

The Elements

All objects on earth have their peculiar element which is predominant in them — although everything is made of the commingling of the five chief elements — the difference being in their greater or lesser degrees. Not only in the substance but in the liquid, even in the gasses we can trace this.

- The *Earth Element* has a yellow color, which may be seen in the earth when it is dry, and this shows that the color of pure earth is yellow. It is seen in many flowers as well as in fruits and leaves, and especially as the other elements in them lose their influence and the earth element remains. Therefore, from red or green they turn to yellow.
- The *Water Element* is green, which may be seen in the water of the sea and in the effect of the rainfall on the trees and plants. Yet, water in its pure state is white, which may be seen in clouds, in pure streams, and in snow.
- The *Fire Element* is red, and not only in the rising and setting of the sun or in the burning coal is it noticed, but even in a hot substance such as pepper. Also, in the face of man during a spell of anger this color appears, and even the eyes become red.
- The *Air Element* is blue, which may be seen in the color of the sky, which is its abode. Even the contact of the air with water makes the sea blue. The marks of this element, when predominating, are seen even on the tongue and lips of a person. It shows itself on the top of flames in the fire; this is when the fire turns into air.
- The *Ether* is smoky in color. It is the commingling of all elements, and even the origin of all. It is as the color of mist. The different grades of its activity have assumed different colors; therefore it is all colors and no color. The colors in the rainbow represent the different colors of the elements collected together as one embodiment of ether.

The forms of all objects tell the seer of their origin; and why a certain object is round, and why another object is square may be understood by the tendency of the element to manifest toward its peculiar direction. For instance:

- ♦ Spreading is the quality of the earth element; therefore the earth is always seen as something spread out, and all objects in which the earth is predominant are square.
- ♦ Water has a tendency to flow downward, and all objects belonging to the water element lean downward.

- ♦ The fire has its tendency to rise, therefore the flame goes up, even the smoke rises, and all objects in which fire predominates will show in them a rising tendency. The circular form is significant of it.
- ♦ The air has in its nature a zigzag direction, and all things concerning the air are zigzag.
- ♦ But ether has no particular form, and all forms are originated from it. Being the finest, it is above limitation.

The five Elements — Earth, Water, Fire, Air, and Ether — are in fact *grades of the abstract life in its gradual activity*, and every element is distinguished by its form, direction, color, and nature.

- ♦ The direction of the *Earth Element* is level, and its nature is spreading; therefore, the smallest island in the sea, in time, grows to be a big island.
- ♦ The direction of *Water* is downward. That is why rain falls, water falls from the springs, and water is found below the earth.
- ♦ The direction of *Fire* is upward. Therefore, the flame and smoke rise, and the sun, the center of all heat, is above.
- ♦ The direction of *Air* is zigzag; that is why the weather changes from time to time.
- ♦ The direction of the *Ether* is not particularly perceived, because it is still.

It is the *grade of activity* which changes the still ether to air, and so changes its direction and nature. Thus the activity of the Air, clashing by the zigzag direction, produces electricity, the fire element of which may be seen in lightning, which is zigzag in form. It is the activity of the Fire Element which rises above in clouds and turns into the Water Element and falls as rain, as the heat of the body is the cause of perspiration, and the heat of the mind accounts for tears. It is the activity of the Water Element which solidifies and produces salt and minerals of different kinds, which develops into rocks and mountains, and then descend and make themselves a plain which is the part of Earth. This shows the origin of Earth in the source of Water.

All these directions *may be seen in the breath* by one who can realize what element the breath is emitting at a certain time. The breath changes its Element so many times during the day and night, and, if in right order, it does not miss the right succession of the Elements. From this the seer knows all about his body and mind, and the body and mind of another, and according to his development, he gets an insight into the past, present, and future.

The Elements are related mostly to their nearest Element: Earth with Water, Water with Fire, Fire with Air, and Air with Ether. Water fertilizes the earth and makes it fruitful, and heat projects water in its liquid form and keeps it from solidifying. The tides depend upon the cosmic heat; in other words, the light of the sun reflected in the moon controls them. The Fire is kindled by the help of Air, and it is the vitality of the Ether which moves through the Air. Although all the elements are related to each other, yet Earth and Water are mated, and so are the Fire and Air elements, Ether being exclusive.

The people of the temperament in which the Earth predominates will harmonize with those of the Water element; people of the temperament in which Fire predominates will be harmonious with those of the Air element. People have harmonious and inharmonious times with their friends; this is accounted for by the same reason. When they have the mated elements, namely Earth and Water, or Fire and Air, active in their breath, they are harmonious, and in absence of the same they lack harmony.

In fact, each of these Elements creates out of itself its child-element and again in time absorbs it within itself. The elements show the Creator's nature, Who creates at times and absorbs at times. This is explained thus in the Qur'ān: "All come from God, and all are bound to return to Him." We see that the Ether creates Air, the Air creates Fire, the Fire creates Water, and the Water creates Earth, and yet in the Water the Earth is dissolved, and by the Fire the Water is consumed, the Air puts out the flame, and Ether absorbs Air. It is this mystery which enables the Sufi to master the constructive and destructive powers of the universe with the knowledge of mysticism. Mastery is not only in knowing, but in knowing and doing, both.

The direction that every object takes through its manifestation shows in it the nature of its predominating Element. All things that bend show the Water Element. All things which spread in a straight line have Earth as their predominating Element. All things which rise and grow upward show in them the Fire Element. All things which develop in a zigzag direction show in them Air. And things which are hidden and are incomprehensible or in a mist show Ether predominating in them.

It is Fire, in one, which makes one rise against another. And it is Water in the nature which makes one bow and bend before another. It is Earth in one's disposition that keeps one set and firm in one's ideas, however good or bad they may be, and it is Air in the nature of a person which makes that one's ways crooked. It is Ether in a person's nature when you cannot see what he is about.

The breath follows the same direction. It flows downward when the Water Element is predominating, and straight when the Earth element is active in it; it

rises when the Fire Element lifts it up, and it goes crossways under the influence of Air. It is incomprehensible when the Ether Element overwhelms it. And at every change of the Element in the breath — which takes place often in the day and night — the mood of man changes; his desires, his inclinations, his expression, even his atmosphere changes. And not only that, every Element that he breathes has its effect upon every affair that he does, or that is done in his presence at that moment.

The various characters of human nature can be divided into five principal divisions:

- a character like the earth
- a character like the water
- a character like the fire
- a character like the air
- a character like the ether

Every person in the world must have one or the other Element predominant in his character, and the knowledge of this helps a person in dealing with others in life, also in understanding himself.

The person of the Earth character is calm and quiet, harmonious and serviceable, simple and good, also dependable to a great extent. Only, the person of the Earth character must be told to do something, he will not do anything by himself. And it is better if you stand by him when he is doing a certain thing and look at him while he is doing it; then you are sure of getting it done. He is willing to do all he can, but somebody must direct him.

The person of the Water character is sociable, imaginative, affectionate and loveable; only he will respond quickly to all influences, as the sea responds to the storm. By nature this person will always be desirable, he will show adaptability, response, and fineness of character. The man of the water nature is emotional, devotional, generous, but sensitive. There are moments when this person is calm and quiet, and there are moments when he is quite upset. This person is subject to be misled, and yet, if rightly guided, will prove to be most desirable.

The person of Fire nature is useful but dangerous. You do not know what he will do from one minute to another. This character is just like a cracker. The silent cracker only needs the touch of a lighted match and will at once declare that it is a cracker. A Fire person cannot hide his character, it takes but one moment to bring it out. A least little excuse will bring him up in a moment. This person is destructive by nature, and the trouble he causes to all others is much less than the harm he does to himself. His life is as destructive as fire, fire which burns all things and burns itself at the same time.

The person of Air character is moody and imaginative and visionary. At one moment he is your great friend, at the other moment he is your enemy, as the air a moment before was blowing towards the East and at the other moment it went towards the West. This person will have material fits and spiritual fits, and spells of virtue and obsessions by evil. This person will change from time to time. When you think, "Today he is good," tomorrow he will show himself different. When you see, "This morning he was calm," in the evening you will find him upset. It is the greatest difficulty to keep that person in control. It is like controlling the air, which is always difficult. Yes, this person will show wit, quickness in grasping things, capability, efficiency in work. He will act on impulse. He will be adventurous, and, if powerful, will be influential in life.

The character of the Ether person shows all the above-said qualities and yet every quality in a subdued form. This person will be serious, calm, quiet, peaceful, subject to sadness, melancholy at times, yet responding to humor, to mirth, rhythmic in action, balanced in life, deep in understanding, brave, bearing at the same time thoughtful and considerate. Ether is the essence of all the elements, and the person who shows Ether in his character shows wisdom. Where there is wisdom there is beauty; wisdom is adorned with beauty. This person will have the power of attraction and expression, together with magnetism expressed through his whole personality.

Purification

The body is made of five Elements, according to the mystical view: Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Ether. Yet these terms must not be compared with the scientific terms; these are mystical conceptions and they should be understood in a mystical sense. These five Elements form the sustenance of the body, at the same time these elements purify the body.

For instance, no ablution with water only is sufficient, earth is required also. In the East Brahmins used pure earth, some used ashes; in the East graham flour is still used in place of soap. The scientist can never deny the fact that there is no better disinfectant than earth itself. The use of water for every kind of ablution has been taught by all religions in some form or other. That shows that it is not only used for cleanliness, but it helps in spiritual development. The scientist today admits that there is no better tonic than pure water; this has always been considered to be so by the mystic, who called the rivers sacred rivers and gave water in healing.

As the use of earth and water cleanses and purifies the body externally, so it has a purifying influence on the internal part of the body. By eating wholesome food and drinking pure water not only does one receive nourishment, but this cleanses and purifies every particle of the body. It is therefore that an adept

must avoid eating and drinking anything unwholesome. This does not mean an absolute restriction to certain food and drink, but just that care in eating and drinking is necessary.

Once a person has advanced in spirituality nothing matters to him, neither what he eats and drinks, for he lives in the spirit the most part of his life; for him the body is a coat and he does not care if it is full of holes or if it is patched. But for a person who has yet to develop spiritually, and who follows a process, consideration is necessary; it is most necessary that the body should be kept pure, outwardly and inwardly, that it may become a suitable vehicle for the manifestation of the spirit.

Purification is the innate tendency of every soul, but it purifies only that part of its being of which it is conscious. There is a Parsi saying, "Purity is the first piety." When striving to purify the body and mind, man often fails to find the real source of their purification. Really speaking, the breath is the source which keeps body and mind alive, and body and mind connected. Impurity of breath turns body and mind impure, and purity of breath gives purity to both.

The question, how we should purify the breath, may be answered thus, that breath is constituted of the five Elements — of which both the body and the mind are composed — and it is the same Elements which are used by the mystics to purify the breath. After a Sufi has made the breath rhythmic by the practice of *fikr*, and has acquired strength in the breath, then the Sufi may purify the breath with different Elements.

By breathing on earth, one will give all impurities to earth, and will attract purity from earth. By breathing before water, one will purify the breath and will give out impurities to water. By breathing before fire, the Sufi purifies the breath by that Element. Therefore, incense is burnt in religious places, and the adepts in India keep fire before them when practicing meditation. One must purify one's breath by breathing in the open air, which is the air of purification. And life in the open space enables one to purify one's breath by the ether, which pervades the whole space. Purification of the breath not only gives sound health of mind and body, but gives perpetual youth and long life, until one has attained the life eternal.

Impression

The nature of the memory is to hold an impression, agreeable or disagreeable, and therefore a person holds a thought in mind, whether it is beneficial to him or not, without knowing the result which will come from it. It is like a child who holds a rattle in his hand and hits his head with the rattle and cries with the pain, and yet does not throw the rattle away. There are many who keep in

their mind a thought of illness or a thought of unkindness done to them by someone and suffer from it, yet not knowing what it is that makes them suffer so, nor understanding the reason of their suffering. They go on suffering and yet hold on in memory the very source of suffering. Memory must be one's obedient servant; when it is a master then life becomes difficult. A person who cannot throw away from his memory what he does not desire to keep in mind is like a person who has a safe, but the key of that safe he has lost. He can put in money, but he cannot take it out. All faculties in man become invaluable when a person is able to use them at will, but when the faculties use the person, then he is no longer master of himself.

Concentration is taught by the mystics in order to exercise the will, making it capable of making use of all faculties. A person with will-power can remember what he wishes to remember and can forget what he wishes to forget. All things that deprive one of one's freedom in life are undesirable. The mind must be free from all bad impressions of life, which take away the rest and peace of life. By concentration, one is able to hold a certain thought one desires and to keep away all other thoughts, and when one is able to keep away all the thoughts one does not wish to think about, it becomes easy to throw away the impressions of years, if one wishes to forget them. Bad impressions, however old and intimate, are like rubbish accumulated, which should be removed in order to make the house clean. The human heart is the home of the soul, and upon this home the comfort and peace of the soul depends.

Purity of mind requires the destroying of all bad impressions which are already collected there or which the mind receives instantly. One can destroy these impressions by five ways, and the way is adopted according to the impression one has to destroy. Some impressions want to be washed off from the mind; some require to be erased from the surface of the mind; some want to be shaken off like dust from the clothes; some require burning like the wood in the fire, which, after its test through fire, turns into ashes; and some impressions must be drowned, so that they will never come up again. Bury certain impressions like a corpse; find every way of annihilation which is suited for that particular impression, so that your mind may be clear. The mind is not only a means of thinking or reasoning, but it is the king of one's being, and upon the condition of mind one's health, happiness, and peace of life depend.

Now the question is what to destroy and what to keep in mind. Collect and keep all that is beautiful, and destroy all that is void of beauty. Collect and keep all that is agreeable, and destroy all that has a disagreeable effect upon you. Collect and keep all that is harmonious, and destroy all that creates inharmony in yourself. Collect and keep all that is restful, and destroy all that disturbs the peace of your life. As some dust gets into the mechanism of a clock and stops it

from going, so the effects produced by all impressions which are void of beauty and harmony and which disturb your peace keep you from progress. The mind cannot act properly when it is hindered by impressions which have a paralyzing effect upon it. Life is progress, and stopping from progress is death. Failure does not matter in life for a progressive person, even a thousand failures do not matter. He has before his view success, and success is his even after a thousand failures. The greatest pity in life is the standstill when life does not move further. A sensible person prefers death to such a life. It is as a paralysis of the soul, of the spirit, and is always caused by holding bad impressions in mind. No soul is deprived of happiness in reality. The soul's very being is happiness. Man brings unhappiness upon himself by holding in his hands the clouds of bad impressions, which fall as a shadow upon his soul. Once a person is able to clear from his mind, by whatever process, the undesirable impressions, a new power begins to spring from his heart, opening a way before him to accomplish all he wishes, attracting to him all he requires, clearing his path of all obstacles, and making his atmosphere clear, for him to live and move and to accomplish all he wishes to accomplish.

Purity of mind is the principal thing upon which the health of both body and mind depend. The process of purifying the mind is not much different from the process of cleaning or washing any object. Water poured upon any object washes it, and if there is a spot which cannot be washed away by the water, some substance which can take away that spot is applied, to wash it thoroughly. The water which washes the heart is the continual running of the love-stream. When that stream is stopped, when its way is blocked by some object which closes the heart, and when the love-stream is no longer running, then the mind cannot keep pure. As water is the cleansing and purifying substance in the physical world, so love is on the higher plane. Sometimes when it is difficult for love to take away some impressions that are disagreeable, which block the way of the love-stream, they may be washed away by some element that can destroy them. The whole life is a chemical process, and the knowledge of its chemistry helps man to make life happy. An unhappy person, being himself unhappy, cannot make others happy. It is a wealthy person who can help the one who is hard up, not a poor person, however much desire of helping he may have. So it is with happiness, which is a great wealth; and a happy person can take away the unhappiness of another, for he has enough for himself and for others.

Earthly pleasures are the shadows of happiness, because of their transitory character. True happiness is in love, which is the stream that springs from one's soul; and he who will allow this stream to run continually in all conditions of life, in all situations, however difficult, will have happiness which truly belongs

to him, the source of which is not without, but within. If there is a constant outpouring of love one becomes a divine fountain, for from the depth of the fountain rises the stream and, on its return, it pours upon the fountain, bathing it continually. It is a divine bath, the true bath in the Ganges, the sacred river. When once one has got the key of this fountain, one is always purified, every moment of one's life; nothing can stay in the mind causing man unhappiness! For happiness alone is natural, and it is attained by knowing and by living naturally.

Q: What is the process of drowning impressions in the ocean of the consciousness of eternal now?

A: The one who does not know the love of an individual does not know universal love. But if one stands there, one stands there without going forward. The love of an individual in love's path is a doll's play, which is learned for the time to come. So the love of an individual is the first step. But when one progresses then one advances towards the love of a cause, a community, a nation; or even the whole universe. Man, as a human being, is capable of loving one; but his soul, as the light of God, is capable of loving not only the world, but even if there were a thousand worlds. For the heart of man is larger than the whole universe.

The principal thing to attain happiness is to purify one's mind from all things that disturb it and create inharmony. There are not only bad impressions which disturb the tranquility of mind, but there are many feelings of resentment and resistance against things which do not agree with one's own idea which disturb one's mind. The person who has some business to carry out, some profession to attend to, requires a tranquil mind, but especially the one who journeys on the spiritual path needs tranquility of mind most. Prayers, concentrations, meditations make no effect when the mind is not purified from all disturbances. Therefore, for an adept, no cost and no sacrifice is great enough to keep harmony within himself. A Sufi tries to keep harmony in his surroundings, the harmony which demands many sacrifices. It makes one endure what one is not willing to endure, it makes one overlook what one is not inclined to overlook, it makes one tolerate what one is not accustomed to tolerate, and it makes one forgive and forget what one would never have forgotten if it were not for the sake of harmony. But at whatever cost harmony is attained, it is a good bargain. For harmony is the secret of happiness, and in absence of this a person living in palaces and rolling in gold can be most unhappy.

Harmony is brought about by attuning oneself to all beings, to all things, to all conditions, to all situations. And he who cannot tune himself tries to tune

others, and while trying to tune others he breaks the string. It is like a person who has a violin in his hands wishing to tune the cello. If he wishes to be in tune with the cellist, he must tune his violin to the cellist's pitch. Every soul, as its nature, seeks constantly for harmony, but rarely there is to be found a soul who really knows how to create it. If one says, "This noise which goes on always next to my ears makes me mad," he cannot stop the noise. He must know how to close himself from that noise; if he cannot, to accustom himself to that noise so as to be able to bear it and eventually to rise above it, that it may no more create inharmony. Very often, at the sight of inharmony, one tries to escape it. But inharmony has such a wonderful magic that if one avoids it in the East one meets it in the West. It never leaves a person; whom it loves it follows. And the best way to meet with inharmony is to try and harmonize with it. Knowing that the source and goal of all things is the perfection of harmony, and bearing that idea in mind, if one met with inharmony, which has no existence in reality, which is like a shadow, it must certainly disappear as the shadow disappears at the sight of the sun.

It is very difficult to evolve oneself and at the same time to keep in tune with the unevolved ones through life. It is like being drawn from above and at the same time being pulled from below. And if there is anything that can save man from being torn to pieces in life, there is only one way, and that is to respond, to respond to all that is asked of man. It is this principle which is taught by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount. The Sermon on the Mount may seem to teach a willing surrender to all, but that is not the way to look at it. The real lesson that one can learn from it is to harmonize oneself with all notes instead of with one note. Every note is fixed in its place, so is every man fixed in his ideas and ways. But the one who treads the spiritual path, he is all notes and he is no note in particular. Therefore he may rightfully be called the keynote, the note which makes a consonant chord with every note that is played with it. There is no beauty where there is no harmony; harmony is the fruit of love. Therefore by attaining harmony in life one reaches the perfection of all three: Love, harmony, and beauty.

Reject the Impression of Errors and Shortcomings

There is generally a tendency seen in those treading the spiritual path to feel discouraged at having bad impressions upon their heart of their own faults and shortcomings. And they begin to feel that they are too unworthy to have anything to do with things of a sacred nature. But it is a great error, in spite of all the virtue humility has in it. When one acknowledges something wrong in oneself one gives that wrong a soul out of one's own spirit, and by withdrawing from all that is good and beautiful, spiritual and sacred, instead of developing

the spirit of rejecting all errors, in time one becomes a receptacle of what is wrong. We go on disapproving and yet collecting errors, so producing within ourselves a perpetual conflict that never ends. When we become helpless before our infirmities we become a slave to our errors, we feel within ourselves an obedient servant to our adversary.

The greater the purity developed in the heart the greater becomes our power. As great the power of us within ourselves, so great becomes our power on others. A hair's breadth can divide power from weakness, which appear to have as wide a gulf between them as between land and sky.

The Real Purification of Mind

The real purification of mind is in purifying it from thoughts and impressions which live in it as a germ of disease. The best way of cleansing the mind from all this is to be able to empty the mind of any thought, feeling or impression. To be pure means to be natural. The spirit in us in its natural condition is not a thought but mind, not love but heart. For as the thought is the outcome of mind so is love the outcome of the heart. To attain to the purity which is the seeking of the mystic one must be able to purify one's spirit from every thought and feeling, however deeply impressed or engraved in one's heart. The mystic goes as far as purifying himself from his *identity*, by removing it for a certain time and by putting something else in its place. From beginning to end the whole process of spiritual development depends upon this.

Commentary:

The practice nowadays called the *Purification Breaths* is one of the oldest and most basic of the breath practices. There are many, many useful concentrations that can be done with this practice, but it will be effective enough if the breaths that purify the Elements are simply performed every day. Much emotional imbalance, whether situational or characterological, is caused by the *sequence* and *balance* of the Elements going awry as the breath moves through its cycles, and daily (or oftener) practice of the Purification Breaths can help set this aright. For those who have a tendency toward "ungroundedness" or are basically grounded — in the sense of energetically connected to the earth¹ — but need to become more fully embodied or incarnated, the sequence of the Purification of the Elements can be reversed, so that the Ether breath comes first, then Air, and so forth. This is in fact the sequence in which the Elements manifest. The undifferentiated energy "interfaces" the local system of one's energy bodies through the higher chakras (primarily the throat chakra) and differentiates into each Element in turn as the energy "steps down" in density in its descent through each chakra, the chakra act-

¹ When doing the Earth purification breath in a standing position, the hands and wrists are best held basically relaxed but with the fingers very slightly extended to promote smoother exchange with the Earth's field, instead of wrists bent and palms facing downward, as is done in the Ziraat Lodge, which is more of a blessing mudra. This writer is indebted to Murshida Vera Corda for this insight.

ing somewhat analogously to an electrical transformer. Doing the breaths in reversed sequence will tend to carry consciousness into a state of greater “nesting” or sync within the physical and energetic structure of the body without increasing the false identification with it. The importance of this state of being cannot be overestimated. It is almost impossible to *accomplish* in life in a balanced way, or to go really high in one’s meditation, without a basic groundedness, body awareness, and “*in-carnation*.” The phrase in the “the Embodiment of the Master” is not a metaphor but a literal description of a spiritual condition.

The Breaths of the Elements

We must distinguish the breaths that *purify* the Elements in body, heart, and soul from the actual *breaths of the basic four Elements themselves*, which are different. This teaching was originally given by Pīr-o-Murshid ‘Ināyat Khān, but for some reason has not been passed-down through all branches of the Esoteric School. The breaths of the Elements themselves are these:

Earth	Out through both nostrils, inhale de-emphasized
Water	Out through the left nostril, inhale de-emphasized
Fire	In sharply through the right nostril, exhale de-emphasized
Air	In through both nostrils, exhale de-emphasized

These are the breaths which correspond in the human being to the Elements themselves, and through which the breath cycles several times over the course of 24 hours.

These breaths can be used as a prelude to whatever activity or state of imbalance requires the rebalance or accentuation of a particular element. One can sometimes notice the breath of the Earth Element in people who are close to death or in very deep sleep, where the other Elements have mostly withdrawn from the body and the heavy exhale of the Earth Element is distinct. There is no “breath” of the Ether itself, Ether being not actually an Element but the *source* of the Elements. One can attune to the Elements by becoming familiar with the feeling of each Element in turn by practicing its breath until a clear sense of its characteristics comes, and then identifying its qualities in various aspects of oneself. Then, take the awareness thus-gained into the environment and repeat the inquiry there. Only when one is able to directly discern the Elements and their proportions in an object or energetic system such as a psycho-emotional impression can one effectively use the Elements in life, for example, in the purification or removal of that impression.