

## How to Use a *Baren*

Before using your *Baren*, spread a drop or two of oil with your hand over the *barengawa* (bamboo sheath), covering both the face and the edges of the *Baren*. You should do this every day that you print. This will keep the *barengawa* supple and help lengthen its printing life. However, if it is saturated with too much oil, the *barengawa* will stretch and become weak, so do not overdo it. Any kind of light weight oil will do. We recommend Camellia Oil which is traditionally used by printmakers in Japan. Some Japanese printers use the oil from their hair or foreheads! Avoid vegetable oils because they can become rancid.

You may want to protect the back of the printing paper by placing a sheet of *ategami* (this thin, translucent Japanese protective paper is strong and waterproof), tracing paper, or baking parchment between the *baren* and the print while you are printing. This will protect the printing paper from the vigorous rubbing, add life to the *barengawa*, and make it easier to move the *baren* over the area being printed.

Grip the *baren* with the tips of your fingers tucked beneath the handle. Apply pressure with the heel of your hand, not the fingers and use the motion of your shoulder to move the *baren*. The *baren* should always move in a circular motion across the area you are printing.

When you have finished printing each sheet, hold the *baren* in your hands with the handle up. Using your thumbs, give the *ategawa* (the stiff, black backing piece under the handle) a little turn. If you are in the habit of doing this every time you print, the coil will not wear through the *barengawa* so quickly and the *barengawa* will last much longer.

It is normal for the *barengawa* to split or develop holes from use. Since the *takenokawa* (bamboo sheath) is a natural material, there is no way to predict how soon this will happen. Some *barengawa* last a very long time while others break down and develop holes quickly. This is not a defect of the *baren*. The *Hon* ("Genuine" or professional quality) *Baren* craftsman recommends replacing the *takenokawa* frequently, before any holes appear, because it protects the *shin* (coil) from wear and the *baren* will last much longer. Some traditional printers in Japan change the *takenokawa* at the end of a long day of printing; others wait a week or so before replacing it. Most people in the west wait until there are signs of wear and then replace it.

Happy printmaking!



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