



Talking Leaves: Volume 3, Issue 4

Winter Solstice 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 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 now also learn more about Yggdrasil through our website at yggdrasilretreat.com, and/or keep track of us on our Facebook page at www.facebook.com/yggdrasilretreat.



Contents

- Where the Waving Branches Meet – Steve Hayes
- Entering the Dreamtime
- Ceres, Bees and Colony Collapse Disorder – Graywolf
- The Dew That Falls From Yggdrasil
- All Around Us, Wherever We Are – Sara Firman
- Busy Bees Moving Forward into 2015
- Our Standing Invitation to You

Where the Waving Branches Meet

by Steve Hayes

*If you can't find me, don't despair
I will be where the waving branches meet
Waving and swirling and joining
With my fellow trees*

*I will be floating and gliding
Over the river
Beside the eagle
I will land at the river's bend
Where the turtles live
And I will submerge
Into the mud with them
All winter long*

*I will be wrestling and playing
With the Wolf and Tiger
Amongst the stars in the night sky*

*So if you can't find me don't despair
I am always here
As I have always been here
If you keep looking for me
You will find me
Where the waving branches meet
And if you join us
I will give you the abundance
Of a full loving heart
And the opportunity to live many lives
And learn endless lessons
Until you are wise beyond belief*

*And one day you will say
If you can't find me don't despair
I am everywhere
But you can find me
Where the waving branches meet*



Entering the Dreamtime

As much as possible, in our work with Yggdrasil, we want to be guided by Spirit, and not just do what we do because we think it is a good idea from the standpoint of our egos. As the old cliché goes, “the road to Hell is paved with good intentions,” and in no way do we want to go down that road. Instead, whatever we do and whatever Yggdrasil becomes, we want it to be from the highest and deepest possible connection with the *anima mundi*, or soul of the world, as embodied by Yggdrasil – The World Tree – Itself.



As it says at the very beginning of our Vision Statement:

Yggdrasil will be a sanctuary enabling us – its residents and guests – to feel our way into a deeper sense of being, out of which more meaningful doing might arise.

Given that we don't yet have a physical sanctuary, or any residents or guests, we are working instead to turn the Talking Council itself into a sanctuary where the brave and creative souls who are drawn to participate can feel our way into a deeper sense of being, out of which our co-creative collaborations can bear more succulent fruit.

Over the past three years, the Talking Council has begun to morph into a Working Council, with various committees involved in the pragmatic task of creating workshops, vehicles for social media promotion, webinars, mentorship programs, and other venues for interacting with our slowly growing extended community. To balance all this pragmatic doing, and to anchor what we are doing in the mythopoetic realm, we have started a Dream Council – where the focus is not on doing, but on being.

The purpose of the Dream Council is to all us each to feel our way more deeply into our personal

connection to the vision behind Yggdrasil, and as a group, into the dreamscape that is Yggdrasil. Yggdrasil is not just the World Tree. It is a map showing how the various realms of inner space are connected to this world – called Midgard or Middle Garden in the mythology of Yggdrasil. In this Dream Council, we want to explore the territory of this map.

The Dream Council is also an opportunity for us to practice being more fully present in the imaginal realm with all of our senses awake, and to experience more deeply and more clearly whatever is there to be experienced. Mostly, we are interested in the dreamscape itself: Where does the dream take place? How is this place connected to the dreamscape of other dreams we bring to the Council? Where is it located on the map of the imaginal realm that is Yggdrasil?

As we re-enter our dreams together, we are also interested in dialoguing with some of the characters in our dreams – particularly those that appear to be guides or teachers or helpers of some kind. Who are they? What is their relationship to Yggdrasil? What sort of help or guidance are they prepared to offer?

If we have strong feelings in a dream, we want to pay attention to those. What do these feelings tell us that our conscious minds don't already know, or don't want to know, or aren't quite yet prepared to consider? How can we allow ourselves to be moved by these feelings into a deeper relationship with Yggdrasil? Or perhaps, what sort of resistance do these feelings suggest might be getting in the way of a deeper involvement?

Lastly, we may be somewhat interested in what is actually happening in the dream – mostly with the intent of taking whatever suggestions are there for meaningful actions in this realm or creating ceremonies or rituals that can deepen our Yggdrasil experience.

This is grand experiment, and like the vision of Yggdrasil itself, we can't ultimately say where it is going. After two Dream Councils, however, I can say that it is a fascinating process. After we choose a dream to work with, Talking Council member Steve Hayes leads us into a hypnotic induction, so that we can do this dreamwork within a trance state somewhere between waking state and dreaming. As part of the induction, he invokes the presence of whatever guides, angels, totem animals, and/or helpers in the unseen realms are prepared to join us for this meeting. Then Talking Council member Genevieve Vierling guides us into a group dream re-entry, and facilitates our process as it unfolds spontaneously and unpredictably.

Entering a dream together as a group is a bit like going on a field trip to the imaginal realm, where anything can happen. Not only have we gained valuable insights, and experienced the same sense of adventure as any traveler to a foreign land, but we have experience a noticeable shift in energy within the group, a mysterious transformation of being in the moment itself. Often what emerges from the experience is a deeper sense of connection to the vision, a clearer sense of direction for the work of the Talking Council, and an exciting awareness of synchronicities connecting our waking state lives to the mythopoetic realm in which Yggdrasil and our participation in Yggdrasil is rooted.

In our first Dream Council, for example, we explored a dream called Bees and Cross Pollination, in which a mysterious woman appeared surrounded by bees, who on closer examination appeared to be an extension of her skin. One Dream Council member was reminded of the bee woman, Madrone in Starhawk's book, *The Fifth Sacred Thing* – whose way of being seemed to embody the very thing we strive for at Yggdrasil:

Within her own body flowed rivers of scent and taste, and suddenly she knew them in a way even she, a healer, never had before – knew the scents her sweat could produce and what each signified and how they could be messages and conversations and offerings . . . Bees hummed lazily around her; their sound was now like music to her, operas and symphonies and oratorios, and at the same time like a crowd of gossiping friends, telling her everything she needed to know.

Several Dream Council members felt connected to this bee woman and her partner by some inexplicable thread of ancestral lineage. And I noted an unexpected piece of synchronicity between the work of the Dream Council on this dream and a blog post I was writing at the time about Ceres, Bees and Colony Collapse Disorder. Bees, it turns out, were sacred to Ceres, and perhaps in some way connected to Yggdrasil's very own bee woman/goddess in the mythopoetic realm.



Who knows? The rational mind struggles to make sense of these things, while the dreaming body feels the truth flowing beneath and within the imagery as a vital life force, and feasts upon the sweetness of its honey-like nectar. At Yggdrasil, we are finding great nourishment in the feast to fortify us for the road ahead.

Ceres, Bees and Colony Collapse Disorder

by Graywolf

The following piece is Part 10 of a 13-part blog series entitled "[Ceres, Climate Change and the Bardo State](#)" – an extension of an article originally published in the Aug/Sept 2014 issue of *The Mountain Astrologer*



According to Jungian scholar Erich Neumann, agriculture (Ceres' domain) was originally the natural outgrowth of a deep psychic identification of humans with all of Life (Erich Neumann, *The Great Mother: An Analysis of the Archetype*, Tr. Ralph Manheim, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1963, p. 262):

Because originally human life was so strongly affected by its participation mystique with the outside world that stone, plant and man, animal and star, were bound together in a single stream, one could always transform itself into another. Men and gods are born of trees and buried in trees; men can turn into plants; the two realms are so close together that one can merge with the other at any time. Man has achieved little independence and is still close to the maternal womb. This proximity to the womb is not only the cause of frequent mythical transformations of men into plants but also of the magic by which human beings – and at first precisely women – attempted to influence the growth of plants.

At the center of this magical practice of agriculture – first conducted from within a state of participation mystique – was the bee, according to Neumann, associated with the Great Goddess in general, but above all with Demeter, Artemis and Persephone. The bee was considered an embodiment of the Feminine potency of nature, and the beehive, the perfect prototype of human society, modeling the laws of nature in action. In addition, the virginal priestesses of Demeter were called “bees.” It was believed that honey came from the Moon – itself a beehive, whose bees were the stars. Bees were the link, not just between the plant and animal kingdoms, nor between

humans and the rest of creation, but also between the Earth and the cosmos.

Today we no longer live in a world governed by participation mystique. This mystique – and the mythological imagination that turns ordinary everyday life into sacred magic – has been supplanted by science, a rational measurement of objective facts. Science, however, is no less in awe of the bee (The Importance of Bees in Nature,” UN Food and Agriculture Organization FAQ, <http://ftp.fao.org/docrep/fao/012/i0842e/i0842e04.pdf>):

Bees and most flowering plants have developed a complex interdependence during millions of years . . . Without bees there would be no flowering plants, and without flowering plants there would be no bees . . . The only way to constantly mix the genes for the plants is by cross-pollination, where pollen from one plant is transported by bees to another so that the offspring become genetically different. In that way, there is a greater chance for at least some of the offspring to survive in the competition of life. In this we find the bees as one of the most important factors.

The U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization notes that 71 of the 100 crops that provide 90% of human food are pollinated by bees (David Jolly, “Europe Bans Pesticides Thought Harmful to Bees,” *The New York Times*, April 29, 2013, <http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/30/business/global/30iht-eubees30.html>). Clearly, whether considered mythopoetically or scientifically, bees are fairly essential to the vitality and continuity of plant and human life on Earth.

So essential are bees, in fact, that it is easy to imagine that one way the goddess Ceres/Demeter could show her displeasure at the rape and abduction of her daughter Persephone by humans run amok would be to remove her bees from the natural order. Doing so would severely diminish the fertility of the Earth, put the human food supply in jeopardy, and easily cause widespread famine in a world of increasing population.

As the Age of Ceres dawns, this in fact, is beginning to happen. In 2006 – the same year that Ceres was promoted to the status of dwarf planet by the International Astronomical Union – beekeepers began reporting losses of 30-90% of their hives. USDA notes that this is not the first time that beekeepers have faced such losses, but acknowledges that overall the total number of managed hives has decreased by 50% in the last 70 years (“Honey Bees and Colony Collapse Disorder,” USDA, <http://www.ars.usda.gov/News/docs.htm>). While the USDA does not associate this loss with a rise in the use of synthetic pesticides, the time frame is identical – beginning with the widespread use of DDT immediately following World War II. The USDA does cautiously advise, “The best action the public can take to improve honey bee survival is not to use pesticides indiscriminately”.

The use of DDT was discontinued in the US in 1972, after the outcry raised by Rachel Carson ten years earlier in *Silent Spring*. Manufacture of DDT continued in the US until the late 1970s. When the last manufacturing plant was dismantled in 1983, it was sold to a company in Indonesia, which continued to manufacture DDT and sell it around the world until 2009, when

Indonesia ratified the Stockholm Convention on Persistent Organic Pollutants. The Convention – which aims at phasing out a wide range of pesticides (including DDT), as well as PCBs, furans and dioxins – has been signed by over 176 nations as of 2011. The United States is not one of them (Patricia Muir, “A History of Pesticide Use,” Oregon State University, October 12, 2012, <http://people.oregonstate.edu/~muirp/pesthist.htm>).

Meanwhile, since DDT was banned in the US, the pesticide industry responded with the development of new pesticides – other organochlorines, organophosphates, carbamates, and pyrethroids – which were less persistent, more water soluble, and up to 40 times more acutely toxic than DDT (Ibid.). The amount of pesticides, herbicides, and insecticides applied annually has more than doubled in the last 50 years (Jorge Fernandez-Cornejo, et. al., “Pesticide Use in US Agriculture: 21 Selected Crops, 1960-2008,” USDA Economic Information Bulletin Number 124, May 2014, <http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/1424185/eib124.pdf>).

In addition, one of the concerns related to the increasing prevalence of GMO foods is the increased application of increasingly potent pesticides and herbicides to combat superweeds and insects immune to less toxic alternatives (“Pesticide use ramping up as GMO crop technology backfires: study,” *Reuters*: October 1, 2012, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/10/02/us-usa-study-pesticides-idUSBRE89100X20121002>). Corn and soybeans – two crops rapidly becoming dominated by GMO agriculture – are together responsible for over 60% of all pesticide and herbicide use in this country – with the amount of use increasing about 7-fold for corn and over 40-fold for soybeans in the last 50 years (Jorge Fernandez-Cornejo, et. al., “Pesticide Use in US Agriculture: 21 Selected Crops, 1960-2008,” USDA Economic Information Bulletin Number 124, May 2014, <http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/1424185/eib124.pdf>). In 2012, 40% of the sweet corn appearing on grocery shelves in the US – all without labeling of any kind – was designed by Monsanto not just to be ready to survive increased external application of toxic chemicals, but to internally produce its own pesticides (“Information on GMO Sweet Corn,” The Non-GMO Project, <http://www.nongmoproject.org/learn-more/sweetcorn/>).

While many of these pesticides are harmful to bees and other pollinators, of particular current concern is a class of pesticide known as neonicotinoids (“Study strengthens link between neonicotinoids and collapse of honey bee colonies,” Harvard School of Public Health Press Release, May 9, 2014, <http://www.hsph.harvard.edu/news/press-releases/study-strengthens-link-between-neonicotinoids-and-collapse-of-honey-bee-colonies/>). Developed in the 1980s by Shell Oil, and sold today mostly by Bayer CropScience and Syngenta, these chemicals are in widespread use around the world on a wide range of crops – including corn and soybeans, as well as rapeseed (used to make canola oil), cotton, sorghum, sugar beets, apples, cherries, peaches, oranges, berries, leafy greens, tomatoes, potatoes, cereal grains, nuts and wine grapes. Because of concerns about the affect of these pesticides on bees, the EPA has begun a review, which it expects to complete in 2018. Following a similar study already published by the European Food Safety Authority in early 2013, in which “a high risk was indicated or could not be excluded in relation to certain aspects of the risk assessment for honey bees for some of the authorized uses” (European Food Safety Authority, “Conclusion on the peer review of the pesticide risk assessment for bees for the active substance clothianidin,” EFSA Journal 2013; 11(1): 3066,

<http://www.efsa.europa.eu/en/efsajournal/doc/3066.pdf>), a 2-year moratorium was declared in the use of neonicotinoids in 15 countries.

Other factors besides excessive pesticide use may be involved in Colony Collapse Disorder, and some fear that an outright ban on neonicotinoids would only result in the development of even more toxic alternatives – a scenario that would continue the history of synthetic agriculture that got us to this point. Clearly with Colony Collapse Disorder, however, Ceres is challenging us to come up with a better idea. Past the current buzz about neonicotinoids, it is time in the Age of Ceres for us to return to a symbiotic form of agriculture that recognizes and holds sacred the interconnectedness of all of Life.

In the end, the future of our food supply and indeed the human species may ultimately depend on how well we can honor the bee, and the goddess she serves.



The Dew That Falls From Yggdrasil

from Chapter VII of *The Younger Edda* by Snorri Sturluson

Many fair places there are in heaven, and they are all protected by a divine defense. There stands a beautiful hall near the fountain beneath the ash. Out of it come three maids, whose names are Urd, Verdande and Skuld. These maids shape the lives of men, and we call them norns . . .

. . . it is said that the norns, that dwell in the fountain of Urd, every day take water from the fountain and take the clay that lies around the fountain and sprinkle therewith the ash, in order that its branches may not wither or decay. This water is so holy that all things that are put into the fountain become as white as the film of an eggshell. As is here said:

*An ash I know
High Yggdrasil;
A high, holy tree
With white clay sprinkled.
Thence come the dews
That fall in the dales.
Green forever it stands
Over Urd's fountain.*

The dew which falls on the earth from this tree men call honey-fall, and it is the food of bees...

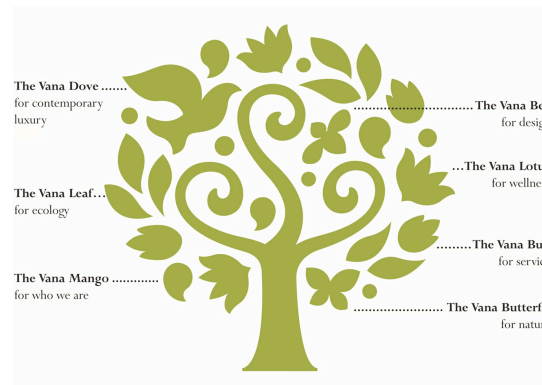


All Around Us, Wherever We Are, The More-than-human World is Waiting to be Noticed

by Sara Firman, reporting from India

I've been in the dreamscape of the Himalayan foothills for nine months and it is no less like a perpetual altered state. Peopled with colorful characters doing impossible, or at least unlikely, things; animals with a bottomless capacity to take a hard life as it comes, whose gentle eyes speak directly to me; and then the trees, more of them later; all overlooked by ancient and still youthful mountains out of which pour the muddy sacred waters.

Recently, the owner director of the new wellness retreat where I work issued the instruction: 'Please be careful not to indiscriminately hurt insects at the retreat. Where possible, move them and place them outside out of harms way. But do not kill them at all costs. The only exception being mosquitoes.' I am glad of this since my pool spaces (I'm an aquatic therapist), are watched over by huge spiders who come out when I am in session and observe.



The retreat's logo attracted me and landed me this job: a stylized mango tree in which you can find bee, butterfly, dove, leaf, bud, flower and mango. Each is a part of the retreat concept: bee, for example, stands for design. Since our director is not only a Sikh with Buddhist inclinations but also a super Virgo, the whole place has a beautifully simple somewhat monastic aesthetic. What I love most is that growing up through the design lines are many different trees, both old and newly planted.

This greening landscape, abutting native forest, is attracting increasing numbers and variety of birds and insects, such as dragonflies, which are an indicator of healthy nearby water just as mayflies are in the Ozarks (where I lived with Joe). I've started guiding silent walking meditations in an old mango orchard on the property. This involves repeating circuits of a path shaped like an infinity sign. Since the practice began, the trees, with their thick trunks like spreading hands, seem to be becoming radiant.

I am hopeful that whatever we give our attention to will flourish.

Busy Bees Moving Forward Into 2015

Aside from our foray into the realm of dreams, Yggdrasil is also moving forward with a number of projects of which the working bee would be proud. Aside from our workshops – [Returning the Inner Masculine and Feminine to Sacred Balance](#) and [Tracking the Soul](#), our [website](#) and [blog series](#), our [Facebook page](#), our [newsletter](#), our [Talking Council](#) and our [Dream Council](#), we are initiating several new projects that we hope will take more tangible shape in 2015:

Webinar Series – in order to introduce more people to Yggdrasil, we are developing a series of free interactive webinars. In this series, you will have the opportunity to meet our Talking Council members, ask questions, have a brief appetizing taste of the kind of experience you can expect to have at a workshop, and who knows, maybe be inspired to want more.

Mentoring Program – Many of us on the Talking Council already work with clients of one kind or another. As we explore the enticing differences in our various approaches to Yggdrasil's [Four Soul Tasks](#), we are developing a program of "soul mentoring" that bears Yggdrasil's stamp, and yet allows for a wide range of modalities and approaches to the Four Soul Tasks, into which some of our clients would quite naturally feed.

Business Plan – In anticipation that one day we will have an actual retreat center community to which students, guests, interns, and a revolving visiting faculty can come for short or extended stays, we are developing a detailed business plan for those with the resources, interest, and creative passion to participate in Yggdrasil as Co-Owner Investors.

Scouting Expedition – I am planning to travel to northern Europe next year to scout out possible locations for Yggdrasil, the actual physical School-Retreat. My focus will be the list of countries that wound up at the top of my location research – as shared in [Talking Leaves #10](#): Norway, Switzerland, Germany, Austria, and Sweden. I will have a loose itinerary but leave plenty of room for serendipity and divine inspiration to guide me.

As I see it, my role at Yggdrasil – aside from being the carrier of the vision – is to encourage the creative ideas of Talking Council members, who have an inspiration to move the vision forward.

Each of these ideas has been pollinated in 2014 by one or more Talking Council members, and with the force of the group intention behind it, find its way into bloom in 2015.

*Place a beehive on my grave
And let the honey soak through.
When I'm dead and gone,
That's what I want from you.
The streets of heaven are gold and sunny,
But I'll stick with my plot and a pot of honey.
Place a beehive on my grave
And let the honey soak through.*

Sue Monk Kidd, *The Secret Life of Bees*

Our Standing Invitation to You

Perhaps you would like to join us in this exciting adventure. 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](#).

The Talking Council 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. We ask for a minimum one-year commitment, and we have one opening left.

Or, if you just want to stay in touch, 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, we look forward to getting to know you at the perfect juncture down the road. 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 formed.

Keep an eye out for the next *Talking Leaves* – Spring Equinox 2015
Contributions in the spirit of Yggdrasil are welcome by March 13.

