



静坐

# Seiza

Quiet-sitting for Beginners

Kobayashi Nobuko

小林信子

Translated by Miki Nakura

2024



## Contents

- Words of Okada Torajiro-sensei — p. 4
- Preface — p. 5
1. *Seiza* — p. 6
2. The Elements of *Seiza* — p. 7
3. Posture 1–8 — p. 7
4. Breathing 1–2 — p. 11
5. The Power/Strength of *Tanden* — p. 14
6. Length of *Seiza* Practice — p. 15
7. Practising *Seiza* on a Chair — p. 16
8. Devotion to, and Mindfulness of,  
the Power of *Tanden* — p. 16

## **Words of Okada Torajiro-sensei (岡田虎二郎)**

- Once the vertical line of the body is established, the vertical line of the mind is also determined, and from this there naturally arises a calm serenity and a fearless courage.
- Through *Seiza* (quiet sitting), wisdom, virtue, and the body all develop. If people transform themselves through the cultivation of mind and body, anyone can manifest their potential abilities.
- Sitting in *Seiza* style alone is not significant. Every action and movement, whether standing, walking, sitting, or lying down, must be *Seiza*.
- When jealousy, hatred, anger, ambition, suspicion/doubt, and other vices arise, it is a time when the energy of the *tanden* (丹田, the point about 2 inches below and behind the navel, the lower belly) is diminished.
- With each breath, complete the great art of yourself.
- Release all energy except for that in the *tanden* (丹田).
- Now, just sit quietly.

## Preface

I have written at length about the precious and the most straightforward path opened by Okada Torajiro-sensei (1872–1920). However, you should be able to grasp the essence of *Seiza* simply through the key points. For areas of uncertainty, please refer to the sections marked with a ♦ for guidance.

Please begin *Seiza* immediately. If you proceed without haste and with enthusiasm, everyone will surely acquire a wonderful power for themselves. I believe that all aspects of life flourish remarkably with *Seiza* as the foundation.

Please make use of this little booklet.

March 5th 1966 (revised edition)

Celebrating the 40th anniversary of the publication of the first *Seiza* newsletter, with my endless gratitude.

Kobayashi Nobuko

## 1. Seiza

*Seiza* is the precious path/way (道 *michi* or *tao*) established by Okada-sensei. It is a way that is in accordance with the laws of nature, correctly nurturing the mind and body. *Seiza* is not something to be explained, but to be practised; not something to be researched, but to be experienced. The power/strength (力 *chikara*) of *Seiza* is indeed vast and boundless.

It is a regrettable thing to harm our precious bodies — which are capable of performing remarkable tasks — through our own carelessness, through poor posture or by leading an unhealthy lifestyle.

Practising *Seiza* with the correct posture and breathing, cultivating the power of the *tanden* (丹田), nourishes the spirit within, and deeply strengthens the body's power, making us realise how precious health and life are.

Through the self-discipline of sitting repeatedly, we will deeply embody this realisation.

*Seiza* Masters unanimously recommend: “Above all else, we must become real and complete human beings, settled calmly in the strength of our belly (肚 *hara*), completely and calmly accepting things as they

are no matter what happens, able fully to handle them with personal integrity. We fervently hope that young people with high aspirations will adopt *Seiza* and practise it earnestly.”

## **2. The Elements of Seiza**

First, it is important firmly to remember the instructions for *Seiza*.

[The *Seiza* posture is well-known to the Japanese as “kneeling whilst sitting on one’s heels,” as seen in the tea ceremony or in martial arts. One should kneel on a flat cushion or carpet or *tatami*. But remember *Seiza* can also be done sitting on a chair. See Chapter 7.]

## **3. Posture**

**1.** At the arches/insteps of the feet, cross both feet deeply in an X shape (refer to figure A on page 19).

- ◆ It doesn’t matter which foot is on top. At first, it may feel unnatural if you are not used to it, but crossing them in this way helps to properly align the hips and correctly position the body.
- ◆ Initially, you may feel pain or numbness, but in that case, you can either stand on your knees or cross your feet the other way around. Gradually, you will become

accustomed to it. However, ensure that both ankles are touching the floor.

**2.** Open the knees slightly, about the width of two clenched fists. For women, the width of one fist is sufficient.

◆ If you open the knees too much, you'll end up supporting yourself with your chest, which leads to tension in the chest area. This results in an improper posture.

**3.** The buttocks should be pushed back as far as possible and placed lightly on top of the feet.

◆ Even if you push them out, it should not look bad or become too prominent; in fact, it should naturally ease your haemorrhoids.

**4.** Sit with your lower back straight and with the feeling of placing your lower belly (下腹) on top of your lap (refer to figure B on page 19).

◆ Focus on directing your strength to the lower belly by keeping your lower back very straight. Keeping your lower back straight is essential whether you are sitting on the floor, standing, or sitting on a chair; in any situation, never let the lower back slump



downwards. Erecting the lower back is the most important.

**5.** Straighten the upper body while releasing/relaxing the chest and shoulders, and release the tension in your solar plexus (鳩尾).

◆ If you put your palm on the area of your solar plexus (鳩尾) and laugh, you will notice that the solar plexus naturally relaxes at that moment. Remember this knack.

◆ The posture of throwing one's shoulders back and sticking one's chest out is like pretending to be enduring something [manifests pride/arrogance].

◆ In well-crafted statues of Buddha, the area of the solar plexus (鳩尾) is always in a relaxed posture. It's fine if the upper back appears slightly curved, but the spine should not actually be bent.

**6.** Keep your neck straight and pull your chin back.

◆ Position your head so that your earlobes are directly above your shoulders.

◆ Hold your neck straight as if the top of your head is touching the ceiling.

◆ If you let your neck fall forward, you will be continuously plagued by distractions, and you will not be able to apply strength to your belly (腹 *hara*).

**7.** Cross your hands deeply yet lightly [one hand holding the thumb of the other and forming a loose fist enclosed by the other hand] (either left over right or right over left is fine as shown in figure C on page 19), and place them on your belly (腹 *hara*), with the palms facing downwards, resting on your lap.

**8.** Close your mouth and eyes, tightly without straining.

◆ When closing your eyes, it's calming to imagine looking at a point about three feet in front of you. Looking upwards can cause your eyes to wander and make the mind restless.

◆ Since the eyes are always receiving various stimuli, closing them allows the mind and body to achieve true tranquillity.

◆ Concerns about feeling sleepy when closing your eyes are unfounded. During *Seiza*, every breath should be focused and attentive. With each breath, consciously put your strength in the *tanden* (丹田), and your mind will always be focused on the power of the *tanden*, keeping the mind clear and calm.

## 4. Breathing

**Exhalation.** First, assume the correct postures (nos. 1–8) described above and begin by exhaling. Release the power/strength (力 *chikara*) in the solar plexus (鳩尾) and breathe out slowly, gradually and continuously (without pausing) while filling the lower belly, *tanden* (丹田) with power/strength.

- ◆ Exhale through your nose so gently that a feather balanced on the tip of your nose wouldn't be blown away; so quietly that even you cannot hear it.
- ◆ To know where the power/strength (力 *chikara*) is being directed, press a finger into your lower belly and then say 'Hai!' or laugh, and you will find the finger will be pushed out strongly. This is the area where you should engage your power/strength, with the feeling of pushing forward from around the waist, aiming for filling the *tanden* (丹田) with strength.
- ◆ When exhaling, leave about one-fifth (20%) of your breath to avoid the need to breathe in hastily with your chest. Then, move on to inhaling.

**Inhalation.** Now, slightly relax the strength in your belly (腹 *hara*) — that is to say, when filling the *tanden* with power/strength is stopped — and then the upper belly (the solar plexus) will naturally expand, and the

breath will effortlessly, and without deliberate effort, enter from the nose to the bottom of the lungs in a single moment. It's not about actively inhaling; rather, the breath naturally and smoothly enters through the nose on its own. Once the breath has entered, immediately lower the solar plexus (鳩尾), and while slowly exhaling, gradually engage power/strength back into the lower belly (下腹).

◆ Breathing is part of living so air is naturally inhaled, and without effort sufficient air is provided without needing consciously to inhale. If inhaling is intentionally forced with the desire to get more air, [i.e. if one gasps] the air rarely reaches the bottom of the lungs, but only the upper part. Instead, if we carefully and skilfully exhale the breath we have received, then without needing consciously to inhale, fresh air enters naturally/effortlessly.

◆ When the solar plexus (鳩尾) drops, the diaphragm pushes up the bottom of the lungs, and this is the time to exhale.

◆ When the solar plexus (鳩尾) expands, that's when the diaphragm descends, and since the lungs are not being pressed by anything, the breath enters through the nose to fill the now empty space, reaching fully to the bottom of the lungs. It's like when you squeeze a

dropper, the air goes out, and when you release your grip, air smoothly enters back into the dropper.

◆ However, since we have the greedy habit of inhaling, simply relaxing the exerted power/strength (力 *chikara*) is not enough to satisfy us, and unconsciously, we end up inhaling with our chest. If we can't break this habit, we cannot breathe comfortably and effectively. Additionally, relaxing the power/strength in the solar plexus (鳩尾) can be difficult for some people. For them, during inhalation, try lightly lifting the solar plexus, then inhaling happens comfortably. To “lift” (浮かす) means to place the flat of your hand on the solar plexus and gently push it upward. This should be done during inhalation. Then, when the breath is fully inhaled, let your hand fall, allowing it to drop softly. Repeating this five or six times will make both your solar plexus and mind more responsive.

◆ If you breathe with your chest, you will never be able to achieve deep breathing. If the solar plexus does not drop, sufficient power/strength cannot enter the *tanden* (丹田). Therefore, please practise lowering and lifting the solar plexus.

◆ Moving the solar plexus helps to improve the stomach.

- ◆ During inhalation, adopt a restful attitude. For beginners, after lightly lifting the solar plexus, it's alright to take your time and rest a little before exhaling. With practise, one can naturally exhale immediately.
- ◆ Beginners need not suddenly reduce the frequency of their breaths, but only gradually do this as one is able. What is essential is to fill the *tanden* with power/strength.

## 5. The Power/Strength of *Tanden*

The power/strength (力 *chikara*) should be in the *tanden* (丹田) and nowhere else in the body. When maintaining the correct method, the entire body is set with an upright and stable lower back, with no power/strength in any part of the body, and should be relaxed. Then, with each correct breath, you put power/strength into the *tanden*.

According to the words of Okada sensei:

“Every breath that concentrates the entire body’s strength into the *tanden* is like a chisel sculpting the body.”

During *Seiza*, do not neglect any single breath; focus your mind on the *tanden* with each breath, aiming to

cultivate the power/strength in the *tanden*. Even if other thoughts come to mind, let them pass like the wind without clinging or trying to dispel them, and quickly bring your focus back solely to the power of *tanden*.

## **6. Length of *Seiza* Practice**

*Seiza* should be done daily in the morning and evening, for thirty minutes each time. It is precisely around thirty minutes when both the mind and body truly start to settle down.

- ◆ It is difficult to maintain the practice but it is the most important thing, so please diligently continue and encourage each other.
  
- ◆ Without wasting any time, practise *Seiza*, not only in the morning and evening, but anytime, anywhere (for example, whilst waiting for someone, or when waiting for a train).
  
- ◆ Needless to say, when listening to lectures or when sitting face-to-face with someone in a meeting, we should maintain the correct *Seiza* posture regardless of the situation. But, in these circumstances, it is advisable to refrain from closing your eyes and entering into quiet practice.

## 7. Practising *Seiza* on a Chair

Please sit on a chair if you cannot sit on *tatami* [or the floor]. If you sit on the front third of the chair according to the previous instructions you will be able to realise how to settle the upper body, and the centre of gravity in the *tanden* will be established. As a result, you will be able to sit comfortably on *tatami* [or the floor] as well.

## 8. Devotion to, & Mindfulness of, the Power of *Tanden*

- ◆ In everything you do throughout the day adopt this posture and way of breathing, ensuring it is done with the power/strength (力 *chikara*) of the *tanden* (丹田). Before going to bed at night, perform *Seiza* in order to finish the day well and relieve all fatigue. And when you go to bed, as soon as you release the power/strength of the *tanden*, you can achieve true, deep sleep. When you wake up in the morning, immediately sit up on top of the bed. Then, prepare the power/strength of the belly (腹 *hara*) and start the day's work, always ensuring to do everything with the power/strength of the *tanden* and always keeping your lower back from dropping.
- ◆ By the power/strength of the *tanden*, the inherent power/strength that every person possesses is fully



utilised, as it nurtures the fundamental power/strength of human beings, the power/strength to live. As a result, the healthy development of both mind and body is achieved.

◆ If you live absentmindedly with a slumped lower back, about 20% to 40% of the blood in the entire body fails to circulate properly, causing congestion in the internal organs. This blood (about 0.9 to 1.8 litres) is moved by the power/strength of the *tanden*, which activates the internal organs. As a result, this congestion is eased, blood circulation becomes vigorous, nutrients are absorbed, and any ailments quickly heal. Just as a powerful central government holds authority, and its orders ensure that each organ of the state performs its respective duties, similarly, vitality in life increases, and not only does the body become healthy, but the spirit also is guided to health. The principle of the unity of mind and body is experienced with each sitting.

◆ Good digestion, sound sleep, and smooth bowel movements are the three conditions for health, and these can be quickly achieved.

◆ Because you are sensitive to your own body, even if you become careless and fall ill, you can quickly recover. Of course, it is good to consult a doctor, but recovery involves further personal cultivation of the

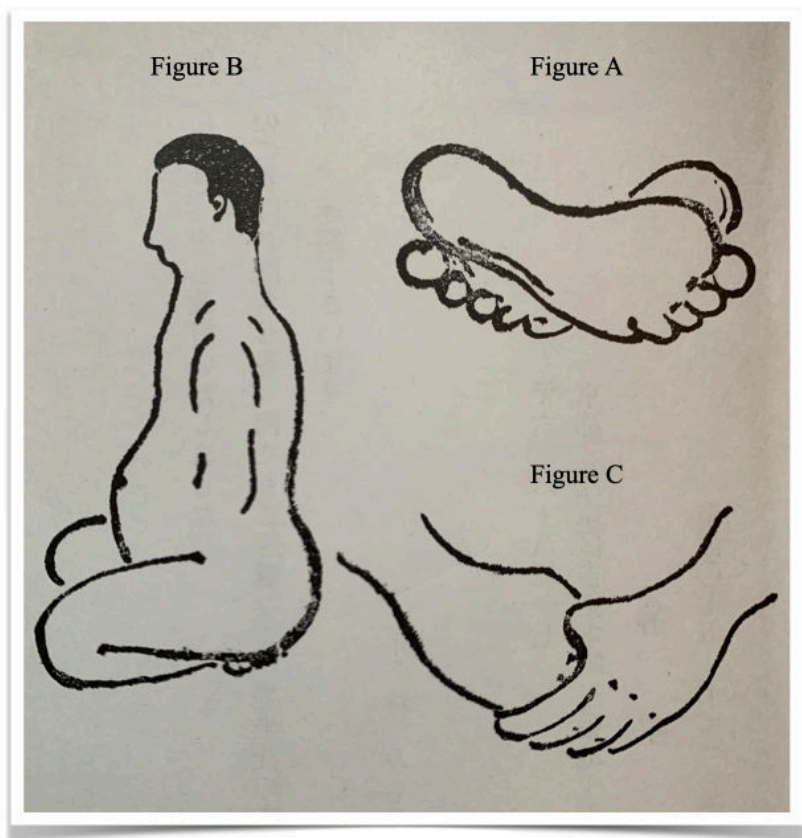
power/strength of the *tanden*. Consequently, the illness, in a somewhat ironic way, yields additional positive effects.

◆ Because I always keep the power/strength in the *tanden*, I feel ashamed when I catch a cold or something, thinking it must have been due to a moment of carelessness on my part, and I never shift the blame for any illness onto others. In fact, whether it concerns physical or mental matters, I never shift the blame for anything that happens to me onto others. Instead, I accept it as part of myself and use it as material to further my diligent practice.

◆ Students, in the examination room, first put power/strength into the *tanden*, and when they regulate their breathing, they can take the exam calmly.

◆ When a woman practises *Seiza* during pregnancy, her body is placed in the most restful state. Therefore, the baby is at ease both mentally and physically, leading to an easier childbirth. The baby will be healthy, breast milk will be abundant, and the child will grow up peacefully and admirably. Our practise of *Seiza* has a significant influence on the next generation.

◆ Okada sensei said, “Health is Seiza’s free gift.” Not only health, but even more truly good things, a profound strength not dominated by external factors, a great power that is properly employed, are all bestowed upon us.



Okada Torajiro-sensei (岡田虎二郎)



I have made this English translation of Kobayashi Nobuko-seiza's Seiza guide with the kind help of my friend, Andrew James Brown. However, I take full responsibility for it, and sincerely hope you will enjoy your life in the Seiza world.

I hold Seiza sessions in New York, Japan, and other places in the world, and also weekly online Seiza sessions, so if you have any questions, or are interested in joining my sessions, please be in touch.

Miki Nakura

PO Box 103, New York, NY, USA  
mikinakura87@gmail.com