

On the use of the waist  
*By Master Kawanabe*

You will certainly notice gradually the value, principle and importance of the stomach. First of all, as everybody knows quite well the waist is located in the center of our body and is the origin of our physical power. The lower part of the stomach movement is accompanied with the waist.

The ideal work in Budo can be made first by breath work which operates the waist movement in a cooperative way. The footwork should follow naturally like a shadow of the waist movement. When the waist movement can be done together with the breath of our physical work, the technique depends entirely on the breath work. This is why breath training is important in developing our techniques.

The breath, body, fist (or kick) should be matched at the same time. This is called "Ki Ken Tai no ituchi" in Japanese. "Ituchi" means match or coincidence. Your inhalation or exhalation can make power, movement and rhythm but the stomach is really part of the source that produces everything. The breath work is just like a wave on the ocean that shows various phenomenons. Techniques are the expression of the breath. Try to show the violent technique of a hurricane and the calm one with your stomach breath. Inhalation and exhalation can be made seamless in various rhythms and powers.

Your technique will be developed according to the degree of fixing the waist and therefore the question of how to settle your waist becomes the challenge. The waist settlement at the starting and ending posture is desired to be the same as far as balance between the left and right sides.

You will realize how to do this with the cooperation and harmonization between the waist, ankles and knees. Therefore the parts under your waist must be very obedient to the waist. It is better to have the feeling of doing your footwork with your waist, instead of the foot. You should feel as if your foot and knee are just fixed with your waist. For this practice, try to make any circle with your stomach power in a usual stance with or without a weapon. In our practice, we sometime use the iron fan to imagine more clearly. All the power of the body must be removed and absorbed in the waist when making a punch.

The Oizuki, with this strong waist and relaxed body, is filled with strong "Ki". We call it Hachiriki or Hachi ken in referring to "Ken". This means all directions and is not limited to just 8 directions. I think with the help of the Ken or iron fan we can study the waist movement and move the waist in less time.

Please try to practice the following using the empty hand or with a weapon such as the iron fan or Ken. This is your choice. Try to strike 'Go' or 'Sei'. Strike 'Sei' with your right waist first moving up and down slowly and correctly and then very quickly in the same way and in a relaxed way. Focus on your waist so it is settled rightly. The hand and waist movement must be the same. When your right foot touches the ground your

hand or ken is already above your head (being pushed up by the right waist) and then comes down together with the ken. Of course the other side of the waist should be harmonized. Using this thought practice the Oizuki the same way.

I imagine a breath ball in my lower stomach with which eight ken directions or any directional movement can be done. Try to move along with your breath in making any of the techniques. The whole of your body should be limber like a whip, especially the lower part of your body with the ankles, knees, waist and corresponding muscle. When the movements of the lower body become limber, naturally the upper body becomes more relaxed and you can move more easily.

To do this you must assure the entire relaxation at the moment of finishing oizuki just as well as in your starting pose. This whole posture may be compared to your hand grip when you grasp a ken; neither rigid nor loose.

Your waist is like the root of a tree and absorbs Ki (energy) both from the upper side and lower side from the flat of your feet with the help of relaxed ankles and knees. This is my view on koshi (waist)-o-waru, which in Japanese means, in my poor perpendicular interpretation, cracked or split waist. This sounds like a dangerous matter, I am afraid.

In talking about the lumbar vertebrae, L1-L5, each has its own peculiar function such as the 1<sup>st</sup> one from upper side moves up-down, 2<sup>nd</sup> one moves side-side, 3<sup>rd</sup> one twists, 4<sup>th</sup> one opens and closes (expansion-contraction), and 5<sup>th</sup> one is back and forth. Therefore splitting the waist means to make the most use of these faculties in accordance with the lower parts (ankle, knee and related muscle). When the split waist can move ideally in the Hachiriki, the appearance increases the dignity. This phrase was very often heard by Sensei Inoue in my young days. I think this status, or appearance gives us stability, ideal movement and full power which are derived from the waist. This is my view on Koshi-o-Waru in our karate-do.