

ORIGINAL INTIMACY: SOUL PILGRIMAGE
TO FIVE AUSPICIOUS HEALING SHRINES

RESOURCES AND PRACTICES

WWW.ELLENGRACEOBRIAN.COM



WWW.OSECENTER.ORG

Earth

LIVING EARTH HAS SECRETS TO SHOW US

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 both 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 our 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

The five elements, on subtle and gross levels, 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. Insights into related sense organs and perceptions are found in the Samkhya and Yoga philosophical systems. Each physical element is associated with an organ of perception, an organ of action, and a subtle capacity. These tools are offered to open our awareness to subtle levels of perception, breaking down the barrier of materialization and objectification.



The experiential insight born of 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 Earth Element

02 PRACTICES

Contemplation Practices

03 REFLECTIONS

Journal

04 SUPPORT

Resources



Earth Element

COLOR

Yellow

SHAPE

Square

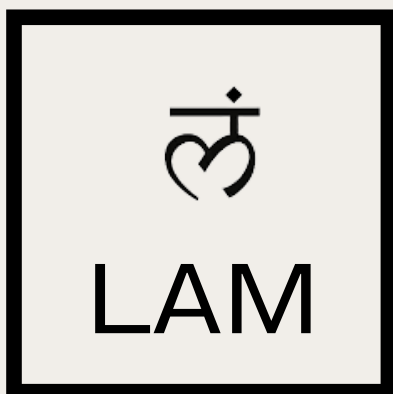
SENSE

Smell

SOUND

Bija Mantra: LAM

The elements are progressively dense as they manifest. Earth element contains a predominance of tamas guna, the quality of heaviness or inertia—that provides its stability. Earth element is associated with the nose and our capacity to smell. The organ of action connected to earth is the anus and the capacity to excrete. The subtle perceptive capacity connected to earth element is odor. Reflect on how earth element is perceived through the sense of smell. We can smell the fragrance of earth. We may also smell a scent of water or in the air, but that is only possible due to the presence of some portion of earth element. Pure water has no smell, nor does air or fire.



Contemplation Rituals

EARTH



"The earth is at the same time mother, she is mother of all that is natural, mother all that is human. She is the mother of all, for contained in her are the seeds of all. The earth of humankind contains all moistness, all verdancy, all germinating power.

Flowing in and out like the breath, the marrow of the hip sweats its essence, carrying and strengthening the person. In just such a manner the vitality of earth's elements comes from the strength of the creator. It is this vigor that hugs the world: warming, moistening, firming, greening. This is so that all creatures might germinate and grow."

—Hildegard of Bingen, trans. by Gabriele Uhlein
Christian mystic

Earth Element Rituals

These rituals are ways to facilitate greater awareness and intimacy with the earth element, to realize its presence both within and around us. No longer some “thing” outside of us, the earth element becomes a living reality.

Connect earth element with your daily meditation practice. Learn about the soil in your surroundings. Dig a small amount of it and place it in a dish on your altar. You may want to include a rock as well.

Each day take time to gaze on this offering of earth, just being present to it. Observe, imagine, or intuit the life force present in the earth element. Give thanks for how you are supported by the earth element in your surroundings—the land, buildings, furniture, plants, trees, your own bones—everything that contains earth element.

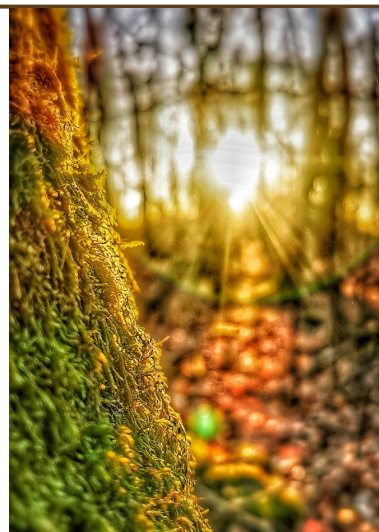
Recognize earth element in your environment, in your body, and in the qualities you associate with earth—such as strength, stability, resistance, yielding, or creativity.

If possible, go out into a natural environment and set your “radar” for earth 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 earth element and its organs of perception and action—the ability to smell, the fragrance or odor that emanates from things, as well as the ability to excrete or eliminate.

I am the sweet fragrance of earth.

—Bhagavad Gita



MUDRA

Earth Gesture (Bhu Mudra)

MEANING

Mother Earth mudra. In Sanskrit, Bhu means Earth and Mudra means "seal" or "gesture."

BENEFITS*

Grounding, Cultivating a sense of stability in the body and the mind, Instills qualities of security, abundance, and serenity.

INSTRUCTIONS

Curl the little and ring fingers inward toward the palms and place thumbs on top of them. Extend the index and middle fingers to make a V-shaped peace sign with both hands. Extend arms and bring the tips of the middle and index fingers into the ground or tops of the thighs. Relax the shoulders back and down, with the spine naturally aligned.

PRACTICE

Practice for a few minutes a day. The main thing is to comfortably hold the position and notice its influence on your body and mind. You can use this mudra to cultivate a calm mind as preparation for meditation if your thoughts are overactive or use it to help you relax and release when you feel tense.



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



ASANA

Mountain Pose (Tadasana)

Helps you connect with the earth—and to your body, breath, and mind. It is also a great foundational pose for all other standing poses. When practiced regularly, it can help improve posture and stability.

PRACTICE

- Stand with your feet hip-width apart and parallel, with your arms at your sides.
- Spread your toes and press them into the floor; distribute the weight of your body evenly into both of your feet.
- Engage the muscles in your thighs and legs.
- Align your head over your heart, your heart over your hips, and your hips over your ankles.
- With each inhale, lengthen your spine and reach the crown of your head toward the sky.
- With each exhale, allow your shoulders to relax away from your ears and reach your fingertips toward the ground.
- Continue for 5 to 10 breaths.

Journal

EARTH

Writing about the earth element can help to “ground” thoughts and experiences and give birth to new insights. Start by reflecting on your childhood experiences of earth element. Children are especially sensitive to the influences of nature. Often many of our most profound memories of nature and insights into our being spring from early life encounters with the elements.

When I was a child, my family lived in a suburban housing tract in California. In the mornings, I would walk alone to school going past the newer homes, then alongside a farmer’s field, and finally across the railroad tracks. The field was an experience of open space, the ground often freshly plowed. Along the far edge of the field was a eucalyptus grove. Passing that open ground with its fragrance of eucalyptus was freeing to me. Situated in-between the constraints of home and the stressors of school, each day I would slow my pace and let my dreams waft out over that field. To this day, the scent of a eucalyptus grove brings me peace and healing.

In addition to writing about childhood encounters with the earth element (and ideally with its associated sense of smell), use your journal to record current experiences during this monthlong contemplation. When I am out walking, slowing my pace, quieting my mind, and noticing my surroundings, contemplating earth element often brings meaningful encounters. Sometimes the encounter is with another person, but it may also be an encounter with an animal, a tree, or the earth itself. By simply being present, my awareness expands, my heart is peaceful, and I am restored to my innate wholeness.



Karma Yoga Practice

EARTH

Karma yoga is the experience of oneness realized through selfless action or service. As we realize the sacred nature of earth, we are naturally inclined to protect it and nurture right relationship with it. This is reciprocity. Earth protects and nurtures us and we protect and nurture earth.

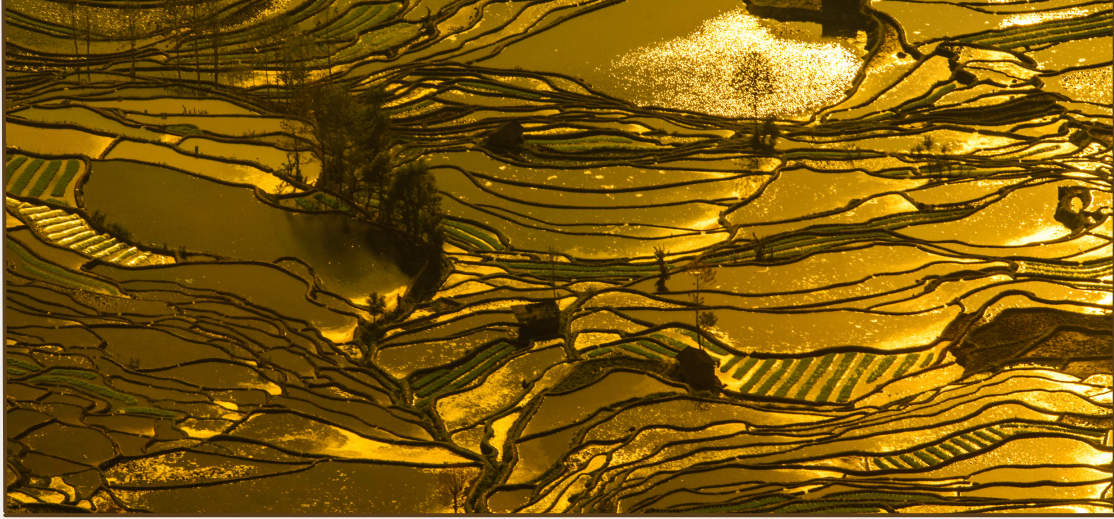
Use this space to record any new thoughts and actions inspired by your practice. It can be as simple as paying more attention to the consumption of food, deciding to cut down on the amount of food wasted, or giving up the use of plastic bags for storing produce. As Rumi says, “there are hundreds of ways to kneel and kiss the earth.” When we are inspired by our direct experience of holiness, helpful changes are easier to make.

GOALS

-
-
-

ACTIONS

-
-
-



Suggested Resources

BOOKS

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

Rooted: Life at the Crossroads of Science, Nature, and Spirit by Lyanda Lynn Haupt

Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest by Suzanne Simard

Living Landscapes: Meditations on the Five Elements in Hindu, Buddhist, and Jain Yogas by Christopher Key Chapple

ARTICLES

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

AUDIO

[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.

Secret Life Underground (HBO max series)

Find out what goes on in the subterranean world of our planet Earth.

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

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