time the stance is lowered to its starting position. To feel the difference try to slap down someone else's hands with tension in your wrists and arms, then as described above. You should feel quite a difference.
3. Again in horse stance and following the same sequence as above the arms, whilst breathing in, are alternately brought from the centre level with the

hara to level with the opposite knee allowed to float up to the level of the opposite shoulder across the face to level with its own shoulder and then snapped down to level with, but slightly out and to the rear of, its own knee. Whilst doing the exercise with one hand the other is allowed to rest lightly in the region of the thigh. The exercise is similar to the floating clouds movement in Tai Chi.

4. The next in this series of exercises is again in horse stance and similar to the second exercise but the arms are slapped down to the rear. It is very important here to keep the body upright as there is a tendency to lean forward as you slap the hands to the rear.
5. Again in horse stance put your arms around a large imaginary stone in front of you and whilst keeping that position do the kokyu and hara exercise. Again you must try to keep the body upright, so think that the stone is very heavy so you have to use your leg muscles, not your lower back muscles.
6. Lastly again in horse stance whilst breathing in and raising the posture slightly bring the hands from in front of and level with the hara out to level with the knees up to the shoulders fingertips together in front of the forehead and then as you breathe out and use the hara exercise imagine compressing a column of air in front of you with your hands palms down to the level of the hara. Try to think of action & re-action when you do this exercise, so there will be a point, once you have lowered the body when pushing the hara and hands down, where you need to come up slightly. This should be the feeling of stretching the head up to touch the ceiling, hence is quite small, not a large upward movement of the body.

Following the above exercises there is further cutting with a bokken or sword in horse stance but in front of a vertical line on a wall so that you can check that kirioroshi is vertical. Combined with this set of cuts it is best to also use the foot twisting action as follows. On furikamuri and as the posture rises turn the heels out then as you do the main cut twist the heels in but grip with the feet and toes as much as possible. The twist in is done on the ball of the foot. The same exercise can then be done in normal cutting stance on alternate legs again concentrating on feet, stance, kokyu and hara and pelvic movements. It is important in this exercise to use the jo-tanden to concentrate on the point on the vertical line in front of you where you will start to apply tenouchi as in a normal cut. The exercise can be done slowly or at normal cutting speed, i.e. slowly initially until the kensen reaches the point where it would contact with the enemy, then fast as the sword does the cut. This dual speed in cutting is very important in normal waza and applies to nukitsuke, kirioroshi, chiburui and noto.

There then follows a set of exercises working on stance that can first be done without cutting and just concentrating on stance and the feet but can then be done combined with cutting as will be described later. It is very important to remember that at first the exercises will feel very 1...2....3 but after a while as the body gets used to the feeling

and movements it will all blend together to be one smooth continuous action. However it is best to let this happen over time and not to force the development.

1. Working along a line on the floor start with the right leg forward with the feeling of 10% residual power in the hara from the previous breath and with the tail bone still forward and up. Take in one abdominal breath and as you do take a step forward but keeping the feeling of pushing forward – settle into the stance rotate the pelvis back and up snap it forward as you grip with the feet then cut using the breathing out and hara movement. The movement is done both forwards and backwards. This exercise can also be done carrying weights in the hands held slightly forward and out of the body line. The weights are then rotated outwards as you breathe out – this gives an increased awareness of the hara movement and also builds up the muscles of the hands and forearms for tenouchi. But perhaps more importantly it makes you use the scapula and lateral muscles, relaxing the shoulders and stretching the head to the ceiling.
2. The same as above but zig zagging right and left over the centre line.
3. The next stance is cat stance moving forwards and backwards and zig-zagging as above. This stance is not used for cutting (but it is like the foot work needed by uchidachi when retreating and accepting the cut in Deai of Tachiuchi no Kurai). The weight should be on the back leg, with only the toes of the front foot touching the floor. When you change direction change the foot that has the weight, i.e. left foot when going the right, right foot when going to the left.
4. Finally the exercise in 1 is combined with zen totsuzan up and down the centre line. The first cut is simply kirioroshi, the second is kesa giri from the opponent right shoulder to left hip, the third is kesa giri from the opponents left shoulder to right hip, the fourth is gyaku kesa giri from the opponents right hip to left shoulder, then fifth is gyaku kesa giri from left hip to right shoulder, the sixth is yoko ichimonji from opponents right to left hip, the seventh is a tsuki forward at ka-tanden level. In all cases be sure that the tsuka gashira finishes in line with the ka-tanden and not out to the side of the body. Also be aware of the elbows being close to the side when you start the last 4 cuts. Be careful of the line you cut up or down, it should be quite steep, but there is a tendency for it to be too shallow on the 4 kesa cuts. This can also be a combined partner practice with an uchidachi receiving the cuts but also doing the correct breathing and hara movements – uchidachi can also receive cuts moving back in cat stance.

Different exercises can be built up over time but care should be taken to always focus on correct posture, stance and breathing.

Ozu, November 2004