



## ELEMENTAL WISDOM

Earth, air, fire, water... if I say these words to you, there's a good chance that they'll evoke a whole range of feelings and associations. Some will be personal – the fun of splashing in the sea on a childhood holiday, the pain of a burnt finger. Others, however, will be deeper, primal, archetypal, shared with many people throughout the world and throughout time. These ancient archetypal qualities of the Elements can provide us with a key to becoming whole and balanced human beings.

The four primal Elements surround us every day of our lives and are essential to our very existence. Earth makes up the physical substance of our bodies and provides us with food and shelter. We rely on the fire of the sun for warmth and light, and we can live for only brief minutes without air to breathe. We are composed of around 70% water; it surrounds us in the womb and covers the surface of our planet. Our forebears recognised and appreciated these great natural forces, personifying them as gods and goddesses and seeking to appease them in order to ensure the survival of the race.

Over time, each Element has gathered to itself a set of archetypal attributes that still exist for us today. In the past they gave rise to the notion of the four “humours” described in early science and philosophy. Eastern Ayurvedic medicine is based around the concept of “doshas”, constitutional types derived from combinations of the Elements. More recently, Carl Jung drew on the characteristics of Earth, Air, Fire and Water to develop his theory of personality types. And time and time again, when I ask workshop participants to share their thoughts and feelings about the Elements, similar themes emerge:

**Air** is frequently associated with lightness, freshness, change, movement and the process of “rising above” things to see the whole picture in an objective way. Traditionally, Air represents the mentality and the ability to generate new ideas – to “inspire” is, literally, to breathe in. Air is the medium through which we communicate, through which thoughts are conveyed either electronically or via the human voice. We even talk about “airing our views”!

**Fire** is seen as the Element of energy, power, will and motivation. It is a strong driving force, the passion that ignites us. Fire catalyses creativity and transforms substance. Mineral ore, when heated, turns into molten metal, a glutinous mass of raw ingredients becomes a cake. The Phoenix reborn from its own ashes is a powerful symbol of the regenerative qualities of Fire.

**Water** is a mysterious element, tangible yet transparent. In myth, it is a gateway to other worlds, other dimensions, that which lies below the surface, the unconscious. It also represents the emotions as they ebb and flow, ever-changing. Think about phrases like “still waters run deep” and “going with the flow”. Water was the earliest mirror, too – and we all need time for reflection.

**Earth** carries a sense of security, solidity, weight and substance. We talk about “putting down roots” and being “grounded”. Earth is the most tangible of the elements, associated with manifestation, with making real. It reminds us of our origins, our connection to the other life forms that inhabit our planet. We come “down to earth” when we remember what is real and true, and our link to Earth is through our five senses.

There is also a mysterious “fifth element”, sometimes known as **Ether** or **Spirit**. It represents Potential, the silent Void or Abyss from which the other four Elements are said to come. In our own lives it speaks of a need to return to a place of stillness from time to time in order to rest, replenish our energies, and reconnect with what is truly important to us.

In exploring the Elements we regain a sense of connectedness to the natural world which is deeply therapeutic but so often missing in our high pressure, high tech environment. We can learn to recognise which elemental qualities we need at any particular time, and to ensure that the balance is right between them so that we don't become “bogged down”, “burned out”, “washed out” or “blown apart”! We can also be aware of our own preferred elemental “type” and how we interact with others. My workshops, and the CD “Journey through the Elements”, are designed to help this process. They are based around the Elemental Wheel or cycle, found in many traditions; a powerful tool for assessing where we are in our lives and work, and the changes we may need to make in order to fulfil our true potential.

What can you do to deepen your relationship with the Elements? First of all, simply notice where they occur in the world around you and in your own life. Note also whether you are drawn to a specific Element – what might this say about your nature, or about this particular point in your life? Record what each Element means for you, in words, pictures, sculpture, sound, movement – the Elements can be a great source of creative inspiration. Recognise and appreciate the presence of these primal forces and you will greatly enhance your life balance and well-being.