
Healing and the five elements

from the view of dzogchen

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Excerpts:

...The infinite whole has no entry requirements – everyone and everything is always already admitted.

...According to the traditional explanation, everything we experience is generated via the medium of the five elements: space, wind, fire, water and earth. Space is stable. It never moves yet it has no substance. Wind, fire and water have the nature of movement. Earth tends towards stability. Left alone, it settles and appears to be substantial. Ignoring the basic ground which is space itself brings a disjunction in the field of manifestation.

...The fact is that the world is moving me just as much as I am moving the world.

...As we start to live in this world of stories, we get woven into the texture of time, into memories, regrets, plans and hopes. Our mind, moving in the medium of language, goes wandering in realms that have no substance yet are most beguiling.

...There are no entities. What there are, are patterns or modes of emergence that are influenced by many factors. The illusion that there are controllable entities is embedded in being out of touch with the actual spacious ground.

...We run our lives as if it were a small business, trying to increase the profit and decrease the debt.

...Once winning and losing become our major concerns we bind ourselves into a competitive frame of reference that makes collaboration difficult and potentially dangerous.

...No matter how hard we try we cannot secure the territory of existence.

...The reified self, the ego, functions like a dictator. It tries to drive its own agenda, using force to overcome obstacles. This conflict-orientation ties more knots because although limited areas can be controlled, the whole energy system in free flow is beyond control. It is a self-organising system.

...Boredom, sadness, grief, disappointment and frustration. What do they taste like? You have to taste them as soon as they come because they go away quite quickly. I

...However if you try not to taste them, they keep coming back until you do taste them. This is the paradoxical structure of our world: that avoidance brings about repetition, while enjoyment and full contact reveal the self-liberation of phenomena.

...The central point is to settle into the peace or spaciousness which is already there. This could also be called love because spaciousness offers infinite hospitality to every aspect of our experience.

Fragmentation and healing.

All the various ailments that we can encounter can be related to the general principles which structure of our experience. Healing, or making whole, occurs when we cease engaging in our habits of fragmentation. When we are accustomed to being fragmented and to inhabiting a world composed of fragments it can be difficult to imagine what being whole would be like. Cultures and religions offer us images of the complete person, for example the 'renaissance man', someone like Leonardo da Vinci, who can turn his hand to anything, or like Buddha, peaceful and free of desire. These are images of perfection, of being without fault – how wonderful. Yet they carry within them a subtle fragmentation, the exclusion of all that is bad, is limited, is lazy, sick and so on. The infinite whole has no entry requirements – everyone and everything is always already admitted.

Rather than exploring the many concepts which exist about healing it is perhaps more useful to start with our own existence. We are alive, so what is life? We have a sense of being alive because we experience. This is the basis of our being who we are. There is a difference between being alive and being dead. Although we talk of being dead it is not as if the person who was alive is now being something else. Dead bodies are not doing anything other than decomposing. No one is being dead. Life is gone and the dead body is just dead!

Inside the sphere of experience that is life many things are possible. Sometimes we're happy, sometimes we're sad; sometimes we're sick, sometimes we're healthy. All of these particular structures are revealed to us by our capacity to experience. This vital basic capacity is usually taken for granted as we tend to be rather preoccupied with what we are experiencing. We focus on the objects of our experience, which might be something 'external' in the world, or some sensation or feeling or thought structure 'inside' ourselves.

Some arising phenomenon catches our attention and we pay no attention to the actual experience. Some experiences arise and pass easily – they have some impact on us but that gets incorporated into the flow of what is going on. Our life continues pretty much as before. But sometimes we get caught up in what is occurring. Aspects of our experience register strongly on our consciousness and we become preoccupied with our take on this event. This creates a foreclosure to the potential of the next arising moment, the richness of the experiential field as it unfolds. We might feel anxious about our situation and worry about it. We tend to rely on habitual forms of interpretation and look for antidotes: what can be done to make this better? That is to say, we resort to our problem-solving management orientation. We run our lives as if it was a small business. We want to increase the profit and decrease the debt. If some event occurs that we feel is going badly or if we feel hurt or disappointed then we usually take this as a sign that something must be done. But what is to be done? If our planning is based on our habitual assumptions it is likely that the plan we try to implement will not fit the actual situation. Perhaps we need to stop thinking and attend to what is occurring.

Do we focus on how things are, or on how we imagine them to be?

This is the basic choice that we have in life: do we focus on how things are, or on how we imagine them to be? How things are stops us in our tracks; the facticity of events interrupts the simple narratives we feel are safe inside. For example in a dance studio there are mirrors on at least one of the walls. The function of the mirror is to help people see that how they imagine their body to be is not how their body actually is. You may feel that you are balanced and vertical, but when you look in the mirror you see that it is not actually the case.

The same principle applies to our emotional and our cognitive life; the mental plumb line that we have is not really working very well. Generally speaking, the force of gravity keeps the builder's line quite straight, but if the weight on the end is made of iron instead of lead it can be pulled by various magnetic currents, and so mislead us into believing that the false is true. Similarly, when we develop biases in ourselves – certain tendencies, attachments and investments – these lead us to give specific values to the objects in our world. These values

which we project in the objects, people and events we encounter, act like magnets and pull us off course. Yet we don't recognise this and act as if we are very clear about what is going on. Then it is difficult to ground and centre ourselves for we have lost the direct sense of what it is like to be truly in balance. Although there are many different methods and exercises we can learn for rebalancing, if we can't drop our fixation on our own personal map then disorientation is likely to occur again and again.

This confusion about how things are is not a sign of a personal weakness; it is not that we are individually faulty. Rather the fault is structural for we come into this world in our particular concrete form on the basis of a shared misapprehension. We experience ourselves and other people and the things around us to be separate entities. We take the field of our experience to be constituted out of real separate objects which appear to be internally, intrinsically defined. An apple is an apple because it is an apple. There seems to be some intrinsic apple-ness to the apple. When we look at an apple we just think, '*That's an apple*', but without the apple tree there wouldn't be an apple, and without the land, the sun, and the absence of frost and so on, there wouldn't be an apple tree. Our usual way of perceiving the apple, seeing it as something existing in its own right, cuts the apple off from its context in space and time. It also cuts us off from the dynamic nature of the world, the world as ceaseless flow.

Fixing the apple as just itself also affirms our use of the same procedure in defining ourselves – we just are ourselves, the given entity that we always have been. We see ourselves as an object that contains many objects within it. Inside our body there is a heart, lungs, bladder and so on, and we talk about them as if they are things that we have. Usually, when we are healthy, we don't have them! But when we get a bit sick, of course we have them. We go to the doctor and say '*I have a problem with my bladder.*' As long as the bladder wasn't causing any trouble it's as if we didn't have a bladder.

Although the actuality of the phenomena that we encounter is situationally evoked as part of our experience, in terms of our abstract conceptualisation they seem to be self-existing and independent of conceptual forces. Of course, we *know* that we always have a bladder even though it doesn't really bother us very much at all. We are convinced that we are made up of parts.

This knowledge seems so simple, obvious and true that there seems to be no reason to examine it. The fact that we are real people with real bodies seems to be self-evident – it is a fact because it is true. However from a buddhist point of view it is only a 'fact' because we take it to be such. We ourselves by our own mental processes construct for ourselves the certainty of the factual existence of truly existing entities, including ourselves. This mental activity is the play of the creative potential of our awareness. Many ideas, images and forms arise and seem to be what we take them to be. Yet they change and pass away as do the thoughts we have about them. What we take to be subject and object are without any inherent essence, truth or validity. They have a functional truth in that they are the content of our experience; the fact that we experience them seems to make them true in themselves.

Consciousness of subject and object.

Once we start to experience a separation between a subject and an object, that is to say, experiencing ourselves as a knower – a consciousness which is cognisant of something – then this sets up a reflexive movement in which the more real the object appears to be, the more substantial the experiencing subject appears to be consolidated with the felt sense that this is happening to me. We can see this with small babies. One of the skills that every parent has to learn is how to distract the baby from their distress. You pick the baby up; you move it around; you sing to it; you make some funny noises. The baby that had been absorbed in its crying, in its sense of discomfort, becomes aware that something else is going on. And because babies have not learnt the wonderful advanced skill of multitasking, when they give themselves to listen to you singing they forget about their discomfort.

In that way, experience for the baby is very immediate and direct. It is not conceptually elaborated or reified into the concrete sense of, *'I am the enduring experiencer'*. But after a few years, once the child starts to come into language and is able to hang on to experiences by transmuting them into conceptual stories then when something difficult or unpleasant is happening, like having to do homework, the child is very ready to ask, *'But why? Why do I have to do this? I don't want to do this. There are other things more meaningful to do'*. Then it's quite difficult to distract that small person from their cognitive involvement. As we start to live in this world of stories, we are woven into the texture of time, into memories, regrets, plans and hopes, as your mind moving in the medium of language goes wandering in realms that have no substance yet are most beguiling. We formulate our identity around what we like and what we don't like, what we are willing to do and not willing to do. Our personality takes shape as we become a unique specific person, a particular entity in a world of entities. This shape helps us to be decisive, to start to act as a shaper of events.

This kind of ego strength is necessary for surviving in the school playground and for getting through exams but it carries with it a kind of rigidity as we rely on particular habitual patterns, which both define and restrict us. Thus the open expanse that lies in front of us, rich in the many possibilities of life, starts to be less visible to us as we rest in the familiar: *'I know what I like and I like what I know.'* We see other people engaging in activities that we avoid, but instead of having the courage to have a go ourselves, we think, *'I am me and I don't do that'*.

In being true to our sense of ourselves we deprive ourselves of many of the possibilities available in the world. This selective attention confirms the value of the partial. The more I am committed to being this particular way the more I become aware of the forces around me which could attack or undermine the integrity of my world. How can I maintain the stability and continuity of myself as I am when the actuality of my situation is part of the world? The fact is that the world is moving me just as much as I am moving the world. Excessive stress on individual identity, on having a personal world, creates an alienation from the self-evident facticity of our co-emergence with the environment.

In buddhism the separation and reification of subject and object is termed ignorance, for it operates by ignoring that actually they are inseparable and co-creating. This mental activity of ignoring does not create an actual lesion, or tear, or cut. Nothing has actually been torn apart but it feels as if it has. We act as if we are monads or autonomous entities when in fact our very existence is simply part of what is occurring as the entire experiential field. The individual sense of being separate arises from ignoring the fact of non-separation. Who does the ignoring? No one. The sense of individual agency arises as a consequence of the ignoring – it is not present prior to that ignoring and so cannot be the 'ignorant'. In fact there is no substantial ignorant. The ignoring is an action, a movement of energy which, though transient, seems to continue in the patterns of energy which arise as a consequence of it.

Once this splitting occurs the intensity of subject / object interaction is so involving that we lose contact with the infinite awareness which is the ground of all experience. On the object side, we name things and attribute values to them, and on the subject side we develop our sense of liking or not liking in relation to the particularity of what we see externally. Thus we come to experience the subject, that is, ourselves as the knower, to be on the 'inside' and the object as being on the 'outside'. The fact that subject formations and object formations ceaselessly arise and pass is ignored and with it the chance to explore who is the actual experiencer of what is taken to be the 'subject' and the 'object'.

In this way we build the little palace that we live inside. As our habits become regular and reassuring why would we bother knowing anything else, so the world becomes full of irrelevant things. What is most interesting are the things that I like or that seem to have something to do with me. I would like to have more of the same. *'Waiter!'* Sometimes we call the waiter, 'God', and say, *'Dear God, please give me the things I like and don't give me the things I don't like.'* God is scratching his head and saying *'I invented this world. I gave them everything! Why are they turning me into the servant? All these people are praying for such a narrow selection of what is*

available. God is sitting scratching his head in confused amazement and that is why prayers are not often answered.

The eight worldly dharmas and karma.

Once winning and avoiding losing become our major concern we bind ourselves into a competitive frame of reference that makes collaboration difficult and potentially dangerous. We are happy when we win and sad when we lose. In this way we are bound to the 'eight worldly dharmas' where we are concerned to ensure gain and avoid loss, ensure pleasure and avoid pain, ensure praise and avoid blame, ensure fame and avoid obscurity or notoriety. Preoccupied with these concerns, there is no time to attend to the dharma of liberation, to the practice of attending to one's own actual nature rather than to the passing show of the world.

Activity carries a momentum with it. As we bring our personalised intentionality into the field of experience, the solidity of our sense of identity carries a dynamic force which means that our actions are over-invested so that their consequences continue long after the action itself has ceased. Our activity creates energetic marks or traces which have a life of their own and which manifest in the future as the patterning of events. This is what is called karma.

The term 'karma' refers to an activity which has consequences beyond its immediate effect. If we are fixated in the moment we don't attend to the future consequences, but gradually they come to impact us. So many of the activities in which we engage are reasonably successful in establishing something useful – for a while. But then the fruits of our efforts dissolve, because the field in which we operate is dynamic and beyond our control. Then we have to start some new project and so our activity never ceases. However we have also been storing up invisible tendencies which will manifest later in a way that we are unlikely to be able to link to the past.

Due to forgetfulness of our own ground we formulate intentions on the basis of a limited sense of self. These self-referential intentions act on the environment in order to secure the patterns of experience we are looking for. We carry out the activity we have intended and then we review it to see if we are happy with the outcome. If these four factors of: a reified sense of self, a self-referential intention, an action and satisfaction at the outcome are all in place, then the full karmic 'charge' is generated which will be discharged as a consequence later when its energetic impulse impacts the current situation. All phenomena, whether internal or external are impermanent and are composed of energy. If the energy is maintained in a certain vibration and rhythm it will manifest as a seemingly consistent structure for a while. But then the little bubble that had encapsulated that particular structure bursts, and some new wave flows through our lives.

From this point of view, we live in the fantasy of being individual agents who can act in the world in an efficient concrete way based on true knowledge of the nature of the environment and of ourselves. If the ground out of which this situation arises is based on ignoring the actual ground, then we would need quite a degree of hubris to imagine that we carry a personal clarity that lets us know exactly what is right. The illusion or fantasy of definite concrete knowledge is part of this drama in which we find ourselves, and so we find ourselves attempting to hold our lives together by ceaseless activity. This is very tiring, and not just physically, for no matter how hard we try we cannot secure the territory of existence. Again, this is not a unique personal fault or deficit – it is built into the structure that arises from ignoring how life actually is.

All living systems tend towards a loss of energy; there is entropy, the breakdown of interactive patterns leading to a loss of form and function. Homeostasis, or dynamic balance, doesn't last for long, so if you are trying to maintain a stable state in a dynamic field you have to endlessly control, develop and direct energy which is moving in other trajectories. In the integrated field of experience everything exists as communication. There are no entities. There are patterns or modes of emergence which are influenced by many factors. The illusion that there are controllable entities is embedded in being out of touch with the actual spacious

ground. When we integrate with space there is room for everything. But when we over-identify with the transient pattern which we take to be ourselves, then we are fighting to protect a false ground, the illusion of intrinsic substantial maintainable knowable personal identity. This illusion and its consequent driven activity is the basis for our lack of wholeness, our lack of true health. Moreover the tension and the friction it generates lead to symptoms in our organic, emotional and cognitive systems.

For example, there has been a lot of rain recently in Britain. This is due to the winds which normally drive the rain north of Britain being pulled south, so the rain that would have avoided our territory has now been falling directly on us. The rain is communicating some of the causal forces which are behind the direction of the clouds. When the clouds come near here, after traveling a long way talking to each other, they are a bit bored with that conversation. *'Aha, now we have some lovely hills here!'* The hills and the cloud then have a little chat and that makes the rain fall. It's obvious.

The whole of existence is moving all the time as the energy of awareness manifests inter-communicating patterns. Within this field of experience we try to hold 'things' in place by naming them and taming them with our conceptualisation. However this is doomed to fail since our being is linked into the world being. Skin is a porous barrier, just as are the boundaries between nations. Our senses are ways of communication between what we call internal and external systems. These systems are not entities; they are mutually influencing dynamic patterns. Our belief in stable forms easily blinds us to this. When we try to hold ourselves together and control events this brings about a further imbalancing.

The five elements.

According to the traditional view everything we experience is generated via the medium of the five elements: space, wind, fire, water and earth. Space is stable. It never moves yet it has no substance. Wind, fire and water have the nature of movement. Earth tends towards stability. Left alone, it settles and appears to be substantial.

Ignoring the basic ground which is space itself brings a disjunction in the field of manifestation. The infinite field of experience is inseparable from space because our potential requires space in order to display itself. Whether the unfolding movement is tight, convergent and centripetal, or expansive, divergent and centrifugal, it will require space otherwise it will remain hidden. But when spacious awareness is obscured by over-identification with 'I, me, myself', the density of being an individual person hides its own spacious ground. Then everything else that occurs is pushed into the category of other, of not me, as the earth element is recruited into the task of protecting the ego as an autonomous agent. Objects and people can then be pulled into or pushed out of the citadel of the self.

For example a small child goes to play school and finds a toy car to play with. Gradually the toy is incorporated into the infant's world. Then when it is time to go home the child wants to take the toy home with it. Mum says, *'You have to leave it here for today'*. But the child is quite clear, *'No! It's mine. It is in my hand. I like it. It's mine'*. The object which was 'not-self' at the beginning of the day has become 'self' by the end of the day and it feels like a tragedy to have to part with a piece of oneself. Leaving the car behind can feel as painful as having your finger cut off, because the car, or the doll, or the balloon, has been incorporated into the sense of self.

With the feeling that 'this is mine', the earth element manifests as the dividing barrier. Children show this very directly with their bodies. The hand closes on the object and the head goes down... *'It's mine – mine!'* Everything is tensing up and the child doesn't want to look at you because they are in their world. *'Leave my world alone!'* It is very limited and intense, and of course it creates suffering, since earth is shown to be powerless in the face of the forces of the world.

Although parents often try to soften the earth element in children in order to show them that there are other more flexible and playful ways to participate in the world, reliance on the earth element is a major and primitive part of our identity. When we lose contact with space we only have earth as a means to stabilise and control the fluctuating currents of water, fire and wind. These moving elements are sometimes experienced as excitement, but often they provoke anxiety since they are the reminders that we don't know what is going on and that we can't control movement in the experiential field.

In my work as a psychotherapist, one of the first things I ask patients is whether they have an alarm clock and a diary? If you can't get up regularly at the same time you lose the rhythm of the day. Going to sleep at three am in the morning and waking up at midday means you come out of the rhythmic pulsation of the daily world. Rhythm is a mode of the earth element, offering a way of participation that is neither too tight nor too loose. The diary lets you know in advance what is going to happen.

If you feel depressed when you wake up in the morning and think you've got another whole day of desolation ahead of you, then it may seem better to pull the duvet over your head and go back to sleep. We need to have something to get up for, but if this is held in place only by our own volition then we are at the mercy of the fluctuations of our water, fire and wind. It is therefore helpful to link ourselves to particular sets of patterns of movement, the momentum of which will carry us along even when we falter.

Movement is necessary because we are moving creatures; our body, voice and mind are movement. When our free movement is blocked due to work, illness or age, then some intentional corrective movement is required. These kinds of interaction are likely to involve a technique whereby we act on our system, manipulating it in order to adjust and rebalance it. However by the middle of the next day we are likely to be unbalanced again due to the basic structural fault of experiencing ourselves as existing apart from, and independent of, the environment.

Maintaining balance requires a mobilisation of the heart, the bowels, the lungs, the liver and so on. Every part of our body is called upon to play a part in rectifying and stabilising balance in an ever-changing world. Stress and tension may become trapped in our energetic system. Traditionally this is understood in terms of knots appearing on the channels through which flow the various winds that keep us alive. The knots block the winds so that they vibrate and this is experienced by us as tension anxiety, depression, laziness, mania and so on. The knots occur because of our habitual focusing on narrow concerns and are the energetic parallel of the editing and compartmentalising with which we attempt to structure our lives. Even if we manage to loosen the knots through yoga and so on, thereby allowing a free movement of energy, the energy itself is organised around reification rather than around space.

The reified self, the ego, functions like a dictator. It tries to drive its agenda, using force to overcome obstacles. This conflict orientation ties more knots because limited areas can be controlled whereas the whole energy system in free flow is beyond control – it is a self-organising system.

What we can do is collaborate with ourselves so that cognitions, emotions, perception, the physical body, the environment, can all move together in a participative way of co-emergence. But if you try to establish the earth element as a barrier to the movement of water, fire and wind, then earth will be defeated.

In order to promote participative co-emergence we have to open ourselves to space. In terms of our own energy system this means bringing the winds into the central channel which is the site of open space in our body. This channel runs from the top of our head to our perineum and is flexible in size, shifting easily from a needle's width to being wide enough to encompass the entire universe. By channeling the winds into this open space and keeping them there, they subside and lose the momentum of the limited habits that have been driving them. Then our system rests and is at peace and so healing can occur as the various aspects which constitute our manifestation are no longer in conflict.

If yoga or meditation become your practice then you do it every day for the rest of your life. Why do you do it? Because you do it. This is the best way to maintain life – for the practice to become simply something that you do. But if you have to *make* yourself do it, it will be very difficult to sustain because you are trying to impose something on yourself. It is about putting oneself in the way of gaining a taste for balance and then establishing the rhythm whereby one finds oneself in the practice of balance. That is to say, one finds a way of collaborating with oneself and this means listening to every aspect of oneself. There has to be a place at the table for everyone: a place for our desire, our laziness, our greed and our duty. These aspects of ourselves have to be brought into communication.

Resting in space.

From the point of view of meditation, the basic principle is to directly experience the ground spaciousness which is the root of our being. Resting in space is not a technique; it does not involve adjusting the balance of earth, water, fire and wind. Rather, it directly settles us in the openness within which these other elements arise. In the presence of this space their agitation subsides. Once space is directly experienced as the root of our existence, then every gesture that we make, whether it appears pro-active and expansive, or reactive and contracted, is the energy of spaciousness revealing itself in the patterns of earth, water, fire and wind..

Space which is intrinsically empty is also full of intrinsic value. Space is the basis of satisfaction. At the end of yoga practice people often adopt the corpse posture; this is the possibility of just being nothing at all. No activity is required. In fact the releasing of muscular tension which hopefully has been explored through the *asanas*, is now fully released by lying in relaxed stillness. The breath is slow and deep, thoughts are not attended to, no hopes and fears, no past, no future. Just like a corpse, neither active nor passive, merely a form in space.

When we relax in that state we are aware yet free of intention, impulse or activity. We experience our mind as naked and this is the basis of freedom. Naked means no pockets, so if you grasp at lots of things where are you going to put them? You pick up one nice shiny thing...and then there's another one.

Gradually we realise that if we want more we have to drop what we have; picking up...putting down...picking up...putting down...this is very tiring. If I pick it up, I have to put it down. If I didn't pick it up it would still be there in the environment. I could see it, feel it, touch it... have a sniff...what a lovely rose! I don't need to take out some scissors and cut off the rose.

This is the shift from appropriation to enjoyment. The world generously reveals everything and our participation in it is moment by moment by moment. If we step out of the constricting tendency to judgment, freeing ourselves from the dualising impulse of 'I like and therefore I want more' or 'I don't like and therefore I want less', then more of life becomes interesting. In encountering an ever-widening range of events we encounter the infinity of our potential. We are able to open to the freshness of the arising events before they have been thought about, relativised and judged.

Boredom, sadness, grief, disappointment and frustration. What do they taste like? You have to taste them when they come because they go quite quickly. If you try not to taste them they keep coming back until you taste them. This is the paradoxical structure of our world: that avoidance brings about repetition, while enjoyment and full contact reveal the self-liberation of phenomena.

This enjoyment is not based on getting what you like; rather it is to fully experience the taste of each event that occurs. Bitter herbs, sour gherkin, and chilli pickles all have intense flavours. If the home base of your palate is on the area of sweetness then you might find these flavours challenging, as they are not what you are used to considering to be 'good' or 'pleasant'. We might want them in small doses, but the more we open to them we know what they are. They are what they are, just that and they don't poison or kill us. If the thought, 'I don't like it'

arises we can stay present with that thought and then we will find that it also vanishes by itself. The form of the object arises and passes and the form of the subject arises and passes.

With the self-liberation of the subject co-emergent with the self-liberation of the object, who is the experiencer? To find this out we have to look for ourselves. We are aware that we are experiencing what is happening – so who are we in the moment that the experience is occurring? By being present with ourselves, our own nature will be revealed. This is an awareness that is both impersonal and personal. Nothing is more intimately or closely ourselves than this awareness devoid of all personal attributes. The arising and passing of what appears to be the subject and what appears to be the object is like an ongoing massage. All the pathways of our being are being gently palpated; gentle pulsations of energy are moving through them, keeping them soft and supple.

Right to the tips of our fingers and toes we have the immediate sense of the spontaneous vitality of existence and, with no position to defend, we are fully available for participation and contact. As the world presents itself we are there both with, and part of, the emerging field. We can collaborate, we can work with circumstances, and we can enter every dance. This is because we are hearing the music of the field rather than our own familiar tunes. If you are at a party and dancing and then a song comes on and you think, '*Oh no, not for me*', then you are out of the dance. Why can't you dance to that music? '*It's not for me, it's not what I like.*' So once again our reliance on concepts, habitual beliefs and judgments has made us as observer rather than a participant.

In such a situation we have the chance to see how we limit ourselves and fragment the world. So release the limitation on our self-definition ... welcome to the world! Maybe we can dance to anything; it is just movement. As long as we are not judging our dancing, we are just dancing, being in the dance, movement arising and passing...arising and passing.

On my journey to work I travel on London Underground, which involves standing next to people who cough and sneeze all around me. I cannot avoid this. But can I welcome it, accept it as part of the wholeness of existence?

- 'I don't want to get sick. Waiter! Please don't serve me this.'
- "Eat what is on your plate."
- 'I don't like it.'

At this point we have to self-liberate the subject, so that its limiting stance does not become the defining factor. We can apply a technique such as *kumbhaka*, holding of the breath in the stillness of emptiness. The movement of the breath and the movement of thought, sensation, and feeling are linked together. Movement is experience, impactful transient experience which cannot establish anything. By blocking the flow of the breath we can open a space of invulnerability – yet it requires conscious effort to do this for it is an artificial imposition on to the dynamic of the situation. It is easier to simply open to the whole situation, releasing yourself from identification with the subject so that in finding oneself in integration with space, both subject and object self-liberate. The cough of one's fellow passenger and one's own fear of becoming sick arise and pass – and there in the midst of sickness one finds oneself in the non-dual wholeness which is the true meaning of health.

The four elements move in the infinite domain of space

The five elements collaborate as the four elements move in the infinite domain of space. Each has its function. If you allow them to have their function they will be healthy. If you perversely ask them to do something they can't do, then troubles will arise.

For example, if you take a lot of caffeine this will bring up the fire and wind elements and so the body is mobilised artificially. This allows you to go beyond your limit. If you listen to your body, you will hear it complain that you are making the demands of the world more important

than it. But we often listen to our plans more than to our body, and so our sense of necessity becomes implacable, forcing our body to comply with its own abandonment. Our world is based on delayed gratification, on sacrificing the embodied present at the shrine of fantasies about the future. This is simply another form of splitting and fragmentation and it sets the elements against each other.

The problem with delayed gratification is that the future is unpredictable. Our notions of our future are mere dreams and fantasies as we do not know what will occur. You cannot walk on dreams. You cannot sit on a fantasy. It's like sitting on a cloud, you just fall through. However if you awaken to the integration of experience and space then you can taste the movements of hopes and fears, excitement and anxiety, without taking them too seriously. Experience is something to work with, not something to rely on.

The four elements of earth, water, fire and wind have enormous value and potential, but if they are delegated too much authority they become lost. In the Christian tradition these four elements are the basis of the mundane world, the world created by God. But there is a fifth element – the quintessence – which is the presence of the divine in the world, and the four elements have to be harmonised by the quintessence if there is to be peace in the world. This quintessence is both the space which surrounds us and the space in our heart. When we experience our being in the world as sky meeting sky, then the friction between the four elements subsides as they encounter their place in the whole.

As the moving elements crash into each other they create bruises, wear and tear, and painful experiences. The antidote to this is to not try harder. This is the opposite of the perverse notion which is driving the destruction of our world, *'We need to do more. If everybody tried harder it would be better'*. However, if you don't know where you are, sit down. Settle in yourself, look around and see where it might actually be possible to go. If you don't know where you are in the world and you don't know where you are in yourself, then wandering around is likely to get you very lost.

The ego has a limited range of vibrations and so can be in contact with only a little of what is going on. This limitation blocks the free flow of energetic communication in our body which in turn interferes with our free articulation in the world. Our ego is revealed through the patterns of our gaze, our posture, our gestures, our breathing, our tone of voice and so on. Rather than learning many different techniques to correct or realign all these habitual movements we will benefit ourselves and others more by attending to the experienter of all the many ways we show ourselves.

The central point is to settle into the peace or spaciousness which is already there. This could also be called love because spaciousness offers infinite hospitality to every aspect of our experience. Space says to come as you are for you are already here. Because you are already here you don't have to dress up and put on some lipstick to get to the party. We are already where we need to be, but we can't see that if we are trying hard to be somewhere else.

The natural perfection or the natural completion of space is that it doesn't expand or contract, or get better or worse. Once this is directly experienced a deep relaxation occurs. Recognising this easy trusting openness as our true base allows us to experience the effortless integration of all that occurs, including every aspect of ourselves. This experienter, presence, awareness, is inseparable from open spaciousness. This is the natural light of the mind, the natural clarity which reveals subject and object moving together. As they co-emerge unobstructed by our desire to shape them, they display a self-liberating dance, which is the integration of movement and stillness.