

## Spiritual Directors on the Great Journey

This ritual was adapted and modified by Terrence J. Moran from one designed by Connie Barlow. Connie's original ritual can be found at <http://www.thegreatstory.org/GreatJourney.html>

If you use this ritual please give credit to both and refer people to the original text by Barlow.

This particular ritual was used for a gathering of spiritual directors at Mercy Center in Madison, CT. It uses key figures and concepts in the history and practice of spiritual direction. It can be adapted for other contexts.

### Items needed:

- meditation bell
- small dishes of glitter
- large candle
- pitcher and large bowl
- small branch for sprinkling
- dirt (enough to fill the bowl)
- incense stick
- a piece of chocolate and/ fruit for each participant (e.g. Hershey's kisses and grapes)
- 2 stones
- pita bread
- a white plate that can be blackened in the candle fire

### 1. The Great Radiance

*The bell is sounded.*

Leader: "In the beginning is the Great Radiance. In a moment of grace, all of Space, all of Time, and all Energy flares forth from the primordial Mystery. From this Great Radiance, 13.7 billion years ago, the Universe will begin its Great Journey. What creativity will unfold? What wonders will emerge in the billions of years before us?"

Reader: Hidden in this fertile womb of creative energy are the forces that, in the fullness of time, will give birth to spiritual direction. The energetic dance of inward and outward, of contemplation and action -that sacred impulse is already here.

Leader Call: "In our hearts, we call forth gratitude for the Great Radiance."

Response: "We are grateful for the Great Radiance. We are awed by the Mystery from which the Universe flares forth."

### 2. The Birth of Galaxies & Stars

Leader: "As the Energy of the Great Radiance expands and cools, matter emerges and congeals into clouds of hydrogen. These coalesce into the communion of galaxies — billions of galaxies. At a moment of grace [BELL], the first stars ignite within these galaxies, fueled by the marriage of matter and gravity, fusing the abundant hydrogen into helium. And then the biggest stars go further, forging all the

chemical elements within their bellies and then offering their gifts in the blinding bursts of supernovas. All the calcium in our bones, all the iron in our blood, all the carbon and nitrogen and oxygen in our DNA: all these elements are forged in the bellies of giant stars."

Reader: Here are present all the elements that will make up the bodies of great spiritual teacher, shamans, gurus, wisdom women and men, spiritual directors; the elements that will feed the chemical processes that will fuse their listening hearts, their creative imaginations.

*Participants are invited to say aloud people who are spiritual direction teachers/mentors for them.*

*Then participants heads are anointed with stardust (glitter) with the words: "You are a child of the stars, made of stardust.*

### *3. Lighting the Sun*

*A large candle is carried into the prayer space.*

Leader: "Among the hundreds of billions of galaxies can be found a lovely spiral galaxy, the Milky Way, where second-generation stars are swirling into being from the rich brew of supernova stardust. One of these is our star, the Sun, and its nine planetary pups and their moons, who came into being 4.6 billion years ago in a moment of grace [BELL]. Our Sun is too small to become a supernova, but it will provide its nearby planets with a secure and steady banquet of warmth and light, day in and day out, for billions and billions of years. Oh what creativity will arise in this new star system!"

Reader: Imagine a spiritual direction encounter. The mind and heart of the directee that gives word to inner experiences; the mind and heart of the director that receives the word and holds it in attentive silence. This entire process of spiritual companionship is fueled by energy from the sun. The sun is an active and irreplaceable participant in every ministry of spiritual direction.

Leader Call: In our hearts we call forth gratitude for our star, the Sun."

Response: "We are grateful for our star, the Sun, whose generosity lights up the sky."

### **4. The First Rain**

*A participant pours a pitcher of water slowly and noisily from on high into a glass bowl.*

Leader: "On planet Earth, third stone from the Sun, there occurs a moment of grace (BELL) as the planet cools: water condenses from the steamy atmosphere, and rain falls for the first time. Rain falls and falls. The oceans fill and begin to respond to the moon, rolling with the tides, and rivers flow through the ever-flowing continents".

Reader: They are all here: the waters of the Pacific and of the Atlantic Oceans, of the Connecticut River and Long Island Sound; the waters that burst from every mother's laboring womb; the tears that spiritual seekers shed in joy, anger, frustration, prayer; all these waters are here.

Leader Call: "In our hearts, we call forth gratitude for the gift of liquid water."

Response: "We are grateful for the rains and rivers and oceans of Earth."

## **5. The Emergence of Life**

Leader: "The rain cycles between ocean, continent, and atmosphere. Rain running off rock carries vital salts and minerals into the ocean waters, while magma continues to refresh Earth's crust. In a moment of grace [BELL], emerging from rock and water, the first living cell pulses into existence some 3 billion years ago. From that cell will evolve all the creatures of the sea. Forever after, life on Earth will build cells and bodies from the earth's elements and liquid water."

Reader: The firm and the flowing; the certain and the ambiguous; the clear and the illusive – these dynamics familiar to every spiritual companion are born here.

*Participants are sprinkled with water.*

## **6. The Coming onto Land**

Leader: "The oceans teem with bacteria, algae, jellyfish, sponges, trilobites, urchins, and fishes. Some of the fishes live in shallow coves, their fins becoming sturdy pegs for scuttling along the bottom like crabs. In a moment of grace [BELL], some 350 million years ago, some of these fishes venture out onto land, pulling and pushing themselves with their peg like fins. And so, the first amphibians are born. Our limbs still bear the traces of our four-finned ancestry."

*Dirt is poured into the bowl.*

Leader: "We are creatures of rock and soil, merged with water. Let us stand now, rise up with our amphibian ancestors, struggling against the pull of gravity to celebrate the gift of sturdy limbs. [Pause]

Let us breathe deeply now, breathe with our amphibian ancestors to celebrate our inheritance of lungs and the freshness of air. [Breathe]

Reader: Here breath is born. Here is born the mindful breathing of centuries of mediators. Here began the breath of peace that the Christ sent forth over the apostles. Here the joyful greeting of Francis and Clare of Assisi – Peace and all good. Here the fiery preaching of Martin Luther. Here the songs of Teresa of Avila and the mystic poetry

of John of the Cross; Here the elegant prayer of Thomas Cranmer and the stirring hymns of Charles Wesley; all here. Here every word of empathy and encouragement of the spiritual director; all here.

## **7. The Emergence of Mammals**

Leader: "Please be seated. In a moment of grace, [BELL] amphibians give rise to reptiles, whose eggs can withstand the stress of dry air. Out of the reptiles will come dinosaurs, birds, and mammals. The dinosaurs easily claim the continents, the birds the skies. Meanwhile, the mammals stay small and wary for tens of millions of years, adapted to a life of darting from one safe burrow to the next, favoring the cover of night. Creatures of darkness, our ancestors develop a powerful sense of smell. Even today, odors call forth within us emotions and memories deeper than the realm of reason and word. . . deeper than the realm of sight and sound. Deeper than the realm of reason and word; deeper than the realm of sight and sound." (*A participant lights an incense stick and walks around to disperse the aroma. Pause while people experience the smell*).

Reader: Imagine the smell of a crackling fire around which our prehistoric ancestors told stories; the monastics breathing in and out the incense laden air; the native peoples blessing one another with the smoke of sage and sweet grass. The sense of presence that they experience, the peace, was born here.

## **8. Into the Trees**

Leader: "I ask you now to close your eyes. And then, 65 million years ago, a great meteor flares forth from the heavens, crashing to Earth, turning day into night for many months. There is darkness ...darkness ... utter darkness. The plants die, the dinosaurs die, the little mammals huddle and hibernate in burrows. And when the sunlight returns, the mammals begin to come out of their burrows. Open your eyes to what is now around you, the devastation, the vacancy of life.

But a different kind of life will flourish from this darkness. The Great Radiance of Mammals is about to begin, and you are a part of it! Your ancestors will co-evolve with the buzzing insects, the fluttering birds, the colorful flowers!

Reader: Life out of death, perseverance in darkness, openness to surprise, letting go and opening to the new –all these dynamics of the spiritual direction relationship are part of the deep wisdom of Earth.

Leader: One lineage of mammal will take to the trees. These are the primates. Feel your eyes moving from the sides of your head to the front of your face, allowing you to see depth. Now you can leap flawlessly from branch to branch. Your heritage of night vision evolves to accommodate the colors of day, allowing your descendents to one day gasp in the presence of a rainbow. All the while, paws for scampering and burrowing are becoming instruments for grasping. I invite you now to take in the wonder of your hands.

Admire your supple primate hands with your depth-perceiving, color sensitive eyes. Know that all these were forged in the welcoming branches of trees... trees: our cherished partners in evolution."

Reader: The hands of spiritual directors – hands held receptive and open on the lap; hands that move with passion and animation; hands that comfort and bless; these hands are born here.

Leader Call: "In our hearts, we call forth gratitude for the trees of the forest that sheltered and challenged our primate ancestors."

Response: "We are grateful for our partners in evolution: the glorious trees."

Leader: "I invite you now to take a piece of chocolate and a piece of fruit. While still in the trees, our ancestors partake of food that the trees provide: leaves and seeds and fruits. The trees respond, in turn, luring us by sweetening the pulp of fruit so we might, unawares, disperse their seeds. Our bodies respond, too: we evolve a yearning for fruits and a tongue that can alert us to bitter plant poisons.

Reader: The skills of discernment – distinguishing the nourishing from the harmful; naming consolation and desolation; knowing what to take in and what to keep out. The ability to set the table of a spiritual feast and to encourage the savoring of the something new and untried. All these skills are deep energies of our Earth. Let us now eat this chocolate and fruit together with joy, and give thanks for the coevolutionary dance of plants and primates."

## **9. Out of the Trees**

Leader: "As the climate dries in our original Eden, the African forest opens into savanna. Our primate ancestors spend less and less time in the trees and more and more time on the ground, where they search for insects and dig for roots and tubers. Might the digging sticks that ferret out the yam and the carrot be the first human tools?"

Reader: All the tools, all the instruments of art and music, of craft and culture, from quill pens to computers, that religious writers, preachers, educators have ever used, are born here.

## **10. Time of the Hunt**

Leader: "Some digging sticks now become weapons, tipped with chipped stones. With these we set out on the communal hunt. Is it the hunt that urges us to sign to one another, and then to speak to one another? Whatever the impetus, we know that in a moment of grace, (Bell) symbolic language emerges in the human, and with it our capacity to teach and learn from one another and sing songs of thanksgiving.

Reader: The sacred texts of every religion – mantras and psalms, parables and beatitudes, comfort and challenge, prayer and protest – all were born here. The voices of every person of faith raised in prayer, in song, in instruction or advocacy – all born here.

SONG

**This is holy ground.  
We're standing on holy ground.  
For our God is present  
And where God is, is holy.  
This is holy ground  
We're standing on holy ground  
For our God is present  
And where God is is holy**

### **11. Firemakers**

*Participant strikes two stones together.*

Leader: "Humans learn to harness and maintain flames lit by lightning. Later, we discover how to beckon fire to appear whenever and wherever we wish. We become the firemakers. Do we feel Earth trembling with foreboding? With fire we can now flush game, alter the landscape, preserve meat, fend off predators, keep warm, and roast away toxins from seed and tuber."

### **12. Farmers**

Leader: About 10,000 years ago, in a moment of grace, [BELL] our kind learns not only how to find and prepare seeds, but how to plant and nurture them. Humans can now stay in one place year after year, and in densities never before possible.

Reader: Seed, sprout, plant, flower, fruit – the ability to believe in life hidden in the ground and the power for patient cultivation of new life; the ability to see in another the stirring of new life, the recognition of beauty, the harvesting of the fruits of growth – all this is born here.

Leader: I invite you now to pass the bread and take off a piece for yourself. As you take and eat this grain, speak in reverence the names of the homelands where your forebears tilled the soil."

*Participants say aloud the names of the homelands of their ancestors.*

### **13. The Desecration of Earth**

Leader: "We come to today, and the awful truth that in humans, inventiveness often outpaces wisdom and restraint. As Thomas Berry has written, 'The glory of the human has become the desecration of Earth. The desecration of Earth is becoming the destiny of

the human.' [pause] Farmed and overgrazed soils are washing into the sea. Earth's fire makers are now burning fuels in such abundance that we are changing the very composition of the atmosphere —tarnishing our souls. *A plate is held over the fire until soot is formed. A participant shows it to the group.*

We are driving into extinction the biotic richness of this beautiful Earth “What can be done? What can be done?”

#### **14. Reclaiming the Past, Revisioning the Future**

[BELL] Leader: "What is to be done? What is to be done? We can dream the dream of the Earth. We can respond as Earth participating in its own healing. In so doing, together, surely we will bring about a mutually enhancing human-Earth relationship! I invite you all now to close your eyes and meditate in silence on what your own individual contributions might be. What is Earth dreaming through you? What is Earth beckoning forth? What is Earth calling forth from spiritual directors and companions?"

Pause for Silence

Leader: "To conclude this ceremony, let us sing an old earth-centered chant with an awareness of the new cosmology. Let us retrieve the depth relationship our ancestors had with the soil, the air, the fire, and the water. And let us replenish these concepts with the awesome wonder and intimacy we now can draw from the new story, the Story of the Great Journey."

The Earth, the Air, the Fire, the Water  
renew, renew, renew, renew.

The Earth, the Air, the Fire, the Water  
renew, renew, renew, renew.