



The Well of Deep Time

a contemplative practice by

Stephan Harding and Robert Woodford





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Designed by Robert Woodford with illustrations by Matilda Ruta.*

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Saltmarshe & Lina Prestwood. It is inspired by the work of deep ecologist, Joanna Macy.*

For a copy of this work and more information, visit www.deeptimewalk.org



Find a place you can relax,
either indoors or outside -
somewhere you can ground yourself
and connect with the living Earth
that surrounds you.





Before we embark on this inner journey
into deep time, lightly close your eyes -
if that feels comfortable - and take a few
slow deep breaths.

Inhale ...
and exhale ...



Inhale ...
and exhale ...

Connect to your breath.

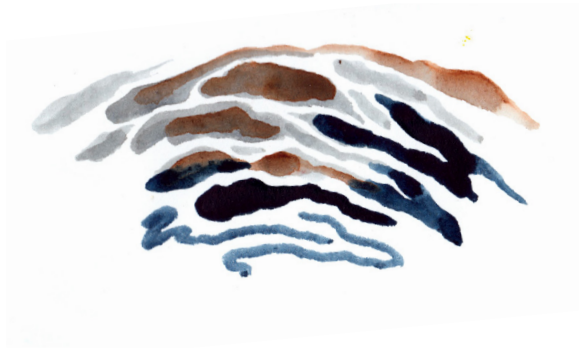
Connect with the aliveness
of this present moment.

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

As you exhale, feel the molecules of
carbon dioxide flowing out of your lungs.

With every breath, you are part of the cycle of
life.

Part of a cycle
that started
long, long ago ...

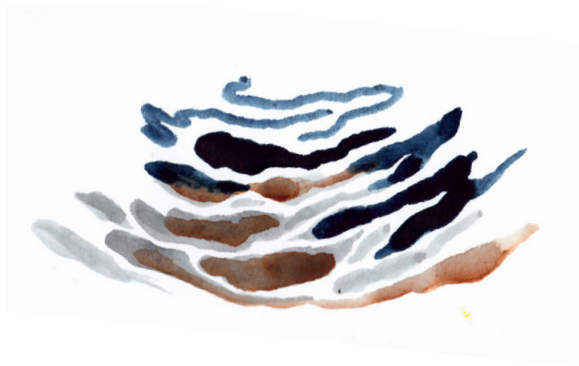


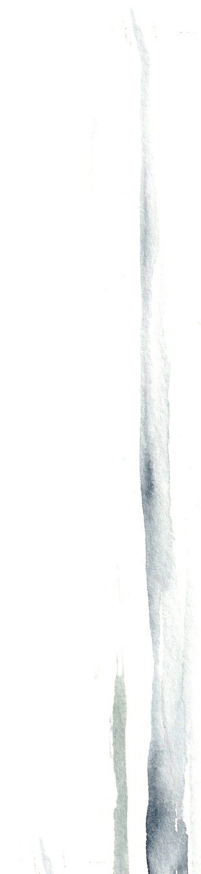
As you settle,
imagine you are under a vast starlit sky,
standing at the edge of a well.

This is the ancient well of deep time.

Peering into the well, you see a universe
of stars swirling in an inviting darkness
mirroring the sky above you.

Curious, you slowly step onto the edge
of the well, and lower yourself into its
dark velvety medium. You float gently
on the surface with a sense of complete
safety and confidence.





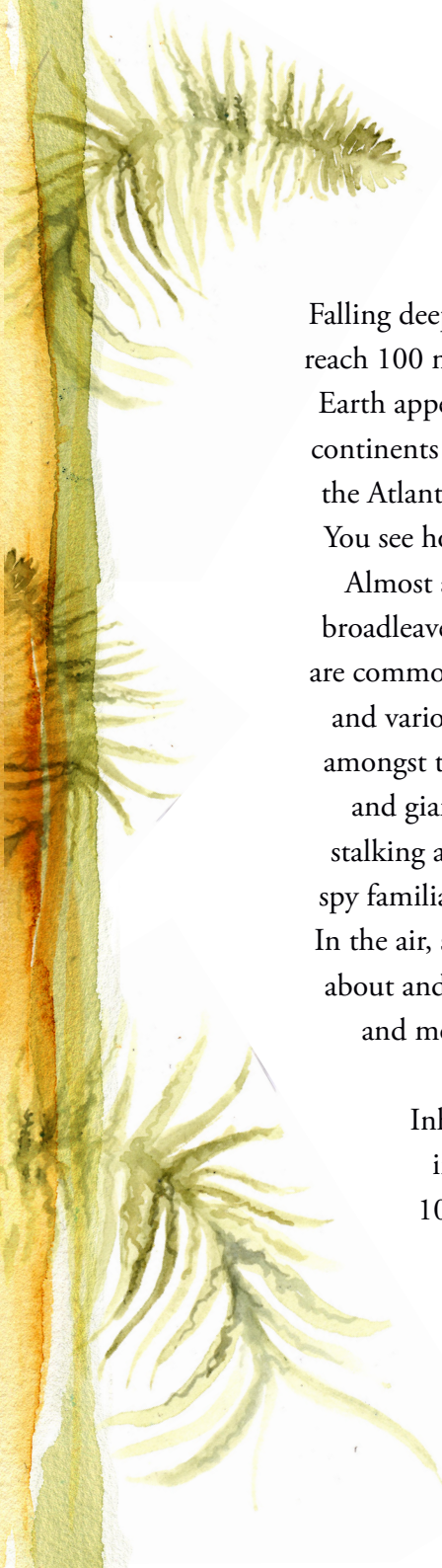
Sinking a little into the well of time,
you reach 800 years ago, breathing
easily and calmly in the inky fluidity
that surrounds you. Looking through
the darkening water you see our planet,
Earth, appear before you floating in
space just as she was hundreds of years
before the industrial revolution. Peering
closer, you see a swirling mantle of
white clouds. Her blue oceans are full
of an amazing diversity of life. Lush
continents are covered with a huge
variety of living ecological communities,
including rainforests, grasslands,
heaths, forests and deserts. You sense
the qualities of the living web of life;
animals, microbes, fungi, plants, rocks,
water and atmosphere – all spread
across the surface of Earth's spherical
magnificence. A knowing comes to you
that at this time she hosts more species
than ever. You marvel at how sublimely
sophisticated she is at handling this
delicate balance of life.

Inhale ... and exhale ...
in this living world,
800 years ago.



Swimming down further into the well of time, you reach 50 million years ago. Again, Earth appears floating in space before your eyes. You can see that the Atlantic Ocean is nearly half the size, with the continents of Africa and South America closer together. Broad-leaved trees are widespread and many forms of life are diversifying, especially birds and mammals. On the South American continent, there are early forms of armadillos thriving in the tropical forests. On the North American continent, small horse-like mammals are galloping in the grasslands. On the African continent, primitive elephants and antelope roam. In the sky, you see thousands of bird species such as songbirds and loons, which evolved from a single dinosaur group.

Inhale ... and exhale ...
in this living world,
50 million years ago.



Falling deeper into the well of time, you reach 100 million years ago. Once again, Earth appears before you, but now her continents are even closer together with the Atlantic Ocean narrowing further. You see how the plants have changed.

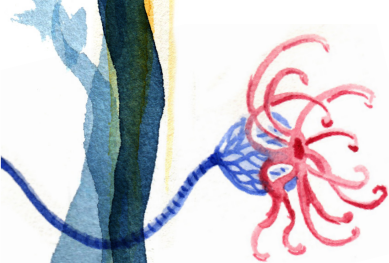
Almost all the herb plants and the broadleaved trees are gone but flowers are common and there are massive ferns and various types of conifer trees. In amongst the plants reptiles dominate, and giant feathered dinosaurs are stalking around. On the ground you spy familiar looking ants and termites. In the air, small dragonflies are dashing about and recently evolved butterflies and moths are skittering about.

Inhale ... and exhale ...
in this living world,
100 million years ago.



Diving ever deeper into the well of time,
you reach around 250 million years
ago. This time, Earth appears before
you as a single great continent - Pangea.
Reaching to the high latitudes on either
side of the equator and covering an
entire side of the globe, Pangea hosts
a diverse array of vegetation. Around
a huge central desert, there are large
conifer trees with dense plants in many
areas. Looking intently, you spy huge
salamander-like amphibians and early,
primitive reptiles that have laid their
leathery eggs in the warm sand of the
river beaches. Giant insects that look
like dragonflies dart through the air, and
cockroaches scuttle noisily through the
decaying vegetation.

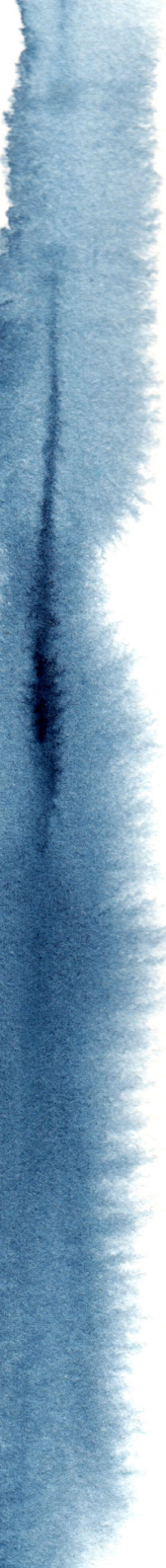
Inhale ... and exhale ...
in this living world,
250 million years ago.



Plunging deeper into the well of time,
you reach 500 million years ago. As
Earth again appears in front of you,
you notice how different she is. The
continents are once again scattered and
the plants that covered the land have
vanished – now there is only a thin
smearing of microscopic organisms
on the rocks. Peering closer into the
shallow seas, you see a diverse set of
armoured multicellular animals - sea
scorpions and strange spiral-armed
starfish. Sponges sift the nutritious
plankton-rich seawater, and tiny single
celled organisms hunt for plankton in
the light-filled sea. This is the time when
primitive sight was first born and when
backbones evolved.

Inhale ... and exhale ...
in this living world,
500 million years ago.





Descending further into the well of
time, enjoying the sensation of sinking
deeper, you feel the water that surrounds
you becomes chilled, and at 725 million
years ago you are amazed to see that
Earth is now completely covered by
snow and ice – like a Snowball – with
temperatures plummeting to -50°C at
the equator. Only a few ice-free refuges
remain in the tropics giving shelter for
life. Watching this snowball revolving,
you notice she is spinning faster than
the present time, with a day lasting
just 21 hours.

Inhale ... and exhale ...
in this living world,
725 million years ago.



Plummeting deeper into the well of
time, you reach 1,800 million years ago.
Earth's continents are once again widely
distributed, with the edges covered with
rock-dissolving bacterial communities.

In the shallow seas there are also a
multitude of larger microscopic single-
celled beings, each containing a spherical
globule, the nucleus, which hosts their
genetic material. The evolution of these
nucleated cells was one of the most
significant and difficult steps in the
history of life, created when different
kinds of bacteria began to live one inside
the other. These early nucleated cells are
the ancestors of all the cells belonging to

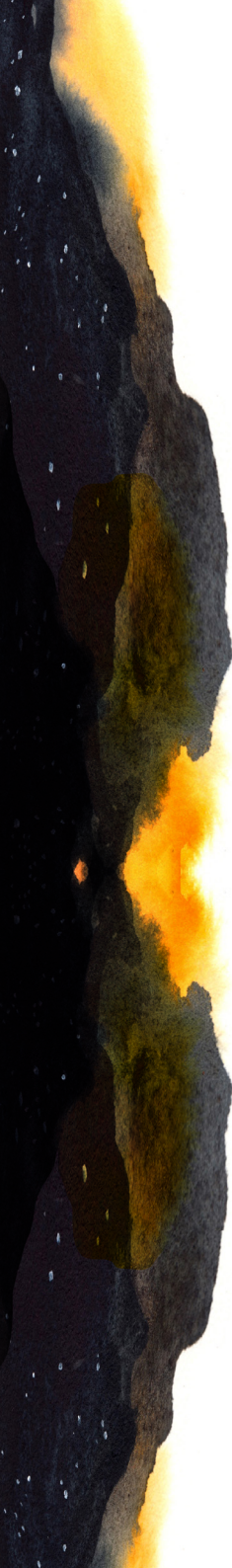
modern animals, plants,
seaweeds and fungi.

Inhale ... and exhale ...
in this living world,
1,800 million years ago.



Dropping deeper and deeper into the
well of time, you reach 3,500 million
years ago. Earth is no longer a blue
jewel - there is precious little oxygen in
the atmosphere. The sea is light green,
reflecting a pinkish methane-dominated
sky. Gone are the abundant continents,
you see only a smattering of volcanic
islands scattered like crumbs in the
huge green ocean. Now in the upper
sunlit reaches of the water there are only
bacteria – gone are the nucleated single-
celled beings you encountered earlier.
Dizzy, you notice Earth is spinning even
faster with days now lasting just
10 hours.

Inhale ... and exhale ...
in this living world,
3,500 million years ago.



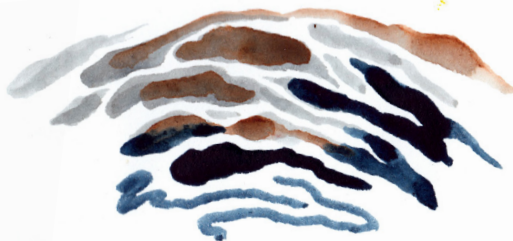
Tumbling further and further into the well of time, you pass huge comets and meteorites as they bombard the Earth, provisioning her with water and other key elements that she'll need as the mother of all life. When you finally reach 4,500 million years ago, you see the scorching Earth as a newly formed sphere of mostly molten rock, with only a thin crust of recently solidified rock on her surface. From your viewpoint in space, you see a massive planet, as big as Mars, crashing into Earth melting both planets and sending shards of molten rocky debris into orbit which will eventually coalesce into the Moon.

Inhale ... and exhale ...
in this world,
4,500 million years ago.



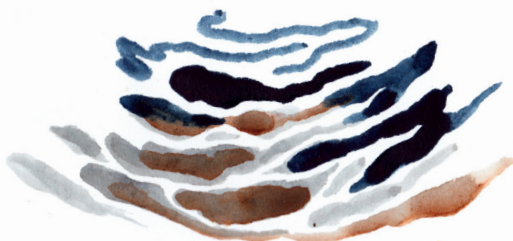
As you dwell awhile in this depth of deep time - a time long before life on Earth emerged - consider the chemical elements swirling in the spinning ball of molten rock before you. Chemical elements that were right here at this very birth of our planet exist today in your body and in those of all living beings.

The creation of these chemical elements is found at even greater depths in the well of time, steeped in greater Mystery.



Hearing bird song from the uppermost
reaches of the well breaks the spell
of deep time, calling you back to the
present moment. Quickly you swim
upwards through the long blue-black
velvety fabric of time and reach the
mouth of the well. Hoisting yourself
back onto the edge, you step back onto
dry land and gaze again into the broad
night sky, spangled with stars.

Inhale ... and exhale ...
in this present living world.



Connect again with
the aliveness of this
unique moment in time.



Breathe slowly, being 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 embody you.



And, however we humans name
our participation in this unique
phenomenon which began so long ago -

our living planet,
Nature,
Creation,
Mother Earth,
Pachamama,
Gaia

- this is your wider body,
your greater self,
our common home.

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.



