

REC001

Today's talk will be on the

## **The Four Elements in Buddhism\***

Presented by Anagarika Tevijjo

What we may call speculative thought/  
upon the four basic elements:

of earth, air, fire and water,

was present/ in the Eastern Vedic tradition  
from the earliest times/ of recordable memory,

and/ particularly/  
in the Buddhist traditions/  
of India,/ Tibet,/ and South East Asia,

long before/ they ever reached/  
ancient Greece  
and took their place/  
in the School/ of Pre-Socratic philosophy  
within the Western/ philosophical tradition.

\*

In early speculative thought,  
we also hear the terms:  
earth, air, fire and water  
in connection with infinite space

- infinite space becoming symbolical -

of a higher level of light and energy  
for which there is no speakable-name.

\*

Actually, in the world, today,  
a philosophy which is based

on earth, air, fire and water  
as the four basic elements of being

sounds quite silly  
and simplistic,  
**doesn't it?**

\*

But there is more to it than just that:-

The formula is/ an allegorical/ representation:  
standing for the changing states/ and cycles/  
- of all elements/ in the universe -  
dependent/ on cause and effect processes.

\*

### **The First Element,**

**Earth**, actually, symbolizes/

the **process of change**/  
with the characteristics/  
of extension/  
solidity/ or rigidity,  
in the nature of matter,

- in which  
nothing is ever in a

fixed/, rigid/ or permanent state -  
but ever in the process/ of altering/ and changing its form  
as it is forever being recycled/ within the process of universe.

**Moreover**/, without the earth- element/ of **solidity** -  
nothing could occupy **space**.

There would be no solid matter-  
only invisible/ impulses/  
of energy/ in empty space.

And this, is likely/  
**one of the ancient mysteries,**

which has been couched/  
in allegorical language.)

\*

### **The Second Element,**

**Water**, in its turn/, means  
the quality of **liquidity**  
and cohesion  
plus  
fluidity,  
malleability,  
adaptability  
or pliability.

Moreover,  
water coheres/ and flows/  
around solid objects  
and clings to them/,  
mirroring their form.

And it is this water element/ which makes/  
different particles of matter/ cohere,  
preventing them/ from being  
erratically scattered about.

Both fluidity/ and contraction  
are properties/ of the water element.

\*

### **The Third Element,**

**Air**, which we associate with **wind**,  
allegorically means vibration  
and / fluctuation

and ultimately/

all motion,  
oscillation,  
pulsation

and pressure  
are caused by this element -

(sometimes called/ the mobile element).

\*

### **The Fourth Element,**

**Fire** translates/ as heat or energy/

which may perhaps be  
better expressed as '**combustion.**'

Both heat and cold/ are its properties

which are ever-constantly changing.

\*

Fire as heat/ as a result/  
has the property  
of causing motion  
due to the dynamic/ effects of energy  
upon and within/ the other elements.

Hence/, it is dependent upon energy/  
that all relative motions/  
and changes  
within all combinations/  
of elements/ occurs.

\*

We must also note that

**matter** (earth)  
**gas** (air),  
**heat** (fire), and  
**liquid** (water),

are always present/ in various proportions-

**in any elemental state,**

and further:-

in each and every/ elemental state,  
**one of the primal elements**  
**will always predominate**  
in relative relationship/ to the others.

\*

**And** we must further note that -

the proportional relationships/  
are always changing  
relative to temperature

- [the fiery element] –

in relation to/ innumerable/ other/  
relative factors/ and conditions.

\*

By ‘**relative proportions/**  
we mean/, for example,  
that a sandy beach/ is solid to walk on/  
because/ of the predominance/ of the earth element,  
but - add enough water - and it becomes quicksand  
in which/ the watery element/ predominates.

**And**

This stands true/ to relative proportions/  
for **all combinations** of  
solid/, gaseous, heat / and fluid / states of matter.

So that, for example,

Water/ deprived of heat/ turns into ice.

Similarly/, water under great pressure  
(say in a fire-hose)  
also behaves like a solid,

as does compressed-air  
in an approaching cyclone.

In each case, the four elements are present in different proportions.

\*

And this is the stuff/ of the study of science/  
and not just some arcane/, nonsense  
out of old books/ by dead people.

\*

Even the table of chemical elements,  
(when broken down into its primal units),  
leaves us with these **four basic elements**.

Aside:

[Which, incidentally, is how  
the ancient and medieval  
interest/ in **alchemy**/ originated.]

**Next**/, in our discussion/ we come to

- **The Space Element** -

And it is highly interesting/ to note  
that in Buddhist contemplation/  
there are forty concentration objects,

ten of which are earth, air, fire, and water,  
plus the four colors blue, yellow, red and white,  
plus space and light,

[the twenty-four other meditation objects\* are  
not directly relevant to our discussion here.]

**What is/ directly/ relevant/**  
is that ultimately/,  
through penetrating-concentration,

even what the mind/body  
originally cognizes  
as being the four basic elements/  
can be

further broken down/ and analyzed  
into refractable movements

of particles and colors  
within energy-vibrations in space.

**And, in summary;**  
**What this means**  
**is that - in the end -**

**there is no ultimate solidity/  
or permanency in anything.**

*(repeat)*

\*

To summarize and reiterate what  
at first may sound confusing:-  
there are two stages to our  
allegorical representation of reality:

**I. The first level is one of**  
seeming solidity/,  
liquidity/, heat-energy/  
and gaseous matter/  
which appears to have independent/,  
objective/and even/  
concrete existence/ within the universe,

**but**, when/ broken-down/ more-closely/,

**II. On a second level,**

(in actuality),  
the basic elements  
have no fixed reality  
and may be analyzed:-

as mere/ miniscule particles/ or units/  
of combustible impulses/ of energy

which are ever-changing/ and moving/  
through a continuum of cycles/  
and processes/

(within the universe)-

in which/ the elements/  
are ever-interdependently-  
being determined/  
by continually-changing/  
conditions/ and factors

**and,**

[when the elements/  
cease to be in motion,

due to/ a lack of  
changing forms  
of elemental energy-/  
within the process of /  
**relative relations/  
and interactions,**]

**then,**

a composite body begins to  
break-down into its original units  
and everything/ therein/ then/ deteriorates/  
(as the ultimate, infinitesimal,  
primary energy units lose cohesion),  
(and all things fall apart)

moving back into



the natural cycle of the elements.

\*

In other, words,  
the fiery units of energy -  
vibrating/ within the elements/  
eventually, go back into/  
and carry on/  
within the continuum/  
of the broad/, vast/,and  
wholly un-fathomable/ universe-

into a realm/ which is  
totally lacking matter and solidity  
and which is,/ ultimately,/ akin to  
what we figuratively call/  
infinite space and light.

\*

In summary,

This **connects** the cohesion of elements  
and their subsequent /separation)  
into vibrations of energy

in what may well have been  
one of the ancient mysteries-

regarding insight/  
into the ultimate nature/  
of arising and ceasing/  
of dissolution and

ultimate death

within the realm of space and light  
and Ultimate Truth  
which lies/ beyond/  
the objectively-visible/ and fathomable.

