EESSENTIALLY, the body is a play of five elements or pancha bhutas—water, earth, air, fire, akash. Everything you call a physical creation has substance of some kind; that’s earth. All of it is in movement—that’s air. All of it ascribes to some temperature—that’s fire. In everything, there is cohesiveness—that’s water. And all of it is held together by what we call akash or etheric space. Whether an atom or a subatomic particle, everything is made of these five elements. From the basic aspects to the highest aspect, your life becomes a possibility only with the cooperation of these five. The fundamental process in yoga is referred to as bhuta shuddhi. Bhuta means element, bhuta shuddhi means to cleanse the elements.

When the elements are pure, you distinctly know the difference between what is physical, psychological and existential. Most human beings are completely in the grip of their physiological and psychological processes. Our physiology is an accumulation of food and our psychological process has been accumulated in the form of impressions. Between these two processes, who you are existentially, the nature of your being, is completely missed. All the suffering in your life arises from your body and mind. If you can hold these two at a distance from yourself, this is the end of suffering. Bhuta shuddhi is an important step in creating this distance for one to live life in full stride without the fear of suffering.

Cleansing the Five Elements

Water: Of the five elements, water has the greatest significance because a major percentage of the body is water. Water has a sense of memory, and even a thought, emotion or touch can change the way it behaves within your system. If you keep water in a copper vessel, preferably overnight or at least for four hours, it acquires a certain quality. Approach it by holding the vessel in your hands with a sense of gratitude and reverence because it is life-making material, and then consume it. It will do wonders within your system.

Earth: Even if you live in a concrete jungle, it is important to keep in touch with the earth upon which you live. If your bare hands and feet—particularly the palms and soles—come in touch with the earth on a daily basis, it will harmonise the physiological process in your system. Try to spend at least a few minutes in the garden, barefooted, touching the plants or trees.

Air: What kind of air you breathe is important, but how you breathe and how consciously is equally important. At least for a few minutes every day, take a walk in the park or along a lake or river. If you have children, at least once a month take them out where nature is in a reasonably pure state so they can climb a small hill, walk in a forest, or swim in a river and do something where the breath is dynamic. The intelligence in the body will make sure that when it senses the air is pure and alive, the way the body breathes will be different.

Fire: What kind of fire burns within you? Is it the fire of greed, hatred, anger, resentment, lust, love or compassion? If you can handle your fires sensibly, you will become an equanimous and exuberant being. A simple process you can do to cleanse the fire within you is get some sunlight every day. Though we have contaminated every other element, sunlight has remained pure—make best use of that.

Akash: The fifth and most expansive dimension is akash. Akash has a certain intelligence. The nature, quality, and power of your life are essentially determined by how much access you have to this intelligence. One process you can do to find more access to akash intelligence is, after sunrise, before the sun crosses a 30° angle, look up at the sky and bow down to akash for holding you and this planet in place. After the sun crosses 30°, sometime during the day, look up and bow down again. Within 40 minutes after sunset, look up at the sky and once again bow down to the etheric space around us that is holding everything in place.

Purifying and taking charge of the elemental dimensions of your making will bring a tremendous sense of well-being and power.

Sadhguru, a yogi, is a visionary, humanitarian and a prominent spiritual leader (www.ishafoundation.org)