

God in the Five Elements

by Ray Gebauer

Abstract. In our pursuit of personal integration, the issue of God cannot be ignored indefinitely. At some point each honest person must ask the question, "How or where does God fit into my world view and into my personal life?" However, the limited focus of this paper is to explore this essential question only as it relates to the Five Element Model we all use in TFH, and primarily in reference to the associated emotion of each element. Specifically three areas will be explored: First, we will examine the concept of God reflected in the five elements. Second, we will discuss our five potential positive spiritual responses within this model. Third, we will look at how these five responses can be distorted or imbalanced, and the important implications of this in our daily living.

I see the Five Element Theory as fairly comprehensive and amazingly accurate model from which we can derive very useful direction. It includes the five basic emotions we all experience: Sympathy, Grief, Fear, Anger, and Joy, but its implications extend beyond physical and emotional issues. It is intended to be a wholistic understanding of the world and how its various aspects interrelate. Since an intelligent Being designed this world, and us in particular, in His image, it would seem reasonable that His nature would also be reflected in the physical world. This is clearly verified in the Bible: "SINCE THE CREATION OF THE WORLD, HIS INVISIBLE ATTRIBUTES, HIS ETERNAL POWER AND DIVINE NATURE HAVE BEEN CLEARLY SEEN, BEING UNDERSTOOD THROUGH WHAT HAS BEEN MADE." (Romans 1:20) So let's gaze at God the Creator through the grid of the Five Elements.

The Earth Element emotion is that of "sympathy". This includes all the "caring" emotions such as "empathy" and "compassion." The very foundation of any relationship with a personal God begins here, with the fact that God cares about us, and has compassion and empathy for us. Perhaps the most well known verse in the Bible contains this element, "GOD SO LOVED THE WORLD THAT HE GAVE ..." Even the common imagery of "mother earth" is relevant. God's nature, like that of a caring mother, is that He desires to be our "Protection", our "Rock" of safety, our salvation and refuge. "WE HAVE A HIGH PRIEST WHO SYMPATHIZES WITH OUR

WEAKNESSES ... DRAW NEAR TO RECEIVE MERCY." (Heb. 4:15-16)

The Metal Element emotion is "Grief". Certainly there is no stoicism in the person God of the Bible: "MY SORROW IS BEYOND HEALING, MY HEART IS FAINT WITHIN ME. FOR THE BROKENNESS OF MY PEOPLE I AM BROKEN; I MOURN, DISMAY HAS TAKEN HOLD OF ME. IS THERE NO BALM IN GILEAD?" (Jeremiah 8:18-9:1) Jesus, the God-Man showed His grief as He wept at the tomb of His friend Lazarus. We are admonished to be careful not to grieve the Holy Spirit of God (Ephesians 4:30) . God's grief is born out of His compassion (Earth element) for us. As a personal Being, God experiences much grief and sorrow because He sees what we so often do not, that our misjudged decisions often lead to much unnecessary pain and alienation from Himself. To not have relationship with a people about which He cares is painful and the cause of His grief.

The Water Element emotion is "Fear". Because "fear" is the response to an unavoidable potential loss, God, being all powerful, by definition is not subject to losing anything outside of His control. Therefore He can not experience "fear". But just as the vast ocean of water is awesome and fearsome; so is the living God. Any rational human has a healthy fear of the ocean IF he understands it; for he knows it can easily overcome him if he is not in harmony with it. So it is with God. If we recognize Him to be an infinite, awesome Being, anyone in their right mind would have fear of

Him, knowing that disharmony likewise can bring destruction. Thus the water element speaks of God's awesome power, His limitlessness, His Majesty and Holiness. Therefore, certainly God is to be revered and feared. "FOR GREAT IS THE LORD, AND GREATLY TO BE PRAISED; HE IS TO BE FEARED ABOVE ALL GODS. SPLENDOR AND MAJESTY ARE BEFORE HIM." (Psalms 96:4-6) "WHO WOULD NOT FEAR THEE, O KING? INDEED, IT IS THY DUE!" (Jeremiah 7:6-7)

The Wood Element emotion is "Anger". This emotion also includes the elements of "zeal" and "passion". Numerous times in the Scriptures, God is angry because of injustice, or His people's refusal to honor Him with relationship and obedience. Instead we insult the Creator of the Universe by wanting to be independent of Him. Supposing our way is better than His, and thinking we don't need Him. "KISS (HONOR) THE SON, LEST HE BE ANGRY AND YOU BE DESTROYED." & "GOD HAS INDIGNATION EVERY DAY." (Psalms 2:10-12 & 7:11-12) The positive side of this element is God's zeal. When Jesus angrily drove the money-changers out of the temple, it is said of Him, "ZEAL FOR THY HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME." (John 2:13-17, Isaiah 9:7)

The Fire Element emotion is "Joy". Like the other four elements, this is a commonly ascribed attribute of God. God's greatest joy is in having intimate relationships with His children. "THE LORD YOUR GOD WILL REJOICE OVER YOU WITH SHOUTS OF JOY." Zephaniah 3:17. Jesus speaks of God's joy, "THESE THINGS I HAVE SPOKEN TO YOU THAT MY JOY MAY BE IN YOU, AND THAT YOUR JOY MAY BE MADE FULL!" (John 15:11) Also, God is said to be a "CONSUMING FIRE". (Heb.12:29) This describes the process of purification that creates joy, "CONSIDER IT PURE JOY WHEN YOU ARE PRESSED UPON WITH PROBLEMS, KNOWING THE TESTING OF YOUR FAITH PRODUCES ENDURANCE, THAT YOU MAY BE MATURE AND COMPLETE LACKING IN NOTHING." (James 1:2-4) Processing through our problems (challenges) can make us aware of our weaknesses and faults, which we may then discard in our journey toward greater wholeness and maturity, which brings joy.

As in both nature and in ourselves, all five elements are essential for balance and harmony with God as well. However, because the Five Element model was based on observation of nature which is of course finite, it by definition is inadequate to fully explain and express the nature of an infinite God. For example, it does not even address His Sovereignty, His Omnipresence, His Forgiveness, Righteousness, Wisdom, Patience, Perfection, Immutability, Goodness and Grace, Absoluteness, etc. Nevertheless, it is still very useful even though God can not be contained by any "box" or model.

Now let's examine what our choices are in responding to this God described by, though not limited to, the five elements.

When we respond to God through the Earth element, we experience His compassion, "emotional protection," as a type of "Mother Earth." "HE ONLY IS MY ROCK AND MY SALVATION, MY STRONGHOLD; I SHALL NOT BE SHAKEN!" (Psalms 62:5-8) In this experience of security and acceptance, we are able to relate to others with compassion: "PUT ON A HEART OF COMPASSION." (Colossians 3:12) Thus in the Earth Element we not only receive what we need from God (compassion, acceptance and protection), but we in kind reflect this one of the five essential aspects of His nature.

When we respond to God through the Metal Element, we experience grief. Just as He grieves over a lack of relationship with His created ones, it is proper for me to grieve over both my lack of relationship with Him, and the cause of it: my self-centeredness (sin). So I respond to my Holy Creator in humility and repentance. "SORROW THAT IS ACCORDING THE NATURE OF GOD PRODUCES A REPENTANCE LEADING TO SALVATION (wholeness/harmony/healing) THAT IS WITHOUT REGRET." (II Cor. 7:10)

In the Water Element we see God's awesome greatness, His Majesty and His infinite power. Unless we somehow can avoid seeing this, our only rational response is bowing down before Him in worship and fear. "THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM, AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE HOLY ONE IS UNDERSTANDING." (Poverbs 9:10) Can we ever mature beyond needing "fear" in our lives?

Of the most perfect man to live (Jesus), it is written, "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD SHALL REST UPON HIM, THE SPIRIT OF WISDOM AND UNDERSTANDING, THE SPIRIT OF COUNSEL AND STRENGTH, AND THE FEAR OF THE LORD; AND HE WILL DELIGHT IN THE FEAR OF THE LORD." (Isaiah 11:2-3) Also II Cor 7:1. So to be in balance spiritually, and to be in harmony with God, this kind of fear must be fully integrated into our lives if we are to respond properly to this infinite holy God.

The Wood Element provides us with yet another non-optional way to respond to God. Here I can experience anger and zeal. It is a sign of death or denial to have no anger or zeal about something. I need to be angry over the injustices in the world such as starvation, crime pollution and evil. I need to have zeal to take strong action against it. Because a holy god hates injustice, I need to hate it with the same zeal He does. In the same way, I need to have passion and zeal for both God Himself, in knowing Him intimately, as well as for His kingdom and purposes.

When we respond to God in the Fire element, we experience the ecstasy of Joy! This joy is independent of circumstances and situations, but finds its source in intimacy with a personal God. There is a shallowness in "joy" that is based on anything else, including achievements, possessions, control, fame, etc. In sharp contrast is the joy that is generated in a close relationship with a spouse or best friend. Only the depth of an intimate relationship can produce full joy. "IN THY PRESENCE IS FULLNESS OF JOY." (Psalms 16:11) Actually experiencing the presence of God creates joy, whether in worship, meditation, or in healing power. "THE KINGDOM OF GOD IS NOT EATING OR DRINKING (externals), BUT RIGHTEOUSNESS AND PEACE AND JOY (internals) IN THE HOLY SPIRIT." (Romans 14:17) So it is not through morality, right principles, or even serving others we have lasting joy, but in doing these same things for God's glory and because of our relationship with Him.

Just as ALL the elements of physical health are needed, such as air, water, food, exercise, and sleep, so it is for our relationship with God. We must relate to Him

in all five dimensions, and not mistakenly suppose we can pick and choose the ones we prefer. If we value balance, harmony and growth, we must embrace ALL of God, His entire nature, whether we fully understand it or not (being finite, we can not anyway). Interestingly, "love" can not be wholly contained in any one of the five elements. In the Earth element, the dimension of love that is evident is empathy, compassion and mercy, as well as the protecting aspect of love. In the Metal, we see the grief that comes from the loss of a loved one (without love, there is no basis for grief). In Water, we experience fear due to the possibility of the loss of someone or something that is dear to us, such as a child or our own life. In Wood, we discover anger when there is a violation against a person or principle we love and zeal when we press ourselves to give to or help a loved one or a just cause. In Fire, joy comes naturally as we experience closeness and intimacy in our relationships. One of our highest goals, love, is therefore only obtainable in its fullness in All five of the elements.

Identifying Imbalances

As in any good TFH balancing, we must now identify the state of imbalance (or "weakness") that may occur in each of the five elements as we seek to relate to God. There are at least 3 types of imbalances: deficiency, excess, and misdirection.

In the Earth element, an imbalance of excessive focus on compassion may exist that can create the serious neglect of other equally important elements. As this is true in our human relationships (sentimentalism), an exclusive focus on God's compassion (usually inaccurately referred to as "love") leads to a denial or minimization of the other elements. Of course, a lack of experiencing God's compassion is equally detrimental. However, a more subtle and equally dangerous imbalance is a misdirection of compassion. Instead of receiving God's compassion/empathy and giving it freely to others, a person can direct all his empathy toward himself in "loving" himself in self-absorption and self-protectiveness. "Empathy" toward others is reserved for the times it is convenient or when it is given to gain approval or an advantage. As with every

good thing, compassion/empathy is diluted and polluted, when it is contaminated with self-centeredness. This puts us out of harmony with others, God, and even ourselves, so often without even any awareness on our part.

In the Metal Element, grief can easily become imbalanced. In a state of excess, we find ourselves suffering with unresolved guilt, depression, doubting that God loves us, and unwilling to release the past. We are unable to fully experience anything else until we have fully forgiven others and ourselves. This person may feel God is an unrelenting policeman in the sky rather than a Father of mercy and grace. Yet, in contrast, or even at the same time, this person may have a deficiency of grief in his relationship with God. Instead of humility, sorrow, or any repentance, there is an attitude of independence, of not needing God or of being accountable to him, and even an air of pride and self-righteousness. The only time "sorrow" of any kind is felt is sorrow over not getting what was wanted. Again this distortion is caused by a self-orientation mentality, if not toward people in general, at least in response to God. Humility is inherently necessary for healthy grief.

The proper balance of "grief" in this respect is so important that in the most famous address given by one man to others, the Sermon on the Mount, the first three of the eight beatitudes refer to this: "BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT BLESSED ARE THOSE WHO MOURN (i.e. in repentance over their sin) BLESSED ARE THE GENTLE/HUMBLE ..." (Matt. 5:3-5) In fact, "GOD MAKES WAR AGAINST THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE." (James 4:6-10) What we all really need is more grace, and NOT having God against us! Let's be sure to stay in balance on this one!

The Water Element also has great potential for serious hidden imbalance. The most obvious is excessive fear, including the fear of rejection, or failure, of success, of sickness, of being insignificant, of not being good enough, etc. There can be an excessive unhealthy fear toward God, such as thinking that God is always angry and/or punishing for past mistakes. On the other hand, there can be a state of reckless fearlessness that

endangers one's life or health. In a similar way, a lack of a healthy fear toward God has serious consequences. It is first of all, certain evidence that a person has chosen to ignore Who God really is. He has either denied or lost touch with the fact of God's awesome greatness, His infinite Power and His Majesty. It is obviously unwise and dangerous to ignore the Creator of the Universe to whom we are accountable. Because we were created for His purposes, when we leave Him out of our lives, not only is God grieved and offended, but we are actually robbing ourselves of fulfilling our greatest potential that comes with being in harmony with God's plans and purposes.

Because we were designed to have a certain amount of fear in our lives, rationalizing away the fear of God does not really eliminate fear at all, but merely shifts it toward something else, such as a fear of not being accepted, or successful, or loved, or having worth or value. Another problem is a tendency toward relativistic thinking, rejecting absolutes. This person increasingly becomes more and more self-orientated, self-focused, and thinking that he does not need God. A balanced spiritual and emotional life must include this foundational element of the fear of a holy and awesome God.

In the Wood element, we frequently see in people two extremes. A person can be aggressive, demanding and controlling, or passive with no purpose of direction in life. A person who has anger toward God or people is a person with a demanding attitude that things should go his way (arrogance). A person with no "anger" energy is not committed to anything and has no drive or meaningful purpose in life. Yet even in a person with zeal for worthy causes, such as TFH, or a political cause, there is the danger of having substituted "good" for the "best". A person's greatest zeal and priority needs to be directed toward God, in knowing Him, and for His purposes in this world. And we must be careful that our zeal is not merely focused on ourselves, on achieving what We want for ourselves. If we are to be consumed with zeal, let it be for no less worthy person than the living God. He not only deserves more than a passive faith and acceptance, but we find that it is in our own best interest to respond to God with zeal and passion.

In the Fire Element, an excessive amount of joy is not very common. Most of us suffer from a lack of it. It is hard to have too much joy; but when joy becomes the primary response to every situation in life, there has to be some serious denial of reality. For most people with an imbalance of joy, it is either in the direction of too little, or it is a case of it being based too much on anything else but a relationship with God. If I don't have enough joy, I am overly focused on MY needs and desires not being met. This again is an evidence of the contaminating effect of self-centeredness. Real JOY is not found in hedonism, or in the illusion of control, or getting what I want. It is experienced in relationships, and most importantly in my relationship with God as I experience both security as I trust Him, and intimacy as I pursue Him with all my being. If I have an abundance of joy, but this has nothing to do with responding to God, I am still out of balance with God in the Fire Element. The greatest joy, in quality and duration, is in personally knowing God as our Father.

Let us be careful to not limit God by our finite understanding or our biases of what we think God should be like. God is not created in our image, but we in His. If we are to fully experience all that He is, and if we are to move closer to greater balance, integration and harmony, we must respond to Every aspect of His nature, as exemplified by the five elements.

I trust that the relevancy of these concepts is obvious. However, may I suggest two specific ways to use this. This understanding of God can be included in your awareness when you are being balanced or balancing another, especially when the emotion of one of the elements is on line. Additionally, of course, the focus of the balancing can be the person's spiritual relationship with God.

The second way of using this is something I do on almost a daily basis. When I pray to my Father, I ask Him to show me how I am out of balance in Each of the Five Elements, and to "balance my heart" accordingly. For

example, I ask God to give me more compassion (Earth element) for those with whom I interact, and that He would give me the grace to rely more on Him as my "protection" (emotional) instead of me being defensive and self-protective. I ask that instead of my heart being hard (to protect me from pain), that it would be soft (as fertile earth), and that He would be my Rock and Security.

Then I ask God to show me what I need to see in my life for which I need to repent (Metal). Usually it is some varied form of self-centeredness. I ask Him to help me to humble, because He only gives grace to the humble, but opposes the proud.

As I contemplate God's greatness, awesomeness and majesty, I ask Him to give me "fear" (Water) of Him as previously explained. I strive to maintain that balance of seeing who I am (my smallness) in light of Who God is (His greatness).

Then I ask God to give me His Zeal (Wood). I tell him I want to have zeal and a passion for knowing Him and following Him in everything I do that day. I recognize that I all too often have a lot of zeal (or anger) for my own agenda rather than for His. I ask for zeal to love and serve others selflessly just as His son did.

Finally, I ask my Father for the experience of His presence, so that I may enjoy intimacy and closeness, and the power and joy of abiding in His presence through His Spirit (Fire).

In conclusion, I strongly encourage you to explore the significance of the five element emotions in your life as it relates to knowing and responding to the God of the five elements and of the Universe. This five element model can be a very useful tool in examining the degree of balance and integration of God's character in your life. The implication of this level of balance can be eternal.