

FIRE, WATER, WIND & STONE

by Serge Kahili King

For a very long time, in many places, the four elements of Fire, Water, Wind and Stone have been considered as forming the basic structure of Nature and life itself, in both natural and esoteric ways.

My interpretation is somewhat different. I see them as representing the four basic elements of health.

FIRE

Fire is active. In terms of health, it represents activity, a necessary characteristic of health and healing. Animals, which includes humans, are “designed” to need activity in order to stay alive. In a healthy human being, activity is constant. Externally, the skin, the eyes (when open), the nose, the ears, and sometimes the mouth, are constantly interacting actively with the environment. Internally, the organs are actively doing what they are supposed to do, the blood is constantly going where it is supposed to go, the muscles are moving what has to be moved... in short, activity is essential to health. When the fire in a person—or in a part of a person—is too low, problems can occur that may lead to illness, and if the fire goes out, life ends for that person in that body. Actually, it seems like the fire will eventually go out for every person, but not at the same time or in the same way. If the fire is too high in a person, however, problems can occur that may lead to illness that results in the fire going out just the same. Fire is vital, but it needs to be managed, by the individual in terms of activity, and with the help of external resources like food and, when necessary, physical intervention.

WATER

Water is fluid. Not just *a* fluid, but fluid by nature. Even the most still water is in constant motion, which means that even water needs fire. Curiously, in the external world water is used to put out fires, but in the inner world of the individual, water is necessary to keep the individual’s fire going. It’s something like the grease in a machine that needs a way to keep all its parts operating smoothly together. Water doesn’t create fire in the individual, but the fire will go out quickly without the water. Too little water leads to dehydration and a breakdown in parts of the body, as well as a breakdown in thinking and feeling. On the other hand, too much water does the same thing, so water intake also requires management.

WIND

Wind is air in movement. Almost every living creature on Earth needs air to live, even fish underwater, because air contributes to the creation of fire, externally as well as internally. It's because of the oxygen, of course. Air alone won't do it, though. The air has to be moving. It has to be, in fact, wind. Breathing is not just the taking in of air. Inhaling doesn't work without exhaling. Shallow breathing lowers the amount of oxygen a person has to stoke the inner fire. This can happen as a result of stress in the body, but it can also become a habit if one doesn't pay attention. Many physical and mental problems can occur due to shallow breathing alone. Many of them can be healed by deeper breathing. As with water and fire itself, serious conditions can result from what is called "overbreathing" or hyperventilation. Inhaling too much can cause you to expel too much carbon dioxide, which interferes with the flow of blood to the brain. At the same time, this type of breathing can lower the oxygen in your cells, which lowers your fire level, and affects your body and your mind. So breathing requires management.

STONE

How does Stone fit into this, you might ask. Stone doesn't move by itself. In some cultures, including Hawaiian, it's a metaphor for being dead. In my interpretation, however, I use Stone to represent Rest. Stones really do move, but usually very slowly. Activity is fine, but it needs a break. Not a complete break, naturally, or there wouldn't be any point, but a short break at least. Humans generally take this break in the form of sleep or inactivity (meaning very little). Think of a wave. A wave moves, but it doesn't just have a crest, it also has a trough. That's where it relaxes for a bit before rising up again. Human beings need movement to be healthy, but it has to be done in a way that allows for high activity as well as low activity. Rest is a vital part of health and healing. It helps the mind and the body to recover from "cresting" and get ready for more activity. Not surprisingly, too little rest results in breakdown, and too much rest also results in breakdown. Rest, like Fire, Water and Wind, needs management.