



Talking Leaves: Volume 3, Issue 1

Spring Equinox 2014

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. You can now also learn more about Yggdrasil through our website at yggdrasilretreat.com. More about this exciting new development below.



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Our New Website

It has been two years plus since I did my 13-day Underworld Journey in southern Utah with Bill Plotkin and the [Animas Valley Institute](#). I went to celebrate my passage into elderhood, and came back with an unexpected mission to create a school-retreat for visionary contrarians. Visionary contrarians, as I have come to define them, are those who:

- recognize that the world is wounded
- refuse to participate in the wounded world because their integrity won't allow it, and
- are ready to tend the wounding they have received from the world and transmute it into a powerful, effective, visionary counterforce for change.

I call the school-retreat Yggdrasil after the World Tree in Norse mythology, upon which the great visionary contrarian Odin hung for nine days to channel the magical language of the runes. I envision Yggdrasil, the School-Retreat to be a place where souls ripe for transformation can gather to heal, and to learn from each other, the more-than-human world, and the Animus Mundi - or soul of the World at the heart of the World Tree itself.

Our world is suffering greatly now, and needs all of us to do this, in whatever way we can. Yggdrasil will be a venue for responding to this need.

The clearest way into the Universe is through a forest wilderness. – John Muir

Trees are sanctuaries. Whoever knows how to speak to them, whoever knows how to listen to them, can learn the truth. They do not preach learning and precepts, they preach, undeterred by particulars, the ancient law of life. – Hermann Hesse

Since my vision quest, I have been working with a small band of co-creative adventurers to put a foundation of substance beneath the vision. [The Talking Council](#) is an extraordinary group of multi-talented individuals, already quite busy with lives of passionate creativity, activism, and service to people and planet, who have been inspired by the vision of Yggdrasil to want to help in midwiving its birth.

Beginning with two extraordinary workshops - [Tracking the Soul](#) and [Returning the Inner Masculine and Feminine to Sacred Balance](#) - we have been working together these past two years to create the foundation for [our soul-based curriculum](#). Ultimately, the school-retreat, as we envision it, will revolve around four main soul tasks:

- 1) **Tending the sacred wounds that serve as the impetus for the soul's journey.** This will be a natural orientation for those who come to the school because some aspect of their life has broken down, and they are feeling the need to re-create themselves in a more balanced, more fulfilling and more meaningful image.
- 2) **Cultivating a deep relationship with a visionary calling.** This calling will invariably

take the form of creative doing in the world, but doing that stems from a profound sense of being, mythopoetic identity, and purpose. Often visionary calling arises as an outgrowth of our soulful quest to tend our sacred wounds.

- 3) **Inviting dialogue between diverse intelligences.** On the way toward the creative embodiment of our visionary calling, we will cultivate the art of cooperative dialogue with the diverse intelligences within the world – between human beings, between humans and the more-than-human world of nature, and between the conscious ego and the more hidden dimensions of the World Dream that is dreaming us.
- 4) **Courting the mysteries of the mythopoetic realm.** The final soul task of the school underlies the other three, and becomes their crowning culmination. When we tend the sacred wound and cultivate visionary calling, we naturally enter into a deeper relationship with ourselves rooted in the mythopoetic rumblings beneath the surface of everyday life. As we interact with each other, with the more-than human-world and with the World Dream from this place of mythopoetic connection, we attain a level of wholeness capable of nurturing the soul of the world and contributing to its wellbeing.

The two workshops we have created so far have been oriented mostly around tending sacred wounds, but out of them has also naturally arisen a stirring of visionary calling in those who have participated. The co-creative process that has led to these workshops – and the workshop experience itself – has been a rewarding ongoing dialogue between people of very different backgrounds, areas of talent and skill, worldviews and belief systems. We could expect no less from a gathering of visionary contrarians. And lastly, when the intention is there – as it has been in our process – the mythopoetic realm is naturally and effortlessly evoked: through dreams, through moments of synchronicity, through inspired breakthroughs.

Encouraged by what we have done so far in these workshops, and the lives they have already begun to change, we have decided to go public this year – to reach out to a broader circle of friends and friends of friends, some of whom may feel the calling to become a more active part of this extraordinary adventure.

Perhaps you are one of them.

In any case, we consider those of you who are already on our mailing list, and have been reading this newsletter so far, to be the first ripple in our pond, out from which other ripples will go.

As a first step in stirring the pond, we offer you a look at our new website: yggdrasilretreat.com

Some of you may have already read our vision statement. If so, you may observe that the website picks up where the vision statement left off, elaborating what was presented there in more detail. Like a dream re-entry process, creating the website has allowed me to notice details of the vision that were not evident at a more casual glance. Like most visions, this is not one that reveals itself all at once. But the creation of the website did unveil additional layers, which I invite you to

explore now.

As you will see when you peer beneath the surface of our website, this is a huge vision, one with many dimensions, and many doors. Feel free to look around.

And if you should feel inspired to do more than look around, I might suggest the following additional steps:

- [Contact us](#) with your questions, comments, and feedback.
- Tell others about [our newsletter](#).
- Subscribe to [our blog feed](#) by email. I will regularly post articles and additional information about Yggdrasil events in more detail on the blog than I can through the newsletter.
- Like and follow [our Facebook page](#).
- Request [our vision statement](#), if you haven't already read it.
- Attend a [workshop](#).
- Join the [Talking Council](#). More about this later in this issue.
- Consider making a donation, which you can easily do from the [home page](#) of our website.

Just for being on our mailing list, you will receive a free PDF extract from my book **The Seven Gates of Soul: Reclaiming the Poetry of Everyday Life**. The extract is entitled, "Tracking My Soul to Odin's Door," which tells part of the story of my personal relationship with Odin, the rest of which can be found revealed in bits and pieces throughout my books.

To receive your copy, just send me an email at jlandwehr@yggdrasilretreat.com with your feedback about the website. This simple act of connection also entitles you to a 10% discount on Seven Gates, and a 20% discount for signing up for one of this year's workshops sometime in the next 30 days.

We look forward to hearing from you. Feel free to pass this newsletter on to anyone on your list that you think might also be interested. Or simply direct them to the first post on our website - [Yggdrasil Retreat Launches Website](#) - which outlines their options for becoming involved.



Talking Council Update

This winter has been a time of gestation and irrevocable change. Here in our Ozarks cabin in the woods, we've been snowed in more this year than any in recent memory. With plenty of wood to burn, a modest stockpile of food, and nowhere in particular to go, it has not been a hardship for us. Quite the contrary. There has been more time to dream, and for the illusory line between dreaming and waking state to dissolve in mythopoetic reverie. Out of that reverie has come the website to which the previously article directs you. Out of it has also come a slowly emerging sense that whatever we might have thought Yggdrasil was to this point has only been the steppingstone to an even deeper unfolding.

On the outer planes, I have been sad to see a number of Talking Council members go. Monica Dixon - artiste extraordinaire, who helped us develop the graphic flavor of the website with her otherworldly art (see her profile in Talking Leaves #7) - has been called to an internship at Kripalu Center for Yoga and Health - a retreat in Stockbridge, Massachusetts. While we are happy that Monica has found this next step on her path to a life of visionary calling, we miss her youthful spirit, her infectious enthusiasm, and her willingness to say yes to the unexpected adventure that comes knocking. We are reminded how volatile and mobile the life of a twenty-something can be - an observation to keep in mind as we work to create a retreat center in which twenty-something visionary contrarians in the making will want to play.

My childhood friend, Brooke Halpin, has also decided to move on, having been with Yggdrasil since the first Talking Council meeting in February 2012. A rare combination of artist (musician, composer, painter, author and lyricist) and businessman (promoter, and public relations executive), Brooke reminds me that maintaining the balance between mythopoetic dreaming and practical one-foot-in-front-of-the-other business acumen is essential for the success of a venture like this. While I have my own business experience (having just retired from a successful twenty years buying and selling college textbooks), I will miss Brooke's common sense, hardy good humor at the absurdity of trying to create something viable in a broken world, and ability to call a spade a spade. Thankfully, I have his number and an invitation to call him any time.

Last - but hardly least - my loving partner Sara Firman is soon to depart to become an aquatic bodywork specialist at Vana Retreat Center in the foothills of the Himalayas. Sara has looked long and hard these past six years for the right opportunity to find her way back to her creative passion - helping others heal body and soul through immersion in water. My heart sings that she has finally found the right venue - a place where she can ply her healing art without compromising her integrity - even though I will miss her more than words can say. Neither one of us dreamed the right opportunity would be halfway around the world, but that is sometimes how life's mystery unfolds. But Sara had a [breakthrough](#) in our last Yggdrasil workshop, and now she is moving forward with her life. This is as it should be.

Meanwhile, aside from my personal loss, Sara will be greatly missed at Yggdrasil, where she has been essential to the evolution of the vision from the start - an irreplaceable source of balance, grace, wisdom, clarity and support. Throughout this process, knowing that she always had my

back has allowed me to move forward with greater confidence and buoyancy. I know she is still there for me, but it will not be the same.

So - as winter moves into spring, I peer out from my dreaming hibernation with some trepidation, but also with a great deal of faith that the creative muse that has brought us this far will take us forward. We're hoping that the website will create new interest in what we are doing - and bring new Talking Council members into the inner circle. We look forward to this year's workshops, soon to enter the more serious planning stages. We've all had and continue to have intriguing and challenging life experiences that add to the mix of who we are and what we have to offer in the days ahead. The Mystery is not lacking in richness, or full vibrancy, even if it never is exactly what we expect or hope it might be.



The Voice

by Maurice Manning

*I heard it first when
mainly trees were in me.*

*Beneath a tree one day -
treesome - I learned listening. Listen,*

*It's shadowy inside a tree,
see, silent - silent green - okay?*

Life Will Rush In: A Call to Adventure

by Sara Firman

When I came to live with Joe in our Ozark forest, I didn't know much about the healing power of trees. In those first months I spent a lot of time alone, surrounded and protected (or so it felt) by the trees. I wrote poems about the way in which they 'spoke' through the wind or the ice or the play of light. The poem above by Maurice Manning captures how that listening experience was.

Then suddenly, the 'silent green' was broken. Joe and I found ourselves thrown into the task of helping the forest recover from an inland storm that wreaked havoc on our haven. The experience made more tangible for me the value of trees. It was natural I think that, as we began to see hope for the forest's survival, Joe had a vision for a school-retreat-community inspired by the World Tree or Yggdrasil.

Though the connection with trees for Yggdrasil Retreat is as much mythopoetic as literal, both go hand-in-hand. Some people have a fear of forests perhaps because they are the places where the wild things are, sometimes shadowy and not always comfortable. Forests are the perfect environment for facing our personal and collective shadows and for daring to be lost for a while. I can attest to that.

Escape

by D. H. Lawrence

*When we get out of the glass bottles of our ego,
and when we escape like squirrels turning in the
cages of our personality
and get into the forests again,
we shall shiver with cold and fright
but things will happen to us
so that we don't know ourselves.*

*Cool, unlying life will rush in,
and passion will make our bodies taut with power,
we shall stamp our feet with new power
and old things will fall down,
we shall laugh, and institutions will curl up like
burnt paper.*

Yggdrasil is for souls Joe has called 'visionary contrarians' and for those who have witnessed the woundedness in our human culture. These are described well in this poem by D. H. Lawrence. I love it especially because it has fire and water in it, masculine and feminine, hot and cold. It talks about the extremes that can bring us into dynamic balance or 'sacred balance'.

The workshops we've started developing through Yggdrasil seek ways to a sensitive state of balance inside ourselves that allows us then to respond to situations like the storm I mentioned, or community strife, or unexpected changes of any kinds. They are intended to be practical springboards back to the world work each of us has to offer in our own unique ways.

I did not expect my own springboard to come along right now but it has, and I am taking the plunge. I have been beckoned from our Ozark forest home to another forested place halfway around the world in the Himalayan foothills. Both are ancient lands. Though happily and thoroughly engaged in forest ways, I never did cease yearning for the warm waters of the healing bodyway I am trained in.

I doubt I would have found the courage for this next adventure without the wise support of Joe, and my time of retreat among the trees. Instead of being on retreat myself I will be supporting that service for others at a newly opened eco-retreat. The place is named after the Hindu word for forest (Vana) since it is set in ancient sal forest and exotic orchards. There will be trees still. But half a

world away in northern India.

As a Founding Member I will stay in touch with what is going on with Yggdrasil and contribute in whatever ways I find I can. When Yggdrasil Retreat has its own forest ground with wild water nearby, I dream of being able to create a pool to share my aquatic bodywork in. I hope Yggdrasil will remain in the Ozarks or at least some other magical 'back hills' place where contrarians are best able to root themselves and thrive. I'll miss this Ozark life.

After supper Uncle Greene . . . began speaking of the Ozarks. 'Used to be a real happy land for us outlaws,' he recalled. 'But for us reformed sons of bitches no country ain't no great sight better than no other country . . . But I still say . . . that whichever the country, hit's the back hills that stay interestin' and closest to everlasting' . . .'

Charles Morrow Wilson in *The Bodacious Ozarks*



Yggdrasil's Birthchart

by Graywolf

The other piece of Yggdrasil magic that took place this winter in these Ozark back hills was a series of Skype calls with Talking Council member Genevieve Vierling - tucked away her own Sierra Nevada back hills sanctuary - about the birthchart for this venture. [Genevieve](#) and I are both astrologers, so it was fun to talk shop and peer beneath the obvious into the inner workings of the cosmos set in motion at our birth two years ago. Sara - who has been a student of my [Astropoetic School](#) - joined us both to learn, and to provide valuable "beginner's" insight.

As some of you may know, the birthchart can provide a point of entry into a deeper understanding of the essence of a venture like Yggdrasil, and at the same time suggest a viable timetable for its evolution. In our conversation about the chart, we took a look at both dimensions of Yggdrasil's astrological signature. In this newsletter, I want to share a bit of that with you, keeping astrological jargon to a minimum.

We began by exploring five possible moments in which Yggdrasil could have been born. The first was the moment in the Utah desert that I had my vision. The next three were three different incarnations of the vision statement, and the last was the first Talking Council. We finally settled on the middle revision of the vision statement, which represented the culmination of a co-creative

process between Sara and I, basically joining my vision of a school with hers of a retreat center – although there is more to it than that. There was a radical change between the first version of the vision statement and the joint vision statement; not so much change between the second and third revisions.

Of the five possible charts, this was the only one that had a waxing Moon. As Genevieve pointed out in the conversation, a waxing Moon is important to a new venture because it gives it more room to grow and expand. Yggdrasil was born during the Crescent Moon phase – a point in the cycle that gives the venture a healthy momentum, a certain contagious level of enthusiasm, and an innate capacity to manifest whatever we envision is possible – albeit often through a process of trial and error. So far, this has been quite true to form.

This chart has Mars retrograde just about to set on the western horizon and Venus just about to rise on the eastern horizon. Since “men are from Mars and women from Venus,” this is a beautiful astrological description of Yggdrasil’s focus on creating Sacred Balance between the Divine Masculine and the Divine Feminine. Mars retrograde setting represents the Wounded Masculine, about to take a hero’s journey through the Underworld that will connect it more deeply to its mythopoetic roots, while Venus in Pisces rising suggests a celebration of the Feminine – especially the Feminine attributes of deep caring and compassion, relationship to the Divine, and the interconnectedness of all of life.

Out of the blue, Genevieve suggested that Quan Yin was the presiding deity over this particular Venus rising. This leap of intuitive faith was confirmed in a rather uncanny way at our last Talking Council meeting, when Talking Council member Nia Kallhof had a vision of Quan Yin in the clouds, with her serpent/dragon in attendance in a morning meditation, on her way back to the Ozarks before our meeting.

Putting these synchronicities together, I couldn’t help but feel that in our attempt at helping heal the Wounded Masculine – the hierarchical, exploitative system that is so wounding to other people and the more-than-human world – we can call upon the energy of Quan Yin to foster a culture that is more caring and compassionate, and based upon a greater sense of interconnection to the Whole Web of Life. Perhaps in the kind of way that only a postmodern venture like Yggdrasil could entertain, Quan Yin is the Feminine counterpart to Odin’s mentorship of the Divine Masculine in Yggdrasil’s process.

In any case, this signature opposition speaks to the idea that everything that happens and will happen in relation to Yggdrasil is the outcome of a dialogue between the Masculine and the Feminine, an ongoing conversation between visionary contrarians who don’t necessarily start on the same page. Sometimes it may even be difficult to find a common language with which to begin the conversation, but with commitment, persistence, and the willingness to listen to diverse points of view with mutual respect, the conversation can lead to something that is more than the sum of its parts. This is a challenge, but one out of which can come something “incredible” – as has already happened with the planning of the Sacred Balance and Tracking the Soul workshops we did last year, and on a smaller scale, the year before.

In addition to the Mars-Venus opposition, Yggdrasil's chart takes place near the mid-point of the Jupiter-Saturn cycle. Astrologers consider the Jupiter-Saturn cycle – which takes about 20 years – as a measure of the cultural zeitgeist, or the vibrational tone of the times. Like Mars and Venus, Jupiter and Saturn in this chart sit directly opposite each other and form a strong pattern (called a t-square) with the Sun – which is the central focus of any chart. The Sun is in the 11th house of community and cultural evolution in the sign of the visionary contrarian (Aquarius).

The beginning of the next Jupiter-Saturn cycle is in December 2020. The new cycle begins in the same place in the sky as the Sun in Yggdrasil's chart – suggesting that within 7 years, if we rise to the occasion with everything we have to bring to it, Yggdrasil could well become a focal point for the outworking of the next cultural cycle. By then, with a little bit of luck and lot of hard work, Yggdrasil could perhaps even be up and running as an actual retreat center on the ground.

Since our inception, we have been in a phase of our process in which we have been finding out who we are as a group and what we have to offer, proving to ourselves – primarily through the workshop development process – that we have something of substance and value to offer the rest of the world. This phase was marked astrologically by the movement of the progressed Moon through our 2nd house and into the earthy sign of Taurus.

This year, with the launch of the website and our promotional efforts in relation to our workshops, we are moving into a new phase of our process in which the focus will be getting the word out, and expanding our base of support. This process will likely begin to intensify in the spring of 2015 and will be our focus for the next 3 years. Astrologically, this new phase coincides with the movement of our progressed Moon into the 3rd house and then into the sign of Gemini, associated with communication and outreach. Throughout this 3-year period, we will also continue to develop and offer our workshops, and hopefully through our workshops, begin to attract more people into our extended community of support and interest.

By spring of 2017 (according to the movement of the progressed Moon into the 4th house of our birthchart and then into the home-based sign of Cancer), we will be ready to plant Yggdrasil on the ground. By then, we should have enough of a base of support to draw upon for financial investment, a core group of people who actually want to live in the community at Yggdrasil, a clearer sense of where in the world Yggdrasil wants to be, and a more detailed plan for a retreat center that we can then begin to manifest in a brick and mortar sort of way. This will be the beginning of our building phase. While nothing astrological is inevitable, we feel excited to have a working template to which we can apply our visionary anticipations, hard work, and co-creativity.

I Will Not Die an Unlived Life

by Dawna Markova

I will not die an unlived life.

*I will not live in fear
of falling or catching fire.*

*I choose to inhabit my days,
to allow my living to open me,
to make me less afraid,
more accessible;
to loosen my heart
until it becomes a wing,
a torch, a promise.*

*I choose to risk my significance,
to live so that which came to me as seed
goes to the next as blossom,
and that which came to me as blossom,
goes on as fruit.*



Calling All Potential Talking Council Members

Perhaps ours is a grand mythopoetic adventure you would like to join, and a vision you would like to help us manifest. If after reading this newsletter and spending some time on our website, you feel the call, we would be delighted to consider making a space for you on the Talking Council. We currently have room for three, possibly four new members.

Although we are always guided by our vision, Yggdrasil is a co-creative effort that continues to evolve as various members of the Talking Council are inspired to contribute their creative passion, professional expertise, time, energy and committed effort to move the vision forward. The Talking Council itself is an evolving mix of diverse individuals each of whom brings something unique to the whole, and all of whom together work from a wide range of backgrounds and worldviews to feel their way into consensus.

We meet once a month by Skype during the New Moon, and often between meetings to work out the details of a workshop or a project. It is both a rewarding and at times a challenging involvement.

If you feel a resonance with what we are doing, and are called to participate, we ask that you pursue your interest by taking the following steps:

- 1) Email us to [request our vision statement](#). Take some time to read it, think about it, and feel your connection to it.
- 2) Respond to the following questions:

- a) With what parts of the vision statement do you resonate? What parts feel foreign, uncomfortable, or contrary to your own worldview?
 - b) What do you feel you would like to contribute to Yggdrasil?
 - c) What level of participation do you envision for yourself: talking council member, core resident faculty/staff, occasional visiting faculty, advisor, guest, student, volunteer, or intern?
 - d) Where is your own mythopoetic soul journey taking you? What is the next step in your journey?
 - e) What is your birth data: time, date, and place of birth?
- 3) Attend a Talking Council meeting.

If after going through this process, you still feel as though you want to join the Talking Council, let us know, and we will consider your application (your response to the questions in step 2) at our next Talking Council meeting. If the consensus of the existing Talking Council is that you would be a good fit, and add something of value, we will invite you to join. We ask for a minimum one-year commitment.

Or, if you just want to stay in touch, you can easily subscribe to [our quarterly newsletter](#), subscribe to [our blog](#), like us on [Facebook](#), make a [donation](#), and/or attend a [workshop](#).

Whatever your level of interest, we look forward to getting to know you at the perfect juncture down the road. You can also help us to spread the word by:

- 1) Sharing this newsletter with select friends or acquaintances you sincerely believe will be interested.
- 2) Directing your friends to our [website](#).

Thanks for being part of our extended community and for helping us hold a space for the vision we carry.

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* – Summer Solstice 2014
Contributions in the spirit of Yggdrasil are welcome by June 14.

