



Talking Leaves: Volume 4, Issue 4

Winter Solstice 2016

Welcome to Yggdrasil

Yggdrasil is a collaborative venture of a small circle of co-creative friends - the culmination of our life experiences; our work as healers, teachers and writers; our soul journeys; our dreams and our quests in nature. We envision Yggdrasil to be a mystery school for visionary contrarians and a forest retreat for souls seeking to reinvent themselves, housed within a self-sustaining eco-village community. We are now in the formative stages of this project, working together to refine and elaborate our vision, and root it in fertile soil.

This newsletter is one way for us to stay in touch with our extended family of friends and supporters. Please feel free to share this issue of **Talking Leaves** with anyone who feel might be interested in what we are doing. You can also learn more about Yggdrasil through our website at yggdrasilretreat.com, and/or keep track of us on our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/yggdrasilretreat.



Contents

Reaching for a Better World
Our Program Menu for 2016
Looking Ahead to 2017: The Spiritual Hypnotherapy Workshop
Quan Yin, the Ark of the Covenant and the Holy Cell Towers
In Quest of Reliable Personal Gnosis
Our Standing Invitation to You

Reaching for a Better World

Over the past four years, the Yggdrasil Talking Council has been working to co-creatively manifest a shared vision of a better world. Our vision is rooted in the awareness that each of us has an important contribution to make to the wellbeing of the world, and that it is our spiritual responsibility to make this contribution with as much clarity, integrity, and wise compassion as we can muster. This is why each of us here, and what the world - whether it knows it or not - is waiting for each of us to do.

Finding the Balance Between Personal Healing and Healing of the World

Our vision revolves around the idea that wounded souls create a wounded world, even with the best of intentions, while every sincere effort toward healing and self-actualization potentially bears fruit that can benefit the greater whole. In a world that is suffering as greatly as ours is, it is not enough to focus exclusively on personal growth. We cannot afford to indulge the delusion that simply feeling good ourselves changes anything but our own experience. We must instead use our growth as a platform for giving back, for helping make the world a better place.



On other hand, to attempt to make a meaningful contribution to the world without doing the hard inner work of healing core wounds, and transmuting the personal pain and suffering we find there, is often to make things worse. As the old saying goes, “The road to hell is paved with good intentions.” The history of the human species is in part one of going off half-cocked to save the world from a place of fragmented dysfunction, and for every problem solved, creating seven more to take its place. More of this is not a good idea.

Instead, we need each and every one of us to heal ourselves, and the use our latent creative genius in order to feed the hunger of the world in ways that nourish it, sustain it, and allow it to flourish. We must do what we can to claim our wholeness, and then out of that wholeness, contribute to the restoration of the world, on whatever scale we have the reach to address.

Becoming a Visionary Contrarian

We realize that this is not the prevailing worldview. In a culture that is built on self-interest, corporate power, and the unbridled pursuit of individual self-aggrandizement, even to think about the wellbeing of the whole becomes the act of a contrarian. At Yggdrasil, it is our intention to create a space where contrarians can both heal and cultivate their personal genius, harnessing both to a visionary sense of calling. When a deep commitment to personal growth meets a strong sense of responsibility to the collective, the world can begin to change in a balance way.

On a trip to Scandinavia this year, I got to experience firsthand what a culture feels like in which the wellbeing of the whole is a driving factor in the political decision-making process, and I can tell you, it makes a radical difference in how people treat each other and the place where they live. It was a tangible experience for me when I was there – evident in the people I met, the landscape, and the infrastructure of a humane and progressive society. Here we call it *socialism*, with a sneer and an attitude of smug superiority that is as misplaced as it is ignorant and arrogant. There, it is the basis for a pretty good life for most people that works as well on the individual level as on the collective.

The conventional wisdom that one cannot have both a social welfare state and economic prosperity is a myth perpetrated by a corporate culture that fears the loss of its hegemony. Norway – which is where I spent most of my time – is the 4th most prosperous country on the planet, and consistently scores high on nearly every scale by which the wellbeing of a nation is measured. Of the top 10 ten countries on a list I created last year (see “Where in the World is Yggdrasil?” in [Talking Leaves #10](#)), based on the composite score of each country on half a dozen indexes, at least 5 are considered to be socialist countries, or to have a strong social welfare platform. The US – dominated by a culture of “enlightened” self-interest – was only #27 on the list.

It is not that I wish to promote socialism through Yggdrasil Retreat, but I do want to make the observation that making the wellbeing of the whole a priority works well. It is this kind of world that we visionary contrarians at Yggdrasil wish to create, through supporting those individuals brave enough and conscious enough to approach their lives this way – and to seek a viable balance between personal growth and a meaningful contribution to the betterment of the world.

Over the past four years, we have created and refined a number of workshops and other venues for translating our vision into a soul-based curriculum for visionary contrarians. At each of our workshops, we begin with the awareness that whatever personal growth we achieve during our time together is not just for us, but for all the ancestors, for all who will come after us, for all sentient beings human and more-than-human, and for the Earth itself. We encourage all participants to take what they have gotten from our workshops back into their lives, their families and communities, and make it real by living it in a way that benefits others, as well as oneself.

In the end, we cannot separate the wellbeing of the culture and the biosphere from our own. To live from this understanding is to be a brave visionary contrarian in a world in need of courage, vision rooted in wholeness, and a path into the future not paved by the walking wounded.

Our Program Menu for 2016

Returning the Inner Masculine and Feminine to Sacred Balance

May 5 – 8, 2016

One of the ways in which the healing of both individuals and the world can be understood is in terms of the balance between the archetypal Masculine and Feminine. The archetypal Masculine encompasses the drive in each of us – women and men both – to individuate, to become unique individuals following a meaningful and fulfilling path to self-actualization. The archetypal Feminine encompasses the longing in each of us to belong – to a satisfying intimate relationship with a life partner, to a family, a community, a soul tribe, and ultimately to a larger web of life.

To become a whole human being, we need to cultivate both the archetypal Masculine and the archetypal Feminine. If one or the other is neglected or underdeveloped, or wounded in some way, it creates an imbalance, and ultimately contributes to a wounded world culture that does not support life, liberty, or the pursuit of individual or collective wellbeing.

We live in a culture dominated by the wounded masculine psyche. The wounded masculine is obsessed with competition, achievement, money and power, and has lost a deeper sense of calling to serve community and planet. The wounded feminine is obsessed with appearance, superficial connectivity, and security, and has lost an intuitive Earth-based wisdom and a capacity for compassion and caring. Together we have created a wounded world torn by war, genocide, ecocide, exploitation, addiction, denial, and out-of-balance behaviors that harm us all.

In 2012, Yggdrasil created the Sacred Balance workshop to facilitate the restoration of balance between the archetypal Masculine and Feminine – first within ourselves, and then as we take back what we have learned into our relationships, families and communities, within the larger whole. The workshop is an opportunity to explore and begin to heal our sacred wounds as men and as women, and to come together to create dialogue and cooperation towards re-balancing the masculine and feminine in ourselves and our culture.

What Participants Have Said About Previous Workshops

The workshop is “an opportunity for deep selfdiscovery from the inside out while being held in an open safe loving container with very revealing experiential activities.”

“I feel a subtle sense of being more anchored inside myself . . . Through this workshop, a little bit of my fear of being on this Earth was lifted.”

The Sacred Balance workshop is “one of the most genuine experiences I’ve had because of the sincerity of the facilitators and the other participants.”



The 2016 workshop will be held at a venue to be announced from Thursday evening, May 5 through noon on Sunday, May 8. It will be co-facilitated by Talking Council members [Joe Landwehr](#) and [Nia Kallhof](#). You can read more about the workshop and sign up [on our website](#).

Tracking the Soul

August 18 – 22, 2016

Based on the [book](#) of the same name, Tracking the Soul is an experiential workshop, integrating the exquisite spiritual psychology of the seven chakras with an intimately personal, image-based approach to astrology called astropoetics. The workshop revolves around real life issues brought by participants, and includes exercises in authentic movement and other modalities designed to illicit our own inner knowing and bring it to the fore.

The workshop includes intensive preparatory work with the individual birthchart of each participant, so that by the time you get to the event itself, you are ready to embody whatever new insights about yourself and your core issues on a deeper level of being, where change is possible.

For those who have little interest in astrology, but are open to using the exquisite language of the astrochakra system to explore personal issues, there will be 3 preparatory sessions before the workshop. These are essentially a series of astrological consultations, but oriented around a more in-depth exploration of the specific issue you are bringing to the workshop.

For those who have some interest in learning more about the astrology behind their personal issues, the preparation can be through Yggdrasil's [Mentorship Program](#) (see below), where an extended course of one-on-one interaction with [Joe Landwehr](#) – author of the book on which the workshop is based – will help you explore your issue in relation to your birthchart.

Lastly for those with a solid working knowledge of astrology, who are interested in learning the nuts and bolts of the astro-chakra system as discussed in the book, we offer a [Webinar Series](#) in conjunction with [The Astropoetic School of Soul-Discovery](#). This is a small group learning experience, rather than a one-on-one source of personal guidance. The Webinar Series is currently filled for 2016, but we do have openings on a track to the 2017 workshop.

If you are unsure about which pathway to the workshop is right for you, just let us know, and we will be happy to help you choose the most appropriate option for you.

What Participants Have Said About Previous Workshops

“The concept is brilliant: Working on your core issues in a beautiful and powerful setting. Eating vegetarian food. Bringing in exercise and meditation to complement it. It was the first time that I really sat down and thought of my life in that way and it was helpful.”

“I would say that it was life altering. I feel that strongly and I don’t say that lightly, perhaps because I’ve done some personal growth work before. I was ready to heal and I’m extremely grateful for this past weekend.”



Our 2016 workshop will be held from Thursday evening August 18 through noon on Monday August 22 at [Spirit Matters Centre](#) near Almonte, Ontario, Canada. You can read more about the workshop and sign up [on our website](#).

The Mentorship Program

To complement our workshops - which are group experiences - in 2015, we have initiated our Mentorship Program, which revolves around one-on-one interaction. The path of the visionary

contrarian is not easy. The work of transmuting core wounds into visionary calling requires fierce dedication, and can at times greatly benefit from the wise counsel of someone who has walked the path themselves - another visionary contrarian who empathizes with your struggle, because it is similar to their own. At Yggdrasil, we have a number of wise mentors, who are available for one-on-one conversation with those who are ready to make a solid commitment to their own growth and to the wellbeing of the world.

Our program is still relatively new, and as with all Yggdrasil programs, we are constantly working to refine and make it more effective, based on the feedback that we get from participants. Currently we have three active mentors, with one in training.



Drawing on many years of training and experience in personal growth work, meditation, shamanic and spiritual practices, crystal resonance therapy, and breathwork/rebirthing, Nia Kallhof intuitively guides her mentees as they tend their core wound, connect with their deepest Self and highest Truth, and learn to live their heart's desire. She embraces the personal journey of each soul with her full loving presence and helps it along with guided visualizations, creative assignments, and perceptive questions and reflections.

John Staniloiu is an educator, committed to alternative education, who has worked as a counselor, school principal, and consultant in a wide variety of settings - from the inner cities of Detroit, the hills of Appalachia, the barrios of Mexico, the prison system, and service ventures in Rwanda and northern Uganda, Africa. In the 1980s, he created and ran an alternative school for teenagers in southern Missouri. John has been trained as a leader of Native American sweat lodges and vision quests.



Joe Landwehr is an astrologer of 40+ years experience, and author of several books. He has studied kundalini yoga with Yogi Bhanan, and siddha yoga with Swami Muktananda, while training as a psychotherapist, and has integrated yogic philosophy, psychotherapy and astrology into a comprehensive approach to spiritual growth and development that he teaches in various formats. As mentioned above, mentees working with Joe will have the opportunity to participate in the [Tracking the Soul workshop](#).

The Mentorship Program can be an excellent adjunct to a Yggdrasil workshop, either as preparation for the workshop or as a follow-up to it, or both. To find out more about the Mentorship program and to submit an application, visit [our website](#).

Looking Ahead to 2017: The Spiritual Hypnotherapy Workshop

All of our programs and workshops at Yggdrasil begin with the inspired idea of one or more Talking Council members, and then evolve through a series of planning sessions to translate the

idea into an experience that we can present in a workshop format. We then offer the experience to the rest of the Talking Council, and through the feedback that comes from this trial run, modify it for prime time. After each public offering of the workshop, we gather additional feedback and refine again. All of our workshops and programs are works in progress.

In 2016, we will begin the process of developing a third workshop to add to our existing offerings. The Spiritual Hypnotherapy Workshop stems from the work of Talking Council member Steve Hayes, who describes its evolution below:



Spiritual Hypnotherapy is a new form of therapy I developed with the assistance of my guides over the last few years. I have been a trauma therapist for about twenty years. More recently, I have become a shamanic practitioner, and been trained by Brian Weiss MD in doing past life regressions and other spiritual/psychological/healing methods.

In 2003, I trained in Attachment Hypnotherapy with Dan Brown Ph.D. This therapy creates imaginary supportive figures such as mentors, good parents or a wise older person to assist with therapy. I found this approach helpful with clients who had attachment issues, trust issues and trauma histories.

Beginning in 2012, as I became more spiritually oriented, under the direction of my guides, my work with Attachment Hypnotherapy expanded to include Spirit guides, angels, deceased loved ones and animal spirits among the resources available to clients. This was so much better I began working with these beings exclusively.

If a client trusted enough and developed a rapport with the spiritual figures, the figures would often assist with whatever issue we were working on throughout the session. In some cases – depending on each client’s closeness to them – these Spiritual figures would direct the therapy on their own. Traumatic memories were resolved. The important or confusing parts of the memories were explained. Negative beliefs were released. It was amazing! Not to mention how loving and compassionate they were and are with my clients.

All clients receive assistance in direct proportion to the connection they have with their spiritual figures. The spiritual figures are very aware and respectful of the clients “free will.” They will only intervene to the extent that the client feels comfortable. Clients who trust them less might get advice or insights, as well as love and compassion. With moderately trusting clients, the spiritual figures contribute more to the therapy, but not completely take over, as with fully trusting clients who have developed strong attachments to them.

Last fall, I did my first workshop to train other therapists in this method. I am planning another workshop this spring for therapists. In the coming year, I hope to start doing workshops through Yggdrasil for laypeople who are working on their issues and would like to try Spiritual Hypnotherapy.

Stay tuned as this workshop evolves. Over the course of the next year or so, we will give progress reports in this newsletter.



Quan Yin, the Ark of the Covenant and the Holy Cell Towers



What happens when a crystal healer and a shaman encounter a giant cell phone tower that's mucking up the energy grid they've been assigned to maintain? Of course, they ask for help from the local devas and crystal beings, Archangel Michael, and Quan Yin, and come up with a brilliant solution! That's the Story! The Back Story includes much valuable sharing of their knowledge about crystals, nature devas, and communicating with the more than human world.

This fall, Talking Council members Nia Kallhof and Bruce Durward published their first book - *Quan Yin, the Ark of the Covenant and the Holy Cell Towers* - available in hard copy or as an e-book from [Amazon](#).

In Quest of Reliable Personal Gnosis

by Graywolf

Yggdrasil's third primary soul task is "inviting dialogue with diverse intelligences;" while the fourth is "courting the mythopoetic realm." Diverse intelligences include not just human-to-human communication - which is an essential art to the rebalancing and healing of a wounded world, but also communication with the more-than-human world including other life forms with whom we share the planet. Beyond that it also includes beings in the unseen realms - spirit guides, animal totems, angels, and ultimately the gods and goddesses themselves - all of whom exist as an expression of intelligence often quite foreign, though not inaccessible, to our own.

Courting the mythopoetic realm - our fourth soul task - is not possible without, among other challenges, developing a clear channel of communication with such beings. These intelligences live within the mythopoetic realm, where this physical world is only the portal to a mysterious place where seemingly solid substance and seemingly ethereal imagination meld. Or put another way, this physical world is, from the mythopoetic point of view, a place not just where human beings interact with each other, but also a place where beings of all kind - human, more-than-human and unseen - can converse and potentially cooperate toward common goals.

The exploration of this possibility is at the heart of our work with dreams, described in previous newsletters, on [our website](#), and in the blog series, [Calling All Dreamers](#). It is also implicated in the Spiritual Hypnotherapy workshop we are developing, and is taken for granted as an everyday fact of life in Nia Kallhof and Bruce Durward's book, mentioned above. As a relative newbie to this kind of communication - less experienced than some of my fellow Talking Council members - I have recently begun a personal exploration of the possibilities.

In particular, I am interested in making more direct contact with and having a more immediate conversation with Odin, and with the other gods and goddesses that inform the mythology around Yggdrasil. My sense is that if Yggdrasil is to become an actual retreat center, rooted in place, who can better assist in this task than the gods and goddesses whose life revolves around Yggdrasil in

the mythopoetic realm. If these are actual intelligences – as I would like to believe they are – then I should be able to invite dialogue with them. This at least is the nature of my current exploration.

As I stand on the threshold of this journey, I am acutely aware of its contrarian nature. In my book [The Seven Gates of Soul](#), I have previously spoken about how the imagination was stigmatized by the scientific establishment as the new “science” of psychology sought to establish itself as a rational, objective pursuit in the 19th century. This historical development – of which most people are unaware – filters into everyday consciousness through such common admonitions prevalent somewhere in most people’s childhoods, as “it’s only your imagination,” or “that was just a dream,” or “I’m sorry to have to tell you this, Johnny, but your imaginary friend is not real.”

Imagination – though valued in creative circles – is often contrasted with reality, as though it is were something apart from reality, instead of the precursor to it, and perhaps in some mysterious way, the source of it. Certainly, everything we take for granted as part of our current culture – from cell phones to celluloid heroes to cellular biology – began in the imagination. Aboriginal stories and other indigenous tales point toward the origin of natural features like mountains and rivers and trees as acts of imagination in the mind of the Creator God. Einstein himself is reputed to have said, “Imagination is more important than knowledge. Knowledge is limited. Imagination circles the world” (*In Cosmic Religion: With Other Opinions and Aphorisms*, 1931).

And yet, even in a world built on imagination, accepting the imagination – and the imaginal realm – as real is considered to be a sign, not of wisdom, but of delusion. The phenomenon of “hearing voices” or speaking directly with unseen entities – central to any conversation within the mythopoetic realm – is even more stigmatized. As Daniel B. Smith notes in his fascinating work, *Muses, Madmen and Prophets: Rethinking the History, Science, and Meaning of Auditory Hallucination* (New York, NY: Penguin, p. 12):

The written record of Western history stretches back more than 2,500 years, and from the beginning voice-hearing was plainly apparent and positively valued. Indeed, the phenomenon is associated with some of the fundamental texts and figures of Western culture . . . But somewhere around the eighteenth century, the culture’s way of thinking and talking about unusual experiences altered markedly. What was once revelation and inspiration became symptom and pathology. What was piety and poetry became science and sanity.

Recognizing that communication with the gods and goddesses can take many less literal forms than voice-hearing – moments of synchronicity, intuitive flashes, dreams, and visions, to name a few – we live in a culture where communicating directly with gods and goddesses raises eyebrows and calls our sanity into question. In certain New Age or esoteric circles, it is accepted, but beyond these fringe enclaves, it is suspect. Because it is central to an exploration of the mythopoetic realm, it is a contrarian act of potential value to the unfolding of Yggdrasil’s vision.

Having said this, and ready to begin the journey, a few questions in particular loom very large in my consciousness. No doubt these are the very questions at the heart of our culture’s institutionalized skepticism. “How can I know that I am really talking to a god, and not some

random voice inside my head? How do I know I'm not just making it up? How can I verify the truth of the messages I receive?"

In the mythopoetic realm in general – as with the dreamwork with which I am more familiar – there are no hard and fast rules for discerning what is true and what is not. But this is not to say that guidelines of discernment cannot be useful, and are not just as essential. After all, we are all too familiar with the stories of genuinely psychotic people who also heard voices and believed they were directed by unseen beings to do terrible things. While I believe it valuable to court the voices in our psyches and the imaginal realm and where possible, to collaborate with them, it is also important to make an attempt at discernment, and not just uncritically accept any random thought popping into our heads as a genuine communication from the divine.

Where exactly is the line between personal gnosis – a bona fide dialogue with deity – and neurotic, possibly even psychotic delusion? When is imagination useful, and when does it lead us astray? How can we properly understand the relationship between the imaginal realm of spirit guides, angels and deities and the realm of everyday reality where we pursue careers, have families, and live our embodied lives?

In approaching these questions and this brave new (new to me at least) world, I have found a tremendously valuable resource in a book called *Talking to Spirits: Personal Gnosis in Pagan Religion* (Rochester, VT: Destiny Books, 2013) by Kenaz Filan and Raven Kaldera. Apparently, there is a whole new generation of spiritual contrarians out there, asking these same questions. While there is a great deal of nuance and a wide variety of approaches to the answer within the neo-pagan community – where this particular set of questions is most alive – there do seem to be a few basic principles that I have gleaned from the book that are worth sharing:

Personal gnosis is more likely to be reliable when it corroborates or at least does not contradict tradition. If Odin appears to me wearing a yellow tutu, and saying things like, “All is love,” this is probably not Odin I am hearing, since this behavior does not fit traditional descriptions of Odin in the Eddas and other mythological sources.

Over an extended period of practice, you will get to know your gods and goddesses, just as you know your friends. While friends can and do surprise us, we are still able to recognize them as the people we know. With practice, the same is true of our friends within the unseen realm, making it less likely that we will naively accept the word of an impostor.

If the gods and goddesses tell you what you want to believe, their advice may be suspect. As the authors of *Talking to Spirits* remind us, the “Holy Powers . . . do not conform to our ideas and desires, and they have their own agenda that may not include our convenience and emotional comfort.” There are no magic solutions, or quick fix shortcuts, and the gods do not provide them. If a being flatters your sense of self-importance, or calls you a chosen one, it is probably not a deity.

If the gods tell you to do something for a particular reason, it is OK to try it out, and see if it works before committing yourself to it. If it doesn't do what they say it will, you are under no obligation

to continue. In fact, just as the most genuine spiritual teachers will tell you to test the validity of what they tell you for yourself, so too will a genuinely deity expect this kind of testing. If instead, your chosen deity asks for blind obedience, you should run the other way.

It is important to distinguish between messages that are meant just for you, and messages that are meant to be shared with others. If Odin tells me to practice hanging upside down from the tree in my backyard, he may not be telling to start a religion based on hanging from trees. A lack of discrimination along these lines is responsible for more than one messianic cult leading the multitudes astray.

In some cases, the validity of your message can be confirmed if others receive the same or a similar message independently from the same deity. This is an approach parallel to the idea of scientific replication of experimental results, but more applicable to an arena in which truth cannot be so easily measured.

The art of discrimination in matters of personal gnosis is as difficult as it is necessary. As the authors note (p 29):

Dealing with personal gnosis requires us to walk on the razor's edge of skepticism and faith. Blind obedience to every voice that pops into your head – or every claim of “divine inspiration” from a leader – will not help your religious development and may well get you into serious trouble. Yet sneering stubborn disbelief will prove no more useful when you find yourself the focal point of the meeting place between humanity and Divinity. Learning to trust the Gods enough to reject an inauthentic message, from whatever source, can be equally difficult.

At Yggdrasil, this is yet another dimension of the sacred balance that informs our vision – one that we will be exploring more earnestly in the year ahead.

Our Standing Invitation to You

If you want to stay in closer touch with what we are doing, you can easily subscribe to [our blog feed](#), like us on [Facebook](#), follow us on [Twitter](#), make a [donation](#), attend a [workshop](#), or find a [mentor](#). Whatever your level of interest, thanks for being part of our extended community and for helping us hold a space for the vision we carry.

Yggdrasil is a mystery school for visionary contrarians and a forest retreat for souls reinventing themselves, eventually to be housed within a self-sustaining eco-village community.

Keep an eye out for the next *Talking Leaves* – Spring Equinox 2016
Contributions in the spirit of Yggdrasil are welcome by March 13.

