



# Talking Leaves: Volume 2, Issue 4

## Winter Solstice 2013

### 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 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 our way of staying 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.

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### Talking Council Update

These past three months – since our last newsletter – have primarily been spent preparing for and co-facilitating two workshops: **Returning the Inner Masculine and Feminine to Sacred Balance**,

held from September 27-30 at [River Spirit Retreat Center](#) near Jasper, Arkansas, and our second annual **Tracking the Soul** workshop, held from November 15-18 at [Hearthaven Retreat Center](#) near Willow Springs, Missouri.

Those of us who live here in the Ozarks have been fortunate enough to be able to meet in person on numerous occasions during the past year to plan and evaluate these workshops in between our regular monthly Talking Council meetings. This has been a very rich process of exploring, experimenting, refining what each of us does individually and integrating it into a co-creative whole that has proven to be more than the sum of its parts in some pretty amazing ways. We have learned a great deal about working together as a seamless team – often working through our own interpersonal issues with each other in the process. The result has been two stunning successes that have surpassed our wildest expectations. Accounts of both workshops appear below.

Beyond the workshops themselves, our extended Talking Council has begun to wrestle with the challenging question: *What is it that allows one person to bounce back from a life-shattering experience and transmute pain, anger, and trauma into a sense of visionary calling, but crushes another?* Those who have made the greatest difference in our world have not necessarily had an easy time of it. In fact, often the contrary has been true. Many of those we most revere have had monumental challenges that they somehow managed to learn from, and transmute into a calling that made life better for the rest of us. Others, who seem to have all the privileges that money can buy, the support of influential people, and every possible opportunity, languish in what they feel is a creative backwater, and live lives that seem without purpose or meaning.

This is a dilemma that speaks directly to the heart of Yggdrasil's challenge – as we seek ways to transmute our sacred wounds into a deeper source of visionary calling. It is often our most difficult life experiences that teach us the most, and if we actually learn and integrate these lessons, it is what we have to teach others from a place of personal authenticity. Since our focus at the moment is the development of a curriculum for our school, it is worth asking – what is it that we really have to teach? Ultimately it is not about the rich smorgasbord of techniques and modalities from which we can draw, even those in which we have combined expertise. It is something more fundamental than that that comes not from what we do, but out of our being and our life experience. Ultimately, each one of us is the teaching.

To feel our way into this important insight, we have begun creating space for each of us to address the corollary question: *What is the most difficult thing you have had to deal with in your life to date, how did you deal with it, and what did you learn from your experience?* The conversation that has begun to evolve is confidential, but is already stirring the cauldron of our co-creative stew in ways that will continue to inform our workshops and other public offerings in the months and years to come. Stay tuned for more, and in the meantime, read on to get the flavor of the tasty options on our current menu.



*Work of the eyes is done, now  
go and do heart-work  
on all the images imprisoned within you; for you  
overpowered them: but even now you don't know them.*

*Learn, inner man, to look at your inner woman,  
the one attained from a thousand  
natures, the merely attained but  
not yet beloved form.*

from *Turning Point* by Rainer Maria Rilke  
translated by Stephen Mitchell

## Finding Balance

by Sara Firman



*How can I become whole if I do not know the other less familiar half of me?*

This question was the inspiration for a workshop co-created with three fellow members of Yggdrasil. Part of our mission is to address the harmful effects of the 'wounded masculine' on human behavior by exploring what enables each of us, man or woman, to achieve a healthy dynamic inner masculine-feminine balance.

*"We live in a world that is marked by apparent duality – seemingly fundamental differences between light and dark, hot and cold, inner and outer, male and female, love and hate. Most of us instinctively identify with one side of these polarities, but not the other . . . nowhere does this become more tangible than in a consideration of gender"* wrote Joe in Yggdrasil's Vision Statement.

The workshop, entitled [Returning the Inner Masculine and Feminine to Sacred Balance](#), was held September 27 – 30, 2013, at [River Spirit Retreat Center](#) on the Little Buffalo River in Arkansas. This article describes my own experience as one of six participants who helped to make this

inaugural event a profound exploration on which we will continue to build. A special thank you to Ann Lasater retreat owner who also joined us.

The words *masculine* and *feminine* do not refer to *men* and *women*, they are parts of each of us.

Joe writes: *"All of us need both our masculine and feminine sides to be working together in order to experience our wholeness and to be able to contribute in a balanced and constructive way to the betterment of the world in which we live. Invariably the soul's journey will entail learning more about one side or other of this polarity, and finding our own integrated expression of both sides."*

As our convoy of cars set out from the town of Jasper, along a rocky road that winds through a shangri-la Ozark valley and then up into wild forest, I felt certain that a journey of warrior souls had begun. Courage (a word derived from the Old French *corage* for heart, and also innermost feelings) is to be found in both genders. We arrived at the remote and aptly named River Spirit retreat to immerse ourselves as fully as we dared.

### **Honoring All That Brought Us There**

At twilight, John Staniloui conducted a Native American smudging ceremony on the Mother Lodge deck facing the mountains. Then I led us in an adaptation of the ritual "Touching the Earth," created by Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh to return us to the Earth, to our roots, to our ancestors (male and female), and to recognize that we are not alone or separate and that – wounded or not, out of balance or not – we are all part of Life.

These simple ways brought the sacred into the time with ourselves, with each other, and with River Spirit.

*"In the same way as the Divine Feminine has been recognized as a force that can be owned and embodied by both men and women, the Divine Masculine is available to all – because it is within"* wrote Lion Goodman for the [Good Men Project](#) earlier this year. In our workshop we wanted not only to talk about intellectual or mystical concepts but to embody an integration of our masculine and feminine parts, earthly and divine.

We brought ourselves back to center with a simple practice that involves coming into your body, feeling your feet on Mother Earth, feeling the safe space in your mind (Father Sky), sensing the front of your body, sensing the back of your body, sensing your right side, sensing your left side, sensing inside, sensing outside. It helped connect us with our inner masculine – inner feminine, and to experience ourselves from the inside out.

*"As human beings, we stand between the earth and the sky,"* suggests Goodman. *"We are a product of both mother (Gr.: mater = matter, mother and matrix) and father (Gr: pater = pattern), a masculine God and a feminine Goddess, Creator and Creatrix. We are part of their divinity, and we are thus divine by design."* This is not self-aggrandizement but a reminder that we are responsible to something bigger than our individual concerns.

To get us in touch with our current inner state, Joe Landwehr introduced some positive masculine-feminine attributes. He had already summarized them well in Yggdrasil's Vision Statement:

***Our masculine side** is that part of us that feels the drive to self-actualize – to become a self-reliant individual capable of making a unique contribution to the Whole – and then strategizes and acts to give tangible expression to our creative potential.*

***Our feminine side** is that part of us that feels and senses; that intuitively understands the symbolic and mythological dimensions of our experience; that instinctively and effortlessly experiences the interconnectedness of all of life; that values community and quality of relationships; and that compassionately considers the impact of its actions on the future beings of the world and on the Earth itself.*

**How did each of us experience these polarities in our lives?** We talked about the effects of conditioning both within our own families and within our culture, because of which: “[M]en will usually need to learn how to more intentionally and consciously cultivate their feminine sides – to learn to feel, to trust their intuition, to care for their body, to negotiate relationship, to find their way into the mythopoetic roots of things.”

Meanwhile, “Women will usually need to learn how to more intentionally and consciously cultivate their masculine sides – to discover and develop independent individuality, practical self-reliance and financial autonomy, self-assertion, strategizing skills, and the strength of contrarian convictions.” Of course, these are gender generalizations, and each person finds themselves in a different place along a continuum for different attributes.

### **Calling Out the Inner Masculine and Feminine**

To close our first evening, Nia Kalhoff offered a dream incubation, inviting us into a mythopoetic space where images that relate to our inner masculine and feminine might emerge. She gave each of us a small crystal to put under our pillows to help us remember our dreams, and encouraged us to call in a dream relevant to the theme of the workshop. If no dream arose, recording the mood with which we awoke would be just as valuable.

I did not dream during the weekend but a dream I had on the night before seemed fitting:

*I am being transported, perhaps on a forklift or by a giant, to a meeting space. I don't know what I'm there for and it feels a bit scary. I'm placed on a very high mantelpiece and perched on what seems to be a candlestick on that. It is hard to balance, and I keep toppling . . .*

As the dream goes on, I'm retrieved to join others on the ground.

*It seems I am there for an interview and ... [a] man asks me what I'd like to know about working there. I haven't prepared anything but realize I should have. Various employees talk*

*about their work in a most unusual, casual and honest way though I'm not clear about what they actually do. What seems important is authenticity and creativity.*

Now here I was in waking life, among people who shared my interest in soulwork.

On a personal level, I am struggling to revive my own 'masculine' drive several years after a crisis of loss (husband, home, work) and have established a habitual way of being that has a preponderance of 'feminine' attributes. I take delight in caring for a cabin deep in the woods and in tending the native gardens I've created around it. I nurture others in small, satisfying ways every day while my earnings have dwindled to zero.

I yearn for right-livelihood yet my previously optimistic and adventurous approach to life is now more fearful and cautious.

As preparation for the workshop we were asked to bring objects from home that symbolized our sense of the masculine or feminine. Looking about the cabin, unsurprisingly perhaps, I found many feminine treasures but few masculine that inspired me. In the end, I chose a hanging mermaid ornament gifted me by a woman for my [aquatic healing art](#) (feminine); and an Indian travel candle inlaid with gold and mirrors in which I placed a coin (masculine).

### Exploring Archetypes Using the Tarot

On the first full day of our workshop, we each chose [Inner Child Tarot](#) cards drawn from three pre-divided blind sets to represent our inner feminine, inner masculine and (later on when we each felt ready for this) the integration of these two parts. These cards, which playfully illuminate 'the mystical meaning of fairy tales and the hero's journey of the soul', provided all of us with a colorful and light entry point to deeper issues.



My card for the inner feminine came up as Gaia, Guardian of Crystals; while the inner masculine was represented by Big Bad Wolf, a major arcana card traditionally called Devil. The pair presented me with a polarity that is very strong in my life, as already hinted: a deep love of the wild lands and a profound fear of the dark-side of human life. Angel-winged Gaia with flowers in her hair is easy to live with but what of her partner?

The Big Bad Wolf appears in some precautionary folkloric stories and is a generic archetype for a

menacing predatory antagonist. Reversing the story of Little Red Riding Hood that contrasts the safety of the village with the dangers of the forest, my own peaceful life in a wooded haven is encroached on by a scary view of the wider world that comes through my computer screen. Fear also lurks in painful memories not yet laid to rest.



Jungian lore tells us that whatever we most love and whatever we most fear in others, is likely imprisoned within our own self also. Does the Big Bad Wolf really deserve to be ostracized from my life? Doesn't he stand for the instinctive and wild one, the protector and marker of boundaries I've failed to bring out when I most needed to defend what I loved? Those who are meek and mild can only flee like deer when the wolf comes around.

In a Lakota story, an injured woman is found by a wolf pack and taken in and nurtured. She learns the ways of the wolves and returns to her tribe to use this newfound knowledge to help them. In particular, she knows long before anyone else when a predator or enemy is approaching. I've known this too but have been much quicker wielding that protective power on behalf of others than in taking care of myself.

Where the wolf combines the duality of the Great Mother and Great Warrior, it could be seen as a symbol for a successful individuation or maturity suggests the writer [Stottilien](#). After the workshop, I began to research this Big Bad and discovered that it might well provide the missing link between these two parts of myself, integrating them rather than dividing them.

In [Women Who run With The Wolves](#): Myths and Stories of the Wild Woman Archetype, Clarissa Pinkola Estes says that healthy wolves and healthy women share keen sensing, playful spirit, and a heightened capacity for devotion as well as fierce protection of the young or vulnerable. There is the story of La Loba, the wolf woman whose work was collecting bones of wolves and singing life into them. It's a story that symbolizes the soul-voice.

### **Speaking and Listening From the Heart**

In our sharing time, both in separate sex and mixed groups, we used the Native American device of the 'talking stick' with special items that stood for 'masculine' and 'feminine' perspectives. It was interesting that much of the time, we each wanted to hold both voices. We found that being with our own genders had the value of initial safety and support in it, which we were then able to bring back to the larger group.

Those not speaking were practicing absolute listening. It's challenging for many of us to appreciate what a person is trying to say without adding to it, fixing it, or putting ourselves into it. If we can stop for a second and sense our own muddle of feelings, tensions and expectations – then clear that – out of the open space we can listen better. What will the other person say into this waiting space that exists for them alone?

We were creating space for something Joe has described well: *"It seems to me this division into 'relationship/care' and 'voice' is another way of talking about what we have already recognized as a core ingredient in balancing masculine and feminine – cultivating a strong sense of individuality (voice) through which we can contribute to the group or community to which we have an equally strong sense of belonging (relationship/care)".*

Similarly, [Heather Plett](#) writing about why she withdrew from the corporate world suggested: *"[W]e've been relying on the leader-as-hero model, when what we really need now is the leader-as-host . . . We need people who can lead from a place in the circle, people who can help heal the brokenness in the world, people who help us feel connected again, and people who can remind us of the importance of our relationship with the earth."*

### **Moving From the Inside Out**

Another important component of our time together was expressing and embodying the insights we had through: morning stretching together in ways that emphasized centering and moving from the inside out; non-verbal group exercises using eye contact and touch; authentic movement in mover and witness pairs; and dance based on [Gabrielle Roth's Five Rhythms](#). No one felt intimidated by these moving meditations.

[Authentic movement](#) – with one person eyes closed allowing themselves to be moved from the inside out and their witness keeping them safe – matched the way of the talking stick. We agreed: *I as witness* will hold the mover in a space of love and safety, without projection, interpretation or judgment. *I as mover* will follow my body's lead without projection, interpretation or judgment. We were inspired by the depth of this experience.

While, authentic movement is done to inner music, in the dance we travelled a wave of different rhythms identified by urban shaman Roth as Flowing, Staccato, Chaos, Lyrical and Stillness. The five tempos allow dancers to discover what is habitual and easy and what challenges their usual way of moving and being. Becoming acquainted with each of them might enable us to move more fluidly through the yin-yang of life too.

I was involved in facilitating all these movement practices and found myself thoroughly re-inspired by them. After pursuing more disciplined, routine exercise methods in my youth, this way of moving – listening first to the inner impulse of one's own body and following that – seems an effective integration of masculine and feminine ways (doing and being, respectively). Through them I can determine the inner weather of my day and respond to that.

## Dreaming With the Land

The retreat we stayed at is bordered by the deep and bouldered Little Buffalo River, a class IV ride when the water is high, though this visit it was dry except for a few gleaming pools. Below one of its bluffs is a sacred space constructed of cob and decorated with snakes, frogs, Gaia herself and many other shamanic symbols. We spent two wonderful sessions drumming and dreaming in this candlelit and fire-warmed womb.



Before one of these sessions, we each set out for solo time in the wildland. We were seeking signs of our inner beloved, *anima* (feminine) for men and *animus* (masculine) for women, though most certainly s/he would come in disguise. I set off along the dry river bottom in my tall rubber boots enjoying being away from all risk of seed ticks or other biting creatures. No beloved appeared and I was on the point of return when my sign arrived.

I had stood on a massive rock gazing along the river's path, admiring the overarching trees that had only the slightest tinge of fall in their leaves, when I realized that here I felt powerful. Here, I could reach my arms high and announce myself without fear. I descended into the riverbed, and then suddenly at my feet saw a single red cardinal plant flowering brightly out of a grey rock crevice. What a symbol of passion and determination!

This seemed enough until, not far from the rock on my return path, I spotted a single dusty pink rose, a soft fabric bloom still tethered in its plastic cupped stem. All the way from China perhaps, but to me a rose is the quintessential expression of the feminine that I rarely allow myself. I buy rose-scented candles and creams for friends but rarely for myself. Just to be sure, my inner beloved let me see he knew my secret.

Later, we each shared our journeys and some had not yet found their signs. It doesn't matter. Like the eros of our dreams, these figures must be approached delicately, coaxed out gently, tended and accepted exactly as they are. They may not always come as flowers but just as likely as storms or snakes. On the last day of our workshop a pair of timber rattlesnakes (likely male and female) showed themselves below the sunny deck.

These highly venomous creatures were seeking only a warm spot and got our attention. The rational, 'masculine' impulse might well have sought to kill them. I prefer to consider them an affirmation of the psychic power of our time together. The snakes slipped away. As the Persian

mystic Rumi said: “Your task is not to seek love, but merely to seek and find all the barriers within yourself that you have built against it”.

On the last morning, our closing circle spilled over into three heartfelt hours as we expressed our appreciations of the weekend and of each other. Monica Dixon spoke for us all when she later wrote: “I did feel that it helped me to find a lot of balance . . . I think the variety of ways in which we communicated really helped me purge a lot of thoughts and emotions that I was holding in, and letting hold me back.”

We're looking forward to next year's workshop! Let us know if you're interested in joining us.

See also: [The sun stands still: seeking balance at the solstice](#)



## Chipping Away

by Graywolf

*I would say that it was life-altering. I feel that strongly and I don't say that lightly because I've done some work – some personal growth before. I was ready to heal and I'm extremely grateful for this past weekend.*

– N.E., **Tracking the Soul** workshop participant

For the past two years, I have been working with a small band of intrepid souls to create a school-retreat called Yggdrasil. The purpose of this venture is to change people's lives and ultimately, in a small way perhaps, the world in which we all live. As I look out into the world, I often see a culture that is broken, wounded, distorted by a rampant confusion about what is truly important, a narcissistic immaturity all too ready to substitute wishful thinking for hard work, and an institutionalized numbness in the face of monumental problems requiring the collective best that all of us together have to offer. Despite our best intentions, and the best intentions of previous generations extending back to Adam and Eve, we keep making a mess of things, and human civilization as a whole keeps slip-sliding toward the edge of self-annihilation.

As a child of the idealistic sixties counterculture, I often ask myself, “How could this be? Surely we must have learned something in the course of our history that can save us from ourselves?” But honestly, the answer seems to be, “No. We're really not learning all that much.” Early on in my journey through this life, I realized that if I wanted to change the broken world – which I did and still do – I've got to start with myself, my own brokenness, and then help those I can with what I learn along the way. Wounded people create a wounded world, and fixing what is wrong – if such a thing is even possible – can only begin by realizing, we're all wounded.

In my twenties, I turned simultaneously to psychology and spirituality for answers to this dilemma,

and found some valuable insight in each realm, although not enough really to make a difference. Knowing where and why I was broken, I learned, is not the same as healing. Turning to the ultimate source of wholeness through my connection with Spirit, I also learned, does not absolve me of the necessity for working through my chronic wounded sense of separation from the whole. I think an intimate knowledge of psychology – particularly psychology rooted in individual choice and responsibility – and spirituality – particularly spirituality rooted in the quest for an open heart and mind – can provide solace and support for the long dark journey from blinding pain to soft light, but it is not the journey itself.

The same can be said for all forms of self-help, spiritual practice, and psychotherapeutic intervention. Tools are necessary and helpful, but they do not wield themselves. Like a stone mason armed with hammer and chisel and a block of stone – even a skilled stone mason – the soul armed with the tools of transformation can only hammer out a rough approximation of real life, inevitably shaped as much by what the soul can and cannot see as by the life that shapes the hammering. The tools themselves are neutral. It is what we bring to them that matters and what we bring to them is ourselves – broken, questing for wholeness, always en route between here and some elusive horizon. All we can do is show up – with the best intention we can muster and the sharpest tools at our disposal – and chip away.



When my partner asks me what I'm doing, I often answer, "chipping away." It is a standing joke between us, but the truth of the matter is, I've learned the hard way that nothing worth having or doing happens all at once. You set an intention, and then you put one foot in front of the other. Sometimes you leap; sometimes you slide backwards; but with your intention to guide you, you make gradual progress, day by day, year by year, decade by decade over the course of a lifetime. If this is true for worldly pursuits, then it must surely also be true for spiritual pursuits as profound as healing the broken pieces of our lives – broken in childhood, broken perhaps in some other life, broken just because as everyman's troubadour Bob Dylan once put it, "everything is broken."

With such an attitude, you might think I am a pessimist. I am not. I show up every day and chip away. It's actually a pretty meaningful existence, despite the fact that part of my brokenness is a

tendency toward depression and despair.

Lately I have been showing up to chip away at a very large vision I received two years ago in the southern Utah desert – to create a school-retreat where people can come to reinvent themselves after a period of immersion in soul-based explorations, chipping away at their core issues, sifting and sorting through the broken shards of their lives for that blinding flash of visionary calling capable of morphing into the softer light of a creative offering.

I'm lucky enough, in this endeavor to have fellow chippers to play with – a few hardy souls, who have been around the block of their own lives a few times, and still have enough wild courage, playful audacity, unbridled curiosity, appreciation for the absurd, and fierce innocence to want to chip away not only at their own lives, but at the broken world in which their own lives have made of themselves what they could.

As a first step in our process, we have created together a couple of workshops. These are designed not to be feel-good experiences, although I must admit in retrospect they do feel pretty good – but rather life-transforming events. This sounds like a bold statement, especially for a perpetual chipper like me. Yet, I also know – because I have seen it with my own eyes – that there comes a time in the course of a life of dedicated pursuit of wholeness when just one more chip can reveal something that was there all along – to a life-changing gasp of wonder.

My intention in working toward the changing of lives through Yggdrasil is to create a space where if such a soul should enter, that final chip can fall off the blade. To my amazement, it is already starting to happen. The two workshops we have done this year have witnessed a number of those final chips falling. I sit in awe as I write this, and find myself asking the question, how did that happen? What exactly did we do that we might consider doing again?

This is – and will always be – a very large question with no final answer. But through an extensive evaluation process, which has become a part of our collective way of chipping away at it, the question has begun to yield a few choice insights that I feel moved to share with you now.

First, I do think that what makes possible a life-changing event is the deep desire to change. As simple as it sounds, without this essential ingredient, we broken people have an infinite variety of clever ways to patch together our broken lives with Duct tape, string and bailing wire, to keep ourselves rattling down the road. It is usually only when the bottom drops out that we admit to ourselves that broken means broken. Until then, the human capacity for denial will trump a tepid intention every single time, and in some cases, time after time for a lifetime of little actual change. People often die with the issues they were born with still relatively intact.

The lucky ones can't quite put themselves back together. Those who are broken and can't pretend they are not, have no choice but to work on their issues.

We all go through periods when it is possible to coast, and even the most broken of jalopies can seem to be moving down the road. Yet those who have been truly broken are somehow unable to

forget that every downward sloping hill is followed by an uphill climb, and that at some point soon, a bit of engine will be required. This engine is the intention that we bring to our experiences. A well-oiled intention will take us up that next hill, and renew itself on the way down. If our intention is to chip away at our core issues, then every hill, up or down, every twist and turn in the road, every experience in fact becomes a portal through which that final chip may fall – provided our intention is strong enough to keep us chipping away no matter what.

People come to workshops with varying levels of intention, and varying degrees of conscious awareness about what intention is actually at the heart of their driving engine. But everyone also comes to a workshop with a story, and what I have found – through years of working with people – is that if you can get to the part of the story that brings tears to the eyes, or a ferocity of spirit to the surface of a laid back personality, or that unexpected smile, or that liberating laugh at the absurdity of it all, or that sudden blink of recognition, or that long slow sigh of surrender, you can coax the intention at the heart of a life out to play. Usually, though not always, that intention is joined at the hip with a buried source of pain. Intentions arise out of core issues, and core issues fuel intentions with the power to drive a life uphill and down.

If you tell the story, the intention will emerge, and if you tell the story in a circle of avid listeners, who listen without judgment or superior knowledge, the intention will generate its own movement and change. Beyond anything that we might offer in any workshop, I'm convinced, this is what it takes to change a life.

Having said that, I personally have found a few tools to be helpful in leading those who are ready to the moment when the final chip may fall. As an astrologer of 40+ years, I have found no other modality as useful for creating a framework for the telling of a story. Although we are conditioned by the clock to believe that time moves in linear fashion, our soul stories actually move cyclically in ways that are uncannily reflected by planetary cycles. We circle around our issues – like red-tailed hawks around their prey – and astrology can help us understand more clearly what it is we are circling, and when what we are circling is likely to come into focus. This is important because our core issues and the intention to heal them to which they are bound can be as elusive as a mouse seeking to hide from the hawk that would eat it. If we wield it with sufficient skill and clear enough intention, astrology allows us to see through the subterfuge that hides our issues from us.

Forget telling the future. In my workshops, I track the soul through the past into the present, looking through an astrological lens. After a bit of circling, the issue ready to be shifted comes into view. If the chipper is ready, he or she may be guided instinctively to strike the chisel at the very point that the final chip may fall. It doesn't always happen, but at the very least, the tools of astrology can tell us where our chipping is most likely to yield deep understanding.

What I have also learned in the course of my work with Yggdrasil, however, is that insight alone is not enough to shift a pattern. The mind – even an astute mind armed with intuitive skill and hard-won wisdom – is insufficient to strike the blow that will release the final chip. The mind must be met by the heart and be dipped in the alchemical bath of emotion. Its abstraction of ideas about the core issues it is attempting to see clearly must be met by mythopoetic images that capture

it without the use of words. And above all else, whatever insights are released must be embodied through instinctual movement that sets actual change in motion. Change is movement, and without movement, change is just an idea waiting to happen.

In our workshops this past year, we have together discovered the power of authentic movement. Authentic movement is a practice developed by Mary Starks Whitehouse in the 1950s as a way to allow the body to free associate. Intrigued by Jung's idea of active imagination while studying with Martha Graham, Whitehouse fused the two ideas into an experiential psychotherapy. In our workshops, we have been experimenting with authentic movement as a complement to astrology, which when combined with drawing exercises and other imaginative experiential components, seem to work well leading those who are ready to strike the blow that yields the final chip.

This has been a bit of a trial and error process, and with each successive workshop we intend to refine what we do, chipping away at a living form that does change lives – consistently and by intention. May we never arrive at “The One True Formula.” May we always be surprised by what happens. But may we create a space where the final chip may fall and fall again.

OK – perhaps I am over-reaching here. Perhaps there is no final chip. Everyone is a perpetual work in progress, and can anyone really say what the ultimate goal of human existence is? Or even an individual life? As one who has spent a lifetime peering deeply into many lives, I gave up that bit of hubris years ago. In the end, I can only marvel at the infinite variety of soul tasks it is possible to chip away at.

I do know that something fundamental about me feels different now, and that by addressing my core issues and moving them, the horizon toward which I am moving has shifted. From the feedback we have gotten to these workshops, I suspect the same is true for nearly everyone who was there, even if words remain elusive.

As my partner Sara put it in her own account of the workshop ([http://www.sulisminerva.org/2013/12/wild\\_warrior.html#axzz2nTMmzllZ](http://www.sulisminerva.org/2013/12/wild_warrior.html#axzz2nTMmzllZ)):

*In this workshop, we learned how to turn our confusions about who we are and what we are here for into an artform. We came away with some powerful personal expressions of what each of us is capable of in voice, body, art and deed. No doubt there are many other aspects of our individual potentials yet to track.*

I would add, no doubt there is more chipping away to do – but later, after the echoes of our gasps of self-recognition have begun to fade and the tears of wonder in our eyes at what we have seen to be possible begin to dry.

Next year's Tracking the Soul workshop will take place somewhere in Missouri, somewhere in the fall. Let us know if you'd like to join us. Since there is a bit of preparation to do, it is not too early to start chipping.



## Our Invitation to You

If you want to be part of our grand mythopoetic adventure, let us know. We'd love to hear from you at whatever level of involvement you are inspired to want to participate. You can:

- 1) Request and read the 2-page vision summary.
- 2) Share this newsletter or the 2-page vision statement with select friends or acquaintances you sincerely believe will be interested. If you do, please copy your email to us at [joelandwehr@socket.net](mailto:joelandwehr@socket.net) and/or [sara.firman@yahoo.com](mailto:sara.firman@yahoo.com).
- 3) Read the more comprehensive vision statement (39 pages) and share with us your feedback. We ask that you not share the more comprehensive vision statement, but instead refer your friends to the 2-page statement, and let them contact us for more.
- 4) Join the Talking Council. If you resonate at a deep enough level with what we are trying to do, this could be your opportunity to dig more deeply into your own mythopoetic roots, even as you help steward the fruiting of the vine. We meet once a month by Skype for 2 hours each session, and would love to have you join us. We do ask for a one-year commitment.
- 5) Attend one of our workshops. Join us in our contrarian attempt to engage the dreaming world from our vantage point upside down on the World Tree.

Our second annual **Returning the Inner Masculine and Feminine to Sacred Balance** workshop will be held sometime in late September; and our third annual **Tracking the Soul** workshop will be held in early November. Both will be here in the Ozarks. Let us know of your interest, and we will keep you informed as time and venue become more definite. **Tracking the Soul** involves some preparation, so you will want to sign up for that workshop by August 1 at the latest.

**Yggdrasil is a school for visionary contrarians and a forest retreat for souls reinventing themselves, housed within a self-sustaining eco-village community, now being formed.**

Keep an eye out for the next *Talking Leaves* – Spring Equinox 2014  
Contributions in the spirit of Yggdrasil are welcome by March 13.

