

## A Druidic take on a Daoist Meditation

*By Paul Magee*

A few years ago, while I was working my way through the Bardic grade, I had an interesting experience while meditating. I have had a meditation practice for many years, long before I started with OBOD, and I have largely trained in the Chinese Daoist style of meditation, and use seated, standing, and active meditation regularly. The one I was practicing that day was a seated version of the Xiao Zhou Tian, or Microcosmic Orbit. One of the older forms of meditation that I know, it focuses on creating a continuous circuit of energy/Qi/Nwyfre flowing up and down your torso. Its name translates most directly as “Small Heavenly Circle”, and is supposed to represent a miniature version of the orbits of the heavens happening inside our bodies.

As I settled into the Microcosmic Orbit that day, I got deeper than usual into the meditation. As I circulated the energy around my torso, the circle of qi suddenly seemed to expand and become larger, and slowly took on the characteristics of the turning of the seasons of the year. It came to me in that moment that the Microcosmic Orbit is already designed to be a representation of the Wheel of the Year, and that overlaying the eightfold Druidic Wheel of Year doesn't alter it at all.

Since I am writing this article for an OBOD audience, I am assuming that the reader is already familiar with the concept of the wheel of the year. I will go through the history and the theory of the microcosmic orbit first, then my thoughts about overlaying the Wheel of the Year, and finally provide detailed instructions for its practice.

The practice as we know it today claims descent from Lu Dongbin, one of the Daoist Eight Immortals. Lu, whose birth name was Lu Yan, was a historical scholar and poet who was born in 796 CE and through self-cultivation became a Daoist Immortal and folk hero. He is said to have appeared from time to time through the centuries to teach and perform miracles. Lu Dongbin's teachings were collected into a book called the *Tai Yi Jin Hua Zong Zhi* which translates to “Secret of the Golden Flower”. The *Secret of the Golden Flower* is, in essence, a somewhat disjointed collection of advice and instructions for self-cultivation through meditation, focusing on the Microcosmic orbit. To modern readers, it more closely resembles a college student's lecture notes, rather than a how-to manual.

The book has been translated several times into various European languages, the earliest instance is a 1929 translation into German by Richard Wilhelm. This work was quickly re-translated into English, and both editions featured commentary by Carl Jung, who stated that the text helped him flesh out his own theories.

Conflating the Microcosmic Orbit with the turning of the year is something that the Daoists themselves did. In the third section of the *Secret of the Golden Flower*, titled “Turning the Light Around and Keeping to the Center”, we have the following line:

“Turning the light around is not turning the light around of one body, but turning around the very energy of Creation....Therefore each breath corresponds to one year of human time.” - The Secret of the Golden Flower, trans. Thomas Cleary

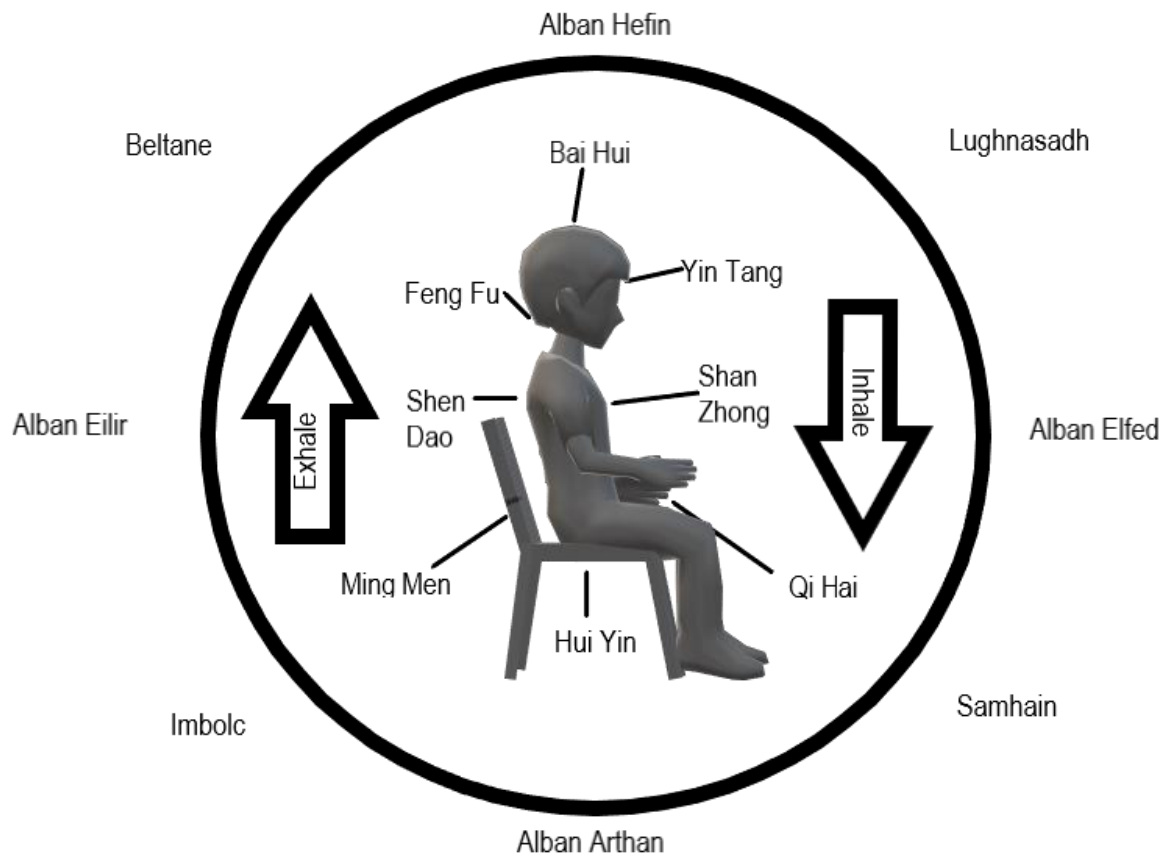
So the basic concept already exists within the meditation, all we have to do is look at it through a Druidic perspective to successfully import it.

The Microcosmic Orbit uses two linked acupuncture meridians, the Du Mai (Governing Vessel) and the Ren Mai (Conception Vessel). The Du Mai starts between the anus and the tailbone, climbs up the midline of the back, over the crown of the head and then descends along the midline of the face until it ends inside the mouth, at the junction of the upper lip and the gum. The Ren Mai connects to the Du Mai at the bottom of the torso, and begins between the anus and the genitals, then climbs up the midline of the front of the torso, across the umbilicus, up the chest and neck and then curves around the mouth to connect to the Du Mai. Between these two meridians, there are a total of 52 acupuncture points, mirroring the number of complete weeks in a year (as a note, the earliest known reference in Chinese writings to a seven-day week appears in the late 4th century CE, predating Lu Dongbin).

As you practice the meditation you focus on or observe various acupuncture points along the meridians. I have seen a lot of variability in the number of points used, from as few as one point to as many as 16, and I’m sure there are many variations with which I am not familiar. For the purposes of this article, we will look at eight points, both because it’s my favorite version and because it mirrors the wheel of the year precisely.

1. Hui Yin (Ren 1): At the very bottom of the torso, midway between the anus and the scrotum in men and the midway between the anus and the posterior labial commissure in women. The most “Yin” location of your torso, so to translate it onto the wheel of the year it corresponds to Alban Arthan.
2. Ming Men (Du 4): On the midline of the lumbar spine, in the depression below the spinous process of the second lumbar vertebra. Roughly opposite the umbilicus. The energy is beginning to rise and become more Yang. This point is between the kidneys, and its name means “Life Gate”, and it acts as the pilot light of your body. On this version of the wheel of the year it corresponds with Imbolc.
3. Shen Dao (Du 11): On the midline of the upper back, in the depression below the spinous process of the fifth thoracic vertebra, roughly between your shoulder blades. On this version of the wheel of the year it corresponds with Alban Eilir.

4. Feng Fu (Du 16): On the midline of the spine right beneath the base of your skull. On this version of the wheel of the year it corresponds with Beltane.
5. Bai Hui (Du 20): At the very top of the head, on the midline, in the depression where several of the bones of the skull meet. It represents the Yang most point on the torso and is opposite the Hui Yin. On this version of the wheel of the year it corresponds with Alban Hefin.
6. Yin Tang (M-HN-3): Along the midline of the face, in between the eyebrows. On this version of the wheel of the year it corresponds with Lughnasadh.
7. Shan Zhong (Ren 17): On the midline of the sternum roughly at the level of the heart. On this version of the wheel of the year it corresponds with Alban Elfed.
8. Qi Hai (Ren 6): On the midline of the lower abdomen, roughly 1.5 -2 inches below the umbilicus. On this version of the wheel of the year it corresponds with Samhain.



There are some general risks and warning signs involved in practicing any form of energy work which shouldn't be ignored. For this exercise, in particular, it is important to maintain a smooth and continual circuit of energy and not spend too much time on any particular point. To use our wheel of the year

symbolism, letting your attention linger too long on any particular point is like trying to keep your Lughnasadh celebration going through midwinter. On an energetic level, having too much energy in various areas of your body can cause discomfort. As an example, in Traditional Chinese Medicine headaches are often caused by an excess of energy getting “stuck” in your head. To learn more about the potential dangers involved in the incorrect practice of energy work I would refer you to Ken Cohen’s excellent book *The Way of Qigong*, which gives one of the most comprehensive overviews of qigong written in English. Chapter 17 deals specifically with warning signs associated with incorrect practice.

### **Instructions:**

This meditation can be easily done in either a standing or seated posture. Start in a comfortable position, making sure that your knees are slightly flexed (if standing), your shoulders and chest are relaxed, and the top of your head is lifted towards the sky. Alternatively, running through the Lightbody Exercise first would get you into the perfect physical and energetic state.

The first step is to lightly place the tip of your tongue against the hard palate at the top of your mouth, which help to bridge the upper gap between the Du Mai and the Ren Mai. The second is to start to physically engage the Hui Yin (the acupuncture point at the bottom of the torso which I am associating with Alban Arthan) with each breath, which helps to bridge the lower gap between these two vessels. These are the same muscles that cut off the stream of urine mid-flow or squeeze the walls of the vagina, and should lightly contract right before and during every exhale. I recommend practicing the coordination of this sequence if you’re not familiar with it already.

- Contract the Hui Yin lightly
- Exhale
- Relax the Hui Yin
- Inhale

Once you have this sequence down well, move on to the visualizations.

Visualization 1: This is the classical microcosmic orbit. On the inhale, visualize a small bead of energy entering the Ren Mai at the top and flowing down the front of your body to the hui yin at the base of your torso, passing through Shan Zhong and Qi Hai on the way. At the bottom of the torso, pause for a moment while you contract your Hui Yin, and then let the energy ascend the Du Mai up your spine, climbing up past Ming Men, Shen Dao, and Feng Fu to reach the Bai Hui at the end of the exhale. Pause for a moment to relax your Hui Yin, and then inhale down the front of the body again, passing by Yin Tang, Shan Zhong, and Qi Hai again.

Visualization 2: Expanding on the Microcosmic orbit, once the orbit is established, let the energy permeate each of the points as it passes by, making sure not to let your attention or the energy get

stuck in any one spot for too long. Remember, the entire orbit is only supposed to take one inhalation/exhalation cycle. I was at this point when I “saw” a mandala-style wheel of the year project out from my midline, with the spring ascending up my back, crossing the summer solstice at the top of my head, and with autumn descending in front of me. The wheel was decorated with symbols I associate with each of the festivals, which lit up as my energy passed them.

Visualization 3: Having returned to the meditation frequently, it has evolved into something a little less dramatic. I travel to my inner grove and sit down in front of one of the trees there, and begin the basic microcosmic orbit. Once I have the pattern down, I open my inner eyes in the grove and watch the tree pass through the entire year in one breath. Going from late summer through autumn and into winter on each inhale, then through late winter through the growth of spring and into the abundance of summer on each exhale.

Like any living organism, Modern Druidry is a vibrant and growing entity that will adapt as it comes into contact with new concepts and ideas. As we look for those non-Druidic sources that most closely parallel the values and worldview embedded in our path, we could do much worse than studying Daoism.

#### References

- a. *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, trans. Thomas Cleary, Harper Collins 1993
- b. *Way of Qigong*, Ken Cohen, Ballantine Books, 1997