



Talking Leaves: Volume 4, Issue 2

Summer Solstice 2015

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.



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Welcome to Our New Talking Council Member – Bruce Durward

In this issue of Talking Leaves, we are pleased to welcome our newest Talking Council member, Bruce Durward into our circle. Bruce was drawn to Yggdrasil through the encouragement of his partner [Nia Kallhof](#), who has been with us since the beginning. But Bruce brings his own interesting background and unique mix of skills to the mix, and we are happy to have him join us.

About himself, Bruce says:

My spirit name is Gentle Bear. I was introduced to shamanism about 15 years ago at a Michael Harner's Core Shamanism class, and it was major healing for me. I then opened up to the spirit world, and started talking to devas, angels, ghosts, fairies, dragons, trees, etc.



This was wild, and for a structure to hang all this on I studied Peruvian shamanism with Lee Hilficker of Eau Claire, Wisconsin, completing a medicine wheel apprenticeship. I've also studied with Don Cohaila and Don Jose Higuera of Peru, Ronna Herman of Reno, Nevada and James Tyberon of Texas. I help James Tyberon put on his Earth-Keeper seminars and sacred site trips. I've also taken Drunvalo Melchizedik's Flower of Life class, and several crystal classes.

My special interests are geomancy especially earth ley lines, power nodes, and releasing old energies in the earth, psychopomp or soul guide work, healing old trauma in the energy body, and removing entities from people's energy bodies. In the last three years I have been blessed with channeling angels and ascended masters, including Quan Yin, Saint Germaine, Archangel Michael, and Lord Sananda (Yeshua). My website about shamanism is [Song of Sirius](#).

I've been working for Ashland County, Wisconsin the last 13 years as their IT Manager. Before that I've done computer consulting, computer programming, managing a construction company and carpentry. I'm retiring the end of May 2015.

If you'd like to join Bruce and [the rest of us on the Talking Council](#), let us know. We'd love to hear from you. We now have a full Council of 9 active members. But we always have room for people willing to roll up their sleeves and help us with the hard, but inspiring work of manifestation. If that is you, please let us know of your interest, and we will make a space for you.



Our Sacred Balance Workshop

From May 1-4, Yggdrasil hosted its second [Returning the Inner Masculine and Inner Feminine to Sacred Balance](#) workshop. For three sacred days, eight of us got together to look at the ways in which our cultural conditioning around gender has wounded us, and how we might begin to heal those wounds. Aside from some major and minor breakthroughs, we all had so much fun we got together the very next day for a reunion.



At all of our workshops, we take the attitude that profound shifts in relation to core life issues can come in an almost endless variety of ways – most of which we can not anticipate ahead of time. Sometimes something exciting will happen during one of our planned activities. Sometimes a casual comment at lunch can spark an internal revolution.

What we have observed is that creating and holding a safe and loving space of clear intention can open portals to change that we did not know were there before we walked through them. As one woman observed, “everyone seemed to shed a few layers of protection.” After that turning point – which was our goal and which came early in this workshop – all bets were off.

One participant found the authentic movement exercises powerful because they took place in silence. Another participant found his most authentic self amidst his more gregarious social interactions, while the inward exercises were more difficult. Another man discovered that his inner beloved was not the projection of his anima, but the 6-year old boy inside he had abandoned nearly a lifetime ago. One woman released surprising power that blew our hair back during a ceremony praying for the healing of all women. I personally discovered that I could be a better facilitator by relinquishing control and doing less.

None of this was planned, nor could it be anticipated. Such is the beauty and the crazy wisdom that sometimes gets spontaneously unleashed when we least expect it. With the power of group intention held in longing anticipation and willing participation, the outcome is assured, although the journey to the outcome is always a surprise.

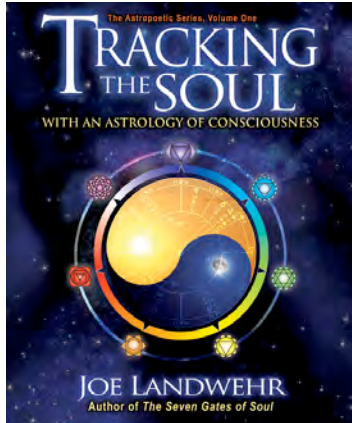
As one participant summed it up for all of us, “The varied experiences were unique and took me inside my self in a new way. I really got to know my inner masculine and feminine and the important notes of each in achieving a very dynamic balance.” One could not ask for a better outcome to a Sacred Balance workshop than that.

In many ways, a workshop is like a dream. In retrospect, we often wonder, “Did that really happen?” But in this case, we have the pictures and some film footage to prove it. Stay tuned as some of that eventually finds its way to our website in the form of a webinar sequence, or workshop trailer, or who knows what. Even we who dance this miraculous two-step will have to wait for the curtain to rise before we know the final choreography.



Our Third Tracking the Soul Workshop September 11-15, 2015

Meanwhile we all got so much out of this workshop that several participants would like to regroup for Round Two – Yggdrasil Retreat’s 2nd annual workshop and our 3rd Tracking the Soul. This workshop takes its title from a book written by Yggdrasil Founder, Joe Landwehr that integrates astrology and the chakra system into a more complete system of spiritual psychology.



Because this workshop is based on a more involved consideration of ideas, it has a more cerebral component to it for those who like to think their way through life's difficulties. The workshop itself, however, is an experiential forum for integrating the material in the heart, belly and bones, as well as in the head. It is also a place where each participant has the opportunity to share a bit of their journey in a focused way that allows them to consciously acknowledge and take responsibility for a core issue that has likely mostly been reverberating unconsciously until now – in the company of caring witnesses who have come together to celebrate the release and transmutation of chronic suffering into soulful gold.

As part of the preparation for this potentially life-changing event, each participant will work with his or her own birthchart under Joe's guidance – over the course of 3 individual sessions. Each session will be customized for each participant, based on their current level of familiarity, experience and interest with astrology and the chakra system. Each will include a homework assignment, and a follow-up 90-minute phone (or Skype) consultation.

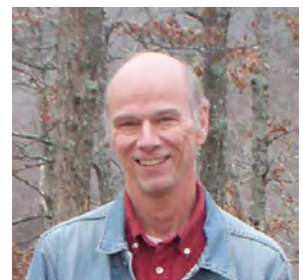
Session One will cover the chakra system, a psycho-spiritual adjunct to astrology, great for understanding how consciousness is being channeled through life experience.

Session Two will cover basic astrology, as it applies to the chakra system, and specifically as it applies to each participant's chart. This session will necessarily be customized to meet each participant at their current level of knowledge.

Session Three will help each participant identify core issues in their birthchart, determine which issue will be the focus of the workshop, and work out the relevant time frame for tracking the soul story related to the outworking of this issue in real life.

Said one participant about Joe's skill in doing this work:

Joe has the uncanny ability to see through the mask of an individual and gently prod them onto a deeper, more relevant and profound exploration of their birthchart. I personally know him to be a genuine spiritual seeker, as well as a gifted writer and astrologer of the highest moral caliber. He is a master of the art of astropoetic interpretation with the ability to skillfully interrelate mind and body, heart and soul into his teachings, which he pursues with passion. On this uncertain journey towards a deeper understanding of the meaning of life, I think Joe is as close as one can get!



There is still room for you in this year's workshop. If you'd like to join us, you can register directly on [our website](#). Registration closes **July 10**.



From the Blog: Tracking the Soul – A Primer

This blog series is an adaptation of a lecture that I gave at the Midwest Astrology Conference in Cleveland, Ohio in May 2009, meant to be a primer for those who are curious to know a bit more about the premise for the workshop.



Part One: The Soul

I should probably start with first things first. If I'm going to talk about tracking the soul, I should probably define – at least briefly – what I mean by soul. This is obviously a huge topic. Actually, I wrote another book about this – before *Tracking the Soul* – called [The Seven Gates of Soul](#), in which I elaborated a 6000-year history of what we have collectively understood the word “soul” to mean. For purposes of this blog series, I will just briefly suggest a working definition to get us started. I don't claim to have the definitive word on the subject, and you may or may not agree with me. That is OK.

But as I have come to view things, at this stage in my journey, I am now defining the soul as what happens when God, Spirit, the Great Mystery, the Life Force, or whatever else you want to call it, inhabits a physical body for the duration of a human life. If you ask me what do I think happens to the soul after death, I would respond in the same way as the Zen monk, Gudo. When asked “where does the soul go after death,” he replied, “I don't know. Ask me again when I'm dead.” Despite all that has been written about life after death, I still think death is a Great Mystery, and I remain an agnostic in my speculations about it.

Meanwhile, I do want to talk about what happens to the soul in this life – which is where the value of tracking the soul comes into play. Although we are conditioned to think of soul and Spirit as synonymous, I make a distinction, which I feel is necessary and important. Spirit is the beginning and the end of the soul's journey. Spirit is not going anywhere, cannot get lost, and does not need

to be tracked. Soul can most definitely have a relationship to Spirit, and this is part of what we can track when we track the soul, but it is the soul we are tracking and not Spirit.

Spirit is eternal; soul is a temporary amalgamation of Spirit and matter. Spirit is unchangeable; soul evolves in its relationship to Spirit and to itself, which is a reflection of Spirit. Spirit permeates this entire manifest creation; soul belongs specifically to you. This life that you are living is the soul's journey, and it is your opportunity to grow in your relationship to Spirit, to yourself and to everything and everyone around you.

Part Two: Astrology as a Tracking Device

When we talk about tracking the soul we are talking about understanding this life as an opportunity for learning and for growth. Specifically in my book and my workshop, I am talking about using astrology as a tracking device. Astrology can be a very useful tracking device, provided you realize that the thing you are tracking – the soul, whose journey is essentially a matter of exercising consciousness – transcends astrology. The birthchart provides a map to the territory traversed by the soul, but the soul itself decides how to use the map.

I think it safe to say that most people who know enough about astrology to appreciate its true value have experienced their birthchart as a useful map to the interior and exterior landscape of their soul's journey. The natal chart shows how we are hardwired psychologically, where our core issues are likely to be found, and how our external lives are likely to shape themselves around lessons related to these issues.

Using the techniques of timing that astrology provides – transits, progressions, solar arc directions, etc. – the birthchart also provides an excellent evolutionary timetable. It tells us when our core issues are likely to be triggered, and consequently when we will have our best opportunity for working toward resolution, healing and growth in relation to these issues. To the extent that we are interested in the application of astrology to matters of psychological and spiritual growth, these advantages are obvious and quite easily taken for granted.

What may not be so obvious to those of us who work with it day in and day out are the limitations of a purely astrological model. The birthchart, in and of itself, does not and cannot reveal the level of consciousness through which the symbolism of the birthchart is actualized.

One person with Moon in Pisces may struggle with tumultuous emotions that constantly threaten to overwhelm her and derail her conscious intentions; while another with this same placement may be highly intuitive, compassionate, and able to create a safe space in which profound healing can take place.

One person with Sun square Saturn may find life a constant losing battle against overwhelming obstacles; another may rise to impressive levels of accomplishment despite obstacles.

One person experiencing a Uranus transit to their Sun may experience an amazing breakthrough

to new levels of possibility; another person experiencing the same transit will experience a breakdown, the collapse of life as they knew it, and the need to start over again from scratch.

In part these differences may be accounted for by astrological context, or how a given astrological factor fits into the birthchart as a whole. A Moon in Pisces that is conjunct Saturn will function very differently than a Moon in Pisces trine Neptune. Sun square Saturn in a t-square with Mars will function very differently than one in a t-square with Jupiter. A Uranus transit to a natal Sun that is opposed Uranus is very different than a Uranus transit to a natal Sun that is opposed Pluto. And so on. As we consider the whole chart, we will always find mitigating factors that make one placement, aspect or transit very different than the same placement, aspect or transit in a different chart.

Beyond these purely astrological differences, however, is something else. In his book, *Measuring the Night*, Steven Forrest points out that both Christ and a cockroach born under the manger at the exact moment of Christ's birth would have identical birthcharts. What makes the difference between our interpretation of Christ's chart and the chart of a cockroach, assuming we had the dubious pleasure of doing charts for cockroaches, is the exercise of consciousness in relation to the birthchart. You cannot predict how an individual soul will exercise consciousness in relation to his or her birthchart; you can only observe how he or she does.

Everyone who writes about astrology and most of us who work with counseling astrology bring an implied understanding of consciousness to our work, but this is something that we add to our knowledge of astrology, not something inherently astro-logical. There is no astrological rule that tells us whether a Neptune transit will bring spiritual enlightenment or a psychotic break accompanied by terrifying hallucinations, or something in between. Astrologically, we can know that a range of possibilities are encompassed by the symbolism, but in tracking the experiences of an actual soul having actual experiences, this does not really help us much.

Because there is nothing inherent within astrology to guide us in making distinctions within the range of possibilities, it is useful to supplement the birthchart with a model of consciousness that delineates the possibilities more explicitly.

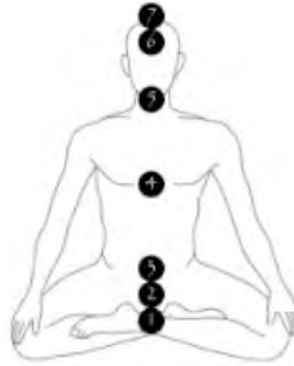
Part Three: Supplementing Astrology With the Chakra System

I personally have found no model of consciousness more useful than that provided by the chakra system, extracted as a system of spiritual psychology from yogic tradition. In addition to my nearly 40 years as an astrologer, and my training in western psychology, I also studied extensively in my 20s with both Yogi Bhanjan and Swami Muktananda, and my understanding of the chakra system comes primarily from these studies. When you combine astrology with an understanding of the chakras, you have a truly useful tool for tracking the soul that I refer to as the astro-chakra system.

From a yogic perspective, each chakra can be associated with a physiological system – eliminative, reproductive, digestive, etc., an endocrine gland, and a nerve plexus. Of greater interest to us here, we can also associate each chakra with a particular orientation toward life, encompassing various

sets of psychological issues, life challenges, and opportunities for growth.

The Seven Chakras



In a nutshell, the chakras break down as follows:

- 1) In the first chakra, our focus is upon survival. Our challenge here is to secure a safe space in which to pursue the soul's journey toward healing, growth and actualization of potential. Issues encountered in the first chakra may include abandonment; alienation, excommunication or banishment from the tribe; fear of death; extreme violations of personal space, such as rape, assault, robbery, or vandalism of one's home; or anything that threatens or we experience as threatening to our physical survival.
- 2) In the second chakra, our focus is upon maximizing pleasure. Our challenge here is to create a life in harmony with our nature that reflects our personal preferences, desires, and predispositions, and to learn how to enjoy life to the fullest. While this might seem to be a strange thing to have to learn, many of us are born into family and cultural environments that do not support us in being who we are, and the issues of the second chakra can reflect our difficulties in overcoming this lack of support. Such issues can include internalized feelings of guilt or shame around sexuality; feelings of unworthiness; a sense of rejection; a sense of scarcity or inability to enjoy life; various inherited taboos limiting what we feel we can or cannot do; and so on.
- 3) In the third chakra, our focus is upon taking our place within the world. Our challenge here is to rise to a level of confidence, competence, and success in the field to which we have chosen to apply our creativity, and to make a contribution to the whole of which we are part. Issues in the third chakra can revolve around feelings of inadequacy or inferiority; difficulties in competing and/or cooperating with others; claiming and responsibly expressing personal power; protecting and defending our personal space; taking a stand for what we believe; and in general, establishing a personal base on which we can function effectively as an individual in relation to the collective.
- 4) In the fourth chakra, our focus is upon learning to love self and others. Loving self entails

not only acquiring a high level of self-acceptance, but also finding and living a uniquely personal sense of purpose that arises from the very essence of who we are – a challenge encompassed by the Hindu word, *dharma*. The *dharma* of a candle flame is to burn; your *dharma* is to _____ fill in the blank. It is your answer to the question, “Why are you here, alive in this body in this place at this time?”

The fourth chakra also encompasses the huge challenge of relationship, especially the necessity for reclaiming everything we project onto another person, either as part of our shadow, our rejected self, or as part of the anima or animus, our ideal partner or mate.

These two challenges go hand in hand, for as long as we are projecting anything on another, we can't truly accept or be ourselves; and to the extent that we are not loving ourselves unconditionally, we won't be able to love or accept others as they are.

Issues in the fourth chakra include any lack of a sense of purpose or meaning; difficulties in relationship; any sense of we might have of not being loveable or worthy to be loved; and the inability to love or to share oneself with others.

- 5) In the fifth chakra, our focus is upon learning to speak our truth and walk our talk. The challenge here is to strive toward a high level of personal integrity, which often entails individuating ourselves against a strong undercurrent of cultural conditioning. In the fifth chakra, we begin to experience ourselves as true individuals, guided not by external rules, but by our own internal compass and by the cumulative wisdom of a lifetime of experience.

In the fifth chakra, we also gain the capacity to teach what we have learned to others, primarily by example, and through our words and deeds. Issues in the fifth chakra can include ethical dilemmas; a profound sense of social or cultural alienation; the need to make difficult choices that pit comfort, familiarity or convenience against emerging truths; and in general, the necessity for aligning actions with beliefs.

- 6) In the sixth chakra, our focus is upon gaining perspective. The challenge here is to understand the relative nature of our viewpoint, including our most cherished beliefs, and to find our place within the whole based upon a personal vision of how the whole fits together. In the fifth chakra, we separate from the collective in order to find ourselves as individuals; in the sixth, we return to the collective, bearing the gifts that only we can bear. Issues in the sixth chakra include a sense of disillusionment in the face of beliefs we outgrow; conflicts between belief systems in relation to others; dogmatism and megalomania; the absence of a sense of belonging to a larger whole; and so on.

- 7) In the seventh chakra, our focus is upon reuniting to Spirit. The challenge here is learning how to become an agent of divine will, playing our role within a divine plan unfolding, not from an ego-based perspective, but from a clarity of vision and a place of non-attachment. Unless we have done the work required of us in the other six chakras, the task of the seventh will remain unattainable. Issues here can include delusions of grandeur; escapist

desires and addictions of all kinds; confusion born of incomprehensible inner experiences; possession by archetypes, demons, or sub-personalities; premature disintegration of the ego; spiritual by-passing, and many other serious conditions too numerous and complicated to go into in any depth here.

Part Four: The Chakra System Reconsidered

The task in working with the chakras is to heal any issues that might be associated with each, so that the challenge of each chakra can be met effectively, and the opportunity for growth maximized. The yogic model assumes a hierarchical structure – that is to say, the assumption that the expression of consciousness through a higher chakra represents a higher state of being than the expression of consciousness through a lower chakra. In practice, I have found this not to be true, and less useful than a circular model in which each chakra is equal to every other and clarity within each is as necessary to spiritual fulfillment as clarity in any other. Often the true spiritual work to be done by a soul is in the so-called lower chakras, and attainment at the so-called higher level, depends upon integrating some more basic lesson.

Often there are interrelationships between chakras that require their lessons to be mastered in tandem with each other. The 2nd chakra ability to accept yourself for who you are in all of your quirky individual glory, for example, is closely aligned with the 5th chakra task of living a life of integrity. The 3rd chakra capacity to take your place in the world is closely aligned with the 6th chakra challenge of taking a more meaningful place within the larger scheme of things, as a functional part of the greater whole. And so on. These kinds of relationships are more effectively approached, I feel, as an interrelationship between equal centers of consciousness than when one center is considered higher or more evolved than another. If your 3rd chakra is relatively clear, but your 6th is clouded by wounds or unresolved issues, then your 3rd is more evolved than your 6th. There is no way to assess how evolved you are in a given chakra, except through honest self-evaluation, but the astro-chakra system will at least provide a framework in which you can ask the right questions.

The astro-chakra system, as presented in my book, also includes a consideration of what the yogis called *kosha*, meaning various levels of manifestation between pure matter at one end and pure consciousness at the other. According to the astro-chakra system, each chakra can manifest at each of five *koshas*, so even within the domain encompassed by a given chakra, there are distinctions to be made. I cover this in some detail in my book, and incorporate it into my workshop. To keep this introduction to the astro-chakra system fairly simple at this point, I will just mention it here.

I do want to suggest to you that there is a sophistication to this system that rivals anything that astrology has to offer. Put the two together, and you have quite a nuanced language with which to address any life experience as a spiritual process of potential soul growth. This does not mean, however, that it has to be complicated. If you have a basic knowledge of the chakras, and understand the logic of the astrology, then there is a great deal you can discover on your own just by playing with the system.

In [the remainder of my blog series](#), I will to present a few basic principles to get you started. If you would like to follow the blog series into more technical territory, you can do that [here](#). Much more is available through [my book](#), and for those who are really intrigued, I would invite you to [attend the workshop](#).

Our Mentorship Program

In addition to our workshops, Yggdrasil is in the process of creating a Mentorship Program for those would like one-on-one assistance in the process of becoming a visionary contrarian. A visionary contrarian is someone who recognizes that they have been wounded by being born into a dysfunctional culture, AND instead of being victimized by that, deeply longs to turn their suffering into something positive that they can then give back to the world. A visionary contrarian is someone who works with passionate resolve to transmute his or her core wounds into a sense of calling around which a meaningful life can revolve. A visionary contrarian wants to change the world, but realizes that first, they must "be the change" they want to facilitate.

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 are ready to make a solid commitment to their own growth and to the wellbeing of the world.

We will be officially launching this program soon. In the meantime, since you were wise enough to subscribe to our newsletter, you are the first to hear about it. [Let us know if you are interested](#), and we will keep you posted.

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](#), and/or attend a [workshop](#).

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, housed within a self-sustaining eco-village community, now being planned.

Keep an eye out for the next *Talking Leaves* - Autumn Equinox 2015
Contributions in the spirit of Yggdrasil are welcome by September 16.

