



Figure 5.8 A reproduction from a Chinese book of alchemy and meditation
Source: “The Secret of the Golden Flower” translated by Richard Wilhelm

5.1 Ascent to Heaven: Spirit Body Journeying

Encountering the Mysterious Lady of the Nine Heavens

The Ascent to Heaven spirit body journeying technique was foremost a children’s game, though it seems to also have rather esoteric and spiritual undertones.

For the game, on the full moon eve of the Harvest Moon Festival in autumn, children would spin clockwise in circles as fast as they could while reciting certain Chinese nursery rhymes invoking Chang-Er, the moon goddess. The premise of the game is if you spin fast enough, your spirit will become so light it will instantaneously float up to the moon and you can catch a glimpse of the goddess, then will immediately descend back to earth into your physical body.

For the spirit body journeying technique, a similar approach to the child’s game is used. The technique sends your astral body, or an aspect of your consciousness, to astral project to Heaven. For a brief moment, your astral body (that aspect of your consciousness) will be close to the celestial palace of Queen Mother of the West, and perhaps you will encounter her protégé, the Mysterious Lady of the Nine Heavens.

Start by fasting from sunrise to sunset. (Still continue to hydrate your body with water, however.) **At the hour of sunset, as solar light begins its descent in the west, light nine sticks of incense.** Traditional options for incense are sandalwood, cedar wood, frankincense, or pine. My preferred incense is either sandalwood or cedar wood. **Arrange the incense sticks in three rows of three, replicating a Lo Shu magic square.**

Take great care ahead of time to ensure you have ample space for this exercise and that the space is sufficiently cleared to be safe. As the aroma of the incense smoke fills

your space and the sun begins its descent, invoke the Lady of the Nine Heavens by holding your thoughts and a mental vision of her steadily.



JIU
joe



TIAN
tea-in



XUAN
shwen



NU
knee

Endeavor to call out to her. A traditional method is simply a chant, reciting her name rhythmically. Alternatively, visualize your mind sending upward a cord, much like casting a line, and envisioning that an anchor at its end hits the base of Heaven and latches on.

Continue the visualization and proceed to spin clockwise in circles until you feel your astral body lightening. When you feel a noticeable shift and lightening of your consciousness, sit down in meditation position and close your eyes.

You will then feel your astral body ascending upward from the crown of your head and floating into the heavens for just a moment. As you alight upon Heaven, you will find yourself landing somewhere along the outskirts of the celestial palace or, if you're lucky, one of its outer courtyards. Take in the vision and move around to what extent you feel you can.

In your vision, does anyone see you? Does anyone speak to you? Having called upon the Lady of the Nine Heavens, she'll probably be the one to waiting for you. Since you've succeeded at journeying to Heaven, she'll have a prophetic message for you.

Listen closely, remember it, and be sure to thank her reverently. Also, do not forget to request that she convey your respects to the Queen Mother. You've alighted upon her palace grounds, after all, so it is only proper to acknowledge her.

Your astral body will then take the same path it took and return to your physical body. When you feel the shift of your astral body aligning back with your physical body, open your eyes and take in a deep breath to reactivate ordinary respiration and circulation in your body.

What in human recorded time might have been a few seconds will have felt, in astral spirit, like an hour of memory. Free-write and memorialize what you remember of the journey. Do not be afraid of your own imagination. Indulge it, at least for the purposes of this fantastical and creative exercise.

For the unpracticed, astral journeying can be a bit like dreams—it's hard to remember it clearly upon waking. It may take concerted effort to write down the vision immediately upon your return, before the recall slips away. Other times, you may have some impression that you went somewhere, but cannot remember any detail of it at all. After some practice, you'll learn to retain more of the memories and be able to recall the accounts with greater precision. In particular, strive to remember the prophetic message that you received. That part you'll definitely want to write down and remember.

After the journeying, especially since you fasted all day, treat yourself to a filling and satisfying evening meal.