

A Few Remarks on the Practice of Kin hin

~ Guy Mokuho Mercier

經行

KIN. This kanji has several definitions. The first and most interesting is a weaving term. "warp thread," which refers to the perpendicular threads through which the woof thread is passed to make fabric. By extension, it means that which is vertical and which directly connects two opposites, such as sky and earth or top and bottom.

HIN. This kanji means "to go". This is its first and most common meaning. But it is also the character which, when read GYO, means "practice".

KIN HIN : standing practice (vertical practice).

Walking is an action which we accomplish daily without even being conscious of the mechanisms and balances that come into play. Walking happens independently of our personal will. But if we wish to walk correctly, far, and/or without tiring, it is important to not create tensions or unnecessary habits in our own body image, and to not make any errors that might hinder this natural action.

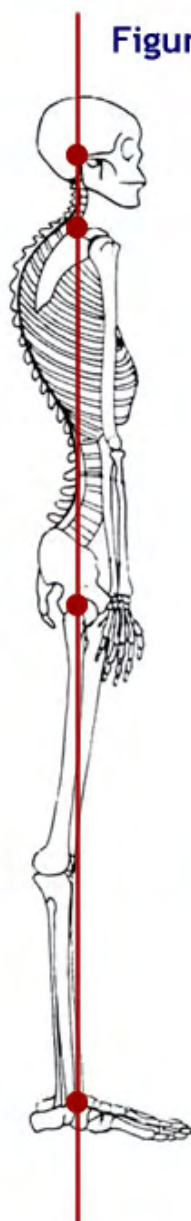


Figure 1

A correct and balanced upright position of the body is realised when the skeleton annuls the action of gravity and the musculature works by spending minimum energy in any direction. For the standing position, as for the seated position no effort is necessary since these two postures correspond to a state of balanced stability. To become aware of this verticality, without tension (to relax upward), is a fundamental point of zazen and of kin hin (figure1).

When Master Deshimaru taught that the kin-hin posture is the essence of walking, this really implied a respect for the natural dynamics of the body.

Figure 2, Position A shows that the body realises this state of stable balance when it is aligned on a vertical plane or axis where it can be seen that a certain number of body points (articulations) are aligned: ankle, hip, shoulders and top of the head. This vertical axis, passing through the top of the head, is also the one on which diaphragm movements occur during exhalation and inhalation.

In order to sharpen the conscious observation of this verticality during kin hin, we must remember that the standing position is balanced on the foot of the front leg. The forces necessary to stay in balance are divided among three arches on the foot which rest on three points, allowing for the stability of the entire posture: the heel, the root of the small toe and the ball of the foot (a tripod).

During kin hin, the pressure on the ground from the ball of the foot increases gradually with the exhalation and from this point comes the impulse to step

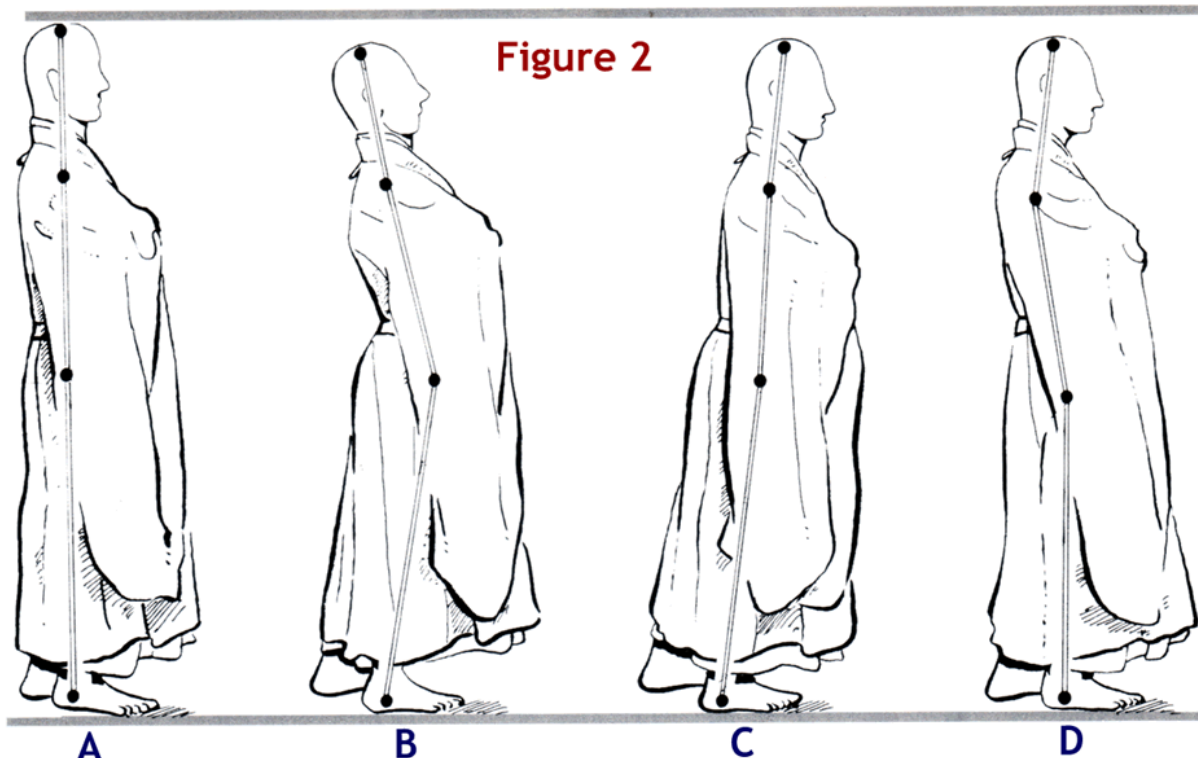


Figure 2

forward, which is why such importance is placed on it in practice.

When the back leg passes forward, it bends at the knee, the foot remains relaxed before touching the ground again, and the rest of the body still in the same vertical release. No need to rock back and forth in order to go forward.

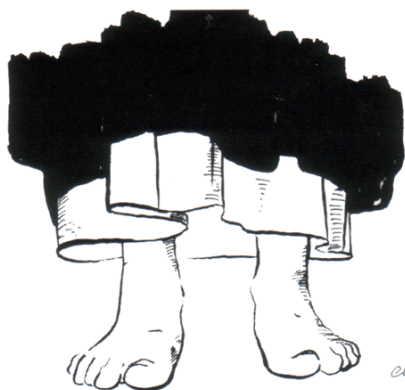
Figure 2, Position B shows that the pelvis is projected forward, creating a dangerous over-arching in the spine, excessive tension in the thorax which obstructs breathing, and an inversion of the natural curve of the neck. It is important that teachers correct this (frequent) willful and quite harmful attitude by trying to help the practitioner feel the vertical balance without tension (move the pelvis back with one hand and push between the shoulder blades with the other hand, which will probably result in a correction of the position of the head and lead to a relaxing of tensions in the neck).

In Figure 2, Position C, the body weight is carried on the front part of the foot, creating a muscular effort in the whole front leg to maintain balance on the toes. We cannot walk very long in this position. However, at the end of the exhalation, we can allow it because leaning forward leads to the movement that will allow us to take the next step. At that point, it is important that all the thigh muscles be tightened, which is one of the reasons for the practice of kin hin, and this does them the most good after the maximum stretching they have been subjected to during zazen (especially the adductors and the quadriceps.)

Figure 2, Position D lacks energy or signals advanced rigidity in the spine (lordosis or kyphosis). In this case, the correction could be the same as that suggested for Position B (relaxing upwards).

Of the four postures shown, only the relaxed one (A) allows the body its optimal height. The tensions created in the other three cases shorten the body and alter its natural propensity to raise itself upwards. This sometimes happens to long-time practitioners whose backs end up becoming blocked, losing their flexibility, their range of motion and their respiratory volume.

Figure 3



The position of the hands is shown in Figure 6: The fingers of the left hand are tightly wrapped around the left thumb, and the right hand envelops the left fist.

Another note: Balance during walking depends on the position of both feet in relation to each other. The distance that separates them is equal to at least the width of a foot (Figure 3) ; in this way, a vertical axis is respected which aligns the tibia and the femur to make walking mechanically easy (Figure 4)

Figure 4

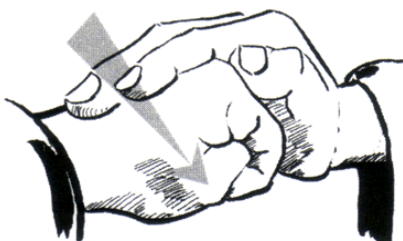
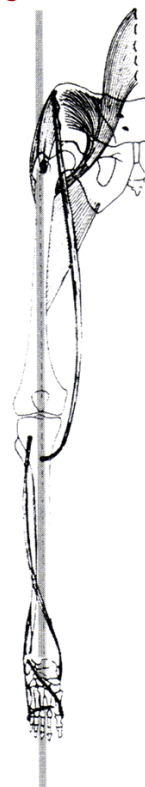


Figure 5

The root of the left thumb is placed on the solar plexus.

In Figure 5, the hands are seen from the interior, simply a way of understanding that the root of the left thumb is pushing on the solar plexus, and that the right thumb remains joined to the other fingers, and is not placed under the left fist – a mistake that is common but difficult for teachers to see in the dojo.

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Figure 6

There are many points to observe during the practice of kin hin, and the teacher's role is to make sure that a misunderstanding of the posture does not create difficulty for a practitioner that may later make practice impossible.

Synchronizing breathing and movement, pressing the ground with the ball of the foot during the exhalation, pushing the left fist with the palm of the right hand, stretching the knee... alternating concentration and observation; the entire posture becomes noble, and the body corrects itself. When attention is maintained in the present moment, Buddha is manifested, naturally, unconsciously and automatically.

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