

Cycles: Life, Death & Rebirth

UNCEASING TRANSFORMATION

A cycle has an in-built **timeframe**; there's always a return back to a place akin to the beginning – at some point in time! We are affected by many different cycles at once, all unfolding according to these different timings.

A cycle has the **same basic shape**, regardless of its timeframe. Essentially, it can be broken into two halves: the movement away from the originating point; and the return to the originating point (or somewhere similar, given we can't travel backwards in time!).

This is a **universal rhythm** to which we are all attuned and which is evident in the natural world – a gathering, peaking, and dissipating of energy, a ceaseless rise and fall and rise again. **Yin and yang**, each merging into the other constantly...

We live this rhythm every moment – with every in-breath and out-breath.

We live this rhythm every 24 hours – with day and night, light and dark.

We live this rhythm every month – with our fertility cycle of menstruation and ovulation.

We live this rhythm every 'moonth' – with the waxing and waning of the Moon.

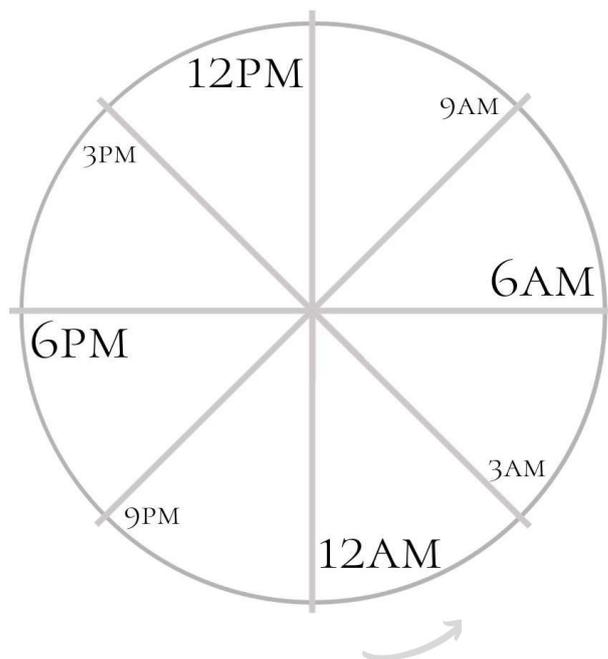
We live this rhythm annually – with the seasons, and our gardening.

We live this rhythm over the course of our lifetime – with the process of living and aging.

When we are conscious of these cycles, and where we are within them, we can work with this nourishing **expansion** and **contraction** of energy, embracing the significant opportunities for **health** and **wholeness** that come with each phase.

Cycles: Diurnal

DAILY CYCLE OF THE LIGHT



Plot your experience on this diurnal cycle map:

What is your favourite time of day? When do you have the most creative or physical energy?

What is the hardest or most tiring time of day?



Cycles: Menstrual

'MOONTHLY' CYCLE OF THE WOMB

The menstrual cycle is one of the **'vital signs'** for the female body (alongside blood pressure, body temperature, heart rate and respiratory rate), providing us with invaluable information about our hormonal health.

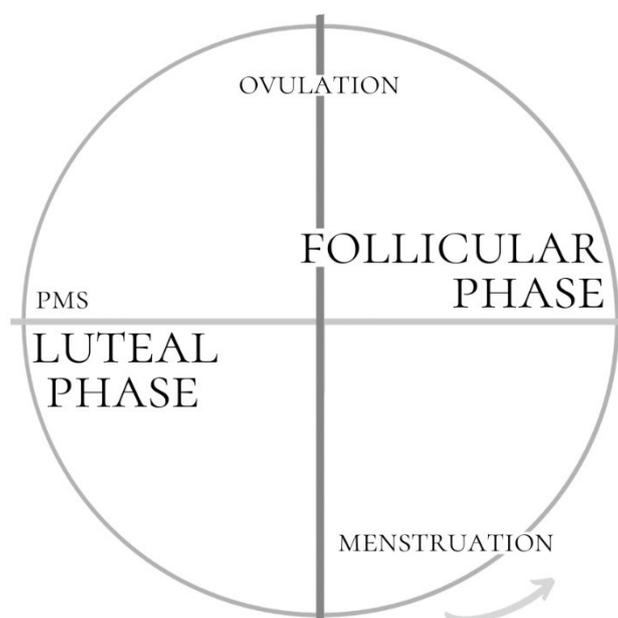
This cycle can be divided into two phases, delineated by menstruation, and ovulation, when an egg is released by an ovary (not that we ovulate every time, necessarily).

In the first part – the **follicular phase** – the pituitary gland releases follicle stimulating hormone (FSH), causing egg cells in the ovary to grow. It takes roughly thirteen days for the egg cell to reach maturity.

In the second part – the **luteal phase** – the corpus luteum – a structure inside the ovaries that holds a developing egg – collapses and begins to produce progesterone. Progesterone helps thicken the uterine lining in preparation for welcoming a fertilised egg.

If no egg implants in the wall of the uterus, the corpus luteum ceases producing progesterone after about ten to sixteen days, and the uterine lining is shed during menstruation. In general, there are fourteen days between ovulation and bleeding.

We can divide the typical 29.5-day menstrual cycle into four 'weeks.' Weeks 1 and 2 comprise the 'ascent' or follicular part of this cycle, and Weeks 3 and 4 comprise the 'descent' or luteal phase of the cycle. However, these are approximate divisions, and the actual length of time of each 'week' will depend on **your unique and particular body!**



Plot your experience on this menstrual cycle map:

What is your favourite time of your menstrual cycle (historically speaking, if you no longer have one)?

When do you have the most creative or physical energy?

What is the most difficult phase?

Cycles: Lunar

'MOONTHLY' CYCLE OF THE MOON

We live this natural rhythm each month, cycling with the Moon every 29.5 days (yes, the same length as a typical menstrual cycle!). We can correlate the energy of each lunar phase with a 'gardening' metaphor of a seed.

At the **Dark Moon/New Moon** we hold the seeds deep within. We are in the darkness – we are the darkness, the not-knowing, the Mystery. We hold all that has gone before in the potency of our rich soil.

At the **Crescent Moon**, the seeds within are called to rise, to seek the light, yet gravity draws down. We need to focus our energies, in order for our seeds and intentions to emerge as fresh shoots.

At the **First-Quarter Moon**, the plant establishes its root system, putting forth stem and leaf. We must become rooted in our new direction.

At the **Waxing Gibbous Moon**, the light is increasing. We are poised on the brink of revelation, as our budding dreams swell and blossom, perhaps cross-pollinated with other like-minds! We work to perfect the structures set in place in the previous phase, structures that support our growing intention.

At the **Full Moon**, all is revealed – the fullness of the bloom, the growing fruit, or the inadequacy of our original structures. The purpose of our original seeds and intentions becomes conscious and visible.

At the **Disseminating Moon**, the descent is underway. The seed has been brought to fruition – the fruit is ready to eat, our harvest (or lack thereof) is obvious.

At the **Last-Quarter Moon**, the plant form has fulfilled the purpose for which it was intended and has used up its store of vital energy. The call is to let go of that which no longer serves, allowing our leaves to fall to the earth. We must surrender.

At the **Balsamic Moon**, the leaves pile on the ground, our letting-go creating rich humus. We invest the last of our energy of this cycle into the preservation of the new seeds. Gravity draws down. The seed capsule falls to the ground and becomes buried, awaiting germination. We lie dormant.

And at the **New Moon** the spirit of our life purpose, embodied in these seeds of our new intentions and dreams, begins the ascent once again...



Plot your experience on this lunar cycle map:

When do you have the most creative or physical energy?

*What is your **natal lunar phase** (the phase of the Moon you were born under)?*

What is your favourite time of the lunar month, and is this related to your natal lunar phase?

Do you notice any phases that feel more challenging than others?



Cycles: Seasonal

YEARLY CYCLE OF THE SUN

We live this same rhythm annually, following a solar cycle of the **seasons**, **equinoxes** and **solstices**. Ancient Europeans marked this flow of energy every six weeks with eight festivals, or sabbats.

Samhain (pronounced 'sow-wen') is the festival of the final harvest and marks the beginning of Winter, and also the Celtic New Year. These days it is more familiar as Halloween!

Yule is celebrated at the **Winter Solstice**, and marks the longest night and shortest day of the year, the rebirth of the light.

Imbolc (pronounced 'im-molc') means 'in the belly,' the time of the first evidence of new life. It is also known as Candlemas and it is traditional to make candles, celebrating the return of the light.

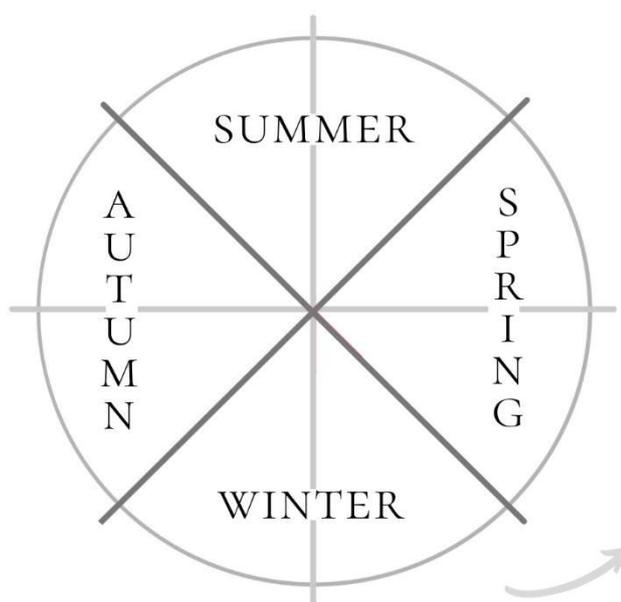
Ostara is celebrated at the **Spring Equinox**, when day and night are equal once again. The equinoxes represent a balance in Yin and Yang energies.

Beltane lies at the opposite point on the wheel to Samhain and its themes of death, and marks the fullness of life and passion. Beltane celebrates the Sacred Marriage of Yin and Yang, of Feminine and Masculine energies.

Litha or Midsummer is celebrated at the **Summer Solstice**, the longest day and shortest night of the year. Litha celebrates the very height of the powers of the Sun and Life, the orgasmic climax of light and warmth!

Lammas or **Lughnasadh** (pronounced 'loo-nass-ah') is the first of three harvest festivals, where we bear witness to the first fruits of our efforts, both physical and metaphorical.

Mabon is the second harvest festival, celebrated at the **Autumn Equinox** when day and night are equal once again.



Plot your experience on this seasonal cycle map:

What is your favourite time of the year?

When do you have the most creative or physical energy?

What season would you like to skip, and why?

Cycles: Life

LIFELONG CYCLE OF OUR DAYS

Throughout our life we journey this natural cycle of ascent and descent too, over the course of, let's say, one hundred years, if we're lucky!

Historically, when we lived a far shorter lifespan, we described distinct female life-stages with the phrase '**Maiden, Mother, Crone.**'

Nowadays we live much longer, in general, and can add in a life-stage between Mother and Crone – the powerful harvest phase of **Maga**. You can read more about that here: janehardwickecollings.com/autumn-woman-harvest-queen

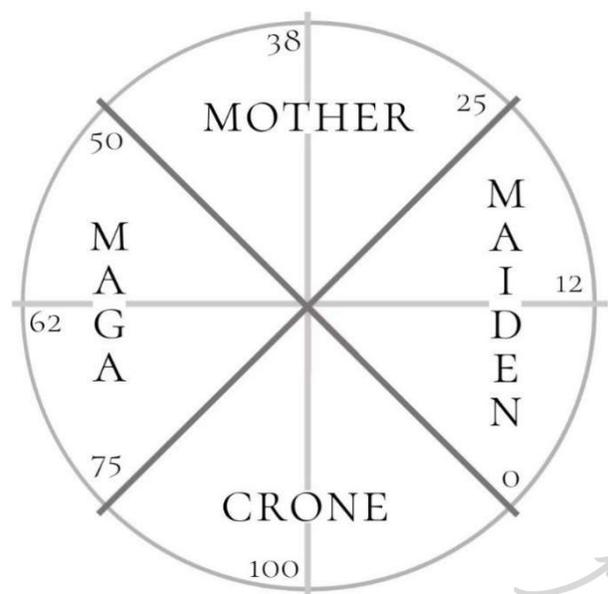
We know this word from the story of Baby Jesus being visited by the **Magi** – the Three Wise Men, the Three Kings. It's connected to the word 'magic' too, of course!

When we become a Maga, we are a **Wise Woman**. We are Queen of our Life. We 'rule our realm,' and we receive the harvest of our life to date. We are **Magick**.

The life-stage of Maiden (age 0 to 25) falls in the ascent part of the life cycle.

The life-stage of Mother (age 25 to 50, or to menopause) bridges the peak of the ascent and includes the beginning of the descent.

And the life-stages of Maga (menopause or age 50, to 75) and Crone (age 75 to 100) are also part of the descent phase of the life cycle, as we embody 'yin' gifts of wisdom and experience.



Plot your experience on this life cycle map:

What has been the most joyful phase of your life thus far?

What does your culture hold up as the 'best' age to be?

What is, or looks to be, the most difficult time of life, and why?

What skills or perspectives are required in order to navigate your next life-stage?