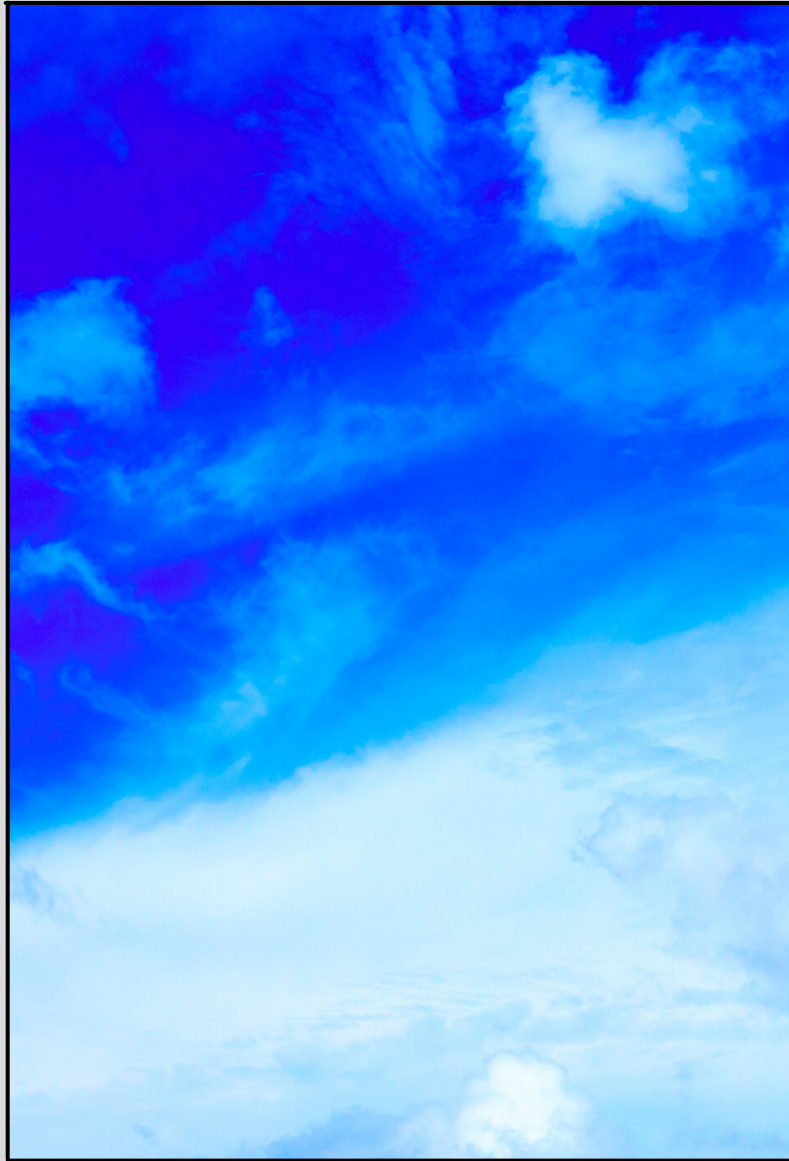


ORIGINAL INTIMACY: SOUL PILGRIMAGE
TO FIVE AUSPICIOUS HEALING SHRINES

RESOURCES AND PRACTICES

WWW.ELLENGRACEOBRIAN.COM



WWW.OSECENTER.ORG

Air

USE YOUR OPEN-HEARTED HEALING POWER

The Elements of Nature

“To see the world in a grain of sand” and the cosmos mirrored in our human body, mind, and soul is a profound and practical method for contemplation and meditative insight. With tools from the Indian philosophical systems of Yoga and Samkhya, we can explore our intimate connection with all creation and discover how science and spirituality meet to reveal the inter-being, or interconnection, of all life.



The five elements of nature— earth, water, fire, air, and space (or ether) are the basic building blocks of all creation. Everything in nature, including our bodies and minds, is formed of the elements in gross or subtle expression. Focused contemplation of any element can be a doorway into the heart of reality, an experiential introduction to the original intimacy of oneness with all life.

Meditative contemplation of the elements has many benefits, it:

- Calms the mind and prepares us for superconscious meditation;
- Reconnects us to the original intimacy of the individual and the cosmos; as imbued with both consciousness and matter;
- Provides the key to experiencing nature as sacred—inseparable from the divine;
- Brings relaxation and healing renewal by connecting body, mind, spirit, and nature;

On subtle and gross levels, the five elements are always combined with one another in varying degrees, which comprises the physical manifestation. As we explore each element, we naturally encounter the others—that's the dance of creation, which is moving and changing all of the time.

Each element has a corresponding symbology to indicate its predominant qualities—a color, geometric shape, mantra, and associated chakra center. There is also a connection to a physical sense organ and capacity for perception that element makes possible.

The colors and mantras associated with the elements are found in the classical yoga text from the Hindu tradition, the Gheranda Samhita. Similar teachings are also found in Buddhist and Jain scriptures. The Samkhya and Yoga philosophical systems include insights into related sense organs and perceptions. Each physical element is associated with an organ of perception, an organ of action, and a subtle capacity. These tools help open our awareness to subtle levels of perception, breaking down the barrier of materialization and objectification.



The experiential insight born from element contemplation strengthens our capacity to honor nature in a sacred way. We see the way things are. We realize the virtue of reciprocity and grow beyond our greed. We wake up spiritually and connect heaven and earth.

This is our dharma.

Yogacharya Ellen Grace O'Brian

Contents

01 INTRODUCTION

About Air Element

02 PRACTICES

Contemplation Practices

03 REFLECTIONS

Journal

04 SUPPORT

Resources



Air Element

COLOR

Black

SHAPE

Hexagon

SENSE

Touch

SOUND

Bija Mantra: YAM

The elements are progressively lighter and subtler as they move from the density of earth to the transparency of air and space. Even though all five elements are always present in nature (in varying degrees), the subtle, pervasive quality of the air element is more readily perceived as omnipresent. Since black is not a color but the absorption of all light, it readily represents the expansive nature of air. As air cannot be seen (unless it carries the influence of another element such as smoke from fire or mist from water), we usually identify it by witnessing its effect.



We experience air with the inhalation and exhalation of our breath, discern it as the swaying of trees and fluttering of leaves, and associate it with the ocean tides or clouds moving across the sky. Because of this omnipresent but unseen influence, the air is associated with Spirit. Our lives depend on the unseen presence of air. The air element is related to the skin and our capacity to touch and feel. The action power related to air is connected to our hands and our ability to grasp and let go.

Contemplation Rituals

AIR



Wild air, world-mothering air,
Nestling me everywhere,
That each eyelash or hair
Girdles; goes home betwixt
The fleeciest, frailest-flixed
Snowflake; that's fairly mixed
With riddles, and is rife
In every least thing's life;
This needful, never spent,
And nursing element;
My more than meat and drink,
My meal at every wink;
This air, which, by life's law,
My lung must draw and draw
Now but to breathe its praise.

— Gerald Manley Hopkins

Air Element Rituals

These rituals facilitate greater awareness and intimacy with the air element, helping us realize its presence both within and around us. The air element becomes a living reality, no longer some “thing” outside of us.

An easy way to connect observation of the air element with your meditation practice is through lighting and offering incense. The rising smoke from the incense stick reveals the movement of air. We can also observe our natural inhalation and exhalation, noticing how the air feels entering and exiting the nostrils and how it moves through the lungs. Air element and breath are linked to prana, the subtle energy that makes all life possible. Notice the connection between air, breath, and life-force or prana.

Recognize the air element in your environment and your body. Notice qualities associated with air—such as movement, flow, uplifting, purifying, or life-giving.

If possible, go out into a natural environment and set your “radar” for the air element. Open to it and experience it. Notice what that brings to your body, mind, soul, and field of experience.

Be aware of the connection between the air element and your organs of perception and action—the ability to touch and the way things feel, and the capacity to grasp or hold something. The subtle perception of these qualities is important too. Notice how air, centered at the heart chakra, facilitates awareness through touch, feeling, and discernment, as well as emotional or mental grasping or holding on.

The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear the sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit.

—Christian Bible, John 3:8



MUDRA

Air Gesture (Vayu Mudra)

MEANING

In Sanskrit, *Vayu* means Air/Wind/Gas and *Mudra* means "seal" or "gesture."

BENEFITS*

Regulates and reduces the air element in the body. Invokes the qualities associated with it, such as movement, openness, and enthusiasm. It helps maintain the air influx and reflux by balancing ida and pingala nadis in sushumna nadi.

INSTRUCTIONS

Rest the backs of your hands on the thighs or knees. Gently fold your index fingers to touch the base of the thumbs. Secure the index finger in place with the thumb by applying slight pressure. Extend and keep all your other fingers as straight as possible. Relax the shoulders back and down, with the spine naturally aligned.

PRACTICE

Practice for a few minutes a day. The preferable time is early in the morning on empty stomach. For better results, practice Vayu Mudra with pranayama or meditation.



*Mudra practice helps us focus attention, raises awareness of vital force, and supports the balance or flow of prana or energy.



PRANAYAMA

Alternate Nostril Breathing (Nadi Shuddhi)

Nadi is a Sanskrit word meaning “subtle energy channel” and *shuddhi* means “cleansing or purifying”. Practicing this breath purifies *sushumna*, the subtle energy channel, allowing oxygen to flow freely throughout the body.

PRACTICE

- Sit in a comfortable position, with your spine straight, your head upright, and shoulders relaxed.
- Begin by inhaling and exhaling deeply with both nostrils.
- Close your right nostril with your right thumb and inhale through your left nostril. After a full deep inhalation, pause at the top of your breath.
- Then, switch and close the left nostril with your ring and little fingers and do a deep exhalation through your right nostril.
- Next, inhale through your right nostril. After a full deep inhalation, close your right nostril with your right thumb, pause at the top of your breath, and then exhale fully through your right nostril only. This is one complete round.
- Repeat this practice for nine rounds.
- Always end the practice as you exhale through both nostrils as normal breathing.

NOTE: Breath should follow its natural rhythm. The symptoms of correct practice are the feelings of freshness, energy, and lightness of the body and mind due to the clearing of pranic blockages allowing energy to flow smoothly in *sushumna nadi*. If you feel headache, heaviness of the head, uneasiness, etc., you are probably exerting too much pressure on the lungs. Keep the practice gentle and easy.

Journal

AIR

Contemplate and write about air element experiences that have been formative or especially impactful for you, both in your childhood and adult life. What did the element of air reveal to you? What did you learn or “see” because of its presence? It may be something as cool and refreshing as an ocean breeze on a hot day or the ferocity of a strong wind that blew down a tree or even a house.

Like many children, my first experience of the air element was my first experience with kite flying. Even a young one quickly learns that though we cannot see the wind, it is there, and if we want to harness that energy to raise our kite, we must run in the right direction! Otherwise, we can run and run, but our kite never gets far off the ground. It’s thrilling to experience the lifting power of cooperating with the wind and learning that once our kite is positioned correctly, it only takes a tug of resistance to steer it and lift it higher and higher. Sri Ramakrishna used this awareness of air to teach about the omnipresence of divine grace, saying: “The winds of grace are blowing all the time; all you need do is raise your sail.”

Pay close attention this month to your encounters with air. Take a few moments each day beyond your regular meditation time to notice your breath. In nature, discern how all life forms breathe. How do you experience and see the purifying influence of air? Drying your clothes or dishes, opening a window for fresh air, or taking a good, deep breath—all connect to the ability of air to bring freshness.



Karma Yoga Practice

AIR

Use this space to record any new thoughts and actions inspired by your practice. Both the gross and subtle energy of the air element can be helpful to us when we feel stuck. When we feel mentally or emotionally stuck, taking a deep breath, or even better, going out for a walk in nature and taking in a good dose of fresh air, can often bring the clarity we need.

Are there ways you are inspired to support clean air such as planting a tree, choosing to sometimes walk instead of driving, or learning about alternatives to the use of fossil fuels? This month we can cultivate greater awareness of the preciousness of the earth's atmosphere and the clean air necessary for everyone to thrive. In yoga, we learn to cooperate with divine grace. We take one step that feels right, then pay attention to the next inspiration. Like the quality of the air element, our small efforts are lifted, and we lift ourselves along with way.

GOALS

-
-
-

ACTIONS

-
-
-



Suggested Resources

BOOKS

Regeneration: Ending the Climate Crisis in One Generation by Paul Hawken

World as Lover, World as Self by Joanna Macy, 30th Anniversary Edition

The Future We Choose: The Stubborn Optimist's Guide to the Climate Crisis by Christiana Figueres and Tom Rivett-Carnac

ARTICLES

[Shifting Winds: A new cash crop is turning Iowa into a renewable energy juggernaut—and preserving a rural way of life.](#) Reasons to Be Cheerful Newsletter

[Nature Connection Guide: US Doctors are Prescribing Nature](#)

[Yoga, Consciousness, and Climate Change](#) by Ellen Grace O'Brian (EllenGraceOBrian.com)

AUDIO

[NPR Fresh Air Podcast: A World on the Wing: The Global Odyssey of Migratory Birds](#)

[Meditations on the Five Elements](#)

Podcast: The Yoga Hour (theyogahour.com)

Dr. Laurel Trujillo interviews Christopher Key Chapple, author of the new book *Living Landscapes* about meditations on the five elements.

VIDEO

Journey of the Universe

An epic film about the human connection to Earth and the cosmos.

© 2022 Ellen Grace O'Brian. All rights reserved.

Center for Spiritual Enlightenment / CSEcenter.org
1146 University Avenue, San Jose, CA, 95126 (408) 283-0221