

The Yoga of Earth

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The Old Testament gives a description of God shaping man out of earth, breathing “into his nostrils the breath of life” (Genesis 2.7). Yoga names your physical body “anna-maya-kosha,” the level of individual consciousness that is created and sustained by food (anna) which comes from the earth. You are referred to as the embodied soul. Your body is honored as a temple, like a holy place that one would visit to experience a profound connection with the divine. The physical practices of yoga enable you to experience your body as the temple of Consciousness-Itself.

Everything that exists is comprised of the five primary elements, according to the ancient sages. The element of earth (prithivee) includes the ground on which you stand, the minerals suspended in water, and the solids floating in air. Water (ap) is found in lakes and streams, as well as the clouds and the humidity of air. Fire (agni) has been tamed to offer us fuel for heating and cooking, while it includes the untamed fires that arise from the molten core of the center of the earth. Air (vaata) is what we breathe, the atmosphere surrounding the planet and suffusing the sunlight to give us the beautiful colors at the beginning and end of the day. Space (aakkasha) is the background upon which all this manifests, the seemingly empty space through which the atoms swirl.

These five elements combine to form your body in an individualized way that is a perfect expression of your uniqueness. Earth gives your body its form and shape. Water provides the life-giving fluids inside, as well as the capacity to move. Fire is your digestive system, the warmth of your body and the warmth of your heart. Air is your breath and is the primary quality of your mind. Space is the hollow space inside your organs.

Your bones are the fullest expression of the element of earth in your body. They are made of minerals, like stones. Their solidity and density provide support for your body. Bones get strong when you use them. They weaken if you do not. Unfortunately, most people do not actually use their bones for support. Most people hold themselves up with their muscles, instead of leaning into their bones. To be centered and grounded you must stand in the bones of your feet, or sit on the “sit-bones” at the base of your buttocks. Lean into your bones. Relax into your bones. Let them hold you up.

Your first chakra (the primary energy center at the tip of your tailbone) houses the principle of earth. It is here that you learn to make it in the world, whether it is bare survival or great abundance. At this level you have the opportunity to become free from fear. You can master the physical plane and go on to the other issues of life: relationship, work, self-expression, insight and service. When this chakra is opened and balanced, your life falls together instead of falling apart. You become supremely glad to be alive and possess great health and vitality. You enjoy your own body without obsessing on it.

Smell comes from the element of earth. A handful of earth has a scent. Experienced farmers sniff the earth to gauge its properties. You may have experienced how a sudden whiff of a scent from your past can thrust you into memory. The experience can be so vivid that you are reliving it rather than simply remembering it. A highly sensitive nose can be an indication of extra sensory perception. A diminished sense of smell may indicate suppression of emotions or memories that make you feel threatened.

The element of earth is also associated with excretion. In many countries, human waste is an essential part of agriculture. Rather than polluting rivers or oceans, this form of earth is returned to the earth. Your own ancestors fertilized their farms in this way. But excretion is more than merely physical. Excretion is the ability to let go. This is easy if your sense of personal survival or safety is not dependent on the externals. But if your first chakra is still out of balance, you may find that letting go is not so easy.

Many yoga practices work specifically on this. This includes yoga poses and other practices that give you a strong sense of self, through finding your own Source in the inner realms. The development of

your own power and potential through these yoga practices is both immediate and long term. Consult with your yoga teacher for advice on your specific needs, both for physical poses and for exposing the inner realms of consciousness.

There are some fun and easy things you can do to stimulate and balance the element of earth in your body. Sit on the floor. Take off your shoes and walk barefoot. Sidewalks are good, for they are made of stone. Walking in dirt or mud is even better, and it is fun. Dig in the dirt, either to plant a garden or to make a few mud pies. Maybe you would rather build a sand castle. Sit in the sand without a blanket or chair underneath you. Visualize your bones and lean into them. Find a small stone and carry it in your pocket or purse. Handle it frequently, but do not get too attached to it. Give it back to the earth and borrow another. Pick up a handful of earth and smell it. Pour the first few drops of your glass of water on the earth as an offering, like the Vikings of old. Remind yourself to live in your body, not just in your head. You will like it.

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