

## HANDOUT #4

# 4 Elements Exercises for Stress Reduction (Earth -Air -Water -Fire)

Elan Shapiro, 2012

### INSTRUCTIONS

- **1-EARTH** : GROUNDING , SAFETY in the PRESENT /REALITY.... *“take a minute or two to “land”... to be here now... place both feet on the ground, feel the chair supporting you.... Look around & notice 3 new things...What do you see.... What do you hear ?”*  
*(don’t ask this if it draws attention to on-going dangers)*
- [Attention is directed outwards to the reality of safety in the present]

- **2-AIR**: BREATHING for CENTERING

Breathing –you can do your favourite breathing exercise here. Option: *“breathe in through your nose (for abdominal breathing) as you count 4 seconds, then hold for 2 and then breathe out for 4 seconds. Take about a dozen deeper slower breaths like this”.*

[Attention is directed inwards to your centre]

- **3-WATER** : CALM & CONTROLLED -switch on the RELAXATION RESPONSE

*“....do you have saliva in your mouth?...make more saliva....when you are anxious or stressed your mouth often dries because part of the stress emergency response (sympathetic N S) is to shut off the digestive system. So when you start making saliva you switch on the digestive system again (parasympathetic N S) & the relaxation response “– (that is why people are offered water or tea after a difficult experience- when you make saliva your mind can also optimally control your thoughts & your body).*

[Attention is directed to producing saliva & becoming calmer, focused & more in control]

- **4-FIRE** LIGHT up the path of your IMAGINATION .

*“Bring up an image of your SAFE PLACE (or some other RESOURCE such as a memory when you felt good about yourself) –what do you feel & where do you feel it in your body?” Install with brief slow BLS / butterfly hugs.*

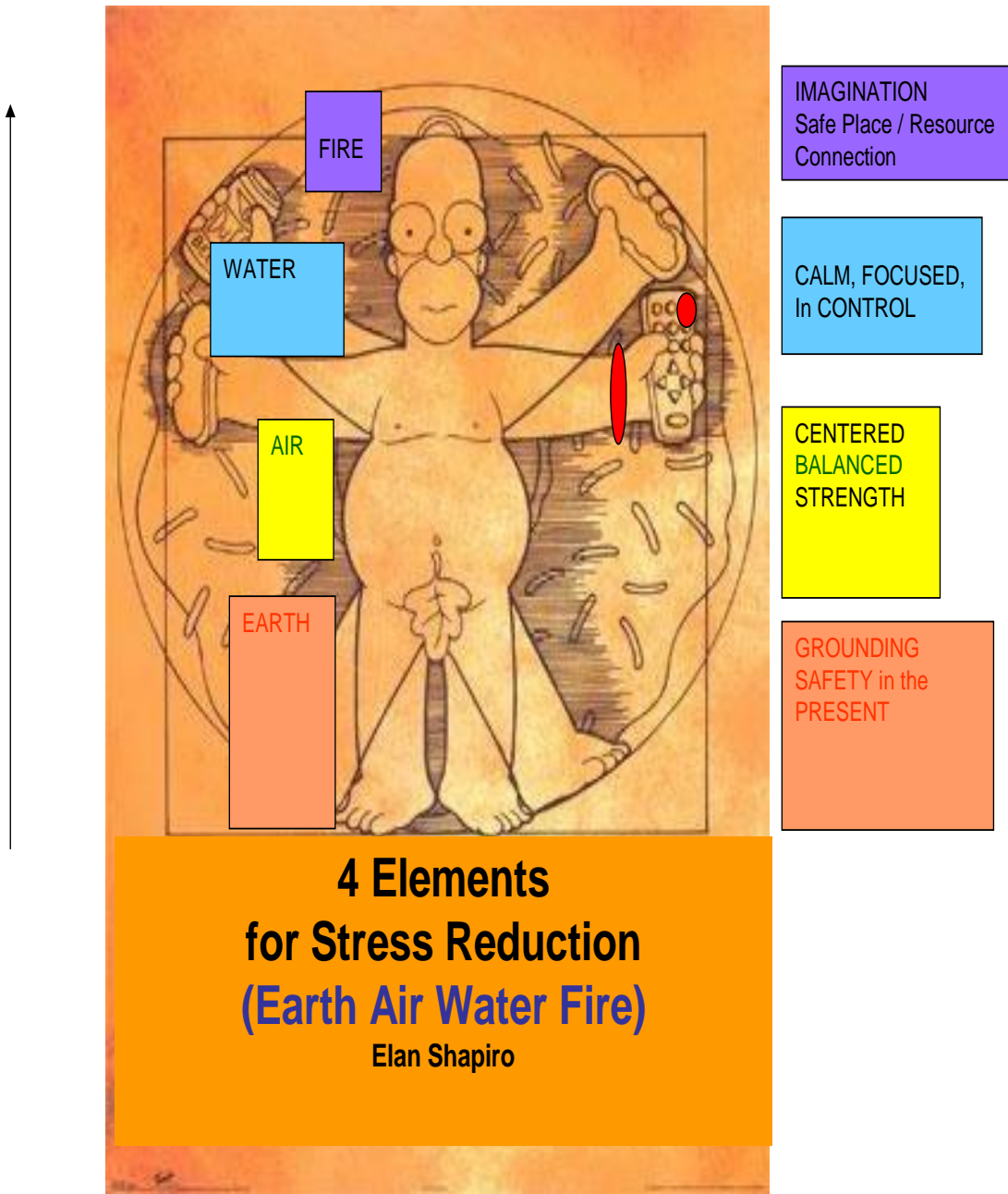
[Attention is directed to the feelings of safety/calm/etc. in your body]

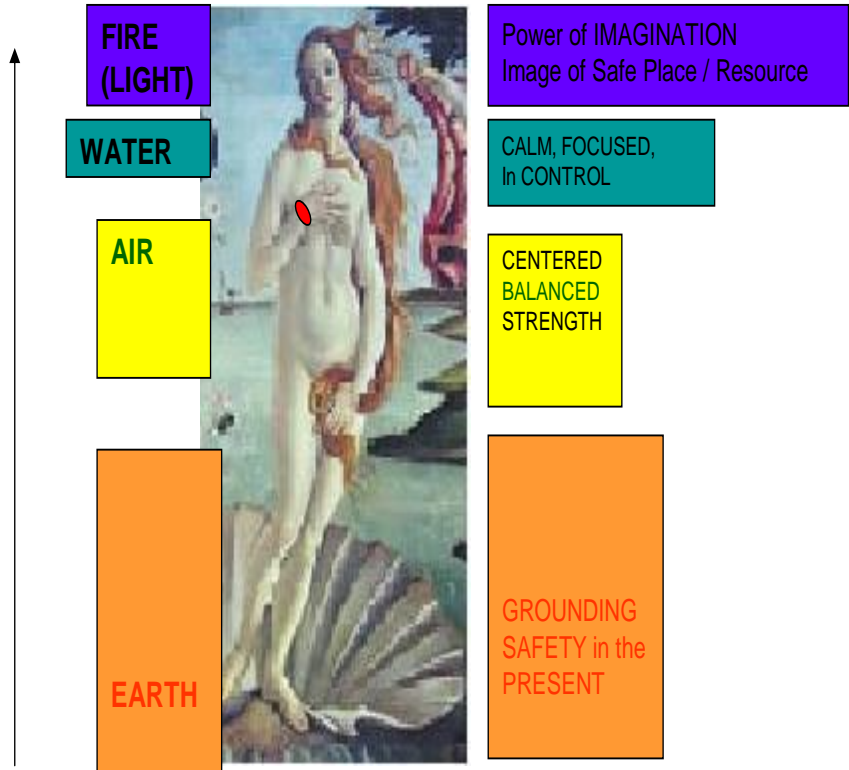
## • Additional Explanations

- ***Rationale:*** external and internal stress triggers have an accumulative effect during the day.
- **We cope better with stress when we stay within our arousal “window of tolerance”.**
- **An *antidote* to stress triggers:** frequent random monitoring of stress level with simple stress reduction actions to keep stress levels within our “window of tolerance”.
- **Wear a 4 Elements *bracelet*\* (coloured silicon band) on your wrist & every time you notice it take a quick reading of your current stress level (SUD) & perform the 4 Elements Exercises & then take a second SUD reading.**  
\*[Alternative: *place a small sticker or label on your watch or mobile phone*]
- **The (modest) goal is to reduce your stress level by 1 or 2 each time & to do this at random times & at various initial stress levels. By preventing your stress responses from accumulating, you may be better able to stay within your “window of tolerance”.**

### *Tips*

- In Phase 2 this can be a way of introducing the Safe Place exercise (as the 4th element), especially when client needs stabilisation first
- Anchor the Safe Place into the bracelet as well
  
- The sequence of the 4 Elements Earth-Air-Water-Fire is designed to follow the body up from the feet –to the stomach & chest- to the throat & mouth -to the head
- As each new “Element exercise” is presented briefly review the previous ones (“ as you continue feeling the SECURITY NOW of your feet on the GROUND; & feel CENTERED as you BREATHE in & out; & feel CALM & in CONTROL as you produce more & more SALIVA; you can let the FIRE LIGHT the path to your IMAGINATION to bring up an IMAGE of a place where you feel SAFE /or a memory in which you felt good about yourself.”)
  
- The rubber band can be stretched (gently) & released to stop negative thoughts & to ground quickly in the present (thought stopping).





**4 Elements**  
**for Stress Reduction**  
**(Earth Air Water Fire)**  
 Elan Shapiro