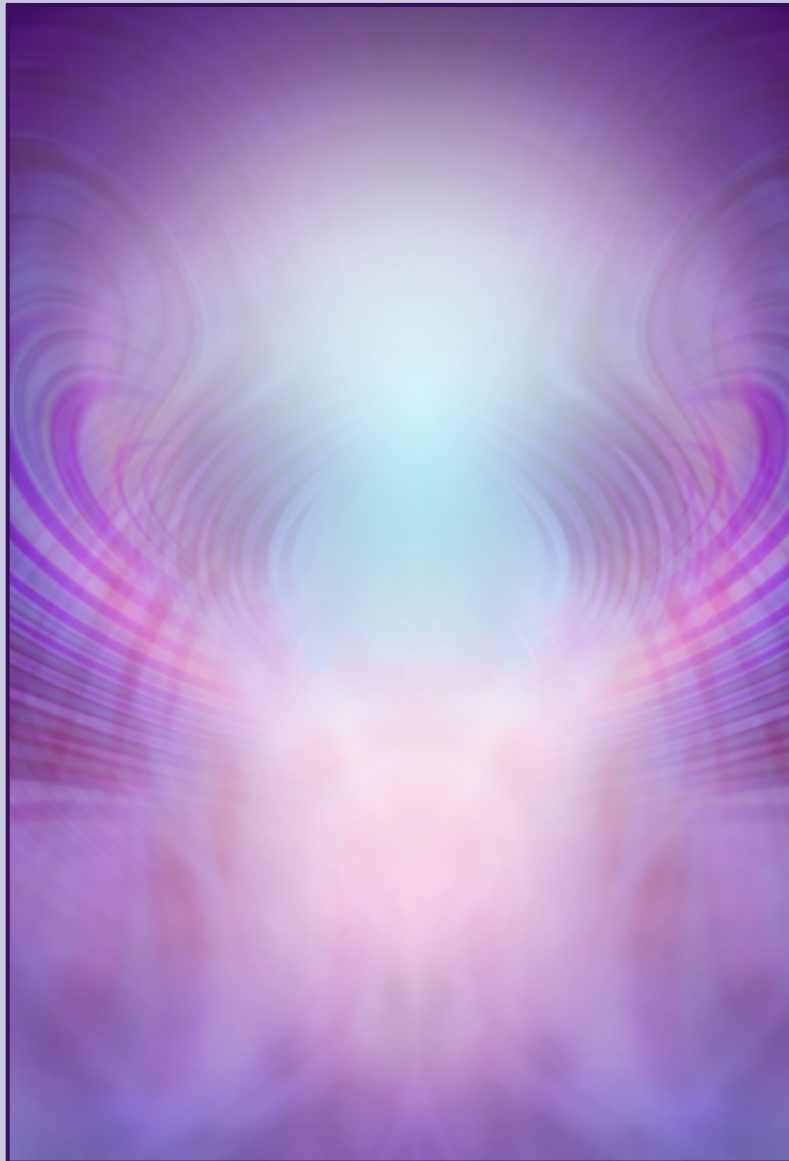


ORIGINAL INTIMACY: SOUL PILGRIMAGE
TO FIVE AUSPICIOUS HEALING SHRINES

RESOURCES AND PRACTICES

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Space

DISCOVER UNBOUNDED DELIGHT—
THE FREEDOM OF WHOLENESS

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

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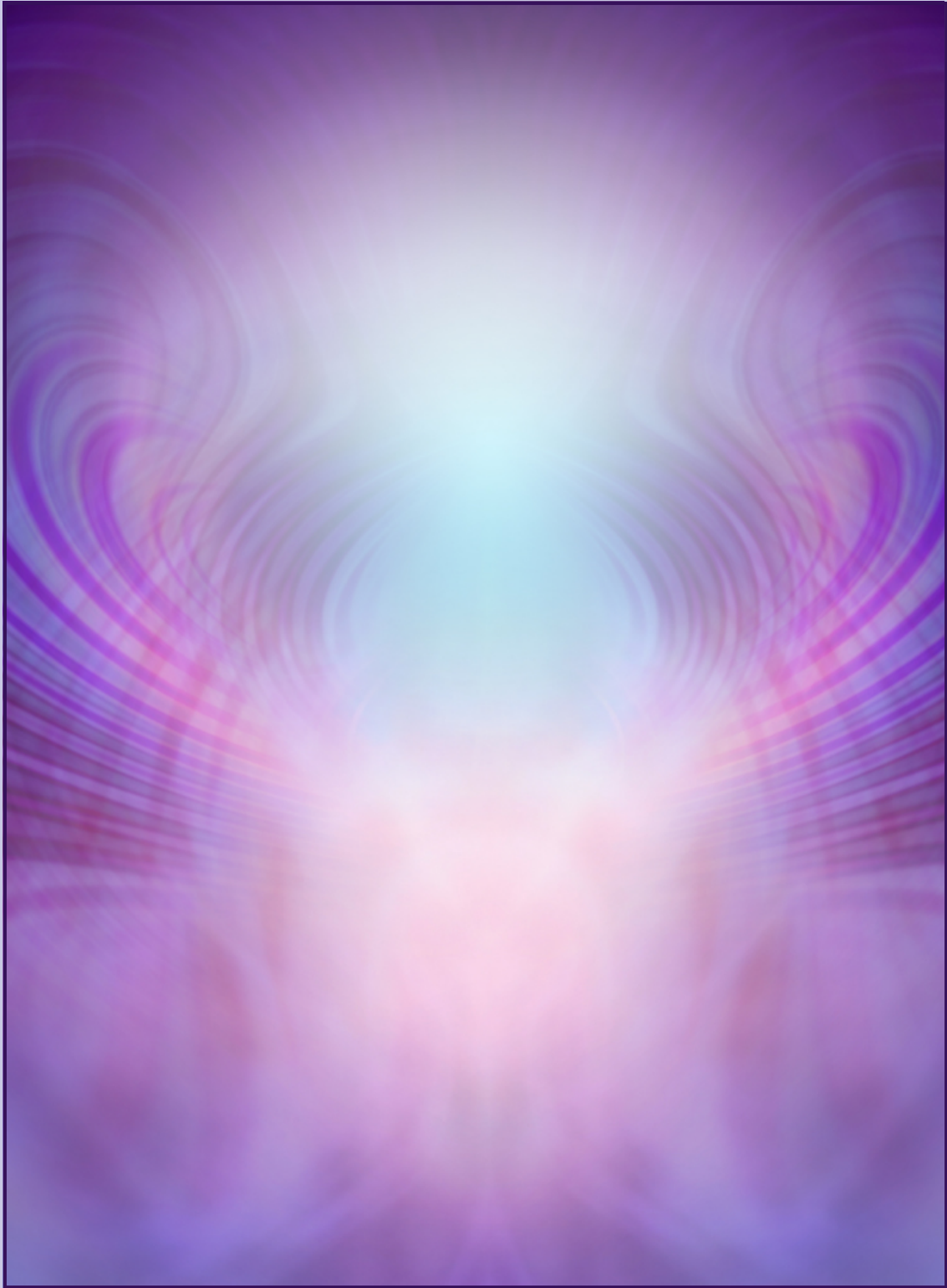
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Space Element

COLOR

Clear

SHAPE

Circle

SENSE

Hearing

SOUND

Bija Mantra: HAM

The space element (akasha in Sanskrit) is the most subtle of the five. Space gives rise to the other elements—air, fire, water, and earth. It is space that makes everything possible. All things arise in it and return to it. We can think of space as expressing in three different but interconnected ways: the infinite, unbounded space of Spirit; the space of individual consciousness defined within the endless field of Spirit; and physical space — which we perceive in our bodies and environment. The main attribute of space is its all-pervasiveness and freedom from obstruction.



Contemplation Rituals

SPACE



Within a circle of one meter
 You sit, pray, and sing
 Withing a shelter ten meters large
 You sleep well, rain sounds a lullaby.
 Withing a field a hundred meters large
 Raise rice and goats.
 Within a valley a thousand meters large
 Gather firewood, water, wild vegetables,
 and Amanitas.
 Within a forest ten kilometers large
 Play with racoons, hawks, poison snakes
 and butterflies.
 Mountainous country Shinano
 A hundred kilometers large
 Where someone lives leisurely, they say.
 Within a circle ten thousand kilometers large
 Go to see the southern coral reef in summer
 Or winter drifting ices in the sea of Okhotsk.
 Within a circle ten thousand kilometers large
 Walking somewhere on the earth.

Within a circle a hundred thousand
 kilometers large
 Swimming in the sea of shooting stars
 Within a circle a million kilometers large
 Upon the spaced-out yellow
 mustard blossoms
 The moon in the east, the sun west.
 Within a circle ten billion kilometers large
 Pop far out of the solar system mandala.
 Within a circle
 ten thousand light-years large
 The Galaxy full blooming in spring.
 Within a circle one billion light-years large
 Andromeda is melting away into snowing
 cherry flowers.
 Now within a circle
 ten billion light-years large
 All thoughts of time, space are burnt away
 There again you sit, pray and sing
 You sit, pray and sing. —Nanao Sakaki [1]

[1] Nanao Sakaki, in *Earth Prayers from Around the World: 365 Prayers, Poems, and Invocations for Honoring the Earth*, Elizabeth Roberts, Elias Amidon, Ed. (HarperSanFrancisco:1991) 390-91

Space Element Rituals

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

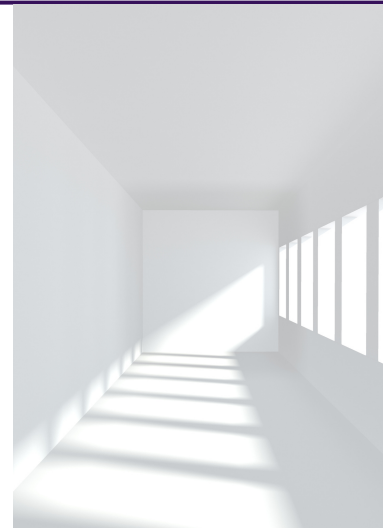
A common practice in many meditation traditions for experiencing the space element of nature and its connection to the infinite spaciousness of consciousness is to view, contemplate, and meditate on the vastness of the sky. Sit outdoors in a comfortable spot (or indoors by a window if outdoors is not possible). Adjust your posture so your spine is straight and you feel connected to the earth, either sitting on the ground or touching it with your feet. Relax. Look at the space around you and notice its boundaries—fences, walls, greenery, buildings. Turn your gaze upward to the sky and notice its boundlessness. Contemplate its expansive nature of absolute openness. If you see clouds or planes, reflect on how they travel through space.

Consider your thought activity as “clouds” in the sky of your mind. As you look at the sky, see if you can feel that infinite space beyond you and within you. Close your eyes and feel that your inhaling breath moves in the space within your body and mind, and your exhaling breath moves beyond. When you are ready, open your eyes again and notice the space around you and your connection to the place you occupy on the earth.

Be aware of the connection between the space element and its organs of perception and action—the ability to hear and the capacity to speak. Anytime we listen or hear, the space element is making it possible. The same is true for speech and sound. Consider that it is the space between the notes that makes music possible.

We hammer wood for a house, but it is the inner space that makes it livable.

—Lao-Tzu



MUDRA

Space Gesture (Akasha Mudra)

MEANING

In Sanskrit, Akasha means Space/Ether, and Mudra means "seal" or "gesture."

BENEFITS*

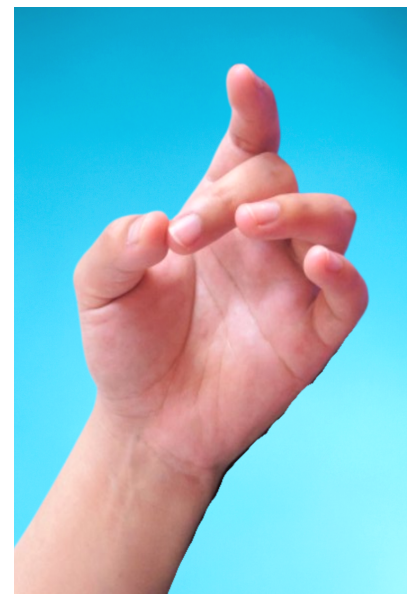
This mudra is used to increase the healing space within the human body and enhance intuitive powers and alertness. It aids with stilling the mind during meditation. With this mudra, we become aware of uniting the inner space (individual consciousness) with the universal space (cosmic consciousness).

INSTRUCTIONS

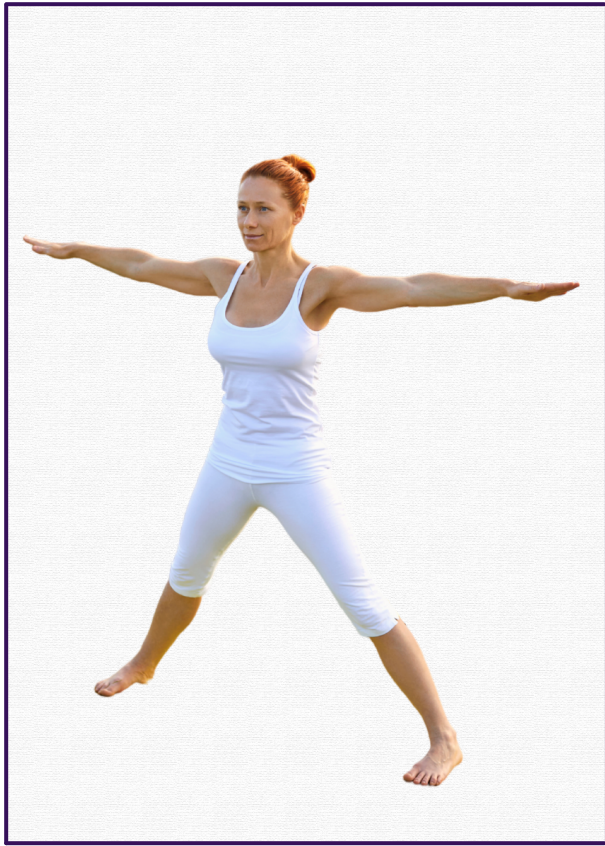
Bring together the tips of the thumbs and the tips of the middle fingers. Let them touch slightly, without pressing too hard. Extend and keep all your other fingers as straight as possible. Rest the backs of the hands on the thighs or knees. Relax the shoulders back and down, with the spine naturally aligned.

PRACTICE

Comfortably hold the position and notice its influence on your body and mind. Practice for a few minutes a day. You can practice this mudra while standing in Mountain Pose (Tadasana), otherwise while sitting down. For even better results, practice Akasha Mudra with meditation.



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



ASANA

Five-Pointed Star (Utthita Tadasana)

This pose lengthens, opens, and energizes the whole body. Its open stance feels expansive, which allows us to experience our innate joy. While practicing this pose, you can feel your energy expand beyond your physical dimension through the furthest extension points (fingers, feet, the crown of the head, and down through the tailbone).

PRACTICE

- Stand in Mountain Pose (Tadasana)—your feet together, arms at your side, palms facing forward.
- With an exhale, step your feet 3 to 4 feet apart, keeping them parallel to one another. Press outer edges of feet into the floor.
- Drop your tailbone down toward the floor, lengthening your lower back.
- With an inhale, lift your arms up and out to the side, bringing them to shoulder height. Keep shoulders relaxed down. Resist squeezing shoulder blades together. Face your palms down and spread your fingers wide. Reach your fingertips away from you.
- On the next inhale, extend awareness and energy through the crown of the head. Look straight ahead with the chin parallel to the floor. Exhale slowly.
- Inhale deeply into the belly and chest. While exhaling, bring awareness into the feet, fingers, and crown, feeling your body expanding in 5 directions.
- Hold the pose and take slow, deep 5 to 10 breaths.
- To come out of the pose, bend one knee and step back into Mountain Pose (Tadasana).

VARIATIONS: For increased stability, begin by standing with your feet hip-distance apart. If you cannot bring your arms to shoulder height, place the hands on the hips.

Journal

SPACE

Contemplate and write about space element experiences that have been formative or especially impactful for you, both in your childhood and adult life. What has the element of space revealed to you? How has space (either physical, mental-emotional, or spiritual) influenced your ability to listen, hear, and express yourself?

A lingering memory for me that features the space element is how as a child, my young cousins and I would create a space for ourselves at the large family gatherings by meeting under the dining table. Shielded from the world of adults in our secret abode draped by long tablecloths on every side, we felt ourselves to be in a secret society that gave us a sense of agency and camaraderie. I also remember being drawn to any private space where I could simply sit and breathe, think, and dream. Perhaps it was a soul memory or intimation of the draw to meditation that would later play a central role in my life, providing me with the spiritual space I needed to realize my essential Self.

Notice your relationship to space this month. How do you experience it in your physical environment? How much “personal space” do you feel you need? What is it like for you to “create space” for yourself? The daily practice of meditation is the primary skill for cultivating a spacious mind and heart by moving our attention beyond identification with the confined sense of self and experiencing our essential Self as boundless, infinite, and all-pervading.



Karma Yoga Practice

SPACE

As we recognize the sacred nature of space, we are naturally inclined to respect it and be in the right relationship with it. The space element provides the necessary container for everything to arise and thus allows us to dream dreams of possibilities. Too much focus on space element, always considering what is possible without the grounding influence of earth, and the ability to bring forth what is needed can lead us to waste time, procrastinate, or be out of touch with what is right before us. What is required to be in the right relationship with space?

Use this page to record any new thoughts and actions inspired by your practice. Awareness of space can help us clear our restless thoughts, reduce anxiety, and calm our emotions. It can give us a taste of witness consciousness and our ability to be unbiased observers of what we see and hear. When we are free of clinging to our reactions, desires, or aversions, we have created a space for clear discernment to arise.

One of the crucial insights about “spaceship earth,” as Buckminster Fuller aptly named our home, is that it is a shared space for nearly 8 billion humans and countless other forms of life today. How do we live as earth citizens and care for the sacred space that makes life possible?

GOALS

-
-
-

ACTIONS

-
-
-



Suggested Resources

BOOKS

Spiritual Ecology: The Cry of the Earth (Second Edition), Ed. Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee

Sacred Earth Sacred Soul: Celtic Wisdom for Reawakening to What our Souls Know and Healing the World, John Philip Newell

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

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

ARTICLES

www.Worlometers.info - Interesting graphs and present time views of the world population

Nature Connection Guide: US Doctors are Prescribing Nature

<https://natureconnectionguide.com/us-doctors-are-prescribing-nature-in-34-states/>

[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

<https://www.npr.org/2021/03/29/982259545/the-amazing-lives-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.

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