

# Element Walks



Human Beings are not only formed of vibrations, but they live and move in them; they surround them as the fish is surrounded by water, and they contain them within them as the tank contains water....There are two aspects of vibrations, fine and gross, both containing varied degrees; some are perceived by the soul, some by the mind, and some by the eyes. What the soul perceives are the vibrations of the feelings; what the mind conceives are the vibrations of the thoughts; what the eyes see are the vibrations solidified from their ethereal state and turned into atoms which appear in the physical world, constituting the elements ether, air, fire, water and earth. The finest vibrations are imperceptible even to the soul. The soul itself is formed of these vibrations; it is their activity which makes it conscious.

—Hazrat Inayat Khan, *The Sufi Message*, volume 11

The concentration and practice of the science of these elements is of tremendous value in the training of body, emotions and mind. When mysticism is taught as a science, as the Vendantists and Sufis would have it, the students learn to employ these elements as their servants, and thus they perfect their own nature and help others. Hazrat Inayat Khan has also elaborated on this point in his *The Mysticism of Sound*. Grace, beauty and art are truly ways toward the realization of God, and if they are felt rather than thought, their value is supreme.

—Murshid Samuel L. Lewis, *Spiritual Dancing*

The following is a compilation of writings on the Elemental Walks. Do not give out these practices without having personal training and experience in them. They are credited as follows:

- A. Excerpts from “Spiritual Dancing,” an unpublished paper by Samuel L. Lewis, written as an informal commentary on the paper “Art: Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow,” by Hazrat Inayat Khan (volume 10 of the *Sufi Message*).
- B. Breaths and Walks to experience each element from the original Teacher’s Dance Manual compiled from the notes of students of Samuel Lewis.
- C. Additional descriptions useful for experiencing the Elemental Walks using body awareness by Neil Douglas-Klotz as drawn from the work of Hazrat Inayat Khan on *Metaphysics* (volume 5 of the *Sufi Message*) and related to current somatic psychology practice.
- D. Excerpts from *The Mysticism of Sound and Music* by Hazrat Inayat Khan on elemental sound and characteristics.
- E. Elemental purification or healing breaths as given by Hazrat Inayat Khan. In the case of water and fire, these differ from the breaths given for the Walks by Murshid Samuel L. Lewis, which emphasize movement rather than stillness. The purification breaths are given for comparison and to help practitioners deepen in the elements as a personal practice. As a morning purification, normally five of each elemental breath are done.

—Radha Tereska Buko

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## ***Earth***

### ***A. Spiritual Dancing***

*Earth position.* There are several aspects of the earth position. Earth movements force the body to inhale more deeply, and draw in air and vital life force. They strengthen the spine and circulatory system, but do not alter the condition of the blood. They may well be preceded by a concentration upon earth. The sustaining of this concentration is very helpful.

*Kneeling.* Kneeling is a common position for children and primitive people. It is required in many folk occupations, such as pounding grain or washing clothes in a stream. Here the feet are anchored while the hands, head and even the whole torso may move. Kneeling is therefore a part of some folk dances while in others one moves from or toward it.

There are indeed two forms of kneeling, which are similar anatomically. In the one kind a person is in prayer or devotion. So we find the kneeling position in many ritualistic prayers. It indicates reverence, humility, modesty and service. Its moral value is great. And the psychic and moral effects are not different because the spirit of devotion is absent. That is to say, humility itself is ennobling, especially when regarded as part of a sacred duty. One may move the arms and torso in rhythm without leaving the floor. It is possible to exhibit grace and beauty in such movements.

*Squatting on haunches.* Though this may appear quite difficult to us it is the natural relaxed position of many native peoples. It is not often employed as a basic position in the dance but is included in the wild movements of the Cossacks. Their very vital dances combine 'fire' and 'earth', and they exhibit these qualities in their natures, especially in their dancing.

### ***B. Breath and Walk***

Breathe through both nostrils; natural inhalation, heavier exhalation. Earth pervades, spreads out in every direction, covers the surface. Breath is rather shallow; deep inhalation or retention would be difficult. Walk in 4/4 rhythm, breathing out through soles of feet and palms of hands. Knees may be bent. Palms parallel to ground. Concentration on exhalation. Color gold. Not necessarily heavy breath.

### ***C. Body awareness***

*Support* through bones and ligaments. Like the first few seconds after stepping off a trampoline or rebounder. How do I feel supported from underneath? How deeply do I feel this support? How far from bottom to top? Can I feel that I am not so much walking on the earth, but rather the earth becoming more and more conscious of itself as it walks through me? If one is controlled by an unconscious excess of earth, this can lead to chronic fear or lack of self-esteem. One can feel this somatically in an imaginary walk down a dark alley: does my body awareness express fright or merely caution? If a conscious relationship with the earth is developed, one also develops steadiness, character, reliability, confidence and rhythm.

### ***D. Sound***

The earth has various aspects of beauty as well as of variety in its sound. Its pitch is on the surface, its form is crescent-like, and its color is yellow. The sound of the earth is dim and dull, and produces a thrill, activity and movement in the body. All instruments of wire and gut, as well as the instruments of percussion, such as the drum, cymbals, etc., represent the sound of the earth.

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### ***E. Purification Breath***

Breathe rhythmically in the nose and out the nose, using a count of four beats in and four out. Note: breathe in 'Ya Shafee' (Source of Healing) and breathe out 'Ya Kafee' (Remedy or prescription for the needs of the moment) during each element.

## ***Water***

### ***A. Spiritual Dancing***

*Water positions and movements.* It is to be noticed that the elements, other than earth, signify movements rather than poses or positions. A dancer cannot stay long in a fixed pose to illustrate a fountain, waterfall or rain. Water has its definite movements in nature and a very determinate effect upon the body. This effect is seen in the tendency to bow and bend, like the foliage of trees. And, as has been stated, water has a close affinity to Yin.

Yin is thus near kin to water and Yang to fire. Yin and water dominate in the arms, which hang naturally from either side. They tend to curvilinear movements. They promote grace, beauty, gentleness, loveliness and sympathy, as well as sadness, pity and affection. All of these emotions and feelings may be illustrated by the arms. A person with awkward arms is generally lacking in one or more of these qualities. It is possible to develop the character through an artistic correction, which is nearly always taken with a better spirit than a personal correction or moral teaching.

Eurythmic concentrations on water are only proper by the seashore, on the bank of a stream, near the edge of a lake or a waterfall. Otherwise, it is best to suppose that the kingdom of heaven is within one and that it is possible to awaken in the heart all qualities, characteristics and properties which appear in the manifestation.

Water movements are characterized by gentle step, light feet and agility. The force of them is toward the left and downward. They go well with drapes, light clothing, sashes and streamers. The color green belongs to water, while yellow and black are associated with earth. White, too, harmonizes with the spirit of water.

### ***B. Breath and Walk***

Natural inhalation through both nostrils with a deep exhalation through left nostril. Not necessarily heavy. Water flows downward, and flows under earth. Walk in a 3/4 time or waltz rhythm, feeling a pull to the left side. Arms move from shoulder level on right side, down toward left side. Color green.

### ***C. Body awareness***

*Flexibility* of muscles (especially outer voluntary muscles), tendons, connective tissue, fluids and all soft tissues within. How could I feel more able to move around and over obstacles, rather than into them? Can I feel the consciousness of the water walking through me? Do I remember my time as primal ocean on this planet? If one is unconsciously controlled by water, one can be subject to unmanageable intoxications and addictions. If a conscious relationship is developed, one develops empathy, responsiveness to atmosphere and the feelings of others, and the ability to express emotional feeling in various ways, beautifying the personality.

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### **D. Sound**

The sound of water is deep, its form is serpent-like, its color green, and it is best heard in the roaring of the sea, the sound of running water, of mountain rills, the drizzling and pattering of rain, the sound of water running from a pitcher into a jar, from a pipe into a tub, all have a smooth and lively effect, and a tendency to produce imagination, whim, dream, affection, and emotion. The instrument, called jalatarang, is an arrangement of china bowls or glasses graduated in size and filled with water in proportion to the desired scale; more water lowers the tone, and less raises it. These instruments have a touching effect upon the emotions of the heart.

### **E. Purification Breath**

Breathe in through the nose and out through the mouth. Breathe in, imagining a spring of water rising up the spine to the top of the head, then flowing out the crown center as a fountain.

## **Fire**

### **A. Spiritual Dancing**

*Fire positions and movements.* For the most part fire is the reciprocal opposite of water. Its tendency is to raise the body and also to draw it toward the right. Its pull is somewhat stiffer than that of water for it is connected with Yang. Its movements develop courage, energy, and force. They also warm the body quickly. Indeed, there is a tradition in India that the musician or dancer who invoked fire and did not know how to control it might become a living torch.

Fire dances are illustrated in war, sword and weapon dances of many peoples. Participation in them seems to make the body insensitive to pain, to rouse the adrenal glands and to produce an antitoxin in the blood which heals wounds more quickly than otherwise. This was certainly true in the case of the Zulus who participated in the First World War. They seemed quite definitely to be able to withstand suffering and to recover much more quickly than their white brothers who did not dance.

It should be noted that fire has the distinctive rhythm of three, that is to say three beats to the measure. Earth has four beats to the measure. Water and air are associated with curvilinear movements, so their stresses are not so well illustrated by integers.

### **B. Breath and Walk**

Heavy inhalation to right, natural exhalation. Walk in 3/4 or waltz time, jumping up to right side on the right foot on the inhalation. That is, inhale '1' and exhale '2-3.' Color red. A clap may be added on the inhalation ('1'), with the right hand being raised as the left claps downward against it.

### **C. Body awareness**

*Pulse,* primarily the pulse of the blood, but also including other pulsations of the body (cerebral-spinal, lymph and sexual). What gets my blood moving? How could I feel more direction and purpose in life? If one is unconsciously controlled by fire, one can have trouble distinguishing anger from uncontrolled rage, or with the healthy expression of anger, passion and creativity. If one 'makes friends with fire,' one develops the ability to express 'pulse' creatively, initiate projects and feel sexual passion.

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### **D. Sound**

The sound of fire is high-pitched, its form curled, and its color red. It is heard in the falling of the thunderbolt and in a volcanic eruption, in the sound of a fire when blazing, in the noise of squibs, crackers, rifles, guns and cannons. All these have a tendency to produce fear.

### **E. Purification Breath**

Breathe in through the mouth, and out through the nose. Breathe in a sense of heat through solar plexus, relaxing the large muscle that the upper and lower body. Allow the breath to rise to heart and be transmuted and refined into light. Breath out light illuminating your path ahead.

## **Air**

### **A. Spiritual Dancing**

*Air positions and movements.* The air appears in all movements from side to side, even when the body lies upon the floor. Even in rolling down a hill the air element expresses itself. Lack of control of it produces dizziness and vertigo. This is also true in the case of inebriates. The crossing of legs and arms, the swinging of limbs and torso are associated with it. It denotes vitality, changefulness, a mental rather than a material outlook, wit, humor, sprightliness, nervousness and intoxication. Ordinarily, it tends to draw one from repose and it aids in the increase of tempo. Probably all rapid dances may be considered as air types.

The air element also consumes more psychic energy but at the same time aids in its restoration, especially as one is lifted from the ground. But it must be assimilated, too, or else one will follow the path of Nijinski. This great genius, or 'jinn' was able to lift his body into the air and eventually to hold it in space. He had invoked psychic power and could use it against the material gravitational forces, but lacking breath control and ignorant of the connection between breath, body and mind, he became 'mad.'

### **B. Breath and Walk**

Light, refined breath in top part of body. Breath in and out either nostril, and may change from side to side in the form of a 'zig-zag' breath (in one side, out the other, then reverse). Emphasis on inhalation: air rises. Color blue. Walking and whirling on toes in any direction with feeling of freedom.

### **C. Body awareness**

*Contact* through the pores of the skin and the entire 'envelope of skin' (front, back, sides, top, underneath). The center is 'everywhere' and felt with freedom and joy, like a child reaching out to touch and be touched in a healthy way, organizing the world around him/her. How could I feel more freedom, more ability to move and change in any direction? How could I feel a greater sense of contact with the world around me? If one is unconsciously controlled by air, one can be indecisive, 'spacey,' or unconscious of one's body boundaries (or parts of them). If one develops a conscious relationship with air, one can develop intuition, playfulness, humor and a sensitivity to and through touch.

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### **D. Sound**

The sound of air is wavering, its form zigzag, and its color blue. Its voice is heard in storms, when the wind blows, and in the whisper of the morning breeze. Its effect is breaking, sweeping and piercing. The sound of air finds expression in all wind instruments made of wood, brass and bamboo. It has a tendency to kindle the flame of the heart, as Rumi writes in his Mathnavi about the flute. Krishna is always portrayed in Indian art with a flute. The air sound overpowers all other sounds, for it is living, and in every aspect its influence produces ecstasy.

### **E. Purification Breath**

Breathe a refined breath in and out through mouth, with lips slightly apart. Breathe in and out as though through the pores of the skin.

## **Ether**

### **A. Spiritual Dancing**

Along with 'earth,' 'water,' 'fire,' and 'air' there is a fifth, the 'ether' or the 'akasha' of the Hindus. The ether-akasha extends through space and is the source and final repository of the others. It is also the refining element and the one which represents stillness. Cultivation of it enables one to hold any position indefinitely. In Tibetan art one finds it in the supreme position, dominating the others.

Static Symmetry corresponds to zero as a living number. Zero is a reality in statistics, graph representations, and decimals. It appears as the pause or rest in music, which so often accentuates a movement. In the dance, it is especially noticeable in what might be called vital or bionomic sculpture. Ancient friezes often depict an individual or an ensemble, and moderns rely upon them in their efforts to restore the forgotten methods. Through them the stone becomes flesh and Galatea reincarnates anew.

Statics is the science of bodies at rest. Even then they are usually subject to many stresses and pulls. Lifeless forms depend upon mechanical centres of gravity. But a throbbing, vibrating, breathing growing body may not always have an exact fixed point as such. Scientists say this is true even of the atom. Growth includes height (the Yang or Jelal factor) and girth (the Yin or Jemal factor). The increment of growth may be negative as well as positive, particularly with regards to girth. Changes in weight, too, effect the centre of gravity.

The heart as static center may best be studied when the body is at rest, supine on the floor. To understand this better let one take the position of the corpse and feel the heart-beat; do not try at first to take any special position. Then lie flat on the back stretching arms and feet to make the sign of the cross with the body. The 'corpse' attests to involuntary, the cross to voluntary self-surrender, meaning: 'I am naught.' The breath supplies its own rhythm and the heart begins to dance. The devotee may repeat sacred words while in that position, the dancer may listen to soothing music. The heart will throb and the inner light be augmented. This is the Alpha and Omega of the spiritual dance, and to it one may always return.

After that one should try lying on the left and on the right sides as if in sleep, doing this preferably without music which might arouse discordant emotions and so distract one from the heart-concentration. After that, without turning attention from the heart one

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may rest upon the bosom. Then one may dream. The mind here begins to assert itself. The vital forces are alert and the animal consciousness is aroused; then one is awakening. Thus there is relaxation and also stimulation. This is important as the tired dancer, snatching a few moments, will obtain knowledge common even to the animals.

God, the Creator of the heavens and earth and of all the lower kingdoms of nature, made humanity in the divine image. So we may find something of the mineral, of the plant, and of the animal in humanity. It is possible to assume 'plant positions' and 'animal positions,' and to increase thereby psychic power as well as animal and vital magnetism. The bird contributed something in the course of evolution, viz., the ability to stand direct. It is this characteristic, absorbed by humanity, which has earned it the name of anthropos, the upright one. To stand correct is part of the teaching of hygiene and choreography and it need not be repeated here. But to keep the centre of movement and feeling in or near the heart is most important and shall be constantly reiterated.

### **B. *Breath and Walk***

Very refined breath. The origin of all, and to which all other elements return. Color smoky gray, or the rainbow.

### **C. *Body Awareness***

*All, the entire soma*, including those given above as well as their combinations. Mostly, this is felt in the silence of meditation, without external movement. As Murshid indicates above, however, the notion of 'stillness' or 'silence' can be felt as dynamic, with the heart as the center that includes all. So the ether element can be given in a walk that begins with earth and progressively adds the other elements (or one may begin with air and do the reverse order). At each stage, one adds an additional layer of 'body' awareness, of feeling, until one is simply moving, fully embodied, together with all bodies composed of the elements.

One can begin with the 'rainbow' form of the ether concentration—all the elements are simultaneously present in harmony—and progress to the 'pure light' form. In the latter, body awareness is, so to speak, lucid as though radiant with the One light. The latter form tends toward a type of samadhi in motion and is best followed by at least a short meditation in stillness. When one has mastered the different qualities of ether in motion, these may be added to other elements. When working with elements and their combinations, adding ether to any element produces a refinement or softening of the element, in breath, movement and/or sound.

### **D. *Sound***

The sound of ether is self-contained, and it holds all forms and colors. It is the base of all sounds, and is the undertone which is ever continuous. Its instrument is the human body, because it can be audible through it. Although it is all pervading, yet it is unheard. It manifests to humanity as it purifies the body from material properties. The body can become its proper instrument when the space within is opened, when all the tubes and veins in it are free. Then the sound which exists eternally in space becomes manifest inwardly also. Ecstasy, illumination, restfulness, fearlessness, rapture, joy and revelation are the effects of this sound. To some it manifests of itself, to others when they are in a negative state caused by weakness of the body or mind; to neither of these is it a benefit, but on the other hand it causes them to become abnormal. This sound only elevates those who open themselves to it by the sacred practices known to the mystics.

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### ***E. Purification Breath***

The purification breath done at the end of the other elemental breaths brings the energy together with a very refined breath through the nose.

### ***Concentrations with the Elements***

The following practices, given by Murshid Samuel Lewis, were recorded by his disciples in an earlier edition of the Teachers Dance Manual. One generally begins with the densest element, earth, and moves toward the most subtle, ether. Although this can also be done in reverse order, it calls for greater experience by the leader. Always watch the breath.

#### ✦ ***Breath***

Concentrate on each element in turn, and watch the breath both while sitting and while walking in a circle. Be aware of the nature of breath, and its direction and rhythm.

#### ✦ ***Sound***

Concentrate on each element and listen for the sound. Sing while concentrating on each element, and be aware of the sound of the voice – its nature, direction, and rhythm. Sing AH or HU or OM.

#### ✦ ***Movement***

Concentrate on each element, moving the body in the breath. Be aware of the movement. Walk in a circle. Spin. Walking outside, noticing the breath, concentrate on each element. For example, fire breath going up steep hills; water breath going downhill. Do not use ether breath when in traffic.

#### ✦ ***Instruments***

Concentrate on each element using the sound of instruments. For example, drums to represent the sound of earth; the koto for the sounds of water; sudden sharp sounds for fire, such as in kabuki theater, two sticks clapped together to warn of coming danger; the flute and other wind instruments for the sound of air.

#### ✦ ***Mantra***

Concentrate on each element with a mantra from the Dances. Be aware of the feeling and sound. Try different elements with different phrases, or the same phrase with different elements.

#### ✦ ***Before Dance***

Concentrate on each element before doing a Dance.

#### ✦ ***Combinations***

Combine each element with each other element.

#### ✦ ***Cycles***

Begin with ether and move in breath and concentration through each element to earth, and then back through each element to ether.