

Earth, Air, Fire, Water

The essential forces expressed in the world and in us.

❖ **Introduction**

➤ **People**

- *The title for today's talk is Earth, Air, Fire, and Water. The entire credit or blame for this presentation goes to Susan. She asked me to explain the symbol on my nametag, and put a spell on me as I answered the question. When I recovered, I was told that I volunteered to speak to the UU fellowship.*
- *I created this symbol, and it has been my spiritual guide. So, explaining it is very personal. I'm glad we've had the opportunity to socialize over the holidays because your friendship will make it easy to share with you what's most important to me.*

➤ **Purpose**

- *My purpose is to explain how this symbol represents the essential energy forces that sustain the world. It is a power that flows through the planet and through us.*

➤ **Process**

- *In only twenty minutes, I plan to share with you how and why this was created; how, in reality, I only rediscovered an organizing principle that is a constant in the symbolism of all cultures; and how we can tap into this power to help others and ourselves.*

❖ **PAST**

➤ **Space**

- *Throughout the millennia, humans have looked up at the night sky and wondered, "What's it all about?" Even today, if we hold a dime at arm's length and use the Hubble Space Telescope to look at an area of the sky no bigger than the size of President Roosevelt's eye, we will see hundreds of galaxies. And if we remember that a single galaxy can have hundreds of billions of stars and be as much as 200,000 light years across, we too will wonder. I not only wonder, I admit - I don't have a clue.*

➤ **Grade School**

- *I had less of a clue in grade school. When my grandmother died, it was sad but somehow natural. When my uncle died, it was sad and somewhat premature. But when three of my childhood friends died, I was confused. Where did life come from? Where did it go? How could the Joey I know be lying in a box, but everything I know about him disappear? Where did the laughter go? I hardly knew anything about life and I was struggling to understand death.*

➤ **Mandala**

- *So what did I know? I knew I could think. I knew I had feelings. I knew I could move my body. I also knew there were things I didn't know, but I didn't know what they were. As I thought about what it all meant, I started to draw. I drew circles for each of these capacities and smushed them together. I created this diagram. It represented who I was. It represented my capacity to think, feel and act. Over time it also represented integration, balance and wholeness. But there was always something missing. Eventually, I added a fourth dimension in the middle to represent this mystery that called to me. It was something real that I couldn't get my hands or my mind around. It was a non-sensory reality.*
- *I was too young to recognize I was creating a Mandala, which is common in the Hindu and Buddhist world. Nor did I realize that they are often dawn spontaneously in psychotherapy, as an attempt by the conscious self to recognize and integrate unconscious knowledge.*

➤ **Quest**

- *I asked for books for my twelfth birthday: *The World We Live In*, *The World's Great Religions*, and *The Epic of Man*. I must have been a strange kid. My hero was Cyranno De Berzerak, the French warrior poet. I was the toughest kid in five neighborhoods, and the one most likely to become a priest.*
- *I don't think I ever quite realized the extent of my spiritual journey until I was asked to talk with you. It's been a little like standing on the bridge of a boat and looking at the wake to find out where I was going. So, as I looked at the wake of my life, I remembered being actively involved with all the world's great religions.*
- *In the Christian Tradition, I have served as an alter boy in the Catholic mass, in Latin. I have also been to mass with the Pope, in Rome and sung in choirs in many Protestant churches. I have participated on the high alter in St. Paul's Episcopal in London. I*

have read the New Testament and translations from the Aramaic. I have also studied, the Coptic Gospels, and the Gnostic Gospels.

- *I have participated in Buddhist temples in Kyoto, Seoul and Bangkok. I have studied the Sutras, wrestled with Koans from Zen abbots and actively participate in sitting and walking meditation in Alexandria.*
- *I have read the Jewish Torah and have sung Hebrew in Synagogues.*
- *I have studied the Bhagavad Gita , chanted in Hindu ashrams and witnessed the great Barong dance in Indonesia.*
- *I have read the Quran, Rumi, and participated in worship at the Blue Mosque in Istanbul. I have witnessed the Whirling Dervishes and have researched Islam at the Islamic Center in Washington DC.*
- *I have studied the Tao Te Ching and traveled to their world headquarters in Beijing, China.*
- *I have studied Judo, Karate, Aikido, Yoga and Gurdjiff's Enneagram.*
- *I have even gone to the Hermitage in Russia to see Rembrandt's Prodigal Son, because it was the focal point of a celebrated spiritual journey.*
- *I must have been very confused or had a lot of time and money on my hands that I wasn't aware of.*

➤ **Archetype**

- *My interest became a real quest after a trip to Japan. I was walking in a temple garden in the Nara area when I felt like I couldn't move and a wave of feeling washed over me. It was almost like a gentle hand rested on my jaw and guided my attention to the roof of the ancient temple. There baked in the tiles was – my symbol (the Japanese call it the tomoye). I thought they stole my creation. But, how could they? It was standing for over a thousand years before I was born. I later discovered the same image in York, Vienna, Bruges, and Chicago. Now I was hooked. As I searched the world, I learned that I had tapped into an Archetypal concept, a universal symbol that was and is expressed in the east and the west, in the past and the present. For at least three thousand years, humans have understood the world and themselves through this principle.*

❖ PATTERN

➤ Astrology

- *In the seventh century BC, a divinatory system based on the interpretation of planetary configurations began to develop in Babylon – and has continued to this day. I bet most of you know your astrological sign. Are you a Gemini, Scorpio, Taurus, or perhaps a Leo?*
- *The Greeks advanced this approach and grouped the 12 astrological signs according to the forces driving the universe. They could see for themselves the power of the earth when it trembled during an earthquake. A tornado demonstrated the power of the air, and floods the power of water. Fire was associated with the Sun and like the other powers had positive and negative qualities. Earth, air, fire, and water are the four elements, which represent the essential energy forces in the universe. These fundamental energies were also expressed in people.*
- ***Air**, which includes the signs for Aquarius, Gemini, and Libra, corresponds to the mind and our capacity to think. Our thoughts are like the sky: clear, cloudy, dark or rushing like a tornado reflecting our rage. Air is also the medium that carries the expressions of thought as the waves of sound or as the signals from radio or television.*
- ***Water**, which includes Pisces, Cancer, and Scorpio, corresponds to our capacity to feel and the flow of our emotions. Water can also have many forms that seem to express our emotions: deep, dark, steamy, cold.*
- ***Earth**, which includes Capricorn, Taurus, and Virgo, corresponds to our capacity to act and the fact that our bodies are the vehicles of our experience. Our bodies provide a way to express us, to manifest our energies, and to experience sensation*
- ***Fire**, which includes Aries, Leo, and Sagittarius, represents the mystery. It is the reality beyond the senses. It is the source of all power. It is out of this world. While our bodies need air, water, and food from the earth to live - their cycles and existence are dependent on the sun, which has always been associated with fire.*

➤ Yoga

- *While Greeks were looking at the world through the perspective of the four elements, the Indians were looking at the same phenomena as paths to God. If we go back at least three thousand years and read India's classic epic poem the Maha-Barata, we will find the Bhagavad Gita, which some believe is India's greatest contribution to the world. It is a universal love song sung by God to his friend man. In it, the god Krishna, disguised as a charioteer, gently teaches Arjuna the secret of life. He says "In whatever way a human being shall seek Me, in that way he can find Me. The paths are many, but ultimately all come to Me."*
- *The Gita is a textbook of Yoga. It teaches that all creation is a manifestation of Brahman. Self-realization is God realization. The goal is union with the divine. The basic idea is that our spirituality grows out of our individuality. If our spiritual path is not congruent with our personality, it will not serve us. As a result, there are four spiritual paths:*
- **Karma** *Yoga is the path of action. This path focuses on service to others. It is about doing the right thing without concern for recognition or rewards. Work itself becomes a sacred ritual. Work is a sacrificial offering.*
- **Jnana** *Yoga is the path of knowledge and understanding. This path focuses on reason and discrimination. It is about increasing consciousness and self-knowledge through mental analysis*
- **Bakti** *Yoga is the path of love and devotion. This path focuses on images of the divine. Adherents are often drawn to chanting and emotional expressions of worship.*
- **Raja** *Yoga is the path of meditation. Meditation integrates and brings the physical, mental and emotional to a single still point. When the intellectual, emotional and physical are silent, we can access a non-sensory reality.*
- *So, each of us is unique. Some of us are more intellectual and others more emotional. Some of us are more physical and others more spiritual. No one quality is more important than another. The key is that the only spiritual path that will work for us is the one that honors, supports and requires from us what we have to give. While all paths are effective, every path is not effect for everyone.*

- *The Greek Earth, Air, Fire and Water and the Indian Karma, Jnana, Bakti and Raja are both describing our capacity to think, feel, act and connect to a reality that is beyond the senses.*

➤ **Witchcraft**

- *Witchcraft also draws on the natural magic associated with earth, air, fire and water.*

➤ **Tarot**

- *And the Tarot cards of the Minor Arcana fall into four suites that correspond to the four basic elements.*
- **Pentacles** correspond to the earth and the material world. The fourteen cards in this suit are about physical experience.
- **Swords** correspond to mental energies, reason, logic and judgment.
- **Wands** correspond to fire, the spark of life, energy and inspiration.
- **Cups** correspond to emotional influences, impulses, and relationships.

➤ **Psychology**

- *If astrology, yoga, tarot, and witchcraft all seem a bit esoteric, let's look at how psychologists use this same principle to understand human personality. According to Jung, the differences in human personality focus on how we take in information and how we organize and structure that information to make decisions. The popular Myers-Briggs Type Indicator is an example of this process. We take in information through a process of sensing or intuition. We make decisions through a process of thinking or feeling.*
- **Sensing** is a preference for taking in information through the five senses and noticing what is actually there.
- **Intuition** is a preference for taking in information through a "sixth sense" and noticing what might be.
- **Thinking** is a preference of organizing and structuring information to decide in a logical, objective way.
- **Feeling** is a preference for organizing and structuring information to decide in a personal, value-oriented way.

➤ **Wizard of OZ**

- *So, is it any wonder why “The Wizard of Oz” is such a popular American myth? As you will recall, Dorothy is upset because a neighbor has accused Dorothy’s pet dog Toto of biting her and demands the dog be destroyed. It is a classic heroine’s journey myth. She departs, becomes transformed and returns a more integrated and wise human being. She says, “If I ever go looking for my hearts desire again, I won’t look any further than my own back yard-because if it isn’t there, I never really lost it to begin with”.*
- *The story is a metaphor for an inward journey of personal growth. The Scarecrow, Tin Man, Lion and even Oz are all parts of herself that must be attended to before she can come home again and be effective.*
- *The **Scarecrow** wanted a brain and represents our capacity to think, and the need for understanding and truth.*
- *The **Tin Man** wanted a heart and represents our capacity to feel, and the need to follow one’ heart.*
- *The **Lion** lacked the courage to act and represents our capacity to behave in a way that supports our beliefs and desires.*
- *The **Witch** and the wizard represent her intuition. Dorothy had to go to another world “somewhere over the rainbow” and hear from Glenda “you’ve always had the power”. It is an enlightening experience where eyes are opened and the truth that has always been there is seen for the first time.*

❖ **PRACTICE**

- *Obviously humans have had a preference for looking at themselves and the world through a lens that pays attention to the head, heart, hands and holy. It’s an interesting pattern. But, what does it have to do with me, you might ask? How can you possibly use this knowledge to live a more satisfying and fulfilling life?*
- *One approach may be to recognize we are intellectual, emotional, physical and spiritual creatures. We could ask ourselves; to what degree have we developed these aspects of ourselves? What is the most dominant part of my personality? Where am I the least developed? Do I have values that might nurture my own development? For example, an intellectual value might focus on truth or clarity. An emotional value could be compassion or commitment? A physical value might express competence or*

sensuality. A spiritual value may support a practice that explores the mystery, our connection with the universe, the meaning of life or the question “who am I?”

- *Perhaps, we could be more helpful to others and ourselves by not having answers. We can tap into the primary power by using the pattern to ask questions. There are people who need our non-judgmental love and support – our children, spouses, friends, family, colleagues, and clients. We could ask essentially four questions:*
- **What’s happening? (Physical)**
 - *There are numerous questions we could ask that help the other notice what is happening inside their own skin, to other people, and between them and others. What are the facts?*
 - *What would life be like if we really paid attention to others and ourselves? What would we notice? What would we hear? What is it like to be heard?*
- **What meaning are you giving to the situation? (Spiritual)**
 - *We are not so much disturbed by things that happen, but by our opinion of things that happen? It is our own interpretation we respond to. What is another way of looking at the same situation? What are the possibilities?*
 - *How would our life change if we recognized that we create our own reality? What would we feel if we recognized that our feelings are the result of our interpretations?*
- **What do you want? (Emotional)**
 - *What do you value? How important is this? If you don’t like things as they are, what do you want? What do you need to feel fulfilled?*
 - *What would happen if we were clear or conscious about our intentions? Do we know what we want? What do we most value?*
- **What will you do? (Intellectual)**
 - *What are the logical consequences? What do you plan to do? When will you do it? What will be the outcome?*
 - *What would happen if instead of complaining we did something?*

❖ CONCLUSION

➤ Clueless

- *So what have I learned from all this seeking and searching? I started this process being clueless about the meaning of life. The bad news is that I still don't have a clue.*

➤ Secret of Life

- *The good news is that I've learned the secret of life. The problem is the solution. The secret of life is to live it – each moment of it. When I go through life clueless, I'm open to life. I'm curious instead of critical. And this silly symbol and the meaning behind it help me stay curious. I keep asking myself "What's happening?" "What meaning am I giving to this?" "What do I want?" "What will I do?" Each moment is new. Every day is a new day. Every hug is the first one. My wife is still my bride.*
- *The prayers in my life record my journey. As a child I used to say, "Help me to know, love and serve you?" By mid life I was so filled with joy, I would only say "Thank you." Finally, I could say nothing. If I said anything, it put me here and God someplace else. And that was not my experience.*

➤ Tiger/ Bear/ Raspberry

- *My daughter Lori painted me a picture that captures the essence of what I have learned. The picture shows a man who has just escaped from a tiger by jumping off a cliff. On the way down, he grabbed a branch of a raspberry bush, avoiding the bear waiting at the bottom. Both animals are trying to reach him with their claws, but he is not paying attention to them. He has a big grin on his face as he slowly enjoys the only raspberry on the bush.*
- *He is not concerned with the past, represented by the tiger. And he is not concerned with the future, represented by the bear. He is absorbed in the present, the eternal now. As my mom used to say, "Yesterday is a canceled check. Tomorrow is a promissory note. Only today is cash."*
- *Suffering is a substitute for real pain. Suffering is the result of wanting things to be different than they are.*
- *Everyday is a great day.*

