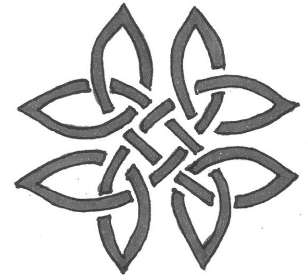


Meditation



Contemplating the Four Elements: Sit on the ground cross-legged if you can, or any position that is comfortable. Sit with your back straight, as if a tree, rooting both into the ground with your hips yet reaching into the sky with your head.



First, focus on the air by paying attention to your inhale and exhale. With each inhale, sense how the oxygen you breathe has been exhaled by the trees, bushes, grasses and other plants of your home. With each exhale, sense how the carbon dioxide you expel is absorbed by the plant life all around the world. Feel how the air inside you is the same as the air surrounding you. Breathe the universe in and out over and over again. Contemplate how each breath connects you with all creatures.

Slowly shift your focus to contemplating the earth. As you sit, feel the hardness and solidity of the earth beneath you, the density of rock. The earth element pours through us, via the food we eat, transformed into muscles and tissues, replacing all the cells in our body every seven years. Feel the earth elements in the hardness and solidity of your body—your bones, nails and teeth. See if you can sense we are not just on the earth, but a part of the earth that walks, moves, breathes. The earth element in you is part of every living thing, from the granite bedrock to the dense bark of a tropical hardwood tree to the rich humus that supports so much plant life.

Slowly shift your focus to the element of water. Allow your eyes and ears to take in any body of water around you, be it a pond, stream, lake or a bottle of water. Explore the notion that the water you see is the same ingredient that resides within every cell of your body. Contemplate the watery nature of your body—blood, mucus, tears and sweat. Sense the fluids inside of you cleansing and moisturizing every cell, vein and artery. Look at the body of water before you and consider the ways you are part of the vast hydrological cycle—water enters your body, rinses it clean, and exits your body to rejoin the flow through the seas and mountains and sky. The water within has been through endless cycles, has passed through people living centuries ago, has been swallowed by whales in Antarctic waters, has laid in deep alpine lakes, been frozen icebergs in Greenland, and fed unnumerable trees.

Slowly turn your attention to the final element: fire. If it is a sunny day, sit in full exposure to the sun's warm rays, our source of this element that connects us with the fire of the big bang. Feel the sun's radiant heat on your skin, penetrating deep into you. Sense how the sun's energy is sustaining your very life, providing the warmth deep in your belly. We need to regenerate fire constantly through exposure to warmth or via energy from food. The sun provides this element universally: we share this energy with all warm-blooded creatures, and with reptiles who use the life-giving rays to warm themselves in the middle of the day. Feel the sun's energy giving warmth to the air, and life to the plants we metabolize.

To end this meditation, let your awareness expand to include all of your experience, and see if you can perceive each arising phenomenon through the lens of the four elements. By deepening our awareness of each of the four elements, we can begin to better see the universal nature of our individual mind-body experience.

- Adapted from *Awake in the Wild* by Mark Coleman

