

# *A Co-Creative Ritual of Gratitude and Commitment*

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(amended by Ursula Goodenough)*

## **1. The Great Radiance**

**GONG** *while lighting candle in center (actor)*

**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 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?"

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

**Response (on screen):** "We are grateful for the Great Radiance. We are awed by the Mystery from which the Universe flares forth."

**Leader:** "Let us each light a candle now, feeling the creativity of the Universe surge within, as we move together in our co-creative ritual."

**MUSIC**

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## **2. The Birth of Galaxies & Stars**

*glitter to anoint foreheads*

**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 [**GONG**], 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."

"Anoint the forehead of your neighbor with stardust (little pots of glitter), which you will find on your table, saying something like: "You are a child of the stars, made of stardust. You are a child of the stars, made of stardust." **MUSIC**

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### 3. Lighting the Sun

*move the candle into the larger glowing candle – (actor)*

**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 [**GONG**]. 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!"

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

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

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### 4. The First Rain

*pour a large shell 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 as the planet cools: water condenses from the steamy atmosphere, and rain falls for the first time (**rain stick**) 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".

**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."

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## 4. The Emergence of Life

*Fill a small bowl of water and sprinkle group with small pine branch dipped in bowl while chant is sung.*

**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 [**GONG**], 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."

**SINGER:** *leads the group in a repeated chant of "Your blood still bears the traces of the salty sea" while actor sprinkles group with water around the tables.*

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## 6. The Coming onto Land

*powdered clay, bowl of water*

**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 [**GONG**], some 350 million years ago, some of these fishes venture out onto land, pulling and pushing themselves with their peglike fins. And so, the first amphibians are born, where our limbs still bear the traces of our four-finned ancestry."  
*Pause.*

**ACTORS:** *Take a few pinches of powdered clay into the palm of hand. Sprinkle water from the water bowl into palm, mixing the two into a mud. Hold up your palms.*

**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]

**MUSIC**

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## 7. The Emergence of Mammals

**Actor:** *light incense – walk around to disperse*

**Leader:** "Please be seated. In a moment of grace, [**GONG**] 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." (Pause while people experience the smell). **MUSIC**

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## 8. Into the Trees

*tree branch.*

**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. The Great Radiance of Mammals is about to begin, and you are a part of it! Your descendants will co-evolve with the buzzing insects, the fluttering birds, the colorful flowers!

One lineage of mammal will take to the trees. [*actor - Hold up tree branch and add to altar.*] 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."

**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 pass the cup of chocolates at your table. 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. Let us now eat this chocolate and fruit together with joy, and give thanks for the coevolutionary dance of plants and primates."

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## 10. Out of the Trees

*Digging stick*

**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?"

**Actor:** *mimics digging with stick*

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## 11. Time of the Hunt

*rock*

**Leader:** "Some digging sticks now become weapons, tipped with chipped stones. (*actor mimics weapon with stick*) 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, symbolic language emerges in the human, and with it our capacity to teach and learn from one another and sing songs of thanksgiving [**GONG**]

**Singer:** *picks up stone, walks between the two actors with weapons and sings* **MUSIC**

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## 12. Firemakers

**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."

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## 13. Farmers

*bread*

**Leader:** I invite you now to pass the bread and tear off a piece for yourself. About 10,000 years ago, in a moment of grace, [**GONG**] 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. As you take and eat this grain, share it with your neighbor and speak in reverence the names of the homelands where your forebears tilled the soil." **MUSIC**

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## 14. 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 firemakers are now burning fuels in such abundance that we are changing the very composition of the atmosphere — blackening our souls. [*Actors daub a bit of the ashes on each others foreheads Then, hold up the feather on high* ] We are driving into extinction the biotic richness of this beautiful Earth. [*Actor then dramatically plunges the feather into the candle flame.* "What can be done? What can be done?"

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## 15. Reclaiming the Past, Revisioning the Future

[**GONG**] **Leader:** "What is to be done? What is to be done? We can begin by reclaiming the wisdom and restraint of the past, relearning from cultures throughout the world. We can then yoke this cultural inheritance to a reenvisioning of the future, a reassessment of our human mode of Earth expression, along with a renewed sense of responsibility to the Universe as its own reworked stardust. 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?"

**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."

**Singer:** *leads group in singing* **MUSIC:**

The Earth, the Air, the Fire, the Water (2x each line)  
renew, renew, renew, renew.  
The Earth, the Air, the Fire, the Water  
renew, renew, renew, renew.