

# The Alchemy of Facial Renewal, Part 2

## ACUPUNCTURIST BECOMES TAOIST ALCHEMIST

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In [part 1](#) of this series of articles, we proposed the idea that the re-vitalization of the facial terrain through facial acupuncture treatments provides the practitioner with unmistakable outward evidence of changes occurring within our patients. The unique topography of the face makes this possible. As we have previously remarked, the face thereby provides a "window" into the alchemical process, allowing us to witness the transformation as it takes place within the bodies of our patients.

It is during this evolutionary journey that we may clarify intention and enhance the vitality of our *qi* so as to function more effectively as guides and interact with our patients on a more profound level. In so doing, their transformation can be mirrored by the acupuncturist, in keeping with the traditions of Eastern alchemy. One of the time-honored techniques used by Taoist alchemists to initiate and facilitate this dynamic was a meditative breath practice using the microcosmic orbit.

### Microcosmic Orbit Breathing

Breath regulation is the *sine qua non* of meditative disciplines in both East and West, and was an intrinsic feature of Taoist internal alchemy. These practitioners distinguished between two types of breathing - "mundane" shallow breathing, and the more desired type of deep breath issuing from the *dan tien*.

One can quiet the mind quite effectively simply by focusing upon the inhalation and exhalation of breath, thus drawing its attention away from the external world with its manifold distractions. This permits both body and mind to relax, and the individual to enter into a state of profound stillness. The goal here is to reach the level of "true" breath, in which any distinction between exhalation and inhalation disappears. We might liken this state to a dissolution of ego-centeredness, in which the separation between the individual and the environment ceases to be relevant and the spirit is free to merge with the Infinite, transcending time and space.

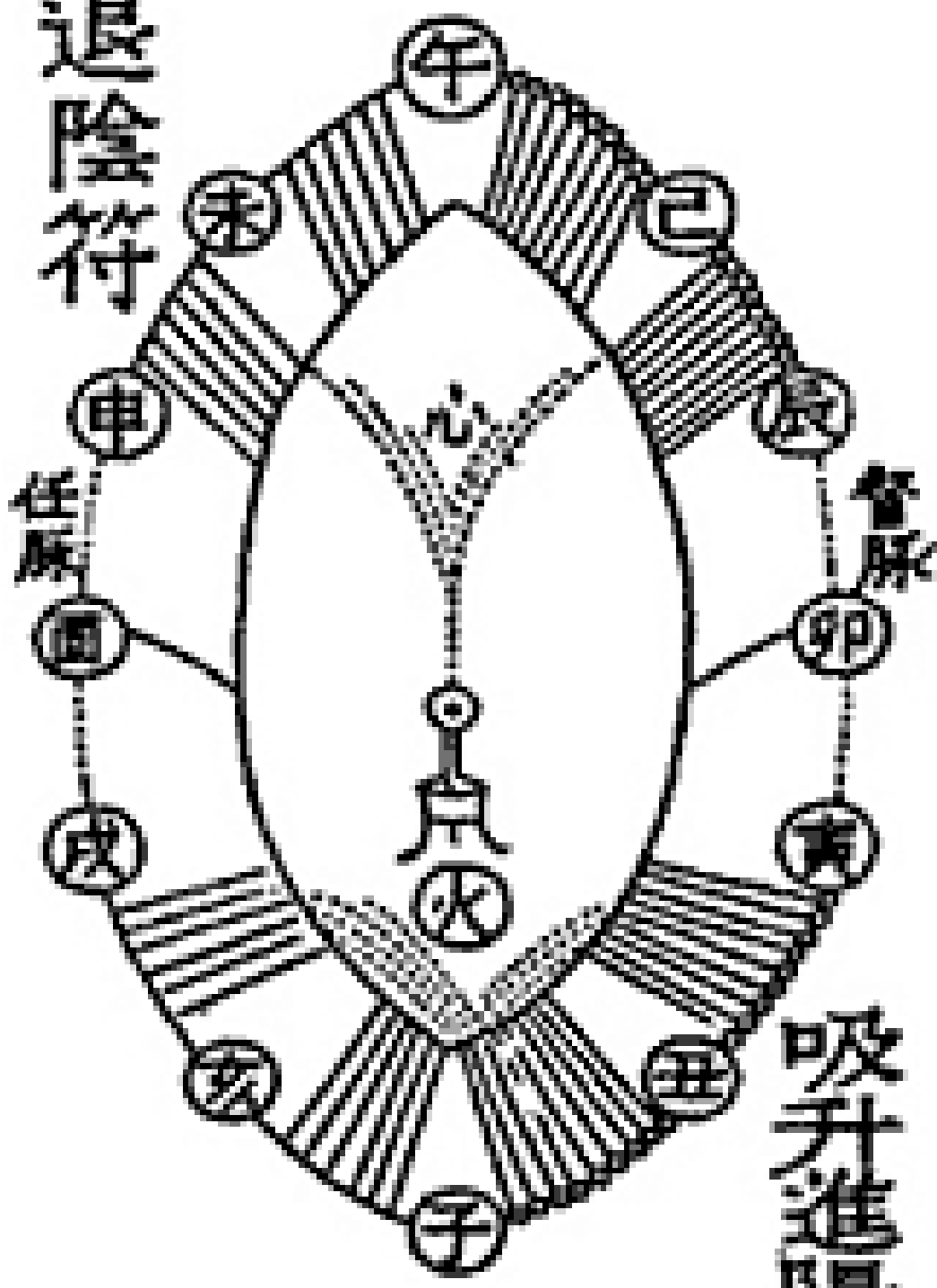
In Taoist inner alchemy (*nei dun*), breathing readily achieves this organic, timeless level and facilitates the emptying of the mind in the pursuit of greater spiritual awareness. During each cycle of breath, the body absorbs primordial *qi* and renews itself. This breathing process is likened to a water wheel that, like an electrical circuit, flows only when it is open. In this receptive, relaxed state, the unquenchable reservoir of *qi* nourishes and transforms the Three Treasures: *jing*, *qi* and *shen*.

In the [Sung Dynasty](#) (11th c. BCE), the part of the constellation [Ursa Major](#) (the Great Bear) known as The Big Dipper was visualized during the water-wheel meditation. It was said to take the form of seven stars appearing on a peachwood sword; peachwood was considered a symbol of immortality. The seven stars were then connected front to back and back to front, mirroring the structure of the *Ren* and *Du* meridians (see Figure). While meditating, the initiate alchemist would actively visualize these seven

stars beginning to revolve, activated by the "true" breath. As this process grew in strength and intensity, greater symmetry and harmony would be created within the *dan tien*. This microcosmic orbit breathing not only formed the Three Burners and the Three Treasures, but likewise "sparked" an enhanced flow of energy through all the circuits of the body. With patience and practice, it was purported that these infusions of astral *qi* could re-generate the entire organic structure of the individual, creating new DNA and a new destiny. In this manner, these practitioners were reported to have successfully achieved immortality while remaining incarnate. This is one of the great arcana (secrets) of Taoist alchemical practice.

The Water-Wheel Technique

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It is traditionally recommended that all individuals practicing this meditation visualize breath being inhaled upward from the coccyx, at the base of the *Du* meridian and then exhaled outward and down along the path of the *Ren*. However, as men would have been the dominant practitioners of this technique, it seems appropriate to suggest that women might proceed in the opposite manner, starting with the *Ren* meridian, inhaling upward from the womb, permitting breath to travel first upwards to *Du* 20, and then descend the *Du* meridian to the coccyx, before beginning the cycle anew.

Eventually, it is expected that there will be no pauses in the cycle of breathing, as it becomes effortlessly flowing and self-renewing, with all circuits connected. For beginners, a duration of this practice of no more than 10 minutes is recommended. Later, one may extend the time, if so desired.

The water-wheel meditation marks the point of departure upon an alchemical journey for the practitioner, the end result of which is to refine the *qi*, facilitating the use of effortless clarity of intention in the treatment process. The prima materia of individual ego consciousness is transformed into the authentic gold of heightened and focused spiritual identity.

It is interesting to consider this image of the water wheel from a slightly different perspective. The microcosmic orbit provides us with a vivid illustration of the transformation of *yang* into *yin*; an organic manifestation of this quintessential symbol of Chinese medicine. In it, through the interaction of *Du* and *Ren*, the two primal polarities intersect and harmoniously co-exist. Regardless of the starting point of the individual practitioner, during the activation of this regenerative meditative process, *yang* becomes *yin* becomes *yang*, and so on, ad infinitum.

We can postulate that this transformation of *yang* into *yin* illustrates the fate of each and every life form, in a re-enactment of the perennial cycle of birth and death. However, in ceaselessly navigating these twin channels of *Ren* and *Du*, the *qi* embodied in the moving breath transcends the limitations of corporeal existence, moving beyond the finite boundaries of individual life, thereby granting to those who harness it through this hallowed endeavor the desired outcome (in both Eastern and Western alchemy), of the alchemical opus - eternal life through the renewal of both body and spirit.

In the next article in this series, we will conclude our discussion of alchemical facial acupuncture, focusing on the transformational voyage of the individual patient - introducing both a constitutional treatment protocol, the *Mu Shu* Tango, and a sample facial acupuncture treatment.

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