

Elementary Approach to Houses

By Anne C. Ortelee

We're going to take a slightly different, elemental approach to houses. We will look at them from the perspective of their elemental rulers to see what they reveal to us.

Elements are an incredibly important aspect of astrology that helps us to look at the way the planets, houses and signs manifest. Each house is assigned an element. There are four elements in Western astrology: Fire, Earth, Air and Water.

The houses repeat, in order—fire, earth, air, water, fire, earth, air, water, fire, earth, air, water—around the chart. We have three houses of each element that behave in three different ways—action-taking, fixed and changeable, corresponding to the modes of Cardinal, Fixed and Mutable. When a planet falls in a house, it automatically assumes part of the inherent elemental nature of the house.

We learn in basic astrology that there are four elements—the masculine or yang qualities of Fire and Air and the feminine or yin qualities of Water and Earth. Yang Elements take action. Fire heats things and dries them out. Air moves things and cools them off. Think clothes dryer and blowing on hot food to cool it down. Yang elements MOVE. Fire and Air houses MOVE and TAKE ACTION.

Yin elements sit still and receive. Earth doesn't move unless we pick up a shovel and help it. Earth sustains, holds and separates. Water flows to the lowest point and then takes the shape of the container it is in—spreading to cover or pool on the surface. And there it sits until moved again—either by you pouring it or by the gravity of the moon. Yin elements RECEIVE. Earth and Water houses SIT, HOLD and WAIT. They also react.

The elements, and words used to describe them, appear everywhere in our understanding of how the houses and signs relate to each other and the dance that the planets make above us. It can feel like a complicated dance, but we're going to go back to basics (with a twist) and look at it from a new perspective.

One consistent area of confusion for my students is the fact that the houses maintain their elemental focus EVEN IF a sign, representing another element, is their actual ruler. So the 1st house is ALWAYS, underneath, a Fire sign regardless of whether an earth, water or air sign rules the house. Beneath that gentle Pisces Rising beats an Aries Fire energy that BLENDS with the house's ruling sign of Pisces to produce a sensitive, selfish, action-taking Fish. This blending is how everything under the sun is ultimately described by astrology.

When planets are in the same element, they cooperate with each other; they “get” each other. They know how to work together collaboratively. We're going to look at the houses from the perspective of their collaborative elements.

Fire houses are houses 1, 5 and 9—ruled by Aries, Leo and Sagittarius, respectively. The metaphysical symbol for fire is a triangle pointing up—and flames expand and climb things rapidly. Fires rise. Witness any forest fire, towering inferno, or even your match, fireplace fire or candle—flames go up. Fire houses are exuberant by nature, expansive, and HEATING. They warm things up. Fire houses are assigned words like passion, enthusiasm creativity, beginnings, wisdom and knowledge, because we are expanding our horizons, our understanding and reaching UPWARDS.

Step into houses 1, 5 and 9, and look at them as a triangular connection of energy. The first house is about ourselves and how we begin or start things. It describes our actual beginning of life and how we begin EVERYTHING. It is a MATCH—Aries. It is a movement-oriented or action-oriented house. We use

the idea of taking forward motion to begin any project or anything in our life. It describes our eagerness. Think about the story of your birth, and how every time you do anything, you actually repeat that story again and again.

Fire from the 1st house trines to the 5th house of creativity. The 5th house is about our passions, our love, our play, our gusto and our children. The 5th house of Leo is FIREPLACE fire, lit by the match of Aries. The 5th house includes the things we create, the things we adore, how we want to play and what we do for fun. We are looking at passion and fire comingled with the natural house of Leo, the sign where we want to shine. The aim of every person, animal and thing is to create something representing their purpose in life. The 5th house is what we create. In the natural wheel, Leo rules where our Sun wants to shine. What house Leo rules in our natal chart is what our passions in THIS life are about.

The things we create can create things too! Children can make grandchildren—which is the 9th house, the creations of our creations. The 9th house rules things like wisdom, journeys undertaken, things learned, good karma from previous lives and blessings. The 9th house of Sagittarius is CANDLE fire—from one starter flame, many candles can be lit. The 9th house is very much about spreading the light rather than containing it, as the fireplace fire of Leo does. Think about the light of many candles rather than the single match of Aries—a single flame illuminating the darkness.

We watch as the metaphor of the fire trine goes from a single match to the warmth of a fireplace to multiple fires of candles. A parent can beget several children, and those children beget multiple children, so the obituaries read: “survived by their two children, seven grandchildren and fifteen great-grandchildren.” The parable of multiples is the underlying energy of Fire. Fire is a multiplying energy. Hanging out with fire, watching it burn, warm and enlighten as it consumes what it’s working with is an excellent metaphor for living life in an abundant and fulfilled way.

As fire turns its fuel to ash, we come to **Earth**, the next of the elements. Earth rules houses 2, 6 and 10. In our daily life, these are the houses of practicality, grounding, solidity and support. They represent what we have, what we do every day and where we’re going during the course of our life. Earth houses are what we make of ourselves after we begin things with Fire. Earth houses are feminine and yin. They are about what we gather to ourselves to support and sustain ourselves in our life.

The 2nd house is the first of the earth triangle—it’s about the physical energy that we create in the world. Taurus is **fixed** earth. It represents our value and worth, the money in our pocket, and the things we own that are portable, that we carry with us. Taurus is the house of MINE.

Taurus is trine to the 6th house of Virgo, which is the house of work, our daily activities and routines. Virgo is **changeable** earth—you do different things on different days, responding to what needs to be accomplished or served. Virgo represents what we gather or harvest on our journey as we travel the earth. We pick up a rock here, a shell there, a piece of fruit there. Virgo is the work of gathering, coalescing and collaborating to harvest, to apply our skill and talent. Our 6th house involves obtaining and creating our own habits as well as our crafts and skillset. The skills we develop in the 6th house feed the Taurus house of what we are good at—what we think of as ours.

The earth trine from the 6th house to the 10th house of Capricorn speaks a great deal about where we are heading in the world. Capricorn is **action-taking** earth. What are we climbing toward? What are we building? The foundation of the triangle runs from the 2nd house to the 6th house—what is our value and worth as created by our talents and skills? The combination of the 2nd and 6th houses, pointing upwards toward the sky, the Midheaven is our 10th house. The pinnacle of the chart describes what we achieve in the world, what we manifest, what we amount to, what we’re known for and how the world perceives us.

When we climb to the top of the rock represented by Capricorn, we are at the top of the mountain and literally the top of the chart. Capricorn says how high we can go and describes when we begin our

descent. Yes, you climbed Mount Everest, now you have to get back down! Capricorn, ruled by Saturn the planet of karma, uses the talents and skills from the 9th-house fire of the karma from previous lives to help us manifest our karma in this life. Note that the 9th house is the 12th house of the 10th house. If we apply 9th-house information as the belief systems that help create our life, our 9th house describes what we think is possible. Each of the earth houses is fed by 12th houses of fire—Aries feeds Taurus, Leo feeds Virgo and Sagittarius feeds Capricorn. In that feeding, we find wisdom in the little engine that could. If I think I can, I can. If I think I can't, I can't. Capricorn's rock hardness at the top of the chart works with the other two versions of earth, the dirt of Taurus's fixed nature and the shifting sands of Virgo's mutable nature to create the foundation on which a life is built.

Leaving the stability of earth, we arrive in the **Air** houses, 3, 7 and 11, which represent different ways of thinking and collaborating with others. We've moved from visions and passions (Fire) and what we have (Earth) into connection with others via communication (Air). Air is a masculine, yang polarity. There are different kinds of communications, represented by our air houses of connection. We communicate and share our ideas and things that we have learned.

The 3rd house of Gemini connects us to our siblings and those side-by-side relationships that we grow up in. **changeable** Air is Gemini. Part of the same family yet separated by age. Gemini encourages us to evaluate ourselves with the other in side-by-side comparison: "You're the smart one, you're the pretty one and you're the athletic one." Siblings differentiate their talents and are born from the same parents. The Gemini house is a companionable, comparative house. In addition to siblings, it includes the people you talk with who live near you, your neighbors, people in your immediate environment and those that you commute with.

The 7th house of Libra is the house of collaboration—picking one particular partner that you like best, as represented by Libra, to talk to one on one. Libra is **action-taking** air. Libra represents the person you partner with, pair up with, share all your thoughts with and communicate with to reach balance, harmony and accord. The Libra house involves a level of mutuality; rather than being part of the same family and separated by age, we've now chosen the other to partner with, or vice versa. We are ostensibly in an equal, balanced and sharing relationship as the Libra house opposed the Aries house of ourselves. Even-stein, we gaze across the chart—we look at each other in an opposition. In Libra, the comparison energy of the siblings morphs into an "I have this, you have that, let's work together to create something." It involves sharing ideas and collaborating with the other to get things accomplished.

When we go to the 11th house of Aquarius, we're now part of a collaborative group. Aquarius is **fixed** Air—it sustains the communication. We're learning as part of a group, rather than one-on-one or with people in our own family or neighbors. The group continues whether we communicate or not. We are part of the audience, fixed in our chairs, watching the creativity of the Leo house across the chart. We're working on a tribal or a community level. We are part of the crowd, part of the greater whole, and we receive or experience the information from the perspective of detachment. Less is required of us in communication—unless we are communicating TO the group. Ideas and learning can take place in the collaborative area of Aquarius. Whether you are listening to the teacher or wisdom source, or disagreeing with them, you are experiencing instead of texting your friends about meeting up for dinner. Aquarius as the group communication has a lot to do with the understanding of a deeper connection that we share—we speak the same languages, we laugh at similar jokes. It's the experience of being in an audience enjoying a performance. When you look around, you see that everyone else is laughing at the same thing or crying at a sad moment. There's a universal connection to others in the 11th, Aquarian house.

Finally, there are the **Water** houses, which are about emotionally connecting as well as linking up the energy of the three previous houses. We exist, we have our own stuff, we've talked and found out what the other guy has, and now we're going to merge our energies and blend them together. The water houses are 4, 8 and 12. Water is the universal solvent, dissolving and merging the other energies together. Whether it is the 227 miles of the Grand Canyon carved by the Colorado River of **action-taking** water of Cancer, the

unchanging swamps and wetlands of **fixed** water Scorpio or the endless tidal, **Changeable** nature of the Pisces ocean water shifting the coastlines.

The 4th house is Cancer, **action-taking** Water. It is the source from which we spring, our parental legacy, our inherited traits, our primal, preverbal nature before we found words and the deep chthonic underbelly of our chart, where our DNA rests. The Cancer emotional memory is carried forward from eons back, when you were 3% Neanderthal, through the tribal legacy of whatever countries your ancestors came from, situated in your family of origin to right now, today. The 4th house is the emotional inheritance, the preverbal-history section where you can't talk but just feel, the emotional memory of the soul, the emotional memory of the chart, the place where you're most vulnerable and most needy. The 4th house, or Cancer house, of the chart represents the primal substance that we're all given to work with. Some astrology traditions teach that the Moon holds the past lives' memories reincarnated, so the 4th house contains that memory too. It is the emotional lake from which you emerge, the river that runs through your being.

The trine from the 4th house goes to the 8th house of **fixed** Water, Scorpio. Scorpio issues are the psychological issues you develop or inherit from your parents and the current life. The 8th house is the 5th house of your family, so it represents the hopes and dreams your parents had for you when you arrived on earth. The 8th house also holds your parents' or tribe's anxieties. It contains the unfinished creative business they were not able to resolve before you arrived which is why children often live out their parents' unrealized lives. The 8th house contains your psychological baggage, of which one often chooses not to speak, but that operates as a gatekeeper to deeper emotional and psychological merging with the other. It is the 2nd house of what or whom you want to partner with. It encourages deeper reflection on the topics that are usually not spoken of in cultured or "polite" society. Working with the 8th-house energy, you're working with the swamp—still, stagnant water. The Scorpio house is intimidating for many people. After all, who wants to go mucking about in a swamp unless you're an aquatic ecosystems biologist? Plus there are mosquitos! But if you go willingly into the 8th house to work with the psychological issues your parents gave you, you frequently come up with a new way of looking at the situation, a reframing of the swamp.

Finally, the 12th house, ruled by Pisces, **changeable** water, represents the previous life's incarnations, hidden problems, things that get in your way that you're unconscious of and situations in your chart's blind spot. Here we find emotional agreements you brought into life to resolve, an awareness of your deeper connection with all sentient beings and your karma. The 12th house, like the ocean that links all the separate continents on earth, is the place where you move into the collective unconscious that we all share, or the undifferentiated morass if you're a bit more atheistic.

Now that we've floated through the Fire, Earth, Air and Water triangles of the chart and learned how the different elements work together, you can unlock any chart with the skills of Sherlock Holmes saying "Elementary!"

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