



Talking Leaves: Volume 4, Issue 1

Spring Equinox 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 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.



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Welcome to Our New Talking Council Member – Julie Yeaman

In this issue of Talking Leaves, we are pleased to welcome our newest Talking Council member, Julie Yeaman into our circle. Julie was initially drawn to Yggdrasil after reading an article that Founder [Joe Landwehr](#) wrote about “[Ceres, Climate Change and the Bardo State](#),” then was inspired to peruse [the website](#) and our vision statement. In response to the vision statement, she said, “I felt as if you were describing my inner world, one that, at best, verbally, I can only circle around with other people, depending on their bent.” We’re happy to report that Julie is now circling around the vision of Yggdrasil with rest of us visionary contrarians, all of us “bent” toward the vision, naturally in very different ways.

About herself, Julie says:

I touched into the inner realms of spirit, as a youngster, during the 3 years that my family lived in the far north in Quebec. The outdoors was magic, but I also dreamed of having a little school, like the one I had seen when a neighbor’s door opened to reveal a classroom. Later I learned she was a Waldorf teacher. Nonetheless, a light had gone on.



My soul journey was re-kindled in 1968 while at university, and led me to travel to Europe and Morocco. While living in Paris, I experienced a spontaneous shamanic journey which revealed to me a world that was at once familiar, yet at the same time, entirely new, for I had no shared language around such an experience. During that same year I found my way to a Sivananda ashram in the Poconos, where I retreated for a year. Yoga, meditation, chanting, sacred texts and astrology, though entirely new at the time, resonated for me. I felt as if I had come home. The difficult part was leaving, which I knew I had to do. I had taken the teachings of the Bhagavad Gita to heart and knew I had karma yoga to do. But how?

My return to Canada led me to education, and I taught many grades in elementary and high school, weaving work in and out with raising a family, continuing my astrology and yoga, by learning, teaching and practicing. Many other spirit trails were followed as well. A house fire in 1997 led to a new path and in late 2000, with my husband Stewart’s firm and caring support, I opened [SpiritMatters Centre](#) on our 25 acre property, along the northern Mississippi River. Here I continue to teach, and we offer a number of small group retreats a year. The heart of my teaching lies in inspiring people to find their precious daimon within. It is my belief that when we connect to our soul purpose, we will find ourselves, as a collective, living in peace, joy, love and harmony.

If you’d like to join Julie and [the rest of us on the Talking Council](#), let us know. We’d love to hear from you. With the addition of one new member currently waiting to join us – whom you will meet in our next newsletter, 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.

From Our Blog: The Lost Art of Communication

The following article is Parts 1 and 2 of a new 12-part series now running on our blog.



At Yggdrasil's Mystery School/Retreat for Visionary Contrarians, our basic "curriculum" revolves around four basic soul tasks. The third of these is "inviting dialogue between diverse intelligences." Diverse intelligences can include beings of the more-than-human world with whom we share this planet – plants, animals, rocks, rivers, clouds, and mountains; and beings of the unseen realms – spirit guides, animal totems, characters in a dream. But most fundamentally, it includes other human beings.

Unless we can learn how to communicate with each other – across sometimes seemingly insurmountable barriers posed by the differences between us – then there is little hope that the human species will survive the damage that we are doing to the planet, its other inhabitants, and each other. As renowned physicist David Bohm wrote in his classic, *On Dialogue* – nearly 20 years ago now (David Bohm, *On Dialogue*, London, England and New York, NY: Routledge, 1996, p. 1):

During the past few decades, modern technology . . . has woven a network of communications which puts each part of the world into almost instant contact with all the other parts. Yet, in spite of this worldwide system of linkages, there is, at the very moment, a general feeling that communication is breaking down everywhere, on an unparalleled scale.

Since Bohm saw the early handwriting on the digital wall, email, cell phones, text messaging, Twitter, Facebook, Skype, and other conveniences of the Internet Age have made communication even more instantaneous than he imagined, and virtually unimpeded by barriers of time and space anywhere on the planet. Information and misinformation is omnipresent, just a Google search

away. Yet despite all this genuinely amazing technology, the evolution of our communication skills has not kept pace, and we seem to be mired in deepening trouble because of it.

Nations with different political ideologies, economic interests, or ethnicities routinely and easily descend into war with other nations, impatient with the lost art of diplomacy, much less any sincere attempt to see the conflict from the other's point of view. Within nations, differences between people lead to systemic patterns of sexism, racism, ageism, gross economic disparities, political gridlock, censorship, genocide, and other atrocities born of a failure to communicate.

Even within smaller groups and subcultures, minor differences can trigger irrational patterns of response that make genuine interaction awkward at best, impossible at worst. Divorce rates are high; isolated, bullied teenagers commit suicide; and the Supreme Court declares money to be speech – essentially all because we have forgotten what genuine communication is.

How did we get to this impasse, and what can we do about it? These are very large questions, and I won't pretend to have ultimate answers. But in this blog series, I want to explore some of the dimensions of good communication, and how they are an essential component of healing person and planet. If we are going to focus at Yggdrasil on the art of dialogue among diverse intelligences, then it will be helpful to start by getting clear about what exactly we mean by that.

Communication – the Quest for Common Ground

As noted by Bohm, the word communication – broken down to its Latin roots – means essentially “to make something common.” The general idea behind this definition is the ideal scenario in which there is a match between what is said and what is heard that yields common understanding.

As important as this obviously is to good communication – and as difficult as it sometimes is to achieve – I think there is a more fundamental sense in which making something common is essential. If the goal of communication is a better world for all – as it is within the context of Yggdrasil's third soul task – then we need to look a bit more deeply into what “making something common” really means from a soul-based perspective.

At its best, “making something common” begins – before anything at all is said – when two people are in agreement that what they both want out of their communication is an improved relationship, a common ground where it is possible to meet in agreement, and from there work together toward an outcome that benefits each other, as well as themselves. Or as the Sufi poet, Rumi once put it (Jelaluddin Rumi, “A Great Wagon,” *The Essential Rumi*, Tr. Coleman Barks, New York, NY: Quality Paperback Book Club, 1995, p. 36):

*Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing
and right doing there is a field.
I'll meet you there.
When the soul lies down in that grass
the world is too full to talk about.*

Paradoxically, when the world is too full to talk about – full with shared intentions for mutual wellbeing – that is when genuine communication can begin.

Although this sounds rather idealistic, I was privileged to witness it in action in the midst of what might have been an insurmountable impasse, where the intention was to find common ground. In the late 1980s, while living in Santa Fe, New Mexico, I had a job as conference coordinator at The Trinity Forum – a non-profit whose focus was creating dialogue between people on different sides of various political issues – using innovative techniques of mediation and conflict resolution.

One of the conferences I helped set up brought together a representative of the Sandinista government in Nicaragua, a Contra leader, and two US ambassadors of different political views. The conference took place toward the end of the civil war in Nicaragua during the Reagan administration, when the US was actively opposing the socialist regime of Daniel Ortega. While it can be imagined that those locked in battle and their sympathizers would face insurmountable barriers in finding common ground, in practice, the mere assumption that there must be some – which framed the atmosphere of the conference – made it possible.

The discussion was heated at times. Old perceptions – rooted in mistrust and the bad blood of past history – were slow to dissolve, and agreement was hard to come by. But as the participants got to know each other and were able to feel the sincerity of their shared desire for what was best for their country, something shifted. Although differences remained, the shared experience of working together to find common ground left them with more than they had when they started.

Though we may have divergent political views with those who see the world differently than we do; as human beings we all want our basic rights – the freedom of self-determination; the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. Though we may have different religious beliefs, we all crave a sense of the sacred; to be lifted up and inspired; to believe in something worth believing in. Though we may be born of different genders; races; ethnicities; cultural backgrounds; or socio-economic status; we are all born, live, and die. We all seek to make creative use of our talents and abilities, seek ways to feed self and family that do not compromise our values, struggle with lessons related to love, make mistakes, and if we are lucky, learn a few valuable lessons along the way that we can pass on to those who come after us. We are human beings and in the end, regardless of our differences, we share the common ground of our humanity.

Where the mutual intention exists to communicate, this is enough to create a space in which it can happen – a field where “the world is too full to talk about.” It is full because this common ground of humanity is huge – tied not just to the here and now, but to our human ancestors, and beyond them, to the animal kingdom out of which our ancestors emerged, the plant kingdom that fed the animals, the minerals that nourished the plants; and the cosmos out of which the solar system gelled that allowed stardust to coalesce into the physical planet on which minerals nourished plants, plants fed animals, and animals evolved to become the ancestors whose lives made possible our being here now.

With this common ground beneath us, we can reach out to a future that will still be viable for our children, our children's children, and whatever unimagined life forms may evolve from our temporary human presence here.

In this vast field too full to talk about, we will find lots to share worth sharing.

*If you like what you have read in this excerpt,
you can sign up [here](#) to receive each new post "hot off the presses" directly in your email box.*



Are You One of Us?

by Graywolf

In [Talking Leaves #12](#), I wrote about Yggdrasil's [Dream Council](#), a new project to parallel the work of "doing" by the Talking Council, with a focus on "being." More specifically, the purpose of the Dream Council is to allow each of us 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 - our own version of Rumi's field. The work of the Dream Council has been absolutely fascinating and has begun to reveal various themes and threads of direction that confirm our desire to be guided in our shared venture with spiritual assistance from the unseen mythopoetic realms.

In one of our early Dream Councils, working with Dream Council member Steve Hayes' dream "Subversives or Contrarians?" a question arose about what values we shared. Given that we are all visionary contrarians, and had become aware of just what a motley assortment of souls we were through a series of Talking Council meetings, we found ourselves wondering, "What is it that binds us together as a group?" Other than the vision of Yggdrasil - with which we all identified on some level - and the personal connection of most Talking Council members to me, each of which

has arisen through very different circumstances, we were curious about what bottom-line values shaped our worldview. “Where is our common ground?” we wondered.

Just before she left to take a job in India, Co-Founder [Sara Firman](#) had discovered an online test called [Personal Values Assessment](#) that seemed a pretty good place to start a discussion about values. The test – developed by the [Barrett Values Centre](#), an international organization “committed to furthering and deepening the collective understanding of the evolution of human consciousness” – measured such things as how service-oriented you are, how much making a difference in the world means to you, how important it is to feel as though you are living a meaningful life, and other dimensions of what I consider to be a fairly enlightened model of human nature. While all models are rooted in certain assumptions and no map is the same as the territory, I thought that this particular map had merit, and was worth exploring.

The model proposed by the Barrett Values Centre focuses on seven primary types of values common to all people, grouped on three primary levels of consciousness.

Self-Interest: All human beings seek to satisfy their basic needs for security and safety, love and belonging, and a sense of self-esteem. No one alive is immune to the everyday demands posed by these needs – which are intrinsic to the experience of being human. Only when these very personal needs are met to a reasonable level of satisfaction, can we begin to consider a life that extends beyond us to touch the greater world in which we live, and to be of service to the planet, each other, and the good of the Greater Whole.

Transformation: In this area, according to the Barrett Values Centre, we let go of our fears, establish a sense of personal authority, and choose to live more intentionally according to our values. This is also the area, where to use Yggdrasil’s terminology, we “tend the sacred wound,” and do the hard work of transmuting our pain and suffering into something positive that we can then give back to the world. To live a meaningful life, we all must feel as though we are growing in our capacity to face the challenges of life and learn from them, while incorporating what we learn into our way of being in the world.

Common Good: In this area, we find meaning and purpose through our striving to make the world a better place, lead a life of self-less service, and find a deeper level of motivation and commitment, out of which comes the capacity to make a difference. Or again, to speak in terms of Yggdrasil’s worldview, this is where we begin to “cultivate a sense of visionary calling” and pursue that calling as our contribution to the wellbeing of the world.

In exploring this model, I asked each member of the Talking Council to take the survey, and then collated the results. As it turns out, based on our composite score, by a factor of 2 or 3, we are greatly focused as a group on contributing to the Common Good; and then to a far lesser extent, about equally focused on seeking Transformation and satisfying our Self-Interest.

As I interpret this, we are a group of people mostly in our 50s and 60s, who have spent a lifetime working on ourselves and creating lives that mostly work for us. At this stage of our lives, these

concerns are not generally front and center for us. We are, instead, largely interested in giving something back to the world, making a difference, and making the world a better place. Doing this is what is most meaningful to us, and we have come together in part, because Yggdrasil provides a vehicle through which this shared desire can potentially be realized.

In the composite, our 10 strongest individual values are:

- 1) **Well-Being:** Throughout very rich and full lives, we have focused on the quality of life that we are leading, not so much in terms of material prosperity or by the standards that a consumer culture imposes on us all, but by paying attention to what it is that makes life worth living, and then building our lives around that.
- 2) **Creativity:** We have all, each in very different ways, been highly creative in the ways we have chosen to live, and in expressing ourselves, given an external voice to the deepest promptings of our soul. As visionary contrarians, we insist on doing it our own way, and on adding something new to the mix.
- 3) **Making a Difference:** None of us is here to simply take up space. We all want to have a positive impact on the world in which we live, and make it a better place than it was when we got here. To our great mutual inspiration, this desire persists even as many of us enter what might traditionally be called “retirement.”
- 4) **Compassion:** We are caring people, who actively reach out to others to help share with them the joys and sorrows of the human predicament.
- 5) **Continuous Learning:** We all believe on some deep level of our being that life is for learning, and we continue to be curious about areas of the unknown to which we are drawn. What better quality could there be in common upon which to create a mystery school?
- 6) **Perseverance:** We are all in it for the long haul. We have all been tested in the crucible of Life; we have all made an earnest effort to learn from our difficulties and challenges, and then to bring back what we learn to share with others.
- 7) **Environmental Awareness:** Many of us live in wild and natural settings, and deeply value our ongoing conversation with the more-than-human world. We all feel the urgency of integrating the human species into the larger web of Life, and that this urgency underscores the importance of what we are doing with Yggdrasil.
- 8) **Family:** Many of us are motivated by our love for children, spouses, parents, and by the ancestors – known and unknown. Ultimately, we all feel ourselves to be part of a larger family that includes the plants, the animals, and beings in the unseen realms, a network of kinship that sustains and supports us through difficult times.

- 9) **Friendship:** Likewise, we are drawn to other kindred beings with whom we have a resonant relationship, shared values and interests, and who become our extended spiritual family – the basis for the kind of community that we envision supporting the school and retreat center at the heart of Yggdrasil’s vision.
- 10) **Integrity:** Whatever we do, we insist upon it being an authentic expression of our values, of what we care most deeply about, and who we are in our innermost heart of hearts.

Our conversation about the results of this revealing survey is just getting started. There is much to explore. As part of an ongoing process of sharing our lives with each other, as well as working together on Yggdrasil-related projects, we want to use this information to improve the quality of our interaction, and to focus our co-creative synergies in ways that optimize the similarities and differences between us.

Do you recognize yourself in this brief overview? If so, then you may want to consider joining us. You can begin by simply starting a conversation. Drop us a line, and let us know what you are thinking. We want to hear from you. You can read about who we are, and get a sense of where we’ve been on the [bio page](#) of our website. Then you can introduce yourself to us. Who are you? What are you passionate about? What gives a sense of meaning and purpose to your life? If you send your thoughts to me at jlandwehr@yggdrasilretreat.com, I will share them with the group. Then, one day, we may meet you at a [workshop](#) or webinar, or who knows, perhaps even joining the school/retreat center community that we create out of the common ground between us.

Making Friends With the Other You @ the Sacred Balance Workshop: May 1-4, 2015



On May 1-4, Yggdrasil will host our second [Returning the Inner Masculine and Inner Feminine to Sacred Balance](#) workshop. In this workshop, participants will have the opportunity to look at the

ways in which our cultural conditioning around gender has wounded us, and how we can begin to heal those wounds.

It is not news that we live in a patriarchal culture built around the needs and rights of men, and treat women as second-class citizens.

As noted by Senator Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY) in [a recent blog post](#):

Despite being 51% of the population (and 53% of the voting population,) women currently make up just 17% of Congress, 23.6% of state legislatures and women hold just 6 governorships. Shockingly, the United States is 78th in the world when it comes to female representation in our federal government.

According to [a recent article](#) in the New York Times, female doctors and surgeons earn 71% of men's wages; female financial specialists make 66% of what men in the same occupation earn; and women who are lawyers and judges make 82%; and within other professions – especially those considered to be at the high end of our cultural scale – a similar disparity prevails.

Over 40 years after the Supreme court decision known as Roe Vs. Wade gave women the right to an abortion, the ACLU has declared “a wide-range of policy efforts designed to place restrictions on women's health care and erode protections for women and their families” to be [a War on Women](#).

These are just three of the ways in which our culture devalues women, and I am certainly not the first to point out these gross cultural imbalances. What is less often discussed, however, is the psychological impact of a culture built on gender imbalance, and how that impacts men and women alike.

It is no secret, for example, that in our culture, we stress outer achievement, reward ambition and aggressive competition, mythologize the conquering lone wolf hero in any field who dominates and stands alone, and promote a consumer ethic in which he (or she) who has the most toys wins.

We often admire the ambitions of movers and shakers, right or wrong, while ignoring or even shunning those who quietly refuse to participate in anything that compromises their integrity. Those who point out that “the emperor has no clothes,” or attempt to hold government, business or religious institutions to high standards of truth telling and integrity are often castigated, ostracized, or jailed.

Those who seek cooperation and community are labeled “liberal,” or “socialist,” or otherwise judged as weak. Those who prefer a life of service to one of self-aggrandizement are deemed fools.

We eye with suspicion and judge harshly those who admit they have issues (who doesn't), and earnestly seek help with them. Those who taken time out of a productive life to reflect, renew, and re-invent themselves are stigmatized.

We fail to value self-reflection; we fear the power of our emotions; we mistrust the imagination; and we pay lip service to religious ideals but go out of our way, as a culture, to discourage and in some cases outlaw actual spiritual experiences.

All of this is a great loss to our culture, and a source of wounding to us all. I would argue that most of these imbalances are a psychological reflection of the cultural devaluing of the Feminine by a patriarchal society, or what we at Yggdrasil sometimes refer to as [the Wounded Masculine](#). Anyone growing up in such a culture is shaped in ways that foster chronic imbalance.

Healing of these imbalances – for both men and women – is often a matter of fully embracing what archetypal psychologists call Feminine traits and abilities: the capacity to feel; to care and act with compassion; to communicate, cooperate, and do what best for the community; to cultivate a deeper relationship with the natural world; to dream and imagine; to nurture an inner life; to pay more creative attention to the quality of life; to value all of Life, not just one’s own. As a culture, these are the pathways to re-balancing ourselves and our world.

Some have difficulty entertaining the notion that there is such a thing as “masculine” or “feminine,” or that healing is a matter of “reclaiming the Feminine” – even though the ways of being mentioned above are those that traditionally came naturally to women of most cultures around the world. There are biological, psychological, and spiritual, as well as cultural reasons that this is so, and I explore some of these in my blog series [Seeking Sacred Balance](#). But I am not attached to labels. If they get in the way, I invite you to discard them.

However you conceptualize the awareness of what is missing in our culture, your own life, and your inner state of being, the important thing is to find your own way back into a place of balance with yourself. The important thing is to make friends with the Other You – the one that got cast aside, shamed, put in the closet, and never taken to the prom. If you are really brave, I would invite you to think in terms of courting the Inner Beloved the way you might pursue a relationship with a wallflower waiting to blossom under your touch. For in seeking sacred balance, you are in fact, pursuing a deeper, more intimate relationship, with yourself.

The first step is always to become aware of what needs your attention, your caring, your tender loving care. In any life, pain and suffering, stress, chronic problems, depression, accidents, incidents and breakdowns of any kind can be an indication that something is out of balance. Whatever that is for you can be an invitation to seek Sacred Balance between some part of yourself that was labeled “OK” and another part of you that was labeled “Not OK.”

This can take an almost infinite number of forms, which each of us has on some level been conditioned to believe is “normal.” I assure you, it is not.

It is perhaps what a culture that is itself out of balance might consider normal, but the mere fact that in your better moments you are capable of questioning that is an opening for you to take the next brave step in your own life toward meaningful change and self-empowerment. Your culture

will advise you to take a pill and keep going with your particular version of the full-tilt boogie. Inside, however, you already know that this is leaning in the wrong direction, as the full-tilt boogie is what has imbalanced you in the first place.

The Other You – whoever that is – wants something other than what you are already doing. The Other You wants your attention. The Other You wants more space in a life of imbalance to which the antidote – whatever it might be – is certainly not more of the same.

My advice is this. Be a contrarian. Stop. Take a time out. Come to [the Sacred Balance workshop](#), where we will make a space for you to find out what the Other You wants, and encourage you to experiment in giving that to them as a gift. At the workshop, we will invite you to explore something different, something new, something perhaps that the world has never seen before, because it has been waiting for you to discover it, own it, and then share it with the world. No one can tell you where the place of balance is for you, or even how to conceptualize what the Other You is feeling. But at this workshop, we will support you in finding your own way into relationship with the Other You, and will cheer you on as you do. Inner Masculine. Inner Feminine. Call it what you will. We just want to hear you name It for yourself, live It and be It.

Won't you join us? We will hold a space for both you and the Other You.

Be a good friend to yourself and sign up [here](#).



Our Standing Invitation to You

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* – Summer Solstice 2015
Contributions in the spirit of Yggdrasil are welcome by June 14.

