



Talking Leaves: Volume 3, Issue 3

Autumn 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 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

- The Benefits of Liking Our Facebook Page
- Tracking the Soul Workshop
- Welcome to Our New Talking Council Member – Steve Hayes
- The Forest as a Model for Community – Graywolf
- From the Website: Seeking Sacred Balance
- One Must Have Great Feeling – Sara Firman
- Our Standing Invitation to You

The Benefits of Liking Our Facebook Page



Six months ago, we launched our website and social media presence. While I can't yet say Yggdrasil Retreat is a household name (and as contrarians, if it ever became one, we'd have to do something about that), I can say that those who are meant to find us are starting to. If you are reading this now, you are one of them. In this phase of our development, we are reaching out to those who resonate with our vision – our extended community – in as many ways as we can: currently through this newsletter, through our [website](#) and [blog](#), through [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

Through each of these media, we will share a slightly different aspect of our project. By subscribing to our newsletter, you will get a more inside look at our process, information about upcoming events, and timely articles on topics of relevance to our multi-dimensional vision – whether that be the art of dreaming, or the ongoing quest for a suitable location for our retreat, or cutting edge science that shows how various creatures in the more-than-human world communicate, create and express their unique innate intelligence. Some of these articles will be exclusive to newsletter subscribers and not available on the website. On the website, our vision is laid out in detail, while occasional blog series will explore the same general range of topics covered in the newsletter, but in more depth. On our [Facebook page](#), we will take a lighter approach.

We will post ongoing reminders of [upcoming Events](#), often with flash discounts for those who respond within a limited time frame. We will post an Events page for each workshop, webinar, or other offering. Generally by following our page, you will be among the first to know when something new is posted.

We will share links to blog series on the website, as new installments are posted.

We will share inspiring quotes from Founder [Joe Landwehr's books](#), and other sources that give us hope and point us toward a more humane, more ecologically balanced, and more spiritually evolved culture.

We will ask provocative questions that invite you to think and feel more deeply into the life of a visionary contrarian – whatever that might mean for you.

From time to time, we will also let you know about other organizations that we feel are doing good work in helping our planet become a healthier place to be.

If you like what we are doing, please Like our [Facebook page](#), and if you really like what we are doing, please tell your friends to Like it, too.

The more people that find our way to our community, the more likely it is that our community will find a place not just in cyberspace, but on this great green Earth – a place where one day you may want to go to reinvent yourself and the world to which you return.

Our 3rd Annual Tracking the Soul Workshop

November 14 – 18, 2014
at [Hearthaven Women's Retreat](#) near Willow Springs, Missouri



Based on Talking Council member Joe Landwehr's book of the same name – [Tracking the Soul With An Astrology of Consciousness](#), Tracking the Soul is an experiential workshop, integrating the exquisite spiritual psychology of the seven chakras with the intimately personal, image-based approach to astrology called astropoetics. The workshop brings the provocative theory of the astro-chakra system into real-life application in relation to core issues brought by participants.

Beginning with a timeline of significant events in your life, and then mapping your astrological cycles to it, we will work toward a story of the particular thread of your soul's journey you are inspired to track. The story then becomes a launching pad for insight and meaningful changes.

Included with this workshop are 3 preparatory lessons, designed to teach the basic astrology necessary to get the most value from the 3-day workshop itself. Each lesson will be customized for you, based on your current level of familiarity with astrology and the chakra system. Each will

include a homework assignment, and a follow-up 90-minute Skype consultation.

The workshop itself will be our opportunity to share these soul stories, and learn from them and from each other. To supplement our group work, there will be an opportunity for bodywork, individual sessions, authentic movement, rituals, ceremonies, and daily yoga classes.

About last year's workshop, one participant said:

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

Read more and/or register [here](#).
Registration Deadline is October 3.

If you register by September 26 and tell us, "I saw it in the newsletter," you will get a 10% discount.

Welcome to Our New Talking Council Member – Steve Hayes

In this issue of Talking Leaves, we are pleased to welcome our newest Talking Council member, Steve Hayes into our circle. After having his annual astrological update from Yggdrasil Founder Joe Landwehr in August, Steve had a dream and a series of synchronistic experiences that led him to believe that becoming part of our Talking Council was an important next step for him. The vision behind Yggdrasil dovetails nicely with a vision Steve received in April 2012.



About himself, Steve says:

For the last 18 years, I have been a trauma therapist specializing in diagnoses such as Dissociative Identity Disorder and PTSD. I have a Master's Degree in Social Work. I use Attachment Hypnotherapy, which creates internal figures that help my clients feel safe and supported. I use Internal Family Systems Therapy to help them unburden traumatic memories and feel compassion for their parts.

My family and extended family are very important to me including: my wife Terry, my three adult children, in-laws, out-laws, nieces, nephews, grandnieces and nephews, and one very precious granddaughter.

Spiritually, I was raised Catholic, but in my mid-thirties I explored Buddhism, Atheism and other Spiritual practices. They have all been helpful. Catholicism taught me about the flaws in organized religion. Atheism taught me how to come to terms with my own mortality. Buddhism gave me the gift of meditation, which I have practiced for 15 years or so.

In January of 2012, I was in my own therapy to experience Integral Family Systems from the client's point of

view. I went inside to check-in with my parts and a Past Life appeared. I didn't believe in Past Lives at the time but it changed everything. In April of that year I had an incredibly powerful vision of a possible future, what my life might become.

Since then I have been trained by Brian Weiss MD in performing Past Life Regressions. I do a Spiritual Practice that comes from the Essenes. I realized the attachment figures in Attachment Hypnotherapy are actually the client's Guides and Angels. I have many Guides and Angels of my own. My practice is much more focused on Spiritual healing and helping my clients to follow their own Spiritual path.

Every year I get [an astrological reading from Joe Landwehr](#). These readings have been incredibly helpful in guiding me on this Spiritual Journey and moving me ever closer to the evolving vision.

If you'd like to join Steve and [the rest of us on the Talking Council](#), let us know. We'd love to hear from you. We still have 2 openings to complete a full Council of 9 active members.



There will be no Talking Council update in this issue. This summer we have all been out traveling on various individual adventures, and it has not been possible to come together as a group. We plan to resume our monthly meetings during the New Moon window period of September 23-25.

The Forest as a Model for Community

by Graywolf

I like to think that even though we have been wandering our seemingly separate ways this summer, with our beloved Co-Founder Sara Firman off on her own adventure in India (more about that below), we are all still connected by some invisible cord that weaves the tapestry of our separate lives into a cohesive whole, revolving around the vision we share. As lofty an ideal as that might seem to be, it is not without some hidden truth, modeled by the natural world. Forests, for example, are now understood to be more interconnected than previously believed – through an underground maze of roots and rhizomes – that connects seemingly separate trees to each other.

Scientists are, in other words beginning to discover what indigenous peoples have long known – that the forest is actually one organism, although it appears to our eyes as a collection of individual trees vying for scarce nutrients, light, and space. Most current “forest management” theories are based on the practice of culling out mature trees – those that have, according to human observation – lived their lives, so that others can reach maturity. This policy ultimately harkens back to 19th century Darwinian theory in which the concept of “the survival of the fittest” created a cultural filter through which everything – from ecosystem dynamics to human societies to fantasies about extraterrestrial life – was seen to revolve around a competitive model where winners win at the expense of losers. Contemporary scientists are beginning to realize that this is not always the case. The most successful systems – ecological, human, and presumably extraterrestrial – revolve around symbiotic cooperative relationships.

In the new paradigm of forest life, for example, it is now understood that the larger “mother trees” serve as distribution hubs, sending nutrients through the underground network wherever they are most needed by individual trees. As the individual trees absorb these nutrients and actualize their potential, they in turn contribute to the health and vitality of the entire forest.

This happens, apparently even when mature trees die. It has long been known that so-called dead or snag trees provide shelter for many species of forest dweller – from squirrels to foxes to bears to beetles. Now it is also known that dead trees contribute their life force to the living trees around them. This is not just woo-woo New Age thinking. It is now scientific fact.

What would it be like then, if we modeled our human communities on the forest ecosystem? This is one question we at Yggdrasil are taking with us into the mysterious unknown.

For more information and a great video about the secret life of trees, go [here](#).



From the Website – Seeking Sacred Balance

In late June, I began a new 9-part series called [Seeking Sacred Balance](#), meant to be an introduction to our workshop [Returning the Inner Masculine and Feminine to Sacred Balance](#). The idea of Sacred Balance is central to Yggdrasil’s vision – which requires us all to cultivate our unique individuality (psychologically considered part of the archetypal Masculine) and a strong sense of identification with the tribe or collective, within which we share our special gifts and make a contribution to the wellbeing of the Whole (psychologically considered part of the archetypal Feminine). Both Masculine and Feminine are necessary to create a balanced culture, and both men and women must cultivate and balance both archetypes within themselves before we can effectively address the many complex problems that keep our world perpetually out of balance.

This blog series explores some of the implications of this idea, and how we might begin moving toward Sacred Balance. We reproduce Part One here as an invitation to read [the rest of the series](#).



Part One
A Culture of Willful Ignorance

Although I would love to begin this series on Sacred Balance on an upbeat note, looking out into the world today, I often feel discouraged by what I see:

*More than 50 years ago now, Rachel Carson wrote *Silent Spring*, warning of the dangers of pesticides (primarily DDT) poisoning our environment. Today, far more virulent pesticides (neonicotinoids – proclaimed by [some](#) to be the new DDT) are being approved by the EPA, killing bees and farm workers, and routinely finding their way into our food supply.*

Nearly 70 years ago now, Little Boy – the first nuclear bomb – was dropped on Hiroshima, killing over 100,000 people and shocking the world with the horror of our human capacity to kill. Today, the US continues to maintain close to 5,000 nuclear warheads, while at least 10 other states either have or are believed to have these weapons of mass destruction.

70-75 years ago, the world experienced the horrific genocide of the Holocaust – in which the Nazis killed 11 million people (Jews and others). Today, ongoing genocides raging in Burma (Myanmar), Democratic Republic of the Congo, Sudan, and Syria have killed or severely disrupted the lives of nearly twice that many people.

These are just three examples of what I call our “collective willful ignorance.” We humans are clever at finding ways to rationalize our actions, and then choosing to do what we know in our hearts is wrong anyway. Meanwhile, this mentality – which pervades nearly every aspect of our lives – begs the question:

***What, if anything, are we learning from our history
and our collective experiences on this planet?***

As far as I can tell, the answer is “not much.” In fact, within my lifetime, the situation on many fronts important to our collective wellbeing – environmental policy, social justice, human rights, the proliferation of dangerous technologies, etc. – appears to have gotten worse. This bothers me. As a child of the 60s, a trained psychotherapist and for those of you who are astrologers, a triple Sagittarius, I have surrendered my optimism slowly. All my life, I have wanted to believe in the possibility of positive evolutionary change. Indeed, I have been privileged to witness it occasionally in my clients, students, and friends. But observing the world around me, I fail to see it.

I cringe when my New Age buddies croon about the next quantum shift. I am horrified when I witness the ignorance of young people who don’t know history, and who don’t care to know. I wonder what drug I’ve taken when I occasionally catch glimpses of television in motel rooms on the road, and take note of what gets discussed and how, and what never gets mentioned.

Have I just become an aging curmudgeon? Or am I witnessing human civilization sink into the

sort of numb denial of reality that generally accompanies powerlessness and despair and/or precedes collapse?

I'm told that some people – the 1%, no doubt – are doing just fine, thank you very much, and see nothing wrong with a life without limits. Do these people think that their grandchildren will enjoy a similar privilege? I don't know.

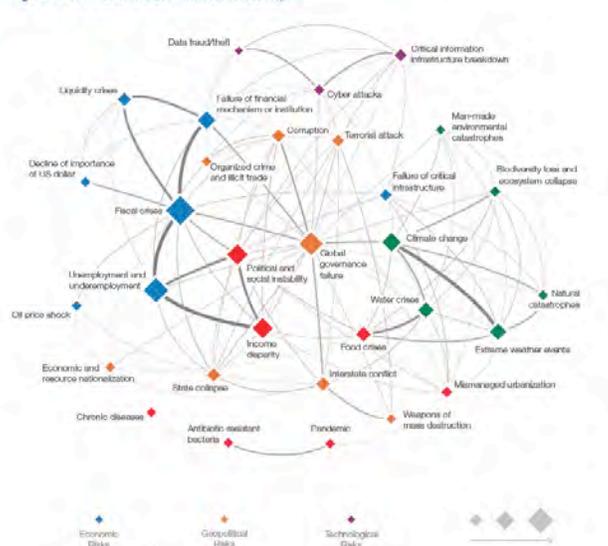
A World Out of Balance

What does seem plausible is that those who are partying like it's 1999 are doing so because it is. Actually, in retrospect, 1999 seems like a peak year of the good old days. 2099 may not be so party-like. Despite the willful ignorance of climate change deniers who confuse scientific probability with belief, [credible scientists around the world](#) predict that if we do nothing – and it appears we are doing very little – the consequences of our inaction will be severe and astronomically expensive, monetarily and otherwise.

Despite the potentially devastating impact of climate change – looming most imminently as accelerating loss of biodiversity, severe food and water shortages, and more extreme catastrophic weather events (storms, flooding, wildfires, etc.) – the [World Economic Forum Global Risks Report 2014](#) calls climate change just the second biggest threat we face in the immediate future.

First on their list is the increasing disparity between rich and poor, which could lead to fiscal crises in a number of key economies, followed by cascading effects around the world. Structurally high unemployment, especially among young people, is also a problem – potentially leading to high levels of social unrest, crime, drug abuse and terrorism, increasingly sophisticated cyber-attacks, increasingly bloody revolutions and increasingly severe government crackdowns. This is already starting to happen – as is evident in places like Syria. This is what the world of the immediate future looks like, according to the report, with interlocking problems caught up in a tangled ball of mutual exacerbation:

Figure 1.4: The Global Risks 2014 Interconnections Map



The good news, I suppose, is that those of us – I hope I’m not the only one – who despair about the fate of our world can be glad we live in the early 21st century, rather than the early 22nd.

Seeking Sacred Balance in a Broken World

If you have read this far, you may feel relieved to know that my purpose here is not to flaunt the bad news with cynical smugness. I’ve never felt that to be productive, and in fact, have lost a few friends over their insistence on it.

Instead, I’d like to step back a bit and look at the shocking state of affairs in our broken world today from a more philosophical and psychological perspective – one that that I think cuts to the chase of what we can do about it, or at the very least, how we as individuals can more deeply align ourselves with whatever hope remains for a more benign and sustainable future.

This, after all, is the focus of our work at [Yggdrasil](#) – where we harbor no pretense about changing the world, but do want to create a place where those with the energy, imagination, and humble audacity to think they can, are supported, encouraged and empowered to live that hope into the world.

Additional posts in [this series](#) include:

Generation Lost
A World Built on Duality
Rebalancing The Wounded Masculine
Balancing the Archetypal Masculine and Feminine
The Biology of the Archetypal Masculine
The Biology of the Archetypal Feminine
My Own Story
The Sacred Balance Workshop

You can subscribe to future blog series and receive each new post directly in your email box or through your favorite web-based newsreader by going [here](#) and following the prompts.

If you'd like to join us at next year's annual [Returning the Inner Masculine and Feminine to Sacred Balance](#) workshop, go [here](#) for more information and to make a deposit. Those who sign up before March 25, 2015 will receive a \$100 discount off the remainder due at the door.



The following insightful article by Yggdrasil Co-Founder Sara Firman reminds us of a fundamental paradox that must accompany any attempt to “change the world” – if such a thing is even possible:

To change anything you must first deeply accept things as they are.

Given the state of the world today (or the state of the world at any time in human history), this is no small task. Acceptance does not mean resignation. It means letting it all in – the pain and the suffering, as well the joy and unexpected moments of beauty. The archetypal Masculine wants to rush in and fix things. The archetypal Feminine wants to feel deeply, embrace, and hold the space with compassionate acceptance of what is. In this issue of Talking Leaves, we have the blessing of Yggdrasil’s very own global ambassador, reminding us of why this is necessary and how it is done.

One Must Have Great Feeling

Sara Firman Reports From India

Ever since I arrived in India 6 months ago, it is as if someone switched up the dimmed light of my awareness. Not that I've had any deep insights, arrived at any great conclusions, or found enlightenment as some who come here hope to. I simply feel more awake. It could be because there are potholes and perils everywhere you go in India, so that being awake is actually essential to survival. But more than that – any fleeting moment of fear is quickly whisked away by something less personal. I'm discovering that life may not be as personal as I've unconsciously assumed. It's something we participate in whether we like it or not.

Just recently I reacquainted myself with the Indian philosopher J. Krishnamurti's writings, which seem to describe the experience I am having. I also find his words an antidote to an increasingly prevalent insistence that each of us do something grand, something important. We try very hard, and get very tired. And when we're tired, the light starts to dim or go out. All we see are unsolvable problems. Says J. Krishnamurti in *The Book of Life*:

In the modern world where there are so many problems, one is apt to lose great feeling.

We shouldn't take this quote out of context since I suspect that many of us won't immediately get what he means by “feeling”.

He continues:

I mean by that word feeling, not sentiment, not emotionalism, not mere excitement, but that quality of perception, the quality of hearing, listening, the quality of feeling - a bird singing on a tree, the movement of a leaf in the sun. To feel things greatly, deeply, penetratingly, is very difficult for most of us because we have so many problems. Whatever we seem to touch turns into a problem. And, apparently, there is no end to man's problems, and he seems utterly incapable of resolving them because the more the problems exist, the less the feelings become.

We become jaded or pretend to feel things we don't.

Someone sent me a depressing article in the *Financial Times* that explained how Bhutan's Gross National Happiness Project "[is a bad idea whose time has gone](#)". I'd heard this before and had myself become rather cynical about "happiness". Still, I decided to visit the new [GNH website](#) where I listened to the Prime Minister of Bhutan speaking - with notable honesty and renewed enthusiasm - to the criticisms the article raises. Bhutan is a mountain country not far from where I am in Northern India and it is a possible location for my employer's next Wellness Retreat venture. Happiness and wellness are two words I've grappled with intellectually.

There's another word - "wellbeing" - that I prefer since it seems more inclusive of culture and environment, less focused on the individual alone. But what is it exactly? A feeling state perhaps? I came back to Krishnamurti:

I mean by "feeling" the appreciation of the curve of a branch, the squalor, the dirt on the road, to be sensitive to the sorrow of another, to be in a state of ecstasy when we see a sunset. These are not sentiments; these are not mere emotions. Emotion and sentiment or sentimentality turn to cruelty. They can be used by society; and when there is sentiment, sensation, then one becomes a slave to society.

When you are slave to society's sentimentality, you lose your ability see that the "emperor has no clothes" - to see life as it is. Sometimes landing in an exotic country and culture can put things under a different light, though I don't think it's necessary to go anywhere. You can experience life as it is by slowing down right where you are.

But one must have great feelings. The feeling for beauty, the feeling for a word, the silence between two words, and the hearing of a sound clearly; all that generates feeling. And one must have strong feelings, because it is only the feelings that make the mind highly sensitive.

To help myself tune up this sensitivity, I have started recording the small life events of my days in India just as they are:

a cow with a pretty necklace bellows her way down the road

a childlike old woman with cropped hair, wearing a green shift and carrying her sandals, stops to wash her face in a muddy puddle then drinks from it also

three young men sharing a scooter are dressed in identical business slacks and blue shirts

someone has tucked a yellow flower between two low-looped power lines

a sick man lies in a horrible twist on the pavement while other men nearby ignore him

a huge mottled pig rummages among plastic garbage as the rain begins

And so on.

These observations are often not beautiful but I am always deeply moved by the courage and resourcefulness I witness every day in all the living beings and doings around me. The practice switches me out of my own world and into the world as it is. It also leaves me feeling a way that I never expected was possible. Now, when I think of the people who are seeking happiness or wellness or wellbeing or any other betterness or state of being in their lives, I want to say:

Start right where you are and bear witness to the life all around you with great feeling.

From that place of aliveness, things might change. This is what Yggdrasil is setting out to encourage.

Our Standing Invitation to You

Perhaps you would like to help us create a retreat center where others can come to reclaim their aliveness. 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.

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* - Winter Solstice 2014
Contributions in the spirit of Yggdrasil are welcome by December 14.

