Begin by lying down on the ground, getting comfortable, get cosy, closing your eyes. Can you allow yourself to relax fully into the earth? Take a deep breath and let go so that you can listen fully to the story I am about to tell you.

Connect with the aliveness of this present moment.

As you inhale, feel the molecules of oxygen absorbing into your lungs.

Many cultures around the world have creation stories… For me, one of the most beautiful and wondrous creation stories comes from our Western world and what evolutionary science has uncovered about our origins. It’s a story of how we all came to be here, and how we are connected to all life on earth. This is the story we share with every species and being you will see around you today.

Let’s travel back now, to a singular event, that may or may not have happened, but for the sake of this journey, let’s imagine that it did.

Imagine you are standing under a starlit sky and before you is a deep well. Peering into the well, you see a universe of stars below in the well, swirling in an inviting darkness, mirroring the sky above you.

Slowly kneel down, and slip yourself into it. Feel yourself fall down deep as if pulled by the gravitational force of the earth. Merge with the mystery of night.

Its now 14.7 billion years ago, and you’re watching how out of the darkness, in the billionth of a second, there was a primordial explosion of sheer force. This was the big bang. I was there, you were there, We were there, in that beginning, and so was everything else – all the atoms, all the energy, all the substance that make you up right now were there curled up in that original nucleus of life.

Energy attracted energy, and formed atoms spinning like dragonflies dancing through space and time, working at the speed of light over millennia, condensing and swirling into clouds of billions of galaxies. Celestial murmurations swooping over the matter of space time.

One of these dazzlingly bright and heat filled mists of stars was our Milky Way.

Halfway along one of its spiral arms, like octopus tentacles in a whirlpool, our sun was born – an eddy of energy folding into itself, held in space, exploding flares and ribbons of fire. As other stars exploded, they sent great swirls of gas towards our sun star.

You were there too, do you remember?

The forces of attraction, the gravitational eros that is the universe itself, gathered atoms of stardust like pollen around this sun and the planets coalesced. One of these t**umbling masses of matter and gas**, where it was perfectly not too hot and not too cold, was to become our home.

To help our minds grasp the cosmic time scales I am speaking to here, imagine the Earth as a woman of 46 years of age. We will call her Gaia, the Greek goddess of Earth. We will use her life, which is cosmically ours as well, to trace Earth’s history.

Gaia then, was born as a fiery mass of molten iron and metal spinning around the sun. She developed a thick crust over her molten luminescent body. Comets curved into her solar system and provided water to douse her chasms and canyons, some possibly carrying elemental molecules, and perhaps even, the greatest mysteries of organic life.

Witness now, a massive planet crashing into Gaia and sending shards of molten debris shooting out of her, into an orbit which will eventually coalesce into that opaline Moon.

The sea on her surface is light green, reflecting a pinkish methane sky.

Fairly early on in her life, deep in the ocean’s volcanic vents, the first molecules of organic life were formed. Somehow, mysteriously, they grouped to form the first cell, the first cell that held delicate strands of DNA, blueprints in a foreign tonge. Every single plant, animal, and fungus can trace its ancestry back to that first cell.

Let that preciousness sink into your bones. We are all related to that first cell, which means, we are all related to a multitude of organisms that exist today on earth. We were all there at the beginning, and have been ever since.

Can you imagine your body dividing into two, and four, and eight, fractaling into a riot of life that spins out into niches across Gaia in so many ingenious ways?

Some of these cells learned to capture sunlight, and transmuted it in their bodies to become algae. What they breathed out was oxygen. That oxygen rose and rose and condensed and over many more millions of years, a blanket of ozone was formed separating earth and space, holding Gaia in its embrace and protecting life on the surface from penetrating shards of ultra violet rays.

When Gaia turned 8 years old, bacteria were established. These were the ancestors of the bacteria that right now are humming in our guts, that line the stomachs of ungulates, cows, goats, in the fields across your homes, and that coat the thin surface of the ocean surface.

In this salty oceanic womb of life, natural selection continued to bring forth wild expressions of Gaia’s creativity – multicellular corals, crabs, jellyfish, worms, and eventually fish with backbones. We have in our bodies today the inheritance of our ancestors as they survived and bred. As you lie on the floor now, feel where your body touches the ground – can you remember developing a spine? Can you remember growing a backbone, a nervous system, a heart, a gut? All these are a legacy of our fishy ancestors. Can you recall wriggling through the sea? Can you flex your spine now? The salt of the sea still flows in our tears and sweat. Even as an embryo in the womb we had gills and a tail.

Here you are playing with sea scorpions and strange spiral-armed starfish, and sponges that sift through nutritious plankton-rich seawater.

Can you recall using your soft flippers and fins to haul up onto a beach for the very first time? Can you imagine what was beheld, the first glimpses of an entire world above the water? Earth appears before you, groaning into what was to become several million years later one single great continent - Pangea.

Gaia was now 42 years old. She waited that long before living on land. Plants soon followed and through the magic workings of moss and lichen, rocks turned into soil. Insects followed soon after.

In places where the weather became hot and dry, reptiles slowly evolved to seal their warm leathery eggs in a watertight shell. Some of these creatures held in an exterior womb evolved into dinosaurs. Around the same time, the first mammals and birds came into being. This was only 2 years ago in Gaia’s life.

Reptiles dominate here, and feathered dinosaurs are stalking though the ferns. On the ground you spy familiar looking ants and termites. In the air, small dragonflies are dashing about and recently evolved butterflies and moths flutter dusty wings on dusk breezes.

Do you remember being a shrew, scurrying around at night, nose twitching for interesting scents, and going back to look after your babies in a nest? Needing a home to call your own goes back as far as that – 200 million years.

You can see now that the Atlantic Ocean is nearly half of its size, with the continents of Africa and South America closer together. On the North American continent, small horse-like mammals are galloping in the grasslands.

The first monkeys moved fast by swinging through the trees in jubilant search of plants and insects. They developed hands and an opposable thumb to grip branches and their eyes, our eyes, moved forward in our skulls for stereo vision, to make sure we didn’t miss a hold. Colours swam into our vision for the first time, with a preference for reds and yellows, the colors of ripe fruit. Now we had nails instead of claws, and we could squeeze fruits and groom our friends.

Only three months ago in Gaia’s life, we became great apes and began to use tools, with social skills and intelligences honing in. Three weeks ago, we split off from the other primates as the climate changed and the forests of Africa began to shrink.

Ten days ago, the first hominids walked on two feet, and began hunting game and animals. We wandered and moved our homes as the seasons changed. What would it have felt like, to stand up over the grassland and view the savannah? There was fire here, and art, and music, speech, friendships. There were five different species of humans there with us.

Our species arrived a mere two days ago in Gaia’s life. Modern humans, us, lying here together. We are one day old. We have lived in the land as hunter gatherers for mostly all of our time on Earth.

One hour ago, the last Ice Age retracted its frosty claws from Gaia’s landscapes, and some of us humans began to farm. And 60 seconds ago, 60 seconds ago, we went through the throes of brutal colonization, the industrial revolution, world wars and cold wars, plunged into the cookie jar of fossil energy, and the invention of machines, trains, cars, techno music, Macdonalds, wall street, LSD, animal factory farms, nuclear energy and megacities, iphones, and of course, we began to forget the rites and rituals of the old ways, we began to forget that we are part of an interconnected web of life, and with exponential abilities but paleolithic instincts, in a brief second in Gaia’s life, we are transforming the face of the planet and putting an end to the marvellous creations that grew up alongside us as brothers and sisters.

Deeply buried in all of us lie these memories. We know we are part of this great tale of life. Drop in to your bones, where they lie within your skin… into deep, bone memory, tunnels of marrow that carry ancient song. Feel behind you your ancestors, your grandparents, and their parents, and their parents. Breathe slowly, be attentive to the story of deep time inside you, in the chemical elements that are the foundations of your body, in the multitudes of living bacteria in your guts, in the nucleated cells that power you with energy, in the ancient blueprints of your backbone, in the ancestral eyes that illuminate your sight - you are a living manifestation of the well of deep time. The echoes of the deep past and the interdependence of the living present are in you.

This is your wider body, your greater self. This is your origin, your lineage. Feel how precious this is. Can we use this to reimagine who and what we are?

Now, slowly open your eyes and take time to gently connect back

to the aliveness of this present moment,

a momentous gift from the well of deep time.

From the Radiance Sutras:

“The air I am breathing

Was exhaled in ecstasy

By an ancient sun.

This earth I am standing on

Was born of cosmic fire.

This body is made of earth and gold

Rivers and oceans,

Immortal magnetic iron,

Masquerading as muscle and bone.

Luxuriate in this deep and simple truth”.