

Voice of Clear Light

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The Elements and Our Well-Being

A Few Excerpts from *Healing with Form, Energy and Light* by Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche



Photo by Maria Aurelia Kulik

Study of and practice with the elements is meant to positively affect our well-being by giving us the tools to bring the elements into the balance that underlies health and wholeness in any dimension of experience. It does not take great intuition to know when we are in or out of balance. We all know these experiences. They fall along a continuum from the most disturbed imbalance – psychosis or serious illness – to perfect balance, which occurs only when we can abide in the nature of mind, the buddha-nature. In our daily lives we are somewhere in between, moving from being more in balance to being more out of balance, and back again.

The idea of balancing elemental energies can be usefully applied to any human function, quality, or activity: health, relationship, spiritual practice, psychological make-up, emotional state, physical environment, and so on. Using imbalance of the elements as a primary metaphor, we can understand illness and unhappiness as well as obstructions on all levels of spiritual practice. Balancing the elements then becomes a metaphor for healing, for the development of positive qualities and capacities, and for the elimination of negative qualities. If

one element dominates, we need to cultivate its opposite. If we are dominated by fire, for example, then we try to activate water or earth, and vice versa. If earth is dominant – we are dull, sleepy, heavy – then we activate air or fire. And if air dominates us – we are flighty, nervous, with a short attention span – then we activate earth or water. There are many obvious examples of balancing in everyday life: if a fever becomes life-threatening, we may be told to soak in cold water; if we become too cold, we apply warmth; and if we're dehydrated, we drink water.

By nature, all conceptualizations are symbolic and the five elements are symbols of great depth and long tradition. Beyond metaphor, however, the five elements are energies that can be worked with directly by the practitioner through physical actions, energetic movement, and the flow of awareness.

Each action that we take, on any level, is an expression of the elemental qualities in some combination or interplay, and a reinforcement of the conditions that generated it. Anger, for an easy example, is usually a fiery response. If we habitually react with anger, we cultivate the fire in ourselves, though in this instance it's a negative attribute of fire. In the same way, because creativity is connected to the luminous fire nature, when we respond creatively we are also developing the fire element in ourselves, in this case its positive aspects. Over time our habitual actions and reactions favor the development of certain elements and often leave others less cultivated or weaker. This process is further strengthened by cultural norms that favor some elemental qualities over others. To continue with the fire example, growing up in a social group that favors aggressive, fiery reactions, we will tend to develop those qualities to the detriment of softer, more watery responses to the world.

One way to think about long-term imbalance is to think about what you've wanted to change about yourself and how you act and react in life. This inquiry usually leads to particular traits or capacities you want to develop or diminish. What do you want to change in how you feel physically, emotionally, energetically, mentally? Where do you run into problems? Are you always late? Do you talk too much? Too little? Are you generally alert or dull? Agitated or calm? Are you creative? Comfortable in yourself? Are you grounded? Do you worry too much? Are you responsible? Are you accomplishing what you want? How is your meditation practice? Is there

progress or do you simply spend time in a trance every day? Is your meditation the same as it was years ago or has there been progress? Do you have more insight? Is your mind quieter and calmer? Are you more peaceful? Is your practice joyful or is it a burden?

The answers to these questions can be translated into elemental terms. For each area that you would like to change, think of the elemental quality that needs to be cultivated or diminished. You will most likely, but not necessarily, come up with one or two elements that seem to dominate your experience or one or two elements that seem lacking.

Another way to find out what your dominant traits are is to ask your friends what element they think dominates you. Even if they don't know anything about the elements, you might find that you get surprisingly consistent responses.

The important thing is to understand yourself. Bring your intelligence to bear on the questions of your own life and apply your insights to improving the quality of your life and the effectiveness of your spiritual practice. You can change even very ingrained habitual tendencies, but you must apply your understanding and effort, and you must do so intelligently. Life is too short to waste doing inappropriate or ineffective spiritual practices, and too short not to engage in appropriate and effective spiritual practices.

These excerpts are from Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche's book *Healing with Form, Energy and Light: The Five Elements in Tibetan Shamanism, Tantra, and Dzogchen*, available at [Ligmincha's Tibet Shop](#).

Tenzin Wangyal Rinpoche's latest book, *True Source of Healing: How the Ancient Tibetan Practice of Soul Retrieval Can Transform and Enrich Your Life*

Hay House, July 7, 2015, will be out in early July. A limited number of copies are available now through [Ligmincha's Tibet Shop](#).

