

## The Center

The Japanese refer to it as ‘the hara’. It is located in an area of the body about one inch below the navel. It is considered the center of all activity in martial arts and the source of personal power in both movement and technique.

Becoming connected to this center is the beginning of understanding where the power of movement comes from in techniques. By connecting to one’s hara, a person starts to move the body in a coordinated manner. Combined with correct posture and proper balance, the movement of the whole body itself creates a power that is greater than the sum of the parts. In order to develop our sense of center when working with a partner, we have *tankan* and *irimi* practice. By moving our bodies as a whole with our partner, we learn to feel the center and learn how to move the center of another person. As we perform these exercises, we also draw our attention to the movement that our bodies experience. This process helps develop our mind by making us more sensitive to our attention and awareness. This is how we connect the body and mind to the movement.

When the concept of “moving the center” originates, it only begins with the above discussed ideas. It begins with the physical movement and then folds into it the process of mind and thought. When we draw our intention to the movement, then the energy moves into that body part. This is where the concept of unbendable arm originates. This is why it is referred to as the “whole body” process. The combination of the body movement and the thought of the mind create the power that the martial artist seeks, and which is able to create a power that extends beyond the simple single human body. That is how a person can break numerous boards or move three or four people that are grabbing them by the arm.

Yet even these concepts of center, connection and thought are not the end of the process of creating this whole-body experience with movement. As we move our mind and attention to these concepts, we also pay attention to alignment, grounding, and spiraling. Just like the moving parts of a technique, the concepts of center, alignment, grounding, and spiraling come together in the movement of a technique to infuse power and strength into the technique itself. A strength that is deceiving to the eye and shows a combined power that moves beyond individual strength.

And all of this begins with the understanding of the center, the self. The ‘hara’ spoken about in the beginning of this discussion. Starting with the understanding and practice of centering, we can bring in these other elements that, in some ways, quite literally injects power into our movement.

[Sandan Essay – Richard Delewski]