

# How to Conduct Research Using the Alchemical Cycle of the Elements:

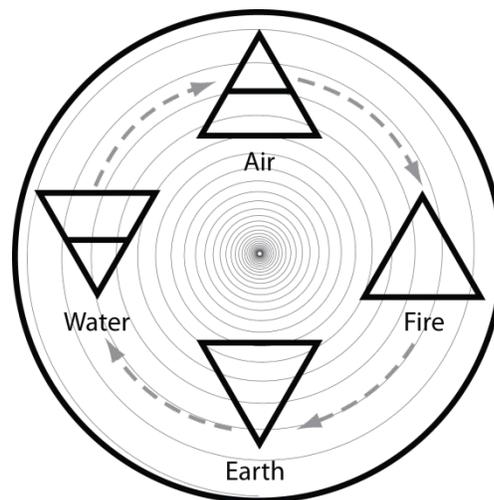
## Earth-Water-Air-Fire

An Introduction and Primer

By Seth Miller

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### Introduction

Thank you for your potential participation in my research project for my Master's degree in Consciousness Studies. I have found the elemental cycle to be a very useful tool in my own life, both personally and professionally, and I am presently engaged in exploring and developing the cycle in a more focused and deliberate way. Part of my goal is to find a sense for where and how the cycle is best utilized, with the ultimate aim of formulating a concise way to communicate the essence of the cycle to interested parties in such a way that it can be immediately and practically useful.

This is where you come in. Part of my research involves a phenomenological look at how the alchemical cycle can be used by a variety of individuals. I have my own personal understanding and ways of applying the cycle, but in no way can I claim that my experience is more fundamental or uniquely special than any other person's. In an attempt to broaden my understanding, and to get a deeper sense of just how the cycle works for a variety of individuals, I need volunteers like you to explore the cycle in your own way, and to submit a record of your experiences.

The other way you can help me is to give me feedback relating to how well this document is able to communicate useful information to you concerning the use of the elemental cycle. In essence, this is a first draft of my attempt to consolidate and express the cycle into a usable package, and your insights, questions, suggestions and comments will be of great value to me as I continue to refine the presentation.

The elemental cycle of Earth, Water, Air and Fire may be an entirely new concept for you, or you may have already used it in your own life with great skill. If you are the latter, then I would appreciate feedback on how you have used the cycle, making sure to indicate steps you took and any results, experiences, problems, or insights you had along the way. A note about where you learned about the cycle and any differences you notice with respect to the approach laid out here would also be helpful.

If you are new to the elemental cycle, or if you wish to begin with it anew, then read on: I will try to formulate a picture of the basic steps of the cycle in such a way that you can begin to work with it on a topic of your choice. In either case, the feedback questions at the end of the document should provide a useful template for your responses to me. Ideally I would receive your feedback by March 15<sup>th</sup> to be able to include it in my thesis work, but would very much appreciate feedback after that date as well. You will also need to sign and return the JFKU Form as well.

At some point you may run into difficulties understanding how to work with a particular element, or you may have question about the instructions. Please feel free to email me if you have any questions along the way, or wish to discuss any of your experiences or other aspects of the process.

My email is: [spiritself@gmail.com](mailto:spiritself@gmail.com).

I have also placed this document at my website, <http://www.spiritalchemy.com> for reference and as a place for further information.

## The Elemental Cycle – Overview

### ***What is the elemental cycle?***

The elemental cycle is a universal tool that can help you understand and connect to phenomenon around and within you more deeply and effectively. For any given topic, it can help you clarify what it is actually like, flow with how it is changing, be open to its possibilities, and illuminate its inner meaning. You can think of the cycle as a key that fits almost any lock – all you need to know is *how to turn the key*. Stated another way, the elemental cycle is a tool for structuring human consciousness according to objective patterns of manifestation.

### ***What is the elemental cycle good for?***

Training in using the elemental cycle has a number of benefits. As the cycle is quite objective in nature, it has the ability to help us understand external phenomenon, such as those present in the natural world (the growth of plants, the constitution of our Earth, weather patterns, physiology, and so forth). On the other hand, the elemental cycle is just as potentially useful as a tool for personal illumination and is a living spiritual technology facilitating our own transformation. Working with the elemental cycle can help you become a more effective learner, a smoother communicator, a more open listener, and a more insightful ‘understander’.

### ***To what types of situations can I apply the elemental cycle?***

The elemental cycle works with the archetype of change, and can thus be instructive at some level for any phenomenon that is transforming. Because essentially every situation is changing, the cycle can be applied to any phenomenon you choose. What this means is that when you encounter situations in life that are confusing, difficult, interesting, mysterious, or that simply present to your soul the feeling of questioning, the elemental cycle can be used to help you skillfully enter into the archetypal background that informs the unfolding of the phenomenon, allowing a deeper glimpse into its structure, relations, potential and its overall meaning. The elemental cycle helps streamline your effort, and lets you know where your attention might be best concentrated.

### ***How do I use the elemental cycle?***

This document is designed to provide a practical introduction to the usage of the elemental cycle. Unlike training in a strictly scientific discipline, where terms and laws are formulated exactly so as to eliminate alternate interpretations, work with the elemental cycle is more like an art, where analogy and metaphor are just as useful as “facts”. Luckily, it is an art that has at its core an objective set of principles – we could call them archetypes – which yield something interesting: the elemental cycle itself helps train you in how to use it! In fact, it would be possible for you to arrive at the principles of the elemental cycle on your own simply by paying attention to the world around you, or your own physiology, or to music. Indeed, you already have a wealth of experiences which will help you understand the elemental cycle. Because the elemental cycle is a way of accessing the lawful patterns of change and transformation embedded within the processes of the world, paying attention to those processes – even ones that you are already familiar with – provides potential feedback from the world that can tell you about the elemental cycle itself.

The point is that you don’t need to know everything about the elemental cycle to use it effectively. Simply rhythmically paying attention according to the principles laid out below will serve to lead you towards a more complete understanding of how the cycle works and how you can use it. There are as many ways of using the cycle as there are individuals, and no way is necessarily better or worse than any other. Like anything in life, you get out what you put into it. My goal is to help you streamline what you “put in” so that you maximize your potential return.

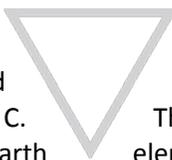
### ***How long will it take?***

Work with the cycle can be undertaken on almost any scale. It is possible to work through a full cycle in a single sitting; alternately, fruitful work with the cycle can take years. Practically speaking, you should expect to gain a basic *theoretical* understanding of the elemental cycle simply by reading through this document. Allotting at least five minutes a day to actually try the exercises can give you a basic *practical* understanding in a week or so. I have been working with the elemental cycle for over eight years and still continually find new aspects and layers of the cycle!

## Introduction to the Elements

### Earth-

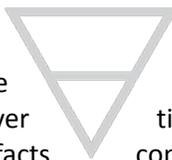
The Earth element is the base, factual level of of the sensory experience of the phenomenon. can be made, such as “It is red,” or “it happened facts; they can be recorded as statements, A, B, C. “true” or “false”, “correct” or “incorrect”. The Earth every fact seems more or less to be isolated from every other fact.



the phenomenon. It is the ‘obvious’. It is the data It is any aspect about which definitive statements at 4:30”, or “It makes me feel queasy.” These are all The Earth level of the phenomenon can therefore be element seems unambiguous: it just is what it is, and

### Water-

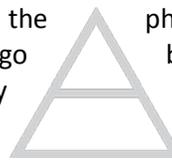
The Water element brings the facts of the Earth into relationship. No fact is stable, or exists in isolation. Rather, every fact is a precipitate that falls out of the interweaving contexts of its immediate environment in time and space, just like a crystal of salt precipitates out of a what is changing, what is moving from B to C immediate past and immediate future of the phenomenon to change the way it appears over other aspects of itself and other phenomenon; facts meaning. In the Water realm, the truth of one fact leads naturally to the truth of another, related fact.



solution when the water evaporates. Water is and has already moved from A to B. It is the phenomenon. It is the tendency for the time. Water is the way the phenomenon relates to connect to other facts to create a stream of evolving

### Air-

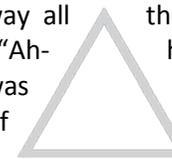
In the Air element, the movements and changes of the phenomenon are found to exist between sets of polarities, whether opposites, complements, or reciprocals. The movement from A to B to C is understood as existing somewhere along the polarity of the scale A to Z. The facts are no longer static, nor are they simply related to other facts. Now the facts of the Earth level of the phenomenon are experienced as if inverted or reversed. In Air we have the experience “what if?”, and we see the view. We recognize that once we get to Z, we go Z, and in the end A and Z aren’t quite so far away space around the phenomenon, what arises nature become as invisible and mobile as the



phenomenon from one or more of the polar points of back to A – and moving the other way, A moves into from each other as we may have thought. Air is the when we make the apparent solidity of its Earth air itself. In Air, the phenomenon presents aspects of itself that are simultaneously one way and another way. Facts are both “true” and “false” at the same time, and the context of the Water level expands to include so many additional aspects that it is like there is no real context at all, or that everything is contextually relevant. We may get very confused, and lose track of what seemed to be stable facts from the Earth level when we reach the Air level of the phenomenon.

### Fire-

The Fire element resolves the tendency towards dissipation of our understanding at the Air level into a coherent, meaningful, encompassing whole. It burns away all aspect of the phenomenon that makes us say “Ah- real understanding of the phenomenon that was The facts from the Earth level, the movements of all fit together simultaneously as an ordered we recognize that in fact the Fire insight was present all along, embedded at each level like a secret waiting to be discovered. We may feel like the insight came from outside of us, as if the world is speaking to us in a language that we are just beginning to learn.



the extraneous fluff and gives us a glimpse of some ha!” to ourselves. We feel now that we have some previously unavailable to us; we have an insight. the Water level, the reversals of the Air level now whole in a way that makes ‘sense’ to us. We

## How to Use the Elemental Cycle

### **First, in Brief:**

Choose a phenomenon and express your phenomenon as a question. Write this question down. Then use the questions appropriate to each element as described below, beginning with Earth, to explore your phenomenon. Record your feelings, thoughts, and any insights or 'answers'. Repeat the asking of the questions from Earth to Fire in a rhythm that seems natural. Respond to the feedback questions.

### **Then, in More Detail:**

1. **(Fire)** Choose a particular phenomenon of any kind around which you have a question, or with which you feel a need for transformation, or an area which you have identified as needing your attention for one reason or another (see sample list of potential questions in Appendix 1 for ideas). Try to formulate this phenomenon or issue as a concise question, which you should write down in a small journal designed for work with the elemental cycle. Don't worry that you have the 'right' question – the elemental cycle includes helping you recognize when to shift your question.
2. **(Earth)** Concentrate on your chosen phenomenon. Try to notice as many of its details as you can. The idea is to get as clear as possible about the basic facts of the situation. Spend about 5 minutes (and no more than 10) identifying as many facts about your phenomenon that you can, using the following questions.
  - a. Ask: What are the facts? What is different? What is unique? What could everyone else agree upon? What stands out? What seems constant? What can I count on? What is irrefutable? What are the pieces? What categories do the pieces fit into? What feels like a heavy weight, like a solid stone, or like gravity with respect to this phenomenon?
  - b. Write down the facts that you notice. Also record how you felt as you did this exercise. Did you feel stifled, sure, apprehensive, robust... etc.?
3. **(Water)** Do not proceed directly to Water, but make sure you take at least a short break where you are not thinking about your phenomenon at all. Then approach your phenomenon again, this time with the purpose of seeing if there are any patterns to what you noticed in the Earth level. It can be helpful to try and remember as many of your Earth facts as you can. Once you can't remember any more facts, re-read your written record. Then spend about 5 minutes (and no more than 10) working with the following questions.
  - a. Ask: What is changing? Do any of the facts connect to each other? Do the facts manifest in a sequence? Are there parts which at first appear different but upon reflection have some similarity or are like each other? What is the immediate context of the facts? What patterns do I notice? Are there any rhythms or cycles? What are the processes that give rise to the individual facts? Is there a specific context that makes the phenomenon more (or less) pronounced or apparent? How is one aspect turning into another, seemingly different aspect? What about my phenomenon makes me feel like I am floating along, caught in the waves, drowning, or repeating the same thing over and over?
  - b. Describe in your journal the impressions, insights, feelings, and any images that arise when you consider the Water level of your phenomenon.
4. **(Air)** After a break of no less than 5 minutes and no more than a day, try to move to the Air level. Your goal is to expand your awareness of the polarities of the situation, and to lessen your reliance upon the overt facts or entrenched aspects of your phenomenon. Briefly remember your Earth facts. Then recall their immediate context and movements. Then spend about 5 minutes (and no more than 10) working with the following questions.
  - a. Ask: What is reversing? Where do I go if I extrapolate the movements I identified in the Water level to their extremes? What is the overall range of manifestation of the major aspects of the phenomenon? That is, what are its limits? Where does the phenomenon seem to 'run out' or dissolve? What parts do I seem to be unable to focus or concentrate upon? If I could imagine the

opposite of one part or the whole phenomenon, what would it be? How would I feel if this reversal actually occurred? What about this phenomenon makes me feel like I am losing my moorings completely, like my knowing runs out, like there is no truth, or like every part is equally important or unimportant?

- b. Describe in your journal the impressions, insights, feelings, and any images that arise when you consider the Air level of your phenomenon.

5. **(Fire)** After a break of no less than 5 minutes but no more than a day, return to your phenomenon. After very briefly recalling the facts, feeling their embeddedness in flowing processes, and their simultaneous polarities, place yourself in a mood of open questioning, where you do not expect any answers. You cannot *make* yourself see the Fire level, but can only increase the likelihood of its appearing to you by getting yourself out of the way of its manifesting. Rhythmically moving from Earth to Air will prepare you for the Fire level, and the entrance into the Fire level may occur at any time or while doing any of the other exercises. Your goal at this stage is to silence yourself inwardly after working from Earth to Air in an open, listening, ready state of quiet enthusiasm for your phenomenon without expectation, need, or fear. The following questions will help you recognize when a Fire moment occurs or has the potential to occur.

- a. Ask: What is the whole? What lies within or behind the phenomenon that allows the seemingly conflicting aspects of the Air level to coexist in a harmony, in a way that is not mutually destructive, but rather is mutually enhancing? Do I have a new insight that makes better sense of all the previous levels? Is there some subtle aspect of the phenomenon that once seemed insignificant but now seems like the key to the whole thing? Do I have the feeling of participating in something larger than myself? Do I suddenly notice how this phenomenon shows up in places I never expected or noticed before? Do I have the experience that the phenomenon is speaking to me through other, seemingly unrelated aspects of my life and experience? Do I feel transformed in some way?
- b. If a Fire moment does not seem to occur, do not worry – this is expected; it will occur when you are ready. To become ready, you must establish a rhythm of working from Earth to Water to Air. This is best if done every day for about a week. In the mean time, describe in your journal any impressions, insights, feelings, and images that arise when considering the Fire questions above. This is the place where you may be led to a new question. In fact, your Fire moment may consist of the realization that you need to ask a different question. Pay particular attention to this possibility by asking your original question again at the end of the Air exercise. Then let your question go and return to daily life.
- c. If a Fire moment does occur, describe in your journal any insights, feelings, images, and experiences. Try to encapsulate your experience or insight into a statement. Sit with your insight for a while. Then try to formulate a new question about your phenomenon based on your Fire experience. This becomes the seed – the new Earth – for a higher level of working with your phenomenon. You can begin the elemental cycle again from the newfound vantage point of your modified question.

## Appendix 1: Helpful Tips, Hints, Caveats, and Secrets

1. The most useful outcome of working with the elemental cycle is not to obtain an answer to any specific question. More important is the way that such work changes our sensitivity to the subtleties of the whole range of potential manifestations of phenomena *in general*. In other words, working with the elemental cycle develops our capacity to understand and work with phenomena in a robust, integral, and healthy way. It objectifies our consciousness, smoothes out our tendencies to approach things from a one-sided or entrenched perspective, opens up possibilities for change on any number of scales and levels, allows deeper entry into otherwise complex, subtle, and confusing phenomena, and provides continuous feedback about our own evolution.
2. Your initial question can be about anything – there are no wrong questions. However, you may find a list of potential areas to which one might apply the elemental cycle helpful. The following is a tiny sample of valid ‘research questions’:

“Why do I have difficulty communicating with _____?”	“How do I learn this computer program?”
“Why do I feel fearful when the topic of _____ arises?”	“How does the weather affect mood?”
“What should I eat?”	“Where should I live?”
“How can I reduce the stress in my life?”	“Should I change jobs?”
“How can I change my habit of _____?”	“What are the effects of watching television?”
“What is my purpose in life?”	“How can I find something sacred in my life?”
“How can I communicate more effectively?”	“Am I investing my money wisely?”
“How should I plan a presentation about _____ for _____?”	“What school is best for my child?”
“What is the nature of cell division?”	“Why do I have this health problem?”
“How is granite formed?”	“How can I find time to _____?”
“How does a lily grow?”	“What is the nature of the elemental cycle?”

3. The questions for each element are just guides designed to connect your consciousness to the archetype behind the element. Do not feel that you must answer every question. Feel free to make up your own questions at each level. Once you get the ‘mood’ of each element, you might dispense with the verbal aspect of the questions and simply approach your phenomenon in the mood of each element, where your consciousness embodies each elemental mode in its structure and function according to your will.
4. When recording your impressions after each exercise, anything is game. Do not feel that you must restrict yourself to thoughts or feelings that seem overtly well-connected to the phenomenon. Allow yourself to be aware of the subtleties of your experience, and do not necessarily discount anything. Sometimes the key to the phenomenon lies in a subtle or seemingly unrelated image or feeling that occurs.
5. Everyone will move through the elemental cycle in a way that is unique. There is no ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ way.
6. As you become more familiar with each elemental stage, feel free to spend more or less time with each elemental stage as appropriate, or as guided by your intuition. Pay particular attention to any feelings that may occur when considering how long to stay with a given element, or when considering the question “Am I done with this element?” This will help inform you about which elements you have a tendency to ‘live’ in by default. The goal is to be able to build the capacity to work from any element according to the needs of the situation at hand.
7. Try to find a rhythm of moving through the elements that is right for you. You may try one element every day or so, or you may try to move from Earth to Air in one sitting, repeated over a period of a few days or a week.
8. You will likely find a particular element in which you feel like you “don’t get” or alternatively that you just “get stuck”. This is an important realization and working through the area that you can’t get into, or that you

can't let go of, can often provide the key to the rest of the process, as well as to your own transformation. The most common difficulties are of two types: firstly, you can have difficulty moving *into* an element after feeling like you successfully and completely engaging with the previous one, as if you just "don't get" the new element. You try to ask the questions but feel like you have no idea about what you are looking for or what an appropriate response might look like. Secondly, you can have difficulty *getting out* of an element to move into the next one, as if you "got stuck" in the element and can't move beyond it, even though you may 'get' the next element. When you "get stuck" in an element you may find that you feel very comfortable asking the questions associated with that level, and that you have plenty of responses to those questions, but just feel like you can't leave the element when the time comes to try the next one.



- a. If you **"don't get" Earth** and have trouble engaging with it, or feel like you are noticing too few details, try to consult a resource that can give you help identifying different elements of your phenomenon. Such resources may include Wikipedia, encyclopedias, or other expert sources – even just asking your friends or family about the phenomenon can help. Alternatively, or additionally, it may help to leave the phenomenon for the day and come back to it fresh. Try to look at your phenomenon from a new angle, literally and metaphorically. It may also be helpful to work with the Water element, as familiarity with the process level of your phenomenon will naturally suggest new places to look for facts.
- b. If you **"get stuck" in Earth**, you may feel like every experience is an Earth experience, or that all that exists are details. This can make you feel like there are an infinite number of facts to notice, and might lead you to feel overwhelmed, trapped, or like you cannot continue with the process because it is too suffocating. If this occurs, you may want to alternate your focus on the questions of the Fire and Water elements. The Fire element will help you remember why you are doing this in the first place, why the phenomenon interests you, and of your enthusiasm for reaching a transformative understanding; the Water element will help loosen any anxiety around the solid facts of the Earth element, and will show you both that there is an underlying flow that keeps things connected and moving, and that things don't have to stay the way they are.



- c. If you **"don't get" Water**, you may feel apprehensive about the inevitability of change. You may feel like you are pulling up your anchor and to set yourself adrift on a wide sea, with no land in sight, and that as a consequence you have no clear indication about where to go or in what direction you should place your effort, because every direction looks the same. You may feel like there are infinite avenues to explore, and too many aspects that are shifting, forming connections or dissolving connections to make sense of anything. In this case, returning to Earth and reviewing the facts of the situation helps summon a mood in your soul that there is something you can rely upon, something objective and solid that gives you a firm foundation to proceed. Try to take one aspect of your phenomenon and then imagine it changed just slightly, like it took a single step to the left or right. Then try to imagine the potential repercussions of this for the rest of the facts – do they change too? If so, how? If your phenomenon allows it, you do not have to imagine this sequence, but can actually manipulate your phenomenon like an experiment: keeping all but one variable constant, shift that variable slightly and see what happens. Paying attention to only one shift at a time can be a good place to begin dipping your toe into the Water realm. Following the resulting domino trail when one fact shifts leads you under the surface entirely, but gives you clarity around *how* you got there, allowing you to feel more at home.
- d. If you **"get stuck" in Water**, you may feel like everything connects to everything else, but that the patterns are so entrenched that you lose the forest for the trees. You may also feel like you have more or less completely understood the gesture(s) of your phenomenon, and that there isn't really much left to explore, like it's the "same ol' thing day after day", or like what you are dealing with is just another cog in the wheels of a big machine – "things are changing all-right, changing the same

way as before". In this case, you can propel yourself out of the 'mud' by taking any fact about your phenomenon and imagining the consequences for the whole if that fact suddenly became its opposite. Working with the Air element in this way can shake of the momentum of repetitious cycles and open up new vistas. You may also benefit from another person's perspective on the matter, particularly if they do not agree with your present view. Simply try to imagine what would have to be the case *if* the other person's perspective was accurate.



- e. If you **"don't get" Air**, you might find it difficult to see alternate points of view. The connected flow of meaning in the Water realm might make great sense to you – so much so that alternatives just seem theoretical, even not worth pursuing. Entering the Air may seem like trying to grab onto an abyss, where there isn't anything obvious to hold on to. When trying to engage with it you might find your mind filled with disconnected, seemingly random thoughts. Your feelings might become amplified and may tend towards what may appear to your rational mind as excess. We have a tendency to experience one meaning at a time – Air requires that we be able to simultaneously experience multiple meanings. Because of this, there can be a great temptation when trying to deal with the Air level of a phenomenon to give up entirely, or to have the feeling like you cannot tolerate continued confusion and lack of knowing. This is both natural and useful, and indicates that you are doing the work. If you can't engage with the Air element, try to imagine some sequence you identified at the Water level in your mind's eye. Now see if you can push the sequence forward just slightly to a new stage that you have not yet observed or imagined, making sure that the feeling of the movement of your sequence is maintained. Now reverse the sequence in your mind and play it backwards. When you reach the beginning, push the sequence backwards to a previous stage that you haven't yet observed or imagined, again while maintaining continuity. Run this sequence forwards and backwards, trying to expand the range just a little each time. You can do this multiple times, where in each instance you take the phenomenon in a different direction on its forward and backward ends. This lets you use the principles of the Water element to expand naturally into the Air element. Working with Air can be difficult, and you may need to work with letting go of any particular feeling or interpretation you have about your phenomenon (generally established in the Earth and Water elements). You can help mitigate any biases you bring to the phenomenon by creating a space in which you consciously explore the complete range of possibilities associated with the content of your thoughts and feelings when doing the Earth, Water, and Air exercises. To do this, after working normally with an element of your choice, review your experience and pick out the most apparent or important thought and feeling that occurred to you in regards to your phenomenon. Then consciously imagine what it would be like if each one was taken to its extreme, as if they had a volume knob that went past 10 and all the way to 11. What would this feel like? What would the content of your thought about your phenomenon consist of when exaggerated like this? Now try to explore what would happen if the volume knob was turned down, *past* zero until it reaches 11 again *from the reverse side*. If this exercise is too difficult, then simply notice your *mood* as you engage with the other elements, and see if you can imagine what it would feel like to be in a completely opposite mood. For more help, you can even try reversing other aspects of how you perform the exercise: if you usually sit, try lying or standing. Try doing the exercise outside, or even simply face the opposite direction. You can even try doing the exercise 12 hours later/earlier, at the complementary time of day. Oscillating between these polarities every other day will definitely put you in an air state.
- f. If you **"get stuck" in Air**, you may feel like anything goes, and that it is impossible to tell between what is true or false about your phenomenon. You may delight in the infinite possibilities but feel at a loss when you try to see how everything is connected on a higher level. You may become frustrated and feel like you aren't 'getting anywhere', even while feeling like you are on the border of some realization. This is a time to cultivate patience. It can be useful here to consciously place the

exercises aside for a while to let them rest in your unconscious. If you have a creative hobby, practice that instead, particularly if it gives you a sense of accomplishment and enthusiasm. When you come back to the exercises, try to do so with fresh eyes and the feeling of allowing but not requiring completely new experiences to be possible. Try to let go of your expectations – you may need to consciously allow yourself to experience the possibility of ‘failure’. This is beneficial, as long as you do the exercise anyway.



- g. If you **“don’t get” Fire**, you may feel that when you are working with the Fire element you feel like a failure, or that you will “never get it”. You may feel like something important is passing you by, like you are somehow blind to something that should be obvious. As a result of this you may feel like there *is* no bigger picture, no insight to be had beyond what is already apparent to you. There can be a number of reasons why your work may not seem to yield a connection to the Fire level. In any case, a common symptom that shows up before the Fire level becomes apparent is frustration, as if there were a friction process occurring deep in the soul. This is actually an indication that you are moving in the right direction! It is the conscious application of your will to the exercises that is pushing a part of yourself up against the unknown, and the abrasion this causes results in a fiery frustration, potentially even anger – at the exercises, the phenomenon, or yourself for feeling incapable of ‘getting it’. This is the moment in which the will must become even more present – but not in a forceful way. Rather, you must learn how to surrender your will to a higher part of yourself – the part of yourself that can Witness your life without judgment. This higher surrender, or we could say conscious suffering – cleans out the part of yourself that acts like a screen between you and the Fire level of the phenomenon.
- h. It is very difficult to **“get stuck” in Fire** when working with the cycle in the way indicated in this document. The nature of the Fire element generally restricts one’s ability to willfully ‘hold on’ to a given state. However, if you find that you seem to see deep meanings in every aspect of your phenomenon, or if the bulk of your thoughts about your phenomenon are accompanied with the feeling of grand importance, you may need to balance your approach. Alternatively, you may feel so passionate about your phenomenon that you feel full of the need for some kind of action but cannot get a clear sense for where to focus your efforts. You may even lose your ability to identify obvious features of your phenomenon because everything becomes more than it seems. In any case, return to the Earth element and seek to become intimately familiar with the facts and details associated with your phenomenon. Grounding yourself in the Earth element will keep you focused and attentive to the actual phenomenon. This will either substantiate your intuitions or will show you where you need to let go of a particular way of viewing your phenomenon in order to incorporate more of its Earth aspects in a coherent way.
9. Let the cycle itself be your guide. Continue to rhythmically place your attention on each element in a questioning mood as you feel inclined. Do not expect particular results, but allow the process to connect your consciousness to your chosen phenomenon and lead you to the next phase. Be detailed. Be flexible. Be willing to let go. Be creative.
10. Earth Tip: To begin with, you may find that it is almost impossible to notice details of your phenomenon without also experiencing an accompanying judgments or emotion. In fact, the details may even consist entirely of a judgment you make about the phenomenon. This is normal – simply note your judgment or emotion in your journal. In working with the cycle, you will slowly learn how to notice details about your phenomenon without becoming distracted by any emotional triggers, interpretations, or desires to have the phenomenon be any different than it appears. At the same time, this does *not* mean that such things will no longer occur to you. Rather, it means that you will strengthen your capacity to keep a part of your consciousness in “witnessing” or “observer” mode, regardless of the complexities and drama of your inner

experience. This part of you simply and profoundly says “this is what it is”, without any judgment, and is often accompanied by the feeling “and it is really *okay* that it is this way”.

- 11.** The List of Descriptors and Qualities (below) is a useful way to get a handle on the elements and their transformation. Examining the columns (one for each element) should give you a decent all-around impression of the individual elements, while working with the rows should help you get a feeling for the transformative capacity of the elemental cycle. If you “get stuck” in an element, briefly scanning the column for *the next* element in the cycle may help your transition. If you “don’t get” an element, briefly scanning the column for that *same* element may help put you in the right frame of mind for working with that element.
- 12.** Working with the elemental cycle is working with an archetype of change. Although the elemental cycle can be used simply for external research, if worked with rhythmically, it will naturally lead one towards self-transformation, and can be quite instructive and illuminative with respect to the training of the inner life. In other words, do not be surprised if, when working with the elemental cycle in any context, insights about your own inner life occur. This is a gift of the well known principle: “As above, so below; as below, so above.”
- 13.** Because the elemental cycle stems from very objective principles of change, its own nature helps correct any personal interpretations, misconceptions, or blind spots that we may have with regards to how the process works in a given situation. It is, in this sense, self-correcting, and can therefore be relied upon as a guide in a way that we could call hygienic.
- 14.** The effectiveness of the elemental cycle relies in large part upon how you use it. It works best when your will is applied to it with calm enthusiasm in a rhythmic way. The quality and rhythm of your attention is more important than any theoretical understanding or skillful manipulation.

## Appendix 2: List of Qualities and Descriptors

Qualities and Descriptors, one transforming from left to right (always partial arcs of a greater circle):

<b>EARTH</b>	<b>WATER</b>	<b>AIR</b>	<b>FIRE</b>
Facts	Relations	Polarities	Wholes
Solid	Liquid	Gaseous	Plasmic
Opposing	Complementing	Reciprocating	Enantiomorphing
Gravity	Movement	Levity	Space
Impacting	Pulsing	Turbulent	Resonating
Being	Shifting	Involuting	Creating
Singularities	Comparisons	Simultaneities	Paradoxes
Isolated	Connected	Interpenetrating	Unitive
Self-contained	Contextual	Unbounded	Integral
Uncompromising	Compromising	Indefinite	Facilitating
Stubborn	Conforming	Waffling	Being
Unchanging	Changing	Chaotic	Evolving
Apparent	Subtle	Hermetic	Esoteric
Divisatory	Connecting	Hyperbolizing	Harmonizing
Actual	Relational	Potential	Capacity
Separating	Joining	Complementing	Communing
Objects	Processes	Inversions	Holons
Distinguishing	Relating	Reversing	Unifying
Contrasting	Comparing	Polarizing	Gestaltting
Still	Flowing	Involuting	Exploding
Waiting	Emerging	Reversing	Completing
Information	Discussion	Conversation	Dialogue
Identifying	Trying	Waiting (Consciously)	Surrendering
Analyzing	Processing	Brainstorming	Creating
Reserved	Polite	Gregarious	Luminous
Informative	Orienting	Expanding	Transformative
Structural	Flexible	Amorphous	Dynamic
Instincts	Urges	Desires	Motives
Material	Growth/Decay	Sympathies/Antipathies	Self
Separate	Mixed	Layered	Holographic
Solitary Independence	Dependence	Mutual independence	Omni-dependence
Dogmatic	Accommodating	Mutually accommodating	Mutually Supportive
Antipathetic	Sympathetic	Empathetic	Compassionate
Knowing	Understanding	Wondering	Meditating
Obvious	Contextual	Subtle	Insightful
Static	Penetrating	Interpenetrating	Omnipresent
Thinking	Imagining	Inspiring	Intuiting
Instantaneous	Sequenced	Simultaneous	Timeless
Individuated	Patterned, Rhythmic	Random, Probabilistic	Archetypal
Known	Felt	Unknown	Intuited
Just Me	Me and You	You? Me?	We
Speaking	Tolerating	Listening	Acting
Just this	This next to that	Either this or that	Both this and that
Maintaining	Balancing, Mediating	Extremizing	Evolving
Having been formed	In the process of forming	Loss of all form	The activity that does the forming

Qualities and behaviors linked to the physical manifestation of the elements, but also meant metaphorically:

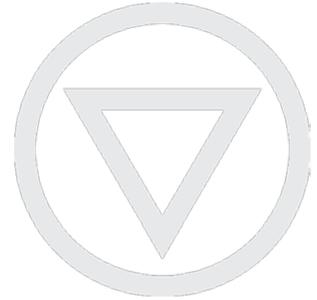
<b>EARTH</b>	<b>WATER</b>	<b>AIR</b>	<b>FIRE</b>
Definite	Relational	Chaotic, Invisible	Supersensible
Shaped	No intrinsic shape (shape of container's 'bottom' and 'sides'), or spherical	No intrinsic shape whatsoever, fills all space of a container	Dynamic shape dependent upon the <i>activity</i> of its medium
Located	Shifts location, dependent on balance between outside and inside forces	Attempts to fill all space, actively moves to periphery, Dispersive	Constantly in motion, and constantly moving other things
Inertial (strongly resists change)	Constant change (inner movement), easy to move, changes transmitted via waves to whole medium	Moves expansively, quickly, constant connects/disconnects, supremely sensitive	Actively transforms other objects (warming, burning, melting, vaporizing, etc.)
All surface, all border, all 'outside'	Border operates differently than insides, inside vs. outside (surface tension)	Borderless, diffuse, all internal boundaries, pressure differentials	Activity only, no borders but with location, inside=outside, boundarylessness
Differences, Unconnected	Self-connecting, continuity with immediate environment	Self-disconnecting, Self-negating, self-dissociation	Integrating, Connected to self and others
Indifference	Mixes w/ other liquids and gases, connects to solid surfaces (capillary action)	Makes way for all other substances, tendency to interpenetrate but not truly mix	Contact necessitates change, transformative
Rigid	Flowing	Expansive, Clear	Illuminating
Structured	Dependent, flexible	Amorphous, reciprocating	Dynamic
Centric, Gravity	Lateral, planar, spreading	Peripheral	Levity
No obvious self-movement	Rhythmic forms (waves)	Vorticial forms, spirals	Dynamic forms - infinite possibilities
Cold	Wet	Dry	Warm
Formed	Unformed	Formlessness	Forming
Settling	Spreading, Covering	Encompassing	Pleromic
Existing	Dissolving	Diffusing	Metamorphosing
Frozen	Melted	Vaporized	Combusted

### Appendix 3: User-friendly Questions List

#### Earth

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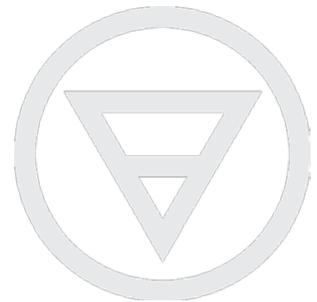
- What are the facts?
- What is different?
- What is unique?
- What could everyone else agree upon?
- What stands out?
- What seems constant?
- What can I count on?
- What is irrefutable?
- What are the pieces?
- What categories do the pieces fit into?
- What feels like a heavy weight, like a solid stone, or like gravity with respect to this phenomenon?



#### Water

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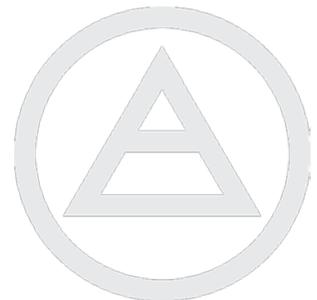
- What is changing?
- Do any of the facts connect to each other?
- Do the facts manifest in a sequence?
- Are there different parts or areas which are self-similar?
- What is the immediate context of the facts?
- What patterns do I notice?
- Are there any rhythms or cycles?
- What are the processes that give rise to the individual facts?
- Is there a specific context that makes the phenomenon more apparent or realized?
- How is one aspect turning into another, seemingly different aspect?
- What about my phenomenon makes me feel like I am floating along, caught in the waves, drowning, or repeating the same thing over and over?



#### Air

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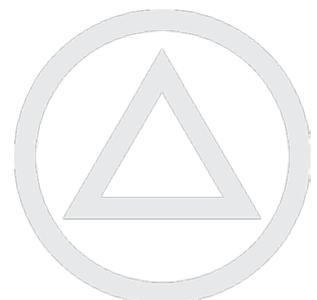
- What is reversing?
- Where do I go if I extrapolate the movements I identified in the Water level to their extremes?
- What is the overall range of manifestation of the major aspects of the phenomenon?
- That is, what are its limits?
- Where does the phenomenon seem to 'run out' or dissolve?
- What parts do I seem to be unable to focus or concentrate upon?
- If I could imagine the opposite of one part or the whole phenomenon, what would it be?
- How would I feel if this actually happened?
- What about this phenomenon makes me feel like I am losing my moorings completely, like my knowing runs out, like there is no truth, or like every part is equally important or unimportant?



#### Fire

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- What is the whole?
- What lies within or behind the phenomenon that allows the seemingly conflicting aspects of the Air level to coexist in a harmony, in a way that is not mutually destructive, but rather is mutually enhancing?
- Do I have a new insight that makes better sense of all the previous levels?
- Is there some subtle aspect of the phenomenon that once seemed insignificant but now seems like the key to the whole thing?
- Do I have the feeling of participating in something larger than myself?
- Do I suddenly notice how this phenomenon shows up in places I never expected or noticed before?
- Do I have the experience that the phenomenon is speaking to me through other, seemingly unrelated aspects of my life and experience? Do I feel transformed in some way?



### Appendix 4: Qualitative examples of the elemental cycle in the world

1. The Earth:
  - E – Lithosphere
  - W – Hydrosphere
  - A – Atmosphere
  - F – Ionosphere/Magnetosphere
2. The Hero's Journey (Campbell)
  - E – The Call to adventure
  - W – The Descent into the abyss
  - A – Encounter with the Shadow
  - F – The Return, integration with the Self
3. Jung:
  - E – Sensate
  - W – Feeling
  - A – Thinking
  - F – Intuitive
4. Alchemical stages:
  - E – Nigredo – black (melanosis)
  - W – Albedo – white (leukosis)
  - A – Citrinitas – yellow (xanthosis)
  - F – Rubedo – red (iosis)
5. Dreams (Jung)
  - E – Stage/mood/context
  - W – Build up (plot)
  - A – Climax/encounter
  - F – Resolution
6. Heuristics (Moustakis):
  - E – Initial engagement
  - W – Immersion
  - A – Incubation
  - F – Illumination
  - E – Explication
  - W – Creative synthesis, future directions
7. The Cosmology of EWWAF:
  - E – Earth, Water, Air, Fire
  - W – Salt, Sulfur, Mercury
  - A – Center and Periphery
  - F – The One
8. Theories of Dream Interpretation:
  - E – Freud
  - W – Jung
  - A – Gestalt
  - F – Existential
9. The process of Goethean research itself (Holdrege)
  - E – the Riddle
  - W – Into the Phenomenon
  - A – Exact Picture Building
  - F – Seeing the Whole
10. Music:
  - E – Rhythm
  - W – Melody
  - A – Harmony
  - F – The whole piece
11. Galen's Humors:
  - E – Black Bile
  - W – Phlegm
  - A – Blood
  - F – Yellow Bile
12. Temperaments:
  - E – Melancholic
  - W – Phlegmatic
  - A – Sanguine
  - F – Choleric
13. Pottery:
  - E – The clay itself
  - W – Sculpting, molding
  - A – Drying
  - F – Firing
14. Calculus ala Arthur Young:
  - E – 0th derivative (position)
  - W – 1st derivative (velocity)
  - A – 2nd derivative (acceleration)
  - F – 3rd derivative (jerk)
15. Goethean Science (Hoffmann)
  - E – Mechanical
  - W – Sculptural
  - A – Musical
  - F – Poetic
16. Tests:
  - E – True/False
  - W – Short Answer
  - A – Multiple Choice
  - F – Essay
17. Education:
 

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• E – High School</li> <li>• W – Junior High</li> <li>• A – Elementary School</li> <li>• F – Kindergarten</li> </ul>	Also:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Kindergarten</li> <li>Elementary</li> <li>Junior High</li> <li>High School</li> </ul>
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18. Communication:
  - E – Informational
  - W – Discussional
  - A – Conversational
  - F – Dialogical
19. Plant Physiology:
  - E – Root
  - W – Leaf
  - A – Flower
  - F – Seed
20. Human Organization:
  - E – Physical
  - W – Etheric (life)
  - A – Astral (desire/mental)
  - F – I-being
21. Organs:
  - E – Lung
  - W – Liver
  - A – Kidneys
  - F – Heart

## 22. Protein Folding (example, hemoglobin):

- E – Primary Formation – String of amino acids (acid-C-N, 2 R-groups off the C)
- W – Secondary Formation – neighbor to neighbor bonding (alpha helices and beta-pleated sheets)
- A – Tertiary Formation – Hydrophilic (polar – goes to outside) and Hydrophobic (non-polar – goes to inside)
- F – Quaternary Formation – requires multiple proteins, the whole working together

## 23. Projective Geometry (Pole and Polar):

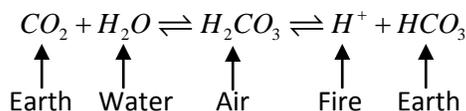
- E – the basic facts – the circle, the point, the line
- W – the relation itself, embedded in and expressed by the 'rules' of the process, the process itself whereby the point and the line are related across the circle
- A – the inherent duality between the inner space of the circle and the outer space of the circle through the polar movement of the point and the line, the circle as a membrane marking the shift between inner and outer worlds, the skin, the place of reversal
- F – the entire field of activity itself, the inherent structuring of the entire plane through the form of the membrane (circle), the complete, simultaneous picture

## 24. Human Body:

- E – Skeletal-Muscular
- W – Blood, Lymph, CSF, Enzymes, Secretions
- A – O<sub>2</sub>, CO<sub>2</sub>, N<sub>2</sub>, H<sup>+</sup>
- F – Warmth

## 25. Acid-Base Regulation in the Human Body:

- E – CO<sub>2</sub>
- W – H<sub>2</sub>O
- A – H<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub>
- F – H<sup>+</sup>
- E – HCO<sub>3</sub><sup>-</sup>



## 26. Interpersonal relationship:

- E – "This sucks." / You hurt me.
- W – "This is *my* experience." / I am hurt.
- A – "What is your experience?" / I recognize that we have hurt each other.
- F – "I experience *me* from within *your* soul." / I directly experience how I have hurt you, as if it were being done to me, and no one is to blame for it.

## 27. The process of understanding something new:

- E – Understanding individual facts (knowledge)
- W – Understanding how the facts are related (knowing)
- A – Understanding the limitations of the facts, the spaces around the facts (unknowing)
- F – Understanding the gestalt behind the facts (meaning)

## 28. The Life-Cycle of a Star:

- E – Gas condensation (birth)
- W – Burning (life)
- A – Nova, Supernova, etc. (death)
- F – Nebula, galactic seeding and new star formation (re-birth)

## 29. Becoming friends with someone:

- E – Introductions, basic facts about each other (separateness, self-contained)
- W – Shared experiences (togetherness, investment, sameness)
- A – Realization of differences (questioning, pulling back)
- F – Acceptance of the other (renewed enthusiasm, caring, love)

## 30. Radioactive Decay:

- E – Original element
- W – Inner relationships undergo a change (process of decay)
- A – Emission of various kinds of particles results in a reversal into a new form
- F – Wholly new properties of the new element manifest, both inside and outside

31. "Ways to Wisdom" (Angeles Arrien):
- E – Way of the Teacher
  - W – Way of the Healer
  - A – Way of the Visionary
  - F – Way of the Warrior
32. "Four gifts of knowing" (de Quincey):
- E – Scientist's gift of the senses
  - W – Shaman's gift of feeling
  - A – Philosopher's gift of reason
  - F – Mystic's gift of sacred silence
33. Light:
- E – Particle-nature
  - W – Wave-nature
  - A – Simultaneous Particle/Wave-nature
  - F – Light itself
34. Storytelling:
- E – Plot
  - W – Squeeze/Drama
  - A – Crisis
  - F – Resolve
35. Bockemühl:
- E – Finished Form and Concept
  - W – Formative Movement / Context of Transformation
  - A – Gesture (Expression)
  - F – Being
36. Computer Design:
- E – Computer hardware
  - W – Machine code
  - A – Assembly languages
  - F – User applications
37. Dimensionality:
- E – Volumes                      Points
  - W – Sheets (Planes)            Lines
  - A – Lines (Directionality)    Planes
  - F – Points (Infinities)        Volumes
38. Images:
- E – sign
  - W – cipher
  - A – symbol
  - F – archetype
39. Operational Principle:
- E – Facts
  - W – Process
  - A – Polarity
  - F – Whole
40. Alchemical Form:
- E – Wrought work
  - W – Ongoing work
  - A – Revelation
  - F – Being
41. Incarnational Process:
- E – Form
  - W – Movement
  - A – Idea
  - F – Will
42. Optical Quality:
- E – Opaque
  - W – Translucent
  - A – Transparent
  - F – Self-Light
43. Punctuation:
- E – Period
  - W – Comma (ellipsis, dash, colon, semicolon, parenthesis, ...)
  - A – Question Mark
  - F – Exclamation Point
44. The Climate Cross (Klocek):
- E – cold
  - W – wet
  - A – dry
  - F – hot
45. The Mineral Cross (Klocek):
- E – Lime
  - W – Feldspar
  - A – Quartz
  - F – Phosphorus/Sulfur
46. Evolution:
- E – Mineral
  - W – Plant
  - A – Animal
  - F – Human
47. Ontological Manifestation:
- E – Material Existing
  - W – Growing
  - A – Feeling
  - F – Thinking
48. The Four Ethers:
- E – Life Ether
  - W – Chemical/Tone Ether
  - A – Light Ether
  - F – Warmth Ether
49. Cognition:
- E – Object Cognition
  - W – Imaginative Cognition
  - A – Inspirative Cognition
  - F – Intuitive Cognition
50. Personality layers encountered in moving toward maturity in gestalt therapy:
- E – the cliché or 'as-if' layer
  - W – the role-playing layer
  - A1 – the no-way-out layer, or neurotic layer
  - A2 – the implosive layer, or death layer
  - F – the explosive layer, or life layer

## 51. Sciences:

- E – Physics      Also/or: Material Sciences (Physics, Chemistry, etc.)
- W – Chemistry    Biology (Literally, the logos of life)
- A – Biology        Psychology (Literally, the logos of the soul)
- F – Ecology        Spiritual Science

## 52. Syntax:

- E – statement
- W – simile
- A – metaphor
- F – archetype

## 53. Making a Tough Decision:

- E – Listing the facts. Identifying pros and cons. Attention to thoughts.
- W – Relative weighing of facts. Attention to emotions, desires.
- A – Asking “What if?” Expanding the context. Attention to possibilities, release of desires.
- F – Finding the ‘right’ context. Making the decision. Attention to morality, to will.

## 54. A Committee meeting:

- E – The agenda
- W – The discussion
- A – The tension of unresolved impulses moving in different directions
- F – The decision for action

## 55. Questions:

- E – What? / Where? / When?
- W – How?
- A – Why?
- F – Who?

## 56. Computer Languages:

- E – The binary language of machine code (first-generation low-level languages)
- W – Assembly languages (second generation low-level languages)
- A – General purpose languages (third generation high-level languages)
- F – Goal-oriented languages (fourth and fifth generation very high-level languages)

## 57. A House:

- E – The physical components – planks, nails, drywall
- W – The ordered relationships – walls, ceilings, floors
- A – The created spaces and polarities – the rooms, doors, windows
- F – The whole house – the potential for activity and meaning to unfold through inhabitation

## 58. Polarities:

- E – Opposite
- W – Complement
- A – Reciprocal
- F – Enantiomorphic

## 59. Baking:

- E – The ingredients, the recipe
- W – The sequential connecting of ingredients, the process
- A – The balancing of polarities – dry/wet, salty/sugary, hot/cold, etc. The waiting.
- F – The transformation into a finished whole

## 60. Some sentences:

- E – This sentence is a statement of fact.
- W – This sentence attempts to relate how sentences facilitate the flow of information through their underlying feeling tone.
- A – No sentence actually carries information by itself.
- F – All sentences carry meaning as structuring agents of consciousness.

## 61. Gazes (Ways of ‘seeing’):

- E – Fixed
- W – Fluid
- A – Open
- F – Inner+Outer

## 62. Individual Psychology:

- E – Self-objectifications, “I am <that>”, Unconscious behavior
- W – Emotions, “I am feeling <this>”, Habitual behavior
- A – Thoughts, “What am I?”, Experimental behavior
- F – Being, “I-AM”, all behavior and no behavior (Wu Wei)

## 63. Images as:

- E – Data Bits
- W – Outer Meaning
- A – Inner Meaning
- F – Universal Meaning

## 64. Communication:

- E – Speaking (one’s-self)
- W – Hearing
- A – Listening
- F – Speaking (the other)

## 65. The Elemental Gifts:

- E – Objectivity/Clarity
- W – Flexibility/Adaptability
- A – Possibility/Openness
- F – Activity/Transformation

## 66. Levels of the Will:

- E – Instinct
- W – Urge
- A – Desire
- F – Motive

## 67. Combustion Engine:

- E – The physical components – fuel, air, a container, etc.
- W – The rhythmic relationship of the components – a mixing of fuel and air
- A – The continuous oscillation between polarities – high and low pressure, opening and closing of valves, influx and outflux of fuel and exhaust
- F – The transformation of fuel into the energy of motion and heat, the production of the ash of exhaust

## 68. Asking a Question:

- E – Initial Facts
- W – Relations between facts reveal patterns
- A – Tension of ‘empty’ spaces in the pattern draw need for resolution
- F – A question arises as a place-holder of and in the shape of the empty space

## 69. Courtroom Proceedings:

- E – The ‘issue’
- W – The presentation of cases and cross-examinations
- A – The deliberation by judge/jury
- F – The ruling

## 70. Scientific Process (with respect to knowledge):

- E – Initial observation or fact piques interest and attention – a tentative question
- W – Successive observations form localized patterns and potential ‘threads of meaning’
- A – A whole ‘field of questions’ arises, with associated possibilities
- F – Creative generation of hypothesis as a synthesis/outgrowth of Air questions
- E – Strengthening and refinement of hypothesis into the basis for an experiment
- W – Research, design of experiment
- A – Carrying out the experiment, gathering raw data (‘dust’)
- F – Analysis of results yields evidence for/against hypothesis (‘cooking’)
- E – Revision of hypothesis, refinement of original question

**Lessons learned from the examples:**

1. The elemental cycle applies across all domains
2. The elemental cycle applies both grossly and subtly
3. The elemental cycle can apply to a single domain in multiple ways