



Hara: Home of the Inner Child

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Do you ever feel like you can't really sense your inner child when you are talking with her? Do you feel disconnected or unaffected when he speaks? Are you frustrated that she seems like nothing more than a mental concept? If you are experiencing any of these challenges while attempting to practice Inner Bonding, it may be that you have yet to discover your *hara*, the place in your body where your inner child makes his home.

Hara is a Japanese word which translated literally, simply means "stomach". Although the word *hara* points us in the direction of the stomach, it is not in fact the stomach, but a deeper, esoteric center within us that could be called our "center of being".

(Durckheim, K., 1962) The physical, energetic location of the *hara* is about two inches below the navel in the center of the body. It is found somewhere between the second and third chakras, yet runs deeper than the chakra system (Brennan, B., 1993), and could be imagined as the "seed" from which our unique and individual life unfolds and manifests. Those familiar with Chinese medicine will recognize the *hara* as the lowest of the three dantian.

Hara is a term that is common to Japanese martial arts, and the way I first learned about *hara* was from my husband, Mark, who is a 2nd degree Black Belt in Aikido. Being grounded and centered in one's *hara* is a foundational practice of Aikido. A student of Aikido learns to bring her awareness or attention out of the head and into the *hara*, and eventually, to extend energy or "ki" from this vital center. When an Aikido student is grounded in his *hara*, he knows what the next move is without having to think about it. She senses whether to move forward or back, to effortlessly remove a sword from an attacker's hand or to pin another to the ground. By breathing into the *hara*, an Aikido student senses the difference between benign encounters and those that might be threatening, and yet remains calm and steady in both situations.

It is likely that *hara* is what we connect with when we listen to our intuition. I believe that the *hara* also happens to be the true home of the inner child. Although the inner child speaks to us through all of our body sensations and emotions, if we imagine an inner "resting place" of the inner child, I believe we will find it in our lower belly.

If we tune in to our *hara* when we are talking with our inner child, we may find that the voice we hear is clearer, the words we hear are truer, and the feelings we feel are more potent and alive than when we tried to connect with our inner child from up in our head. Why is this important? Because the more we are willing to truly hear and feel our inner child's call for help from us, the more we are able to respond. Remember, your inner child's happiness is your happiness. If you are not responding to your inner child's needs, you are not responding to your own.

If tuning in to your inner child is challenging for you, practice centering your awareness in your hara. One way to bring your attention to your hara is to simply breathe deeply. Keep breathing deeply until you begin to “feel yourself” in your belly. When your energy and attention are in your belly, begin dialoging with your inner child. Do you notice a difference? Does your inner child seem more real to you? Are her feelings more noticeable or obvious? Does he speak with more ease and directness about what you are doing or saying that is causing his pain?

If your inner child continues to feel distant, vague or unreal to you, try putting one of your hands across your belly. Continue to breathe and imagine your energy moving down from your head, through your heart space and into your hara. Keep your hand on your belly as you continue to breathe deeply.

You can also use visualization to help you connect with your inner child in your hara. Here is some imagery that my inner child came up with to help me connect with her in my belly:

Imagine that the surface of the ocean is in the middle of your head. It may be hard to see in there because the choppy waves are crashing about behind your eyes.

Breathe into your head. Feel your energy there.

Now imagine that your inner child is decked out in her scuba gear and is sitting cross-legged on a heavy, but loose rock at the surface of your inner ocean.

Watch as your inner child slowly sinks under the surface of your mind. Breathe deeply.

Feel the heaviness of the ocean as your inner child sinks further and further. Continue to take slow, deep breaths.

Notice how things become quiet and still the further away from the surface your inner child goes.

Take a nice, deep breath as your inner child enters your heart space. Watch him smile behind his scuba mask as you offer him your lovingness.

Continue to watch as your inner child sinks deeper and deeper into your body. Coordinate your breathing with your inner child's. Breathe together as your inner child sinks deeper into the ocean.

As your inner child begins to sink into your belly, notice that she is nearing the ocean floor. There is a nice sandy spot at the bottom of the ocean with lots of cool ocean plants and fish, and a sign that says, “Hara: Home of the Inner Child.”

Let your inner child land there, on his rock. Feel the peacefulness and solidity of the ocean floor. Breathe in and out with your inner child.

Let your inner child explore her home. Does she feel safe here? Does she feel like herself? Does she feel the ground beneath his feet? Does he want to talk with you?

If so, do an Inner Bonding dialog with your inner child now. Otherwise, just take some time to get a sense of what it feels like to rest with your inner child in your hara.

If these images don't work for you, make up your own visualization exercise to help you find your inner child's center. Maybe for you, your inner child's home won't be the hara. Maybe it will be the heart or solar plexus. The best way to find out, though, is to let your inner child be your guide. She knows where her home is. And, she wants to take you there. Are you ready for the adventure?

Karen Kral is a licensed psychotherapist who offers Inner Bonding Intensives and Workshops in the Boulder, Colorado area. Please check out www.corequestpotential.com for information on Karen's upcoming intensives and workshops, or see the 3-Day and Weekend Workshop headings on the Events page of the Inner Bonding website.