

小周天 Lesser Mandala of Heaven Breathwork

Rooted in classic Taoist inner alchemy (內丹, neidan), the Lesser Mandala of Heaven (小周天, xiao zhou tian) cultivation technique teaches you to unlock a hidden energy circuit that runs through your body, up the back spinal Du 督 meridian and down the frontal Ren 任 meridian, forming a continuous loop of nutritive forces, vitality, and also, your consciousness, sense of self-awareness. By circulating breathwork along these two meridians in a loop, you harmonize the body's three dantian 丹田, or energy centers, with the three realms and cycles of the universe. Taoist masters believe this alignment refines your essence, restores internal balance, and elevates your personal power.



Step # 1 - Settle into the Right Posture

For setting the space, at your option, you can light incense or diffuse a calming essential oil blend, but of course this isn't necessary. For many, it can help get you in the right calming mindset.

You want to sit comfortably with an upright, straight spine, and your shoulders relaxed but slightly back, so your chest and airways are open. Rest your hands in a position that feels natural and comfortable to you. I rest my hands in the cosmic mudra, where for me, it's left hand atop right hand, palms up. (For others, it may be right hand atop left hand, palms up.)

I like the analogy of driving a car along a narrow road (you're going to be using your attention to "drive" the flow of internal forces along a particular meridian), because it communicates the level of attention and focus you want, and why you want to minimize potential distractions.

Start with just ordinary deep, slow, and steady breathing, making sure you're breathing from your abdomen and not the chest.

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Step #2 - Start at the Lower Field (Lower Dantian)

Bring your attention to your inner Lower Field, or Lower Dantian. This is the energetic hub just below your belly button. Rest your awareness here for a moment so you can center and ground yourself.



Step #3 - Initial Inhale: Draw Breath Up to the Crown

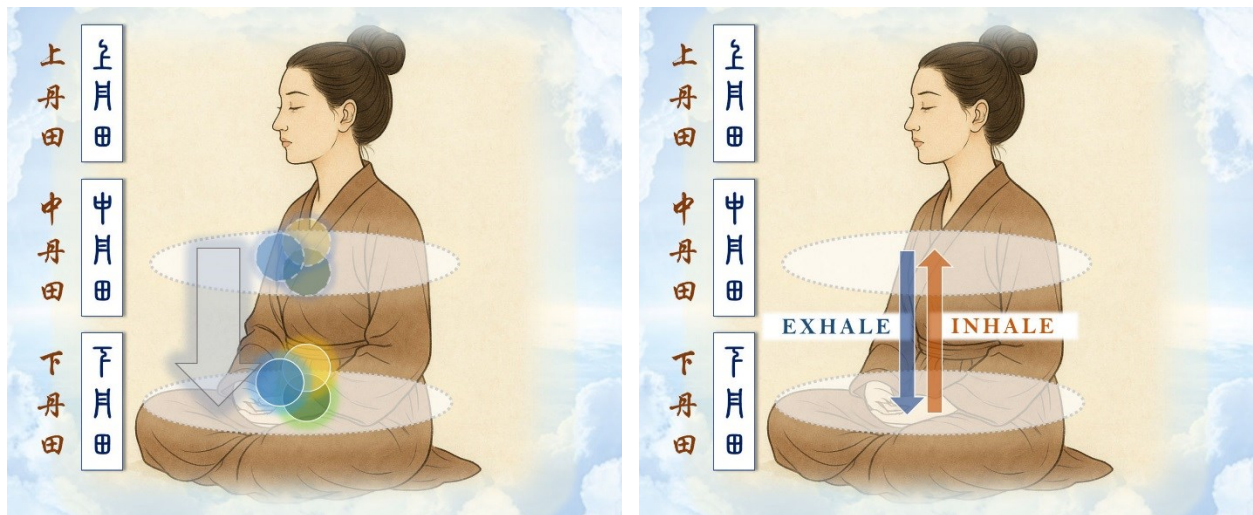
Take a deep, slow, calming, and relaxed inhale and gently pull energies and forces situated in your Lower Field along with the breath up a spinal meridian along your back, up to the crown of your head, to your Upper Field (Upper Dantian), occupied by your crown chakra and third eye chakra.

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Step #4 - Initial Exhale: Descend Forward into the Lower Dantian

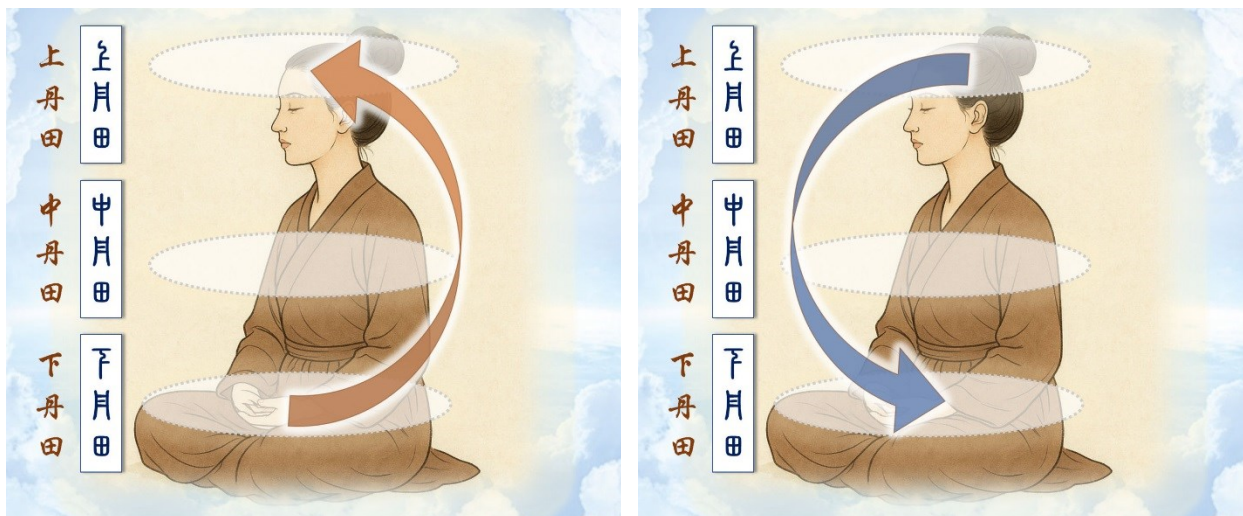
Upon a long, slow, and steady exhale, pull those internal energies and forces downward along a frontal meridian, back down to that Lower Field, gently "landing" that Lower Field, as if you had to land a helicopter.



Step #5 - Breaths Between Lower and Center Fields

Before beginning the orbit, take a few moments to direct the flow of energies and breath between your Lower Field and Center Field (your chest and heart area). This may feel just slightly uncomfortable at first. The purpose for this initial strengthening between the Lower and Center is to stabilize you, to give you a bottom-heavy sensation. It's what will keep you grounded and your foundation strong, especially as you cycle the flow up and beyond your crown and "merging it with the universe" later on.

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Step #6 - Inhale Up the Back Meridian, Exhale Down the Frontal Meridian

When ready, start by making sure you end Step #5 by guiding your breath down into the Lower Field and resting it. Then begin the full orbit. Upon inhale, regulate your breath and direct the flow of your internal energies (your Jing, Qi, and Shen) up your back meridian, as if the back meridian was a pathway and your internal energies are situated inside a vehicle.

Your mind and intentions are driving these forces up that pathway, upon a slow, deep inhale, from Lower Field passing through the Center Field and up the nape of your neck and back of your head up to the crown.

Then guide the forces, upon a slow, deep exhale, down the front center of your body, down the central meridian of your face, chest, passing the Center Field and down into your Lower Field.

THE LESSER MANDALA exercise is about controlling and guiding flow of energy via inhale up along your back, spinal Du 督 meridian, and then your frontal Ren 任 meridian via inhale. Upwards rising, you're managing your internal *yang*, aligning with how warm air rises and expands, and then downward descending, you're managing your internal *yin*, aligning with how cool air falls and contracts, due to its density after the ascent.

Previously the English translation for the practice of Xiao Zhou Tian 小周天 was "Microcosmic Orbit." A translation that better encompasses the metaphysical implications of the cultivation practice, however, is translation "周" (meaning a cycle represented by a circle, and implied within it, four directions or four gates) to "Mandala." Also, referencing Mandala circles back to how I describe the I Ching in my book, **I Ching, The Oracle**, and the I Ching is the foundational premise of Xiao Zhou Tian. See: "Circling the Square: The I Ching Mandala."

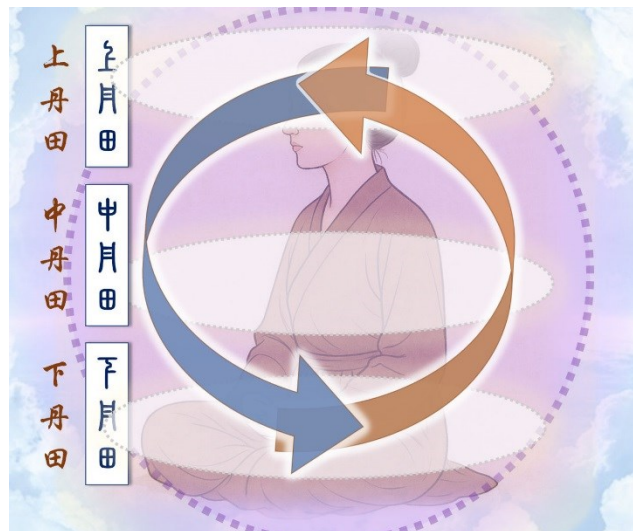
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Step #7 - Regulate the Inhale/Exhale of that Inner Orbit

Continue to be mindful of your posture and the sensations in your body, making sure you feel fully relaxed. Guide your breath along this inner orbit, up the back, down the front, and as you do, feel the inhale up your back to be warm and expanding, and feel the exhale down your front to be cool and contracting.

You want your rhythm to be smooth and unforced. Keep cycling the breath and guiding internal energy along this circular pathway.



Step #8 - Expand the Orbit; Microcosm Merges with Macrocosm

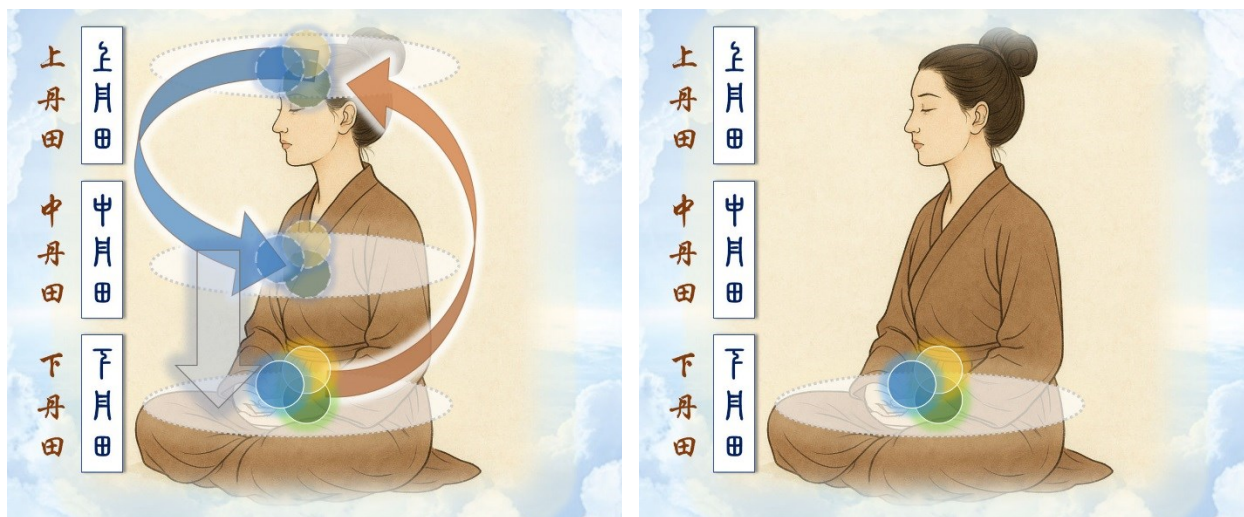
As you continue cycling breath and internal forces along this circular pathway, you can feel the flow forming an unbroken circle, cycling within, and as you continue the inhale/exhale, warm expanding air up, cool contracting air down, the span of that orbit -- its reach -- gets bigger and

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bigger until it expands beyond your physical body into your auric field, and feel even that personal auric field getting bigger and bigger, your aura radiating larger and larger.

Soon you feel the orbit of you, a microcosm, syncing up with the orbit, or rhythmic cycles of nature, the macrocosm. Sense a rhythmic cycling flow in the world around you, as if there is a giant cycling wheel formation that the universe's energy is turning in, and the inner cycling wheel you've formed from the inhale/exhale orbit is moving in sync with that universal cycling wheel.

All of this should feel easy, effortless, calming, not in any way strained. You want this to feel natural, so if it's not feeling natural, you started the expansion too soon. Be patient with the steady pacing of how you expand the orbit, merging microcosm with macrocosm.



Step #9 - Closing the Cycle

Upon feeling a oneness with the universe and feeling strengthened, amplified, and empowered by that oneness, slowly reduce the scope of that orbiting wheel so it returns inside your body, to that basic energy flow up your back meridian cycling down your frontal meridian. On your concluding cycle, feel your inner energies gathered together along with breath (essence, vitality, and consciousness), and on the downward descent along the front, gently land into your Center Field (the heart/chest area). Let the forces pulse here for a few moments as you continue to breathe in and out, taking breath but focusing on internal forces pulsing at the chest area while you breathe in and out.

When ready, take another deep breath inhale, then upon exhale, guide those gently pulsing forces downward to settle into the Lower Field, that Lower Field like a landing pad, receiving the forces and breath. This seals these strengthened triple forces within your core.

Slowly re-acclimate to ordinary consciousness and the mundane world around you. Through slow, steady, relaxed, and gentle movements, stand up or change your position from the seated position you were in.

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GUIDANCE FOR SAFE PRACTICE

You want to enter this practice in a calm and relaxed state, so don't jump right into it while you're feeling agitated or off-center. Get centered first, *before* you start. The practice involves "driving a car," in a manner of speaking, directing the flow of your internal energies along the two meridians, guiding along that pathway in a specific, focused way. If you enter in a state of agitation, you're probably not properly controlling that "vehicle." It'll be harder to guide the flow down the two meridians.

If you've *never* practiced inner alchemy of any sort before, then yes, the first few times you put in a full effort doing the Lesser Mandala, you may experience mild dizziness, nausea, soreness around the chest area, or minor headaches, or even ringing ears. It's not unlike weightlifting for the very first time, or right after a prolonged period of inactivity -- you're going to be sore the next day. But it's a *good* sore. Slowly as you build up your strength, the mild soreness goes away. I find ginger to be really healing here, or a topical application of a camphor oil or balm.

On the other hand, if you experience very strong emotional surges in a negative way, or sharp, significant physical or mental pain, stop immediately. Taoist teachers emphasize that such reactions may point to a deeper imbalance in the body. It might not hurt to also get a full medical evaluation just to rule out any issues you might not have been aware of, like abnormal growths or blockages.

Just as hiking or running is a healthy form of exercise, but not if you're trying to do it on a broken leg, this form of breathwork is a beginner-friendly wellness practice that brings physical, mental, and spiritual benefits for the general populace, and can therefore become an integral part of a balanced, healthy routine. That being said, closely follow the guidance provided here, always check in with your own intuition, and be ever diligent about prioritizing self-awareness (so that you can rely on the accuracy of your intuition). If at any point you feel the sensation of having to *force* the energy flow through your internal system and there is sharp pain, stop immediately and engage with medical providers to start ruling out potential health concerns. That sensation of blockage or sharp pain, according to Taoist holistic healers, could be an early sign that there is a physical health complication you'll want to address first, before "hiking or running" or, as applied here, the Mandala breathwork exercises.



VIDEO LINK: [A Taoist Secret to Cultivating Personal Power: Inner Alchemy Basics](#)

ARTICLE LINK: [A Taoist Secret to Cultivating Personal Power](#) (with additional PDF downloads)