



Four Elements: Reflections on Nature

John O'Donohue

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From the beloved author of the bestselling *To Bless the Space Between Us* and *Anam Cara* comes a new work that shares his insights on nature and the ancient wisdom of this earth.

John O'Donohue won hundreds of thousands of admirers with his now classic work on Celtic spirituality *Anam Cara*. Unfortunately he died suddenly at age fifty-two just as his book of blessings, *To Bless the Space Between Us*, was being published. The loss of his powerfully wise and lyrical voice has been profoundly missed, but his many readers are given a special opportunity to revisit John in a new book based on a series of papers he wrote on the elements of water, stone, air, and fire, now published here for the first time. O'Donohue's readers know him as both a spiritual guide and a poet, and in this work he exhibits both qualities, sharing his Celtic heritage and his love for his native landscape in the west of Ireland. As O'Donohue explores a range of themes relating to the way we live our lives today, he reveals how the energy and rhythm of the natural world--its innocence and creativity, its power and splendor--hold profound lessons for us all. With a foreword written by his beloved brother, Pat, this illuminating book is an inspired reflection on the ancient wisdom of the earth.

Four Elements: Reflections on Nature Details

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Rae says

I am not going to review the other John O'Donohue books. He is a Celtic poet and philosopher. I have heard him interviewed by Krista Tippitt on NPR and really love what he has to say; however, he seems to be one of those 'single message' people and if you read one book, you kinda have read them all.

Gina says

Beautiful 4 part book treating the 4 elements (air, water, fire, stone) and what they symbolize for our spirituality. Air deals a lot with breathing and slowing down and appreciating the invisible, the space around us. Water examines the flood of emotions we express and conceal and our mutability. Fire is about the power of the hearth to connect us and empower us. And finally stone, landscape, is our memory and the majesty of age old silence. He talks about the symbolism of each, weaving in examples for each element from the culture and spirituality of Ireland.

A short but beautiful book that I had to read and reread passages of to really take in the ideas.

writer... says

Always a challenge to contemplative thinking, Irish poet and philosopher, John O'Donohue, brings spiritual understanding using concepts of air, water, fire, stone.. exploring aspects of air as applicably descriptive of Ruach Ha'kodesh - Holy Spirit ~ the breath of God.

O'Donohue's quote from a 13th century portion of a Persian prayer poem continues its resonance in me ~ "Be a full bucket pulled up the dark way
Of a well, then lifted out into light."

While not in agreement with every theological thought, there is much to enjoy in the exploration...

Gala says

Genuinely powerful as a series of meditations on the planet we share.

Beth Orchard says

Currently reading this book by one of my favorite authors. I am finding this book much different than his other works. It's as if he's throwing out postulations and theories and ideas but is not ready to dig deeper into

their themes. Nonetheless I find myself stopping often to read over again what I just read and also to consider what he is saying on my own deeper plane of thought. I don't always need someone to pull apart everything for me to feel connected to their writing. I wish I had the opportunity to meet him and savor his words in person and to cultivate a conversation. He's influencing me to think deeper about my life as a new mother and birth is a common theme for his writing as it is about the cyclical nature of Earth and her elements. So much beauty in his words about the four elements but I wish he would have taken a deeper dive into them. He's just scratched the surface and now we must do the inner work to find the meaning. Perhaps that was his goal all along.

Moose says

Philosophical, spiritual, and poetic--this entire book is a calm and peaceful reflection on how nature and the soul fit together. It was a lovely read but I suggest not reading it all together at once. It can become repetitive and lose some of it's beauty that way.

SA says

Definitely something of a ramble, and certain sections are more polished than others, but O'Donohue has such a turn of phrase that I found myself flagging a ton of pages for the beauty of the language.

Dodie says

This was the first book I have read anything by John O'Donohue. I did enjoy the book. There were four main chapters, air, water, fire and stone. My favourite chapter was fire. There were some poems and quotes that were in the book. The book was written in prose but at times felt that it as a stream of consciousness.

Anita says

The author writes in a manner that animates these elements of nature: air, water, fire and stone. One can almost hear the Irish lilt in these written words, and be magically transported into the great outdoors. It could be a fast read if you want to, but I just had to stop every so often and immerse myself in the embrace and reflections of nature. With so many subtle nuances to tune into, it is a most beautiful piece of work!

Chrissie says

More brilliant writing by John O'Donohue. He has turned the four elements of nature into beautiful poetic beings, giving us a completely new perspective on them. He really made me look at and contemplate them in a different way. The mysticism and poetry in his words is just beautiful. I highly recommend it.

Pradnya says

Its appeal is in the poetic language and spiritual thoughts.

Cornerofmadness says

This book made me think two things: it's a shame the author died relatively young and I should go look for his other works. It's hard to put into words what this book really is. He was a poet and a philosopher so that should help a little in classifying it. These were separate essays he wrote in the 90's and posthumously collecting into a book, each dealing with an element, earth, wind, fire water and viewing the world, the landscape and spirituality (somewhat fluid in terms of a religion, a holistic pantheist view).

It's clear by the lyrical writing style that Mr. O'Donohue was a poet and his love of his home country of Ireland shines through as well. But it's more than that. Viewed through his lens, the world, however, imperfect is still a beautiful, peaceful place if we only know how to look, listen and feel for it. However, there is a bit of a repetitive feel since these essays weren't technically meant to be read together. Taking a break between the elements is helpful.

Ken says

John O'Donohue on the relationships of the four elements of nature

John O'Donohue's gifts that sense rhythms in humans as in his Anam Cara are capable of sensing rhythms in the four elements, earth, air, fire, and water. In this rich example of his Celtic wisdom flow patterns of life in the inanimate. It is a flow I have not sensed before, so it took time to resonate with the workings of a great mystic... time I had no regret about spending on the experience.

Anne Hamilton says

I think I was expecting a deep intimate exploration of the themes, instead of a wide, relatively shallow one. There were many ideas but they generally skated the surface before hurrying on, stream-of-consciousness, to a related topic.

Still, it was a gentle, easy read. I never did get my curiosity assuaged as to the repeated, unexplained description of Jesus as a stonemason, despite the entire section on Stone.

Some thoughts/information 'worth keeping':

Prayer has to do with breathing. ... Prayer allows God to be God. And prayer allows our secret selves to be themselves. This is a recommendation that Meister Eckhart makes again and again: be who you are. This is

one of the great spiritual duties.

In Ireland too there is the tradition of the haunted house. In olden days nearly every village had one. ... It could be a residue from some past deed or pain. As if the intensity of the pain was so acute that it left a permanent imprint in the ether of that place. Again, the air is not so innocent or unaware as we might believe. Despite its invisibility, it seems to register everything that happens in it.

Though space is vast and distant, at the heart of it is Love. As Dante says, Love turns the stars and the planets.

There is also the tradition in Ireland over covering the mirrors or turning them to the wall when someone has died; the reason for this is the fear that the soul projected onto the mirror could be carried by the spirit of the departed.

[Heidegger]told Gadamer: 'Wir haben noch nicht gelernt die Griechen griechisch genug zu denken.' 'We have not yet learned to think the Greeks sufficiently Greek.'

He was referring to the notion of Epiphany that pervades Greek philosophy. He recounted how one would be sailing in this diffuse blue light, when suddenly an island would appear, fully formed and stark in its thereness. It had come out of nowhere. ...

This is where the idea of Epiphany in the Bible and religion had its roots.

Carol says

I won through this book through the Firstreads program. Thank you Goodreads! I find this is not a book to read from start to finish in one afternoon but rather one to keep on my nightstand to browse through a little bit from time-to-time.
