



This document is an extract from the full chapter which is available for download in the table via this [link](#) and is intended for use by participants of meetings.

Mindfulness of the elements – Seeing our connection to nature

**Recognising the fundamental materials of our raft**

**Deconstructing the body into qualities**

*“I see that this body – made of the four elements – is not really me, and I am not limited by this body” ~ Thich Nhat Hanh*

As we continue to expand our practices in the service of *Recognising* what it is to be human, we move from observing the body's parts and reality to contemplating its fundamental composition through what is traditionally called '*Mindfulness of the Elements*'. This ancient practice, the fifth lens offered within the first anchor of mindfulness, invites us to see our physical form not as a solid, separate entity, but as a dynamic interplay of primary qualities shared with the entire natural world.

Like our previous contemplation on our body's physical reality, this practice aims to reduce our unhealthy clinging and foster wisdom. It involves reflecting on our body through the lens of four primary qualities (or elements):

- ★ **Solidity**
- ★ **Fluidity**
- ★ **Temperature**
- ★ **Movement**

It's important to understand that these 'elements' are best approached as *experiential qualities* rather than literal substances matching modern chemistry.

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## Self-Reflections

Tune into your body right now. Can you sense these elemental qualities?

- ★ Where do you feel *solidity* or *firmness* (earth)? (For example, bones against chair, muscle tension, teeth)
- ★ Can you sense *fluidity* (water)? (For example, saliva in the mouth, moisture on the skin, perhaps the sense of blood flow?)
- ★ What about *temperature* (fire)? (For example, warmth of the skin, coolness of the breath, internal heat?)
- ★ Where do you notice *movement* (air/wind)? (For example, the rise and fall of breath, heartbeat, subtle vibrations, larger movements?)
- ★ Can you sense *space* within the body (For example, inside the nostrils, mouth) or the space the body occupies?
- ★ Are you aware of *consciousness* itself – the '*simple knowing*' of these other sensations?
- ★ How does seeing my body as a collection of elements change my relationship with it?
- ★ Can I observe bodily sensations with more objectivity and less reactivity?
- ★ How does it feel to consider my body as a temporary arrangement of these elements, rather than a solid 'thing'?
- ★ How does understanding my body as part of the natural world affect my actions and choices?
- ★ Can I identify the different 'elemental' qualities in my current physical experience?
- ★ How can I support the balance of elements in my body through diet, exercise, and rest?

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## Journaling Prompts

Explore the elements through writing:

- ★ **Elemental body scan:** Sit quietly and mentally scan your body, specifically looking for sensations corresponding to each of the four main elements. Journal about where you noticed each quality most clearly and what the experience was like.
- ★ **Interconnectedness:** Reflect on how the elements within your body connect to the elements outside. (For example, breathing connects internal air with external air; body temperature changes with ambient temperature; food/water from outside become body tissues). Write about this sense of connection or dependence.
- ★ **"Not mine, not I, not my self":** Choose one element (For example, the warmth in your hands). Contemplate the thought: "This warmth is just the fire element, present due to conditions. It is not mine, I am not this warmth, this warmth is not my 'self'." Write about the feelings or insights that arise from this reflection.
- ★ **Elements in daily life:** Try to consciously notice the elements during everyday activities (water in showering, earth in walking on solid ground, air in feeling the wind, fire in feeling warmth/cold). Journal about how this perspective changes your experience of simple activities.

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## Remember to Remember

Mindfulness of the Elements offers a profound shift in perspective, inviting us to Recognise our embodied existence not as a separate, solid self, but as a dynamic, impermanent, and interconnected flow of natural qualities. By contemplating the 'earth, water, fire, air, space, and consciousness elements' within and around us, we deconstruct the illusion of inherent selfhood and lessen the grip of attachment and aversion – key drivers of our addictive suffering.

The benefits of this practice include reducing our self-identification with the body, cultivating equanimity towards both pleasant and unpleasant sensations, understanding our interconnectedness, enhancing our mindfulness of sensations, reducing our materialism, improving our stress management and resilience, and fostering an appreciation for health through understanding and cultivating balance.

This practice provides invaluable 'material knowledge' for our RAFT, helping us understand the fundamental nature of the physical body we inhabit and its intimate connection with the world that it navigates. As we continue our journey, we can experiment gently with noticing these elemental qualities in our experience, allowing this perspective to foster grounding, flexibility, and wisdom. This prepares us for the final contemplation within Mindfulness of Body: facing the reality of the body's eventual aging and decay.

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