

# **The Four Elements**

## Their Relation to Mankind



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# Introduction

Pictures and symbols continue to be the universal language of man and some would say also a language of the spirit. The nature of it is that a person in Outer Mongolia and a person in New York can have the ability to understand pictures and symbols of the same kind, even though both speak different languages.

There are two types of symbols the author is aware of:

- Man-created symbols –for example written languages, letters and forms.
- Nature's symbols- the ordering of the natural universe.

The author will be concentrating on the second one, the universal symbols of nature. In

particular the symbols of earth, water, air and fire.

Just as there is an alphabet for writing, so is there is one for nature. To read the book of nature is an Earthly challenge. Once you understood one thing you look to another and see how it relates with the first. How does earth, water, air and fire relate to the world and to each other? That is the question explored in the booklet.

The author will explain, as best he can, why he gives certain elements certain meanings.

An attempt has been made to be as logical and as objective as possible in this booklet. This booklet is largely based on Aristotle's four elements, which is a splitting of a polarity into four: the heavy earth and water, and the light air and fire.

The knowledge in this booklet is based on the work of many great thinkers ~ it is an ancient

idea, but the idea must be renewed constantly to keep it mobile with the times.

One quote of Johann Wolfgang Von Goethe's speaks of the basic rule, which this booklet is built upon:

“Alles verganliche ist nur ein gleichnis ”(1)

Roughly translated this means:

“Everything transient is a symbol”

# 1. The physical human body or Earth

The physical body of a person has a polarity. If we look at the whole body as it goes about its daily life, we see stillness near the head and movement in the limbs. The brain lies cushioned in the cerebrospinal fluid while the feet and hands are in continual movement during the actions of daily life. The head being the more conscious, the limbs being less conscious – a knock on the head can leave someone unconscious yet this is less likely with a foot injury.

Of the physical body, the head would be considered to be the most physical. It is hard like a rock, think of the lifeless skull. The head lies on top of the body with little movement. However on the other hand, there is something living in it that is so alien to physical observation – thought.

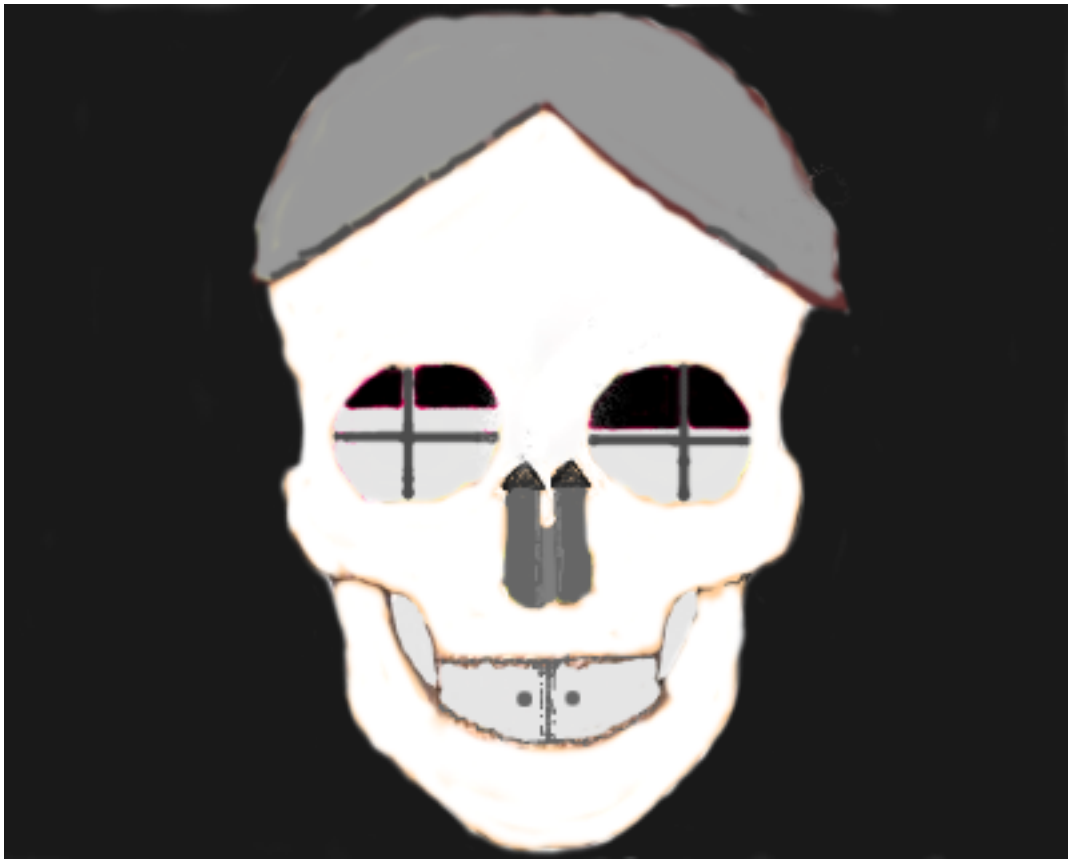


Figure 1: The temple of the body

The thought occurring in the brain however cannot be linked to the physical body. Scientists cannot see the thoughts, they can only see the nerve activity ~ the physical representation of thought occurring parallel to thought activity.

The physical body of man has a symbol in the mineral world ~ what is left discarded after death when the life processes and the consciousness has left. Our skeleton betrays the mineral in us most clearly ~ in stillness it lays in our grave and all growth stops.

Therefore in things most dead we should seek the physical ~ in the still Earth element. The Moon with its lifeless terrain void of plants, animals and humans reflects this physical side well.

There is another spiritual law that will be considered, that man is made in the image of God. This implies that 'the All' or God can be



found in man. That man would be a small representation of the universe. The dead matter in the universe being connected to the dead matter of the human body.

If the rocks and the earth are nature's dead matter, the buildings we build are humans dead matter. Just as humans live in their physical body so do people live within their constructed buildings.

The house can be viewed as a skull, a symbol of death, the door as a mouth for coming in and out, the windows as eyes. There is the old saying: "Our body is our temple".

The Earth element provides the foundation for earthly life. Its stability and stillness give us ground to stand on; however it is very isolated and it hardly ever mixes with the other rocks, very different to the continuously intermingling

water, air and fire. Therefore, we can say that Earth is an isolated, almost lonely element.

All four of the Aristotelian elements are found in the physical Earthly realm. Earth, Water and Air can be found in the different states of solids, liquids and gases, while Fire is found in warmth, which is invisible to the physical eye.

## 2. That which lives and grows

What is it that causes our body to live and grow, to transform, to prevent decay, to create the possibility of reproduction? Why can't a stone grow and reproduce itself like a plant from a seed?

A cynical person, who considers man an advanced biological machine, might answer that a stone does not have the biological mechanisms to perform these functions. This kind of person is one who does not want to move beyond the physical realm. Unfortunately the author can't point out the realm of life for him to see with his physical eyes ~ the closest he could possibly come to that is Kirlian photography, but he would likely argue that it is just a physical radiation.

To such a man as this, the author would have to argue not using physical observation, but logic, a skill which the physically obsessed skeptic distrusts. You can't observe mathematical logic under a microscope, but one plus one equals two. Thinking is also able to obtain the truth, this must be admitted. Observation is an important tool in the search for knowledge, however not all forces can be seen with the physical eyes. That does not mean we must dismiss those forces as fiction just because we can't obtain observational proof. We haven't dismissed the theory of gravity – gravity can't be seen with your physical eyes, only its effects.

Here is a question, the author would ask the physically obsessed: “If humans are advanced biological machines, murdering a human would be similar to breaking a window – they are both physical objects?” Morality would just be an electrical impulse in the brain – world wars would be a natural result as human life and

morality could not be highly valued. The physically obsessed would answer that morality has no real existence, but when his family gets murdered the injustice feels so real to him. The observation of the emotion of injustice arises in his soul ~ just as the study of the nerves is an observation. Both observations have equal validity, do they not? Why should the observation of injustice and the observation of nerves be treated differently?

To go further in the booklet we must step beyond what is visible to the ordinary person.

The element Water symbolizes the life body in humans; it is what we have in common with plants. The life body lies between the physical and the animal connected realm of the soul. It is connected with warmth, light, chemical processes and life itself. All these processes cannot be seen with the physical eye ~ light cannot be seen, only its reflection. What governs

the chemical reactions in the body? Why do certain substances react with others in specific ways? This understanding must be looked for in the Water element, the universal chemical solvent.

‘Where there is water, there must be life’ is a common idea, especially when people are lost in a desert. Plants need water to live and grow and chemical processes occur in the plant ~ one of the major processes is called photosynthesis. When we cut a rock it doesn’t heal itself; when we cut a plant it often regenerates and heals itself. Life is concerned with time more strongly than dead matter ~ it harmonizes with the seasons. One may watch as trees metamorphose and grow with the seasons.

The physical reflection of the Water (Life) element in the human body is the lymphatic and glandular systems. The lymphatic system being largely water fights illness through the white

blood cells and deals with waste drainage. The glandular system is connected with the chemical side, helping with growth and digestion – just as plants digest so must humans.

A strong mythological picture of the life realm is the fountain of youth.

The hermetic law, ‘as above, so below’, speaks of the physical mirror-images of the spiritual. A reflection in water and in a mirror can be compared; however water would be the reflecting surface and not the image behind the reflection.

An interesting aspect of water is its memory, as shown by Masaru Emoto in water crystals. It is shown how ideas and emotions can create different forms in the crystals (2).

### 3. Our animal aspect

What is it that distinguishes a plant from an animal? They both grow and reproduce. One of the most obvious differences is the ability of the animal to move itself according to its desires. If an animal is hungry, it goes out actively to find food for its hunger. A plant does not.

The animal shows emotions and sense activity. Plants give no external expression of emotions or soul activity, yet it is quite obvious to outer observation the expressions of joy, pain and fear of the higher animals. Animals react to external stimuli using their senses to make them aware of the outer environment. The plant lacks a nervous system which takes away the ability to have physical sensations messaged through the nerves.



This animal element can go as far as basic thought. How much control they have over their thoughts is debatable, as well as whether they are conscious that their own thoughts exist. The highly instinctual nature of the animal points to instinctual uncontrolled thoughts.

The domestication of animals is an interesting phenomenon. It shows the ability of man to control animals; this can be extended to mankind itself and the possibility of a person to control his own animal instinctual nature.

There is a possible rule for animals – ‘survival of the fittest’ or ‘natural selection’ as theorized by Charles Darwin (3). This would apply more for animals in the wild; humans have bred animals in huge numbers which by themselves have little chance of survival.

We should emphasize that this rule would only apply to animal nature. Where it is found in mankind it is an expression of his animal nature.

Often we see the greatest humans among us having little concern over the continuance of their family line or race. If we were solely determined by this principle there would be a lot more genocide and violence in the world. It would be logical to kill all others who compete with you for natural resources and to breed as fast as possible. Don't think that the lion and the hyena are good friends; they are known to kill each other over dead prey. The wildebeest and the zebra roam together to increase their chance of survival. Any social collaboration is usually because it is mutually beneficial for both groups survival.

Animal group nature is inherently selfish. It cannot be considered evil as it is a mechanism of their survival and they are not conscious of it. That is, if we accept that consciousness of thought and selfhood is a human characteristic. It is also obvious that humans struggle with this

selfish animal aspect. However humans can also transcend it through self sacrifice to others.

The connection of Air to animal nature can be understood when we consider Air's freedom from the land, as well as the animal's ability to move freely~ not being tied to the earth like plants. Water must follow the land more closely than air. It also points to animal desires that come upon them like a gust of wind.

Four archetypal animals point to the four elements themselves, as observed by Rudolf Steiner (4):

Fire:

Bees are related to warmth and fire; they keep their hive's temperature regulated to a temperature similar to the human's body.

Air:

The butterfly is a beautiful creature that moves like the wind and it is light like the air. Its capricious dancing from flower to flower shows its desire nature.

Water:

The fish is a creature that depends on water and moves in water. It is shaped for water.

Earth:

The snake lies and moves in direct contact with the earth, feeling the earth with the entire length of its body. They often live in holes in the ground.

## 4. The human

We have to be more subtle when identifying the realm of the human. Minerals, plants and animals reveal their nature externally, but not so obviously with the human. In recent times people have often fallen upon the idea that man is an advanced animal.

It must be admitted however that humans stand out quite strongly from animals in other ways, not so much in their bodies as in what they bring to the world. Only a fool would fail to see the gulf between advanced humans and the higher apes, even though genetically, on the physical level, the gap is small. It has been shown by scientists that there is a 96% similarity in DNA between humans and great apes (5). If you're looking for a major difference between humans and animals it will not be found easily on the physical genetic level. It is better to not search in

the physical at all, but to look in the abstract thinking abilities, the self awareness and self control of the two groups.

Does this make such a fundamental difference that humans must be separated from the animal kingdom? Yes it does, it sets us apart, in that morality can only be placed in the human realm - knowledge of good and evil can only come with self awareness.

The story of Adam and Eve is a fascinating one. We have them eating of the tree of knowledge of good and evil and then suddenly becoming aware of themselves and realizing they are naked.

Does a chimpanzee feel embarrassed about being naked? Well he doesn't show it and we are talking about the highest animals here, not a tadpole or a snake. We should also consider that most experiments have been done on captive chimpanzees. The chimps have had a heavy

human influence on them which affects animal behavior – yet they show hardly any self awareness.

In an article written in the New York Times (6) about monkeys and mirrors, the female Capuchin monkey looks with interest into a reflection of itself, possibly even flirts with it while the male feels uncomfortable with its own image. Because the monkey is interested in the mirror-image of its monkey form, it doesn't automatically mean it has self awareness. The author has seen dogs barking at their own mirror-image. It appears they partly recognize a dog but they also realize it's not a proper dog, possibly due to their smell and other senses. Their acceptance and interest of the mirror image does not automatically signify self awareness. The author will not rule out possible weak self awareness in chimps – as they are one of the highest forms of animals. However their self awareness appears weak – if it exists at all.

This should not lift them any where into the human realm of self awareness.

In this booklet the question is whether humans have enough differences to be categorized separately from animals. It is not the purpose to discuss evolution or creation. That is another huge discussion that can be gone into another time. The author has no where gone into the discussion of the apes relationship with man.

A human desire to walk upright is an interesting phenomenon. Some animals can walk upright but it is only for short periods. It is remarkable; it is almost as if the human wants to lift himself to greater heights, leaving down below the stooping, crawling animal nature.

The element Fire relates to the human. It is interesting that fire in the physical realm has not been declared a substance as the other three



have: solid, liquids and gases. So we stand in modern society with an exclusion of the Fire element as a recognized substance ~ this is similar to the lack of recognition of the human as a separate class to the animal. One aspect of the human is its closely regulated body temperature (element of fire) which exists within a narrow range ~ animals usually have a wider range. The normal human temperature range is roughly 36.5-37.5°C; chimpanzees range is roughly 37.5-39°C, which is a 30% greater variance (7). A cold blooded animal's temperature can vary greatly. Yet humans inhabit all and extremely diverse climates from the tropics to the Arctic/Antarctic.

When we look at the Earth we find earth below us, water on the surface and the air above us. Warmth cannot be seen it is invisible to our eyes. A fire cannot be seen - only the gases, the vapors and the solids are visible, the warmth cannot be seen. Warmth dwells in the earth, in water and in air. The ground has little temperature difference to the air, it moves from one to the other. This invisible force of warmth is like the human element, it can't be seen in its physical appearance, it is not obviously visible in the physical DNA.

Just as warmth is an invisible force so is abstract thinking - the ability to think generally. One plus one has no natural form, only man created form.  $1 + 1$  which we use to signify our invisible thought picture, is a human created symbol. What is the picture of jealousy? It is abstract idea that can have thousands of outer manifestations. That is why humans can only deal with morality. Human's ability to think

abstractly allows us to consider jealousy and how it affects our lives. If you have no idea of what jealousy is and have no real awareness of yourself how can you have self control and stop yourself being jealous? With abstract thinking you can lift yourself out of the situation, think about yourself and the situation, and based on this make a free decision. Without freedom there is no morality, no good and no evil. There is only one path, the path that is determined by outer forces and events.

It is not in our cleverness that we stand apart, for the wisdom in animal instinctual behavior and in all nature is great. Our human technology does not match the greatness in natural design. However our thinking which we can use as an external controllable tool gives us power over the lower realms of nature. It is our own to be used in greater freedom. We can think beyond our senses.

When we look at our abstract concepts – for example the laws of mathematics and the laws of reading and writing, we create concepts that reach beyond the physical, beyond the individual soul. We reach the spiritual. The animal has a soul, the human reaches into the realm of the spiritual. We all unite in ideas which are global, beyond the uniqueness of every individual soul. Humankind has a universal understanding of one plus one equals two. It can be applied in counting anything from peanuts to cats; it is universal, used by all cultures. What unites humanity is the spirit – abstract thinking is dead freely manipulated spirit. So it only has the potential to unite us. What is separating us is our different soul desires.

In the story of Moses and the burning bush, he is told 'I AM who I AM' or 'I AM that I AM' (8). The statement I AM is a declaration of self awareness. This statement of self awareness is

connected with fire in the burning bush. Fire, self awareness, the human element and the spirit are all connected.

There is the Greek legend of Prometheus who steals the secret of fire and gives it to man. What would man be without fire? It shapes our metal, gives us the possibility of technology. It truly is a great gift.

## 5. The symbolism in dreams

One thing that is full of pictures is our dreams. Although the common dream seems totally disconnected from reality, many of them have connections to our physical bodies during sleep. Also many dreams have connections to our past experiences, especially events from the previous day.

Here are a few examples of dreams the author had:

The author has a dream image of being wet and having only a few clothes on, while he stands on top of a building structure. The author is lying in bed with only a sheet, feeling very cold.

The author has a dream that the roads have flood damage, the buildings lie in ruins and the whole environment has changed. The author had

the previous day been contemplating the nature of an apocalypse and what it would be like.

The author dreams of chasing a goat around a dam. He had done this a few months prior to the dream.

However often the feeling in the dream is more accurate than the image. For example, the author dreams he has a snake crawling up and touching his leg. The previous day a Parktown prawn, a grotesque insect creature, crawled up the author's leg creating the same feeling of repulsion. However, we see how the snake has been replaced by the Parktown prawn.

Sleep has been called the smaller brother of death. Could there be dreamlike memories after death, similar to our dreams in sleep?

Awake-life has the hard contours of earth;  
dreaming has a watery nature, almost a hazy  
underwater feeling.



## 6. The shadow of technology.

Nature has been given to us as a gift. The wisdom hidden in it can barely be imagined. Wisdom lies in a bird's feather, a spider's web and a fish's scales. Their structure and ease of manufacture is ingenious.

In world polarities, nature and technology stand on opposite sides; their design and manufacture come from different sources. Yet technology copies what occurs naturally and it is the shadow of nature and of the spirit.

The influence of nature on technology can be seen quite clearly. But what of nature's design, who is the architect? Is the spirit responsible?

The spiral pattern is found everywhere in nature from our starry sky to our DNA. Plants are filled with this form. Straight lines dominate human

constructions, but let us look at the function not so much the form:

The dung beetle rolls his ball, which is a 3-dimensional wheel.

The human's elbow joint acts as a hinge.

Certain seedpods explode when ripe.

Lightning and nerve impulses both make use of electricity.

The Sun's explosions are nuclear in nature according to the scientists.

A computer has been compared to a human's brain, with short term (RAM) and long term memory. The human eye is similar in function to a camera.

Many scientists have realized that we are constantly trying to copy nature. In a TED video, one of the speakers, Robert Full, explains how they have been trying to copy things in nature such as the movement of insect legs, where they have built mechanical applications that show an inbuilt intelligence for climbing and moving with a self correcting balancing movement.

Rudolf Hauschka (9) spoke of the realm of mirror-images created by man. The natural colors, smells, oils and medicines have been imitated by man. These synthetic copies have not arrived from the chemical cycle of life but have been transformed by man using a dead chemical process. The structural material of nature ~ carbon, has been manipulated into many forms ~ let us not forget our large use of plastic. Plastic and dead wood are both largely carbon just one being man made and the other natural.

The nature of dead items is that they don't wither and decay as quickly as the living. A rock keeps its form longer than a dying flower. In technology we have been mostly concerned with the Earth element, with death itself.

Bio-technology is a new interest of man; we begin to explore the Water element of life. We are unable to manufacture a metamorphosing living plant at present; however genetic engineering can influence the nature of a plant. Mankind is growing organs in laboratories (10), but they take the initial cells from nature.

Scientific work in living creatures is gaining interest. However the clever discoveries of man have lacked something which is found in nature: harmony with the rest of creation. Man's creations have been lacking in wisdom however clever and ingenious it has been. The whole environmental movement has sprung from this. How great man will appear when he can create with the same wisdom and harmony as nature.

When we look at DNA questions however remain unanswered. What is causing DNA mutation and gene change? This is both a scientific and a religious question?

So we take a fish put it in a cave and after a while it loses its eyesight (11). So was it the cave or was it the DNA that caused the change. Well the change would never have occurred had there not been a cave. However the DNA and the fish were needed before the change could occur.

I would say that DNA is not the answer to the human form by itself. When we look at all the mutations or designs that have shaped life on our planet, what is important to realize is that living creatures have been shaped by their environment as much as by their DNA. It would be ridiculous to say our legs would be shaped the same way without earth to stand on and a

certain force of gravity. So it might be more accurate to say that external forces shape us more than the seed of our DNA.

Who is responsible for the external forces and laws that shape us? Is it random chaos that creates these forces and order? Is it Divine beings? Is it a God?

If thoughts and emotions affect the very structure of water crystals is it possible that they influence gene mutation?

Many diseases are influenced by our mental and emotional states. A typical example often quoted is cancer. It is a disease that influences the genes (12). Stress effects the growth of tumors. However self control can change emotions and stress. If cancer can be influenced by our minds, can other DNA mutations be influenced by it?



## 7. The symbol of the cross

There are many symbols and understandings of the cross. It is a symbol filled with manifold meaning. One symbolic meaning will be gone into superficially.

The symbol of the cross has four arms. These four arms represent Earth, Water, Air and Fire. It is mankind's symbol. We carry these four elements within ourselves.

The four elements can be related to the four seasons:

Winter has a cold hard earthy feel to it, life lies hidden and the bare skeleton of nature shows itself.

Spring arrives with water filled shoots and life arrives from all places.



Summer comes with an expanded active movement.

Autumn arrives and the lingering warmth ripens and destroys nature so it is ready for winter.

Although the symbol of the cross represents all four elements, it has a special connection to the fourth element Fire. The cross is necessary for a certain death to occur; without autumn a rebirth in spring cannot occur.

# Conclusion

To understand the four elements can be the beginning of a great adventure. Knowledge is a worthy thing to search for. But where do we look?

If we want to understand ourselves we must look to the world. The four realms lie in nature and in us.

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