

## Essences of Astrology - Understanding Modes, Elements & Qualities

*Written by Kelly Lee Phipps © 2011*

When the Eternal Being dissolves into the rhythmic vibration of polarity expressed as Yin and Yang, Consciousness arises. Everything in existence partakes of this eternal stream of polarization, tapping into its dualistic-unity. In the world of explicit forms, it appears as duality, but in the inner realms it is expressed as an implicit unity. Yin and Yang are not opposites, but cosmic companions. Yang is the Logos, or creative light and awareness of the eternal expressed as the AIR principle. Yin as Sophia wisdom provides the templates, patterns and fabric of manifestation, expressed as WATER and giving birth to molecules, cells and bodies. For life originates in water. When they combine, they give rise to the Divine Gravitational Spiral Force of Cosmic Love, known as the Universal Consciousness that pervades life and expressed as the archetype of FIRE. Before these three aspects of the Universal Trinity were visualized as elements though, they were seen as three processes of motion in the Creative Void. Yang was seen as Outward motion away from the center of being or Expansion. Yin was visualized as Inward motion toward the center of being or Consolidation. And the Divine Spark of Love was imagined as a combination of the two, expressed as an evolving Spiral around the center of being breathing inward and outward in an alternating rhythm that acts as the evolutionary pulse of the cosmos.

In astrological lore these three modes of motion in the universe are known as Cardinal (Outward), Fixed (Inward) and Mutable (Spiral). When you pair their meanings with the keywords for the Elements, beautiful archetypal imagery arises that shows why the Signs derived their various meanings in synchronistic relationship to the local cultural experiences of seasons and annual events. In my upcoming book *Tao of Astrology*, I've been inspired to re-examine the keywords for the Modes and Elements based on my investigation of and meditation on the traditional Qualities. According to astrological scholar Robert Hand, the Qualities (Hot-Cold & Dry-Moist) preceded the Elements (Fire-Air & Earth-Water). But before we look at the implications of the Elements arising from the Qualities and the corresponding key phrases and keywords that result, let's explore the keys to the Modes. Each astrological Zodiac Sign is a combination of a Polarity (Yin or Yang), a Mode of Expression, and an Elemental Way of Being composed of one quality shifting into another. The keys to the Modes are given in the table below.

<b>Cardinal (Outward)</b>	<b>Fixed (Inward)</b>	<b>Mutable (Spiral)</b>
Activating	Harnessing	Seeking
Creating	Utilizing	Adapting
Expanding	Consolidating	Distributing
Animating	Empowering	Demonstrating
Invigorating	Penetrating	Evolving

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### On the Conceptualization of the Qualities

According to the Greeks (from the writings of Aristotle and his contemporaries) there were two main measures of the natural world that could be used to classify the experience of an energy field, whether a natural system, object or an entity. The first indicated the amount of energy or activity in a system described on the *Hot-Cold* vertical axis. These were not thought of as literal temperature ranges but metaphorical gradients of potential versus kinetic energy. Something that was Hot had a lot of power, a lot of active energy and drive, whereas something that was Cold was considered closer to a rest state of Potential energy and psychological satisfaction. Where Hot Quality tends to raise, uplift, and energize an energy field, Cold Quality tends to decrease, soothe, and relax an energy field. Hot and Cold then are more accurately visualized as Activity versus Receptivity, Summer versus Winter, and Noon versus Midnight.

According to astrological scholar Lee Lehman, the Greeks thought of the *Dry/Moist* axis in terms of symbolic gradients of granulation. Something that was Moist was said to blend easily while something Dry resisted synthesis. For instance, sand would be considered Moist due to its inherent mix-ability, whereas bowling balls would be considered very Dry. Dry and Moist then are more accurately visualized as Distinction versus Connection, Autumn versus Spring, and Sunrise versus Sunset.

This led early Greek physicians to develop a theory of healing through interaction. They claimed that if one wanted to increase the essence of a Quality in a system, then one had to apply treatments and medicines that had the same Quality. If one required more courage and daring, then a plant medicine thought to increase bravery was utilized or a form of training like warrior arts or athletics was introduced.

In addition, the Greeks realized that opposite Qualities tend to balance each other. If you have too much aggressive Mars energy, then practice consciously bringing Venusian arts, diplomacy, and harmony into your life. Become a martial artist or take an art course! They would achieve wholeness through Polarization. An emerging adolescent needed the wisdom of an elder to develop properly. Today the youth have been trained culturally to see elders not as a source of wisdom, but an unfortunate hinderance to society and something to be avoided. And elders have been indoctrinated to desperately try everything (ointments, creams, hair dye, skin surgery, etc.) to reclaim the suppleness of youth. Thus modern society is out of balance.

The Hot/Cold Axis was primary as the *Axis of Activity* that drives change and manifestation, often deriving the Dry/Moist Qualities. The Dry/Moist polarity is the *Axis of Granulation*. Hot and Dry are related in that they are both Yang in orientation and heat evaporates moisture, producing Dryness. Cold and Moist are related in that they are both Yin in orientation and Coldness condenses moisture to produce the quality of Wetness.

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Axis of Activity		Axis of Granulation	
Hot (Yang)	Cold (Yin)	Dry (Yin)	Moist (Yang)
Active	Receptive	Distinction	Connection
Energizes	Relaxes	Separates	Unifies
Enthusiasm	Contentment	Analyzes	Synthesizes
Uplifts	Soothes	Categorizes	Mixes
Illumination	Secrecy	Differentiation	Integration
Expendes	Conserves	Disperses	Blends
Dynamic	Passive	Hardens	Softens
Excitement	Reflective	Rigid	Supple
Enlightenment	Mystery	Boundaries	Possibilities
Addition	Subtraction	Division	Multiplication
Passionate	Reserved	Organizes	Creative
Summer/Full Moon	Winter/New Moon	Autumn/Waning Moon	Spring/Waxing Moon
Midlife	Rebirth	Elderhood	Emergence
Peak	Valley	Declination	Inclination
Noon - Midheaven	Midnight - Nadir	Sunset - Descendant	Sunrise - Ascendant
Awakens	Rests	Structures	Visualizes
Extroversion	Introversion	Tenses	Lubricates
Adventure	Restoration	Exclusive	Inclusive
Provocation	Reconciliation	Secludes	Socializes
Brightens	Darkens	Asceticism	Indulgence
Advances	Retreats	Conservative	Liberal
Initiates	Dreams	Wisdom	Innocence
Actualizes	Imagines	Crystallized	Formless
Accelerates	Decelerates	Arranges	Bonds
Expansion	Contraction	Establishes	Inventive
Warms	Cools	Parches	Moisturizes
Encourages	Protects	Solitude	Communion

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The third principle the Greeks discovered was that the Activity Axis generates the more passive Axis of Granulation. Heat not only negates coolness, but over long period produces Dryness. Warmth parches over time. Actualization leads to Crystallization. Noon leads to Sunset. Enlightenment leads to Boundaries. Initiation leads to Wisdom. Extroversion tenses the soul. Making Advances leads to Conservative politics. Provocation leads to Seclusion. When numbers are plentiful, people begin dividing themselves into groups, thus Addition leads to Division. Passion leads to Organization. Being dynamic hardens the soul. Courage yields Solitude, because few can be authentic leaders.

In addition, Coldness negates heat but also condenses into moisture over time, producing the Quality of wetness. Receptivity leads to Connection. Imagination leads to Synthesis. Visualization opens one to Formlessness. Dreaming leads to Innocence. Introversion lubricates the soul. Experiencing Retreats leads to Liberal politics. Reconciliation leads to Socialization. When resources decrease, people yearn to produce them in multiples, thus Subtraction leads to Multiplication. Detachment leads to Creativity. Being Passive softens the soul. Protection leads to Communion.

### On the Generation of the Elements

As it turns out, the Greek philosophers of old, starting with Empedocles (490 - 430 BCE) crafted the four Elements of *Fire, Earth, Air and Water* from the dynamic combinations of the Qualities. Empedocles' philosophy is best known for being the originator of the cosmogenic theory of the four Elements (named Elements by Plato). Empedocles, who subscribed to reincarnation and was a philosophical vegetarian, also proposed powers called Love and Strife that acted as forces to bring about the mixture and separation of the elements. We might describe these last two forces as consciousness and unconsciousness, harmony versus inharmony.

Nature generated the Qualities not as fixed parameters but as the ever-changing energies of life. In the great cycle of change, the Greeks saw the Cold Quality giving way to the Moist Quality as Winter changes into Spring and visualized that as the *Water* Element, corresponding to the modern *liquid* state of matter and the emotions. Then the Moist Quality would fade into the Hot Quality producing the Element of *Air*, corresponding to the *gaseous* state of matter and the intellect. Then the Hot Quality would gradually give way to the Dry Quality to produce the *Fire* Element, corresponding to the *plasma* state of matter and the Aura or Spirit. Plasma is similar to the gaseous state, but with charged ionized particles that make it respond to electromagnetic fields. Most of the matter in the universe including stars exists in the plasma state, reflecting this fiery principle. And finally, Dryness would yield to Coldness and the *Earth* Element or *solid* state of matter emerged. The solid state would correspond to the experience of embodiment.

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Water (Yin)	Air (Yang)	Fire (Yang)	Earth (Yin)
Cold --> Moist	Moist --> Hot	Hot --> Dry	Dry --> Cold
Liquid	Gaseous	Plasma	Solid
Heart	Intellect	Spirit/Aura	Body

Since the Elements are understood as dynamic shifts from one Quality to another, such as Fire being Hot becoming Dry, we can draw deeper understanding through analyzing these unique combinations and craft key phrases and concepts that correspond to each Element. In what follows, we'll use Quality key words from the table on page 3 to imagine new ways of understanding the Elements and in the process generate some potent key words for them. Let's begin by plunging into the Water Element!

### Water Element - Heart - Cold becoming Moist

The Water Element marks the secretive beginning of things corresponding to the nurturing power of receptive-connection. Life itself emerges from Water. It was seen as a combination of the Cold Quality which decreases energy, soothes, and is reflective and the Moist Quality which synthesizes, blends, and innovates. When the keywords from the Cold and Moist Qualities are brought together some remarkable insights are made into the essence of the Water Element.

Cold Descriptors	Moist Descriptors
Receptive - Secrecy - Mystery - New Moon - Nadir - Reconciliation - Imagines - Relaxes - Conserves - Subtraction - Rebirth - Rests - Darkens - Decelerates - Contentment - Passive - Reserved - Valley - Introversion - Retreats - Contraction - Soothes - Reflective - Winter - Midnight - Restoration - Dreams - Cools - Protects	Connection - Integration - Possibilities - Waxing Moon - Ascendant - Socializes - Formless - Unifies - Blends - Multiplication - Emergence - Visualizes - Indulgence - Bonds - Synthesis - Softens - Creative - Inclination - Lubricates - Liberal - Inventive - Mixes - Supple - Spring - Sunrise - Inclusive - Innocence - Moisturizes - Communion

From combining the Cold Descriptors with the Moist Descriptors the Water Element comes into focus. Some of my favorite combinations are: Imagines-Visualizes and Creative-Dreams (**Imagination**), Reflective-Integration and Introversion-Communion (**Emotion**), Soothes-Unifies, Protects-Blends, Connection-Reconciliation and Formless-Protection (**Compassion**), Restoration-Bonding and Rests-Softens (**Rejuvenation**), and Mystery-Visualization and Creative-Contentment (**Coresight**). The term CoreSight was developed to describe Dimensional Heart Vision. Watery people are adepts at emotional expression. They are gifted healers,

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empaths, and nurturers, concerned with the welfare of others. You can sense their inward, silent connection to soul forces and the realm of imagination and dreams. They thrive in realms of feeling expression and are usually very visionary, psychic, and compassionate. The Water element bonds people together and sustains us, and a person deficient in it can be unsympathetic, cold, and aloof. Taken to the extreme, watery people can be overprotective, clinging, insecure, and secretive. People blessed with Water are flowing masters of change, able to sustain our dreams and dissolve our wounds.

### Earth Element - Matter - Dry becoming Cold

The Earth Element symbolizes the wisdom that dwells in natural things: dirt, wood, stone, sand, crystal and flesh. Its power corresponds to the Waning Moon, the descent into the Autumn Equinox, and the setting of the sun, all times when we are called to harvest. It was seen as a combination of the Dry Quality that separates, analyzes, organizes and forms boundaries and the Cold Quality, which decreases energy, soothes, and is reflective. When the key from the Dry and Cold Qualities are brought together some remarkable insights are made into the essence of the Earth Element.

Dry Descriptors	Cold Descriptors
Distinction - Separates - Analyzes - Categorizes - Differentiation - Disperses - Hardens - Rigid - Boundaries - Division - Organizes - Autumn - Waning Moon - Descendant - Elderhood - Declination - Sunset - Structures - Tenses - Exclusive - Secludes - Asceticism - Conservatism - Wisdom - Crystallized - Arranges - Establishes - Parches - Solitude	Receptive - Secrecy - Mystery - New Moon - Nadir - Reconciliation - Imagines - Relaxes - Conserves - Subtraction - Rebirth - Rests - Darkens - Decelerates - Contentment - Passive - Reserved - Valley - Introversion - Retreats - Contraction - Soothes - Reflective - Winter - Midnight - Restoration - Dreams - Cools - Protects

From combining the Dry Descriptors with the Cold Descriptors the Earth Element comes into focus. Some of my favorite combinations are: Organizes-Reserved and Hardens-Conserves (**Productivity**), Separates-Imagines and Disperses-Contentment (**Resources**), Imagines-Categorizes and Reflective-Distinction (**Values**), Structures-Contraction and Organizes-Reconciliation (**Organization**), and Solitude-Restoration and Mystery-Wisdom (**Nature**). Earthy people are grounded and full of practical wisdom and a deep reverence for nature and the world of things. They excel at manipulating forms, living in the “real world”, and creating, maintaining, and improving structures and organizations. Of all the elemental types, they thrive in the physical dimension. They are usually very sensual and present. The Earth element brings industriousness, and a person deficient in it can lack the ability to cope with responsibilities.

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Taken to the extreme, earthy people can be rigid, controlling, possessive, and overly cautious. People blessed with earth are natural builders and crafts folk, skilled at organizing daily life and operating organizations.

### Air Element - Intellect - Moist becoming Hot

The Air Element symbolizes the conceptual power of the mind, corresponding to the Waxing Moon, the ascent of the Spring Equinox, and the rising sun. These are times where we are uplifted, awakened and inspired. It was seen as a combination of the Moist Quality which synthesizes, blends, and innovates and the Hot Quality that energizes, uplifts and provokes adventure. When the keywords from the Moist and Hot Qualities are brought together some remarkable insights are made into the essence of the Air Element.

Moist Descriptors	Hot Descriptors
Connection - Integration - Possibilities - Waxing Moon - Ascendant - Socializes - Formless - Unifies - Blends - Multiplication - Emergence - Visualizes - Indulgence - Bonds - Synthesis - Softens - Creative - Inclination - Lubricates - Liberal - Innovates - Mixes - Supple - Spring - Sunrise - Inclusive - Innocence - Moisturizes - Communion	Active - Energizes - Enthusiasm - Uplifts - Illumination - Expend - Dynamic - Excitement - Enlightenment - Addition - Passion - Summer - Full Moon - Midlife - Peak - Noon - Midheaven - Awakens - Extroversion - Adventure - Provocation - Brightens - Advances - Initiates - Actualizes - Accelerates - Expands - Warms - Encourages

From combining the Moist Descriptors with the Hot Descriptors the Air Element comes into focus. Some of my favorite combinations are: Visionary-Passion and Creative Action (**Expression**), Social Enlightenment and Dynamic-Blending (**Knowledge**), Innovative-Courage and Synthesized-Advances (**Innovation**), Enthusiastic-Connection and Energizing Unions (**Alliance**), and Liberal-Actualization and Inclusive-Extroversion (**Activism**). Airy people are brainy, blessed with intelligence and communication/conception abilities. Their focus in life is the mental realm of ideas, awareness, and knowledge. They are very diplomatic as a result because they see the interconnectedness of life. They thrive in any situation that requires thinking abilities and are experts in the mental domain and socializing. The Air element produces brilliance, and a person deficient in it can lack perspective and logic. Taken to the extreme, airy people can be “air-headed”, inconsistent, scattered, and indecisive. People blessed with Air are here to enliven us with intellect.

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### Fire Element - Spirit - Hot becoming Dry

The Fire Element symbolizes the warmth and passion of the spirit. Its power corresponds to the Full Moon, the peak of the Summer Solstice, and the glowing power of the noon sun. Since primitive times, the Promethean Fire and the stars have inspired and empowered humanity. It was seen as a combination of the Hot Quality that energizes, uplifts and provokes adventure and the Dry Quality that separates, analyzes, organizes and forms boundaries. When the keywords from the Hot and Dry Qualities are brought together some remarkable insights are made into the essence of the Fire Element.

Hot Descriptors	Dry Descriptors
Active - Energizes - Enthusiasm - Uplifts - Illumination - Expends - Dynamic - Excitement - Enlightenment - Addition - Passion - Summer - Full Moon - Midlife - Peak - Noon - Midheaven - Awakens - Extroversion - Adventure - Provocation - Brightens - Advances - Initiates - Actualizes - Accelerates - Expands - Warms - Encourages	Distinction - Separates - Analyzes - Categorizes - Differentiation - Disperses - Hardens - Rigid - Boundaries - Division - Organizes - Autumn - Waning Moon - Descendant - Elderhood - Declination - Sunset - Structures - Tenses - Exclusive - Secludes - Asceticism - Conservatism - Wisdom - Crystallized - Arranges - Establishes - Parches - Solitude

From combining the Hot Descriptors with the Dry Descriptors the Fire Element comes into focus. Some of my favorite combinations are: Enthusiastic-Separation and Uplifting-Distinction (**Identity**), Enlightened-Boundaries and Initiating-Differentiation (**Competition**), Distinct-Encouragement and Passionate-Wisdom (**Leadership**), Actualized-Crystallization and Energized-Hardening (**Will**), and Dynamic-Structures and Awakened-Wisdom (**Vitality**). Fiery people are full of charisma, longevity, and vitality. Their character's exude confidence and inspiration and their bodies enjoy action, energy expression, and motion. They are strong in the physical and spiritual realms, acting as conduits between them. The Fire element animates people, and a person deficient in it can lack zest and energy. Taken to the extreme, fiery people can be impulsive, aggressive, egocentric, and fanatical. People blessed with Fire are here to be living beacons of warmth, creativity, daring, and optimism. They are both enterprising and courageous, spirited and inspired.

### Bringing the Modes & Elements Together

When you combine the Mode Keys with the derived Element keys (listed in Bold in each Element section) you get a fascinating blend of twelve archetypal expressions that are known as the **Zodiac** (the Circle of Image-Casts). You can blend the Mode keys with the Element keys in any order to illustrate the meaning of the Signs, shown below. In this way the Sign meanings



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emerge from a synthesis of Motion/Expression (Mode) and Way of Being (Element). When you visualize Aries as Outward exploding Fire you understand its heroic Warrior nature. When you see Taurus as Inward Earth it's like the consolidation of nature into the form of a mountain. When Gemini is imagined as a Spiral of Air, it is easy to see why it is the Messenger archetype. Learning to visualize the Modal motions with the Elemental essences is the key to poetic astrology!

Outward Mode
Activating
Creating
Expanding
Animating
Invigorating

Inward Mode
Harnessing
Utilizing
Consolidating
Empowering
Penetrating

Spiral Mode
Seeking
Adapting
Distributing
Demonstrating
Evolving

Fire Element
Identity
Competition
Leadership
Will
Vitality

Air Element
Expression
Knowledge
Innovation
Alliance
Activism

Earth Element
Productivity
Resources
Values
Organization
Nature

Water Element
Imagination
Emotion
Compassion
Rejuvenation
CoreSight*

\* Dimensional Heart Vision

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**Aries** (Outward Fire) Flames exploding outward to lead the world.  
Activating Identity, Creating Competition, Expanding Leadership, Animating Will,  
Invigorating Vitality. **Warrior, Leader, Pioneer.**

**Taurus** (Inward Earth) Earth solidifying to form a tranquil mountain.  
Harnessing Productivity, Utilizing Resources, Consolidating Values, Empowering  
Organization, Penetrating Nature. **Builder, Owner, Artisan.**

**Gemini** (Spiral Air) A whirlwind of versatility, curiosity, and variety.  
Seeking Expression, Adapting Knowledge, Distributing Innovation, Demonstrating  
Alliance, Evolving Activism. **Messenger, Writer, Shapeshifter.**

**Cancer** (Outward Water) Nurturing waves flowing outward to heal the world.  
Activating Imagination, Creating Emotion, Expanding Compassion, Animating  
Rejuvenation, Invigorating CoreSight. **Protector, Therapist, Healer.**

**Leo** (Inward Fire) Glowing embers of the heart symbolizing royalty.  
Harnessing Identity, Utilizing Competition, Consolidating Leadership, Empowering Will,  
Penetrating Vitality. **Performer, Noble, Magical Child.**

**Virgo** (Spiral Earth) Garden rows planted to harvest in perfect order.  
Seeking Productivity, Adapting Resources, Distributing Values, Demonstrating  
Organization, Evolving Nature. **Servant, Guide, Mentor.**

**Libra** (Outward Air) Intimate winds flow to create social harmony.  
Activating Expression, Creating Knowledge, Expanding Innovation, Animating Alliance,  
Invigorating Activism. **Artist, Lover, Diplomat.**

**Scorpio** (Inward Water) Torrential rivers of passion flow to transform.  
Harnessing Imagination, Utilizing Emotion, Consolidating Compassion, Empowering  
Rejuvenation, Penetrating CoreSight. **Researcher, Alchemist, Shaman.**

**Sagittarius** (Spiral Fire) A fiery spiral seeking the meaning of life.  
Seeking Identity, Adapting Competition, Distributing Leadership, Demonstrating Will,  
Evolving Vitality. **Gypsy, Pilgrim, Philosopher.**

**Capricorn** (Outward Earth) A lone peak surveys life with wisdom. Activating  
Productivity, Creating Resources, Expanding Values, Animating Organizations,  
Invigorating Nature. **Manager, Hermit, Wise Elder.**

**Aquarius** (Inward Earth) Electric shock waves flow inward to awaken.  
Harnessing Expression, Utilizing Knowledge, Consolidating Innovation, Empowering  
Alliance, Penetrating Activism. **Inventor, Reformer, Humanitarian.**

**Pisces** (Spiral Water) A dreamy vortex of soul-sensitive compassion.  
Seeking Imagination, Adapting Emotion, Distributing Compassion, Demonstrating  
Rejuvenation, Evolving CoreSight. **Mystic, Navigator, Visionary Artist.**