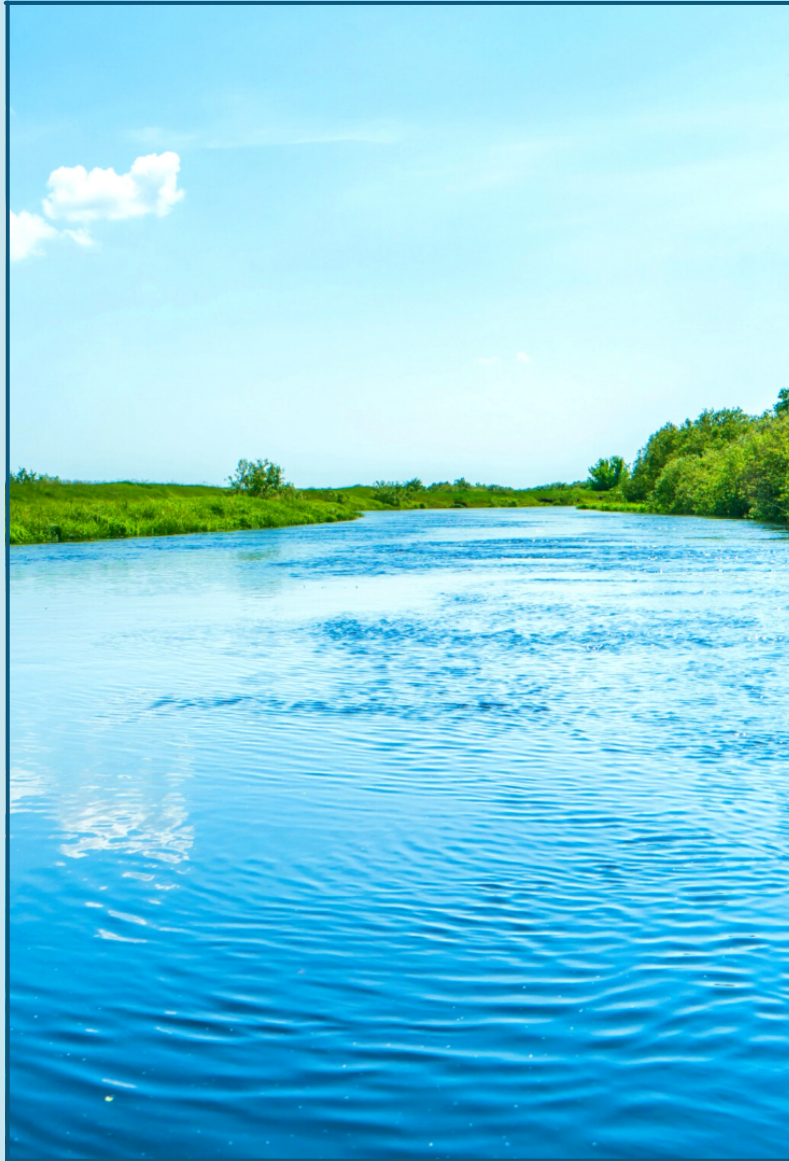


ORIGINAL INTIMACY: SOUL PILGRIMAGE
TO FIVE AUSPICIOUS HEALING SHRINES

RESOURCES AND PRACTICES

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Water

THE SUPREME GOOD IS LIKE WATER

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

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Water Element

COLOR

White

SHAPE

Crescent Moon

SENSE

Taste

SOUND

Bija Mantra: VAM

Water has less density than earth, but more solidity than fire. According to the Samkhya philosophical system, water makes possible our sense of taste and is associated with the tongue as its organ of perception. Think of how important saliva is to our ability to taste! Science tells us that our bodies are up to 60% water—with the brain and heart comprised of 73% water, lungs 83%, skin 64%, muscles and kidneys 79%, and our bones 31%. (U.S. Geological Survey). Water's organ of action is our genitals, connected to our capacity to reproduce. We usually experience bodies of water—creeks, rivers, lakes, and oceans—as healing or inspiring. Water has the capacity to move and change, taking on many different forms like rain, snow, ice, ocean, stream, or mist, as well as the ability to nurture and support life.



Contemplation Rituals

WATER



Water flows from high in the mountains.
Water runs deep in the Earth.
Miraculously, water comes to us,
and sustains life.

Water flows over these hands.
May I use them skillfully
to preserve our precious planet.

—Thich Nhat Hanh
Buddhist monk, author, poet, teacher

Water Element Rituals

These rituals are ways to facilitate greater awareness and intimacy with the water element, to realize its presence both within and around us. No longer experienced as some “thing” outside of us, the water element becomes a living reality. Along with recognizing the water element in the environment, your body, reflect on the qualities you associate with water—such as yielding, powerful, flowing, soothing, or reflective.

If you can, visit a body of water in nature near your home and bring a small amount of that water home with you. Put it in a glass jar or dish so it will be visible and place it on your meditation altar. Each day take time to gaze on this offering of water, simply being present with it.

You can also offer the water to the divine as a prayer, lifting the container to your heart, giving thanks for water, extending it outward, back to your heart center, then placing it back on your altar. An alternative or additional daily ritual is to offer water to plants either indoors or out. Observe, imagine, or intuit the life force present in the water element. Give thanks for how you are supported by water.

Look for water in your surroundings—in beverages, food, products you use, dew in the mornings, clouds in the sky, puddles on the ground. Notice everything you can that contains water element. If possible, go out into a natural environment and set your “radar” for water element. Open to it and experience it. What does that experience bring to your body, mind, and soul?

Reflect on the connection between water element and your physical body with its organs of perception and action—the ability to taste a variety of flavors, as well as the ability to reproduce. Notice the presence of water in your body—your saliva, tears, and all bodily fluids.

Include water element contemplation with your daily life events and meditation practice. Learn about the water in your surroundings. What is the source of the water that flows from your tap? Once you know that, envision that place whenever you turn on the water. Give thanks for it. Notice all the things in your day that involve water. It’s amazing!

I am the taste of water.
—Bhagavad Gita



MUDRA

Water Gesture (Jala Mudra)

MEANING

In Sanskrit, *Jala* means Water and *Mudra* means "seal" or "gesture."

BENEFITS*

Invokes the element of water and all the qualities associated with it, such as fluidity, clarity, ease, movement, and adaptability in both the mind and body.

INSTRUCTIONS

Touch the tips of the thumbs to the tips of the little fingers of the same hand and extend the other three fingers straight out. Rest the backs of the hands on the thighs or knees. 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 ease tension and invite a sense of flow in both body and mind. Envision water element enhancing lubrication of joints as well as supporting the body's systems for reproduction and elimination.



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



ASANA

Half-Moon Pose (Ardha Chandrasana)

This is a graceful, balanced pose that mirrors the image of the half-moon in the sky and awakens energy on opposing sides of the physical body. The pose improves balance, particularly through the legs and feet. It improves concentration and supports the flow of circulation.

PRACTICE

- Stand in Mountain Pose (Tadasana)—your feet together, arms at your side, palms facing forward.
- Close your eyes and draw the focus inwards. Pause for a moment, perhaps reflecting on what the moon means to you and to the earth.
- On an inhalation, circle your hands out to the side and up. interlace the fingers while pointing both index fingers and stretch tall.
- As you exhale, bend to your left, extending long through the right side, all the way from the outer right foot to the tips of the index fingers.
- Stretch your body upward just as much as to the side; don't bend so far to the side that your breathing is inhibited.
- Keep your lower belly drawing in and up to protect your lower back.
- To exit, inhale, stretch and return to the upright stance, then exhale as you circle your hands back to Mountain Pose (Tadasana).
- Pause, then repeat on the other side.

VARIATIONS: If unable to bring your hands directly overhead without arching your spine, then bend your elbows more, separate your hands, or simply join palms at the heart. Alternatively, place your left hand on the hip or on the thigh, so that only the right arm is overhead, palm facing forward.

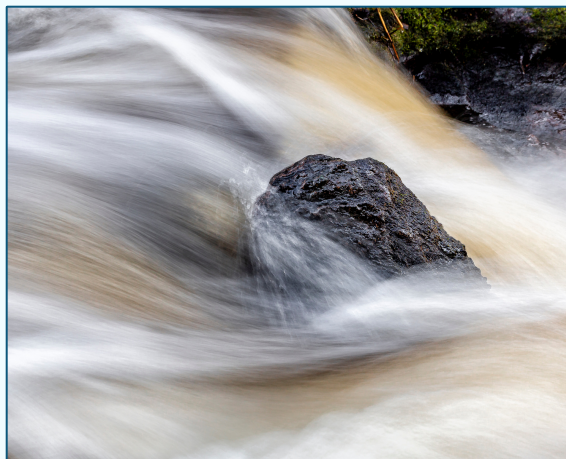
Journal

WATER

Writing your thoughts about water without editing them can support the experience of flow. Make it easy and enjoyable. Start by reflecting on your childhood experiences of water 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 grandmother lived in a little cottage nestled in the redwood forest in Northern California. I would spend weeks there with her during summer vacation. A short walk down the road from her cottage was a shallow creek that meandered through the woods. I was drawn to the adventure of the creek—its damp smell, the trickling music of its lilted flow across the rocks, the shades of green and brown that populated it, the squishy bottom and slippery rocks, and yes, the frogs! It was a magic place for me where the flow of the creek pulled my sense of curiosity and adventure further and further into unknown places. This was my introduction to flow and the living presence of water.

In addition to writing about childhood encounters with the water element (and ideally with its associated sense of taste), use your journal to record current experiences during this monthlong contemplation. I often think of the inspired teaching from the Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh who said that whenever we see a sheet of paper, we should also see the clouds that made it possible. He used that teaching to explain how everything is interrelated—the paper, clouds, rain, trees, sun, and yes, us. Without the trees, no paper. Without the sun, no trees. Without trees and plants, we cannot survive. Let your insight into the pervasive presence of water take you to that awareness of what he called “interbeing”—everyone and everything connected.



Element Insights and Experiences

WATER

How did I experience water element as a child? What did that encounter reveal to me? Does that memory have significance for me now?

What are some of the ways I am aware of the water element within and around me?

When I consider the qualities associated with water such as flow, ability to nurture life, persistence, fluidity, or adaptability, does it seem that I am in a balanced relationship with this element? Does it appear either in over or under abundance? How might connecting with water element in nature help me to be more balanced?

Karma Yoga Practice

WATER

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

Use this space to record any new thoughts and actions inspired by your practice. It can begin with mindful awareness of water use. When we are aware of the gift and value of water, we do not waste it. We only use what we need. Simple practices like turning off the tap when we are washing our hands at the sink or showering then turning it back on when it is time to rinse, are transformed into sadhana—spiritual practice that expands our awareness.

GOALS

-
-
-

ACTIONS

-
-
-



Suggested Resources

BOOKS

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

The Water in You: Water and the Human Body, US Geological Survey website:
www.usgs.gov/special-topics/water-science-school/science/water-you-water-and-human-body

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

VIDEO

Small Things Considered: How Phytoplankton Make Life Possible
www.youtube.com/watch?v=9zLZc21R0U8

The Global Food Waste Crisis and The Danish Solution
www.youtube.com/watch?v=e7HwD5Go3io

My Octopus Teacher

Academy Award-winning 2020 Netflix Original documentary film directed by Pippa Ehrlich and James Reed. Documents filmmaker Craig Foster's relationship with a wild common octopus in kelp forest.

Journey of the Universe

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

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