

The Elements of Emotion: Fire - Joy - Anxiety - Compassion

Kim Peirano, DACM, LAc

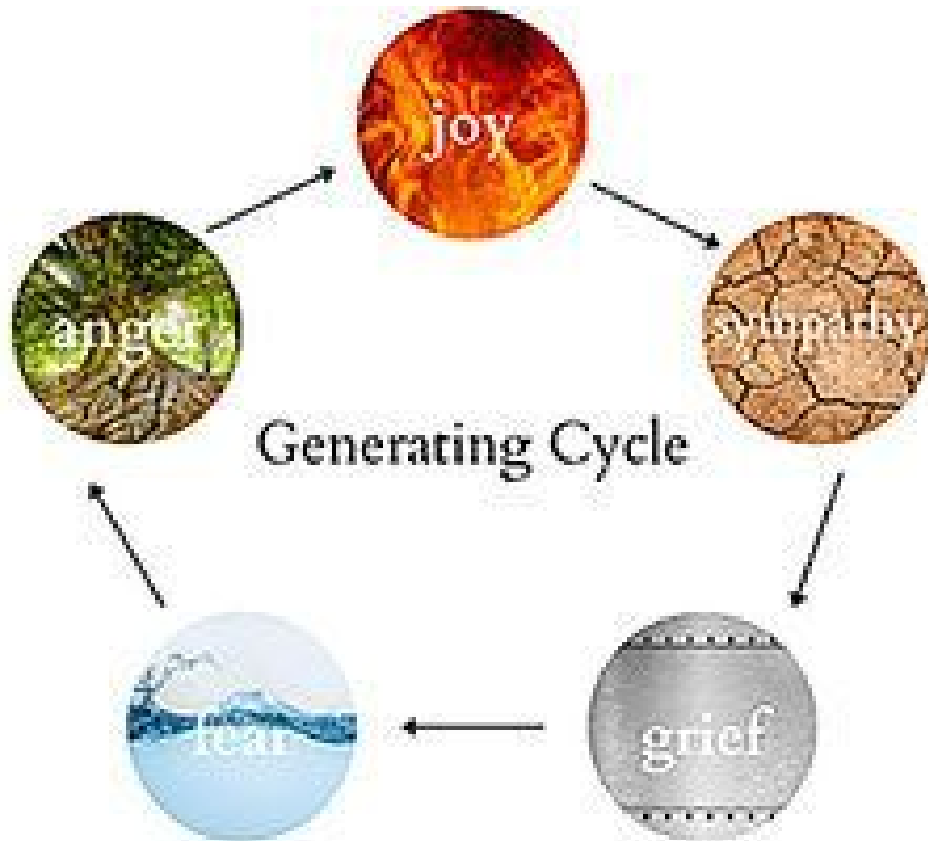
Editor's Note: In her [January 2022](#) column, Dr. Peirano discussed wood - anger.

Our emotional landscape is a complex entity in and of itself. Turning to the element cycles can help us understand more deeply how our emotions arise, how they can be transformed and how we can ultimately begin to live in a space of the virtues of the elements, instead of gripping to the emotions.

With the element of fire, we know the emotion to be joy, which is essentially the only fully "positive" emotion among the five emotions; although we can view how joy plays out in a spectrum ranging from contentment, to joy, to overexcitement, to vulnerability, to anxiety and mania.

The generating cycle tells us how emotions arise into the next emotional state, and in a healthy system these emotional states flow easily and fluidly. When there is an issue along this cycle, we may see excesses of specific emotions, being stuck there, not experiencing an emotion properly, or an absence of it entirely.

Repressed Emotion (Wood) Feeds Anxiety (Fire)



An aspect of wood emotions is repressed emotion, and here is where we can see the generation of anxiety or panic take place. When emotions are bottled up and repressed - particularly anger (as we might see with failing to set boundaries that are important to us), the wood element grows and grows until it starts to fuel the fire, pushing past joy and into anxiety.

I think of anxiety as a tea kettle with no release spout: the kettle starts to jump around with no release and continues to bounce and shake more fervently. By moving our liver *qi* with physical, primal-type movements, we can start to release and remove the wood - fuel from the fire. This can help to reduce anxiety or panic in an acute state.

Anxiety (Fire) Feeds Overthinking (Earth)

At the root of overthinking is anxiety at some level; we're using our *qi* to worry, which is a pointless and fruitless expression of *qi*. Anxiety is the concern about the future, which ultimately we have no control over and this anxiety removes us from the present moment which is where we inherently have the most power. We may also think of anxiety and overthinking as a cycle, whereby one feeds into the other back and forth, ultimately the root of which is fear taken out of balance.

We can also view anxiety as a type of manic energy: the high vibration of joy gone awry, vibrating faster than we have the ability to hold and work with. This excess of energy is what feeds the overthinking and rumination; since that energy has no place to go, it feeds into earth and gives rise to overthinking.

The Virtue of Fire - Compassion

The virtues of the elements aren't often spoken about, but they are essential to our process of personal and spiritual growth. Every element has a virtue; we exhibit this virtue when that element is in alignment and we are walking our path of right action.

Assertiveness (Wood) Releases Compassion (Fire)

Compassion is the virtue of the fire element, whereas anxiety or panic is the difficult emotion associated with the fire element. When looking at this cycle, we see that a healthy expression of anger - like setting and holding a boundary - is what has the ability for us to embody compassion.

Compassion is the act of holding our space with an open heart while allowing another to have their reality. The virtue of assertiveness and ability to set appropriate boundaries is necessary to embody compassion.

Compassion (Fire) Feeds Sympathy (Earth)

When the emotions are being expressed in their appropriate weights and speeds, we experience joy in the fire element. This joy or peace is required for a person to be able to express authentic sympathy. Being in a space of peace and joy allows us the space within ourselves to connect with others, especially when others are in pain or distress.

By coming from that space of love and joy, we can authentically connect, hear the other person, see where they are coming from and hold space for their reality. Compassion is the ability to hold our space and allow another to have their reality, and this in essence is the experience of the virtue of *fire creating the virtue of earth - compassion feeding sympathy*.

Practical Application: Helping Your Patients

In practice, we can use the relationships of the emotions and virtues along the element cycles to help us coach our patients and help them tune in to a deeper state of awareness about themselves. When a patient struggles with anxiety, we may inform them about the generating cycle and then pose the question: What emotions or experiences have you not fully felt into or have released? By helping our patients simply have more awareness of their emotional landscape, we help to transform it. There isn't much we need to specifically do; it's simply about cultivating awareness.

APRIL 2022