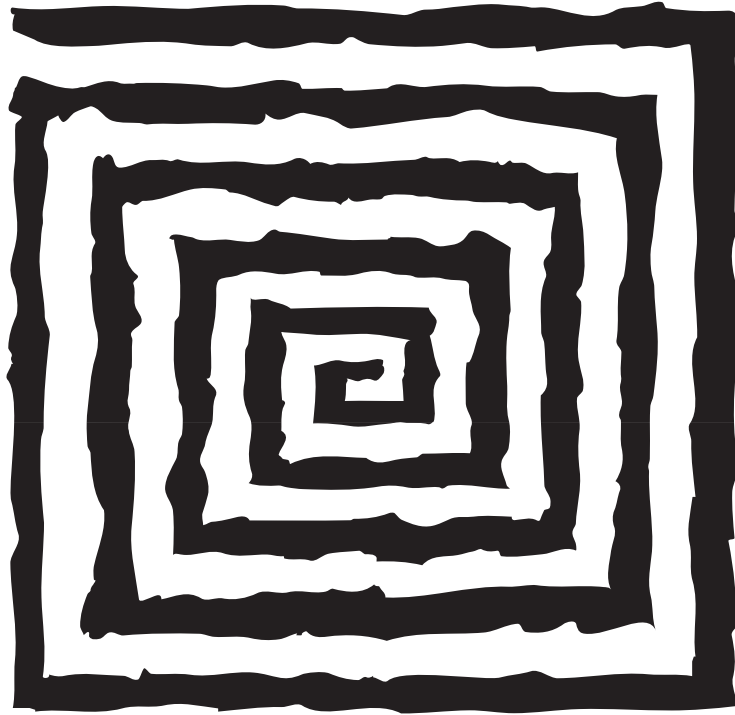


The Cosmic Walk

BY LARRY EDWARDS



Editor's note: The Cosmic Walk may be the most venerable ritualistic expression of the Epic of Evolution. It was created in the mid 1980s by Sr. Miriam Therese MacGillis of Genesis Farm in New Jersey, who was inspired by the "New Story," as then told by Thomas Berry. Larry and Jean Edwards have been facilitating the Cosmic Walk ritual for learners and other participants at Genesis Farm for the past 8 years—along the way, revising the narrative substance to reflect ongoing scientific discoveries, and revising the expression to deepen the artistry.

The Cosmic Walk is a ritual created by Sr. Miriam MacGillis of Genesis Farm. It has subsequently been modified and facilitated by many people in the United States and Canada, and increasingly around the world. The Cosmic Walk is a way of bringing our knowledge of the 15-billion-year Universe process from our heads into our hearts. It is a simple ritual that can be performed in a large built space or outdoors. A spiral representing the entire 15 billion years of the cosmic and evolutionary journey is laid out on the floor or ground. At Genesis Farm this spiral is painted on the floor of the library, but one can also lay out a rope in the spiral form. The spiral should be at least 100 feet long, with each instance of emergence marked at a proportionate distance in time

along the length of the spiral. Each such station is marked by an unlit candle and, optionally, by a card describing the emergence.

In the version of the ritual portrayed here, 30 emergences are recognized, and each is numbered in sequence. The first station, located at the very center of the spiral, represents the Flaring Forth of the Universe itself. This primary emergence is usually represented with a large candle or by a small candle within a large glass bowl (preferably faceted). While others look on, one person (the walker) walks the spiral, starting with the Flaring Forth and lighting each candle in turn. This walk is synchronized with the reading of the text by a second person (the reader). The ritual is accompanied by music, traditionally "The Fairy Ring" by Mike Rowland.

This ritual works for any size of group, the limitation being the participants' ability to see the stations well. For fewer than about 15 people, we normally would ask each person to walk the spiral, in turn, during the reading. Since the Cosmic Walk was born, many variations in text, process, and music have arisen.

Narrative for the Cosmic Walk

Now we want to communicate to you something of the beauty of the Story, something of its deep mystery. It is

a story, the story of the universe, the story of Earth, the story of the human, the story of you and me. It is a narrative of one single integrated activity, the universe.

(Start music.) In the beginning was the Mystery, the churning quantum foam of potentiality. Through the mystery all things came to be. Not one thing had its being but through the mystery.

(1) *Some 15 billion years ago, our Universe flashes into existence, lit by the power of the eternal matrix of being.* From the quantum foam is born the universe. Time, space, and energy become the gifts of existence. The universe expands and cools rapidly. Energy organizes itself into fundamental particles, new beings with new powers, and they in turn transform into atoms of hydrogen and helium, new beings with new powers. And so on it goes.

(2) *A billion years later, Galaxies, Stars, and Supernovas emerge.* For billions of years the universe continues to expand and cool. Hydrogen and helium coalesce into billions of enormous structures: galaxies. With-

in their galactic homes stars are born, live, and die. As they live, stars transform their hydrogen and helium into heavier elements: carbon, oxygen, aluminum. Many of these stars die and cool slowly to become dark tombs. But the larger stars in their death throes explode, become supernovas, blasting out to the cosmos their precious gifts of selenium, boron, lithium, iron. These treasures will be gathered together and supplemented in the life of second-generation stars. Birth, death, and resurrection is an ancient theme of the universe. Supernovas are the mothers of the universe, creating in their wombs the elements of life.

(3) *4.6 billion years ago, our Grandmother Star becomes a supernova.* She gives up her life in an explosion of possibilities .

(4) *4.5 billion years ago, our Solar System forms.* The sun and a great disk of matter emerge—all the planets and other members of our solar system family. Here begins the story of what will become one blue-and-white pearl of a planet.

(5) *4.1 billion years ago, the Great Bombardment of Earth ends.* Over hundreds of millions of years, Earth has been sweeping up solar system debris in its orbital path, swelling in size. Collisions great and small have kept Earth a churning, molten mass. But now the cataclysms of growth are over, and Earth begins to cool.

(6) *4 billion years ago, the First Cell emerges.* As the surface of Earth quiets and cools, an atmosphere begins to form. Then a miracle of transformation: the first rain! Oceans are born, and soon after, the rich chemical brew brings forth the wonder of life. Earth comes alive.

(7) *3.9 billion years ago, cells invent Photosynthesis.* Small creatures learn to capture the sun and store the energy in chemical bonds. In doing so, they invent a new source of food for the growing bacterial population of Earth. In the process, however, they give off oxygen. Eventually the atmosphere becomes oxidizing, threatening all life.

(8) *2 billion years ago, Oxygen-Loving Cells emerge.* The first global environmental crisis is averted by the creativity of these tiny creatures.

(9) *2 billion years ago, the first Nucleated Cell emerges.* Bacteria enter into the communion of a larger, single cell.

(10) *1.5 billion years ago, Meiotic Sex emerges.* By relinquishing their own immortality, these cells bequeath to their progeny an extravagance of novelty.

(11) *1 billion years ago, Organisms begin to eat one another.* Predator organisms learn to use the complex biomolecules of their prey organisms, thereby saving themselves the effort of making their own. Here begins the predator-prey dance that promotes the vast diversity of life: the power of the lion and the speed of the gazelle.

(12) *700 million years ago, the first Multicellular Organisms emerge.* Individual cells dramatically increase their cooperative capabilities and learn to specialize for the good of the whole organism.

(13) *600 million years ago, Sight is invented: eyes emerge.* The Earth sees herself for the first time.

**Today
the Story
of the Universe
is being told
as our sacred Story.
The Flaring Forth
continues as this moment,
as us, as one.**

(14) *460 million years ago, plants and animals learn to live on Land.* Leaving the water, they seek the adventure of weather and gravity.

(15) *330 million years ago, Insects take to the air.* The Earth learns to fly.

(16) *235 million years ago, Dinosaurs emerge.* For 170 million years, these creatures explore the extremes of size, speed, and power.

(17) *215 million years ago, Mammals emerge.* Molten rock has reorganized itself to be able to express a mother's love for her child.

(18) *150 million years ago, Birds emerge.* They follow the insects into the vast vault of the sky.

(19) *115 million years ago, Flowers emerge.* The Earth adorns herself magnificently and invites the sky creatures into a new dance.

(20) *65 million years ago, the Cenozoic Era begins.* Dinosaurs disappear, providing mammals the chance to explore an even vaster suite of modes, dimensions, and subtleties of existence. The flowering plants and insects commune to produce the great florescence of Earth life.

(21) *4 million years ago, Hominids leave the forest, stand up, and walk on two legs.* The savanna offers the challenges and opportunities for these early creatures to evolve into humans.

(22) *100 thousand years ago, Modern Humans emerge.* Language, shamanic and goddess religions, and art become integral with human life.

(23) *11,000 years ago, Agriculture is invented.* Humans begin to shape the environment.

(24) *3,000 years ago, Classical Religions emerge.* Hinduism, Confucianism, Judaism, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam.

(25) *250 years ago, scientists calculate the Age of the Earth.* Humans try to understand how old the Earth is through empirical observations.

(26) *70 years ago, empirical evidence of an Expanding Universe is discovered.* For the first time humans are aware they live in a developing universe.

(27) *46 years ago, inquiring minds discover the Genetic Bonds of life.* Science confirms indigenous wisdom of Earth life as "all our relations."

(28) *33 years ago, scientists find evidence of the Origin of the Universe.* In Murray Hill, New Jersey, scientists see the Primordial Flaring Forth.

(29) *30 years ago Earth is seen as Whole from space.* The Earth becomes complex enough to witness her own integral beauty.

(30) *Today the Story of the Universe is being told as our sacred Story.* The Flaring Forth continues as this moment, as us, as one. ☺