

Talking Leaves: Volume 4, Issue 3

Autumn 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 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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Dreaming Our Way Into Magic Action

One of the core principles on which the evolution of Yggdrasil – the mystery school/retreat center – rests is the idea that the mythopoetic realm and the world of everyday mundane reality are not separate from one another. Just as Harry Potter found his way into the magical world of Hogwarts through Platform 9 3/4 in a train station filled with Muggles going about their ordinary lives, so too is the point of entry into Yggdrasil everywhere and anywhere we are willing to entertain the possibility that more is always going on than meets the rational eye.

On one level, Yggdrasil is the World Tree – a mythopoetic embodiment of the divine intelligence that permeates the manifest world, a living map of the nine worlds through which consciousness flows, and out of which grows the very rich, complex, multi-faceted experience called Life. On another level, however, Yggdrasil is just a tree – any tree – to which we have a special relationship, that is to say, to which we pay attention in the here and now, suspending for the moment, any preconceived ideas about what a tree might be.

Scientists have a great deal to say about the tree, which serves a vital function in the regulation of the hydrological cycle, the revitalization of a breathable atmosphere, the mitigation of climate change, and the transmutation of light into living substance. So do poets, who have celebrated the sacred magic of trees ever since language was first used to stretch beyond the known into unknown and unknowable mysteries. But in the end, what matters is not what others have said about trees, but what you yourself – and each of us – can learn by entering into relationship to one. Only then will the tree reveal itself in ways that render the permeable boundary between the mythopoetic and the mundane into something we can actually experience.



As with Yggdrasil the World Tree, so too with Yggdrasil the mystery school/retreat center that we at Yggdrasil Central are working to create. The enterprise is neither strictly speaking the implementation of a preconceived plan, nor a visionary dream unfolding, but a bit of both. The

vision I had 4 years ago of a mystery school/retreat center is described in a fair amount of detail in our vision statement, on [our website](#), and in our evolving business plan – and this description continues to reverberate as a reliable guideline to what we do, as we go about the business of creating Yggdrasil. At the same time, as we listen and feel our way into the less obvious mythopoetic dimensions of Yggdrasil, we find ourselves perpetually surprised with new discoveries, a more nuanced understanding of what it is we are doing and how, and tender new shoots of growth where we could not have anticipated them. This is not a linear process, and ultimately it is not predictable, even though the vision itself is as vital and as clear as the day it was born.

Over the last year or so, we have been leaning into the less obvious mythopoetic dimensions of the vision through the parallel work/play of a [Dream Council](#). In the Dream Council, we work with the dreams of various Talking Council members that intuitively seem related somehow – even if we can't say how – to our common vision. Rather than attempt to interpret these dreams, we re-enter them as a group, in an induced hypnogogic state, between sleep and waking, as though they were an actual mythopoetic event, taking place in present time – which in fact they are.

Out of this exploration have come several important themes, repeated patterns, realizations and insights – born not of trying to figure things out, but of spontaneous revelation:

- *In our work with Yggdrasil, we are part of an ancestral lineage unfolding. We are at the same time reconnecting with something ancient and creating something new.*
- *At the heart of Yggdrasil is a celebration of diversity; there is no code, or formula, or uniform belief system that defines us. At the same time, a shared sense of values is and will increasingly be an important consideration to our cohesiveness as a community.*
- *The geode has become an important symbol for what we are creating: on the outside, it may not look like much or perhaps be perceived as rough and crude, but on the inside is a magnificent, exquisite, colorful and radiant light.*
- *Finding our way to the inside is often a matter of breaking through a wall, or in some cases, busting out of a box, or at times, cracking the geode open.*
- *One of Yggdrasil's totem animals is the dog – a contrarian god, spelled backwards – named Ge-Odin. Bringing the dog (often a wounded dog, representing the sacred wound) into the center of the circle is what allows it to transmute into a god, capable of guiding our sense of visionary calling into manifestation.*
- *Healing transformation is something that happens in a shared space of loving, non-judgmental, focused attention.*
- *We are on a journey, but at the same time, our process is one of arriving in the present moment and just being here.*

As we take note of these insights and work to incorporate them into our action plan, we honor the dream world and its power to reveal divine intelligence at work within everyday reality. Everyday reality becomes permeated by a magic you would never know was there until you look in anticipation of seeing it. As sleight-of-hand magician and eco-philosopher David Abram says:

Magic doesn't sweep you away, it gathers you up into the body of the present moment so thoroughly that all your explanations fall away: the ordinary, in all its plain and simple outrageousness, begins to shine – to become luminously, impossibly so. Every facet of the world is awake, and you within it.

This is what we aspire to at Yggdrasil – waking from the dream to realize the dream in waking life. As we pay attention to our dreams, and incorporate the guidance we receive there into our evolving plan, the Talking Council is beginning to morph into a Magic Action Council in which ordinary actions become charged with impossible luminosity.

If you'd like to join us in this madcap adventure, [the rest of us on the Magic Action Council](#) would love to hear from you. We currently have a couple of openings that perhaps only you can fill. If you are a geode ready and willing to be cracked open by the loving attention of a group of contrarians dancing with wild idiosyncratic abandon around a shared vision, then on the other side of the wall from our own quirky version of Platform 9 3/4, we are waiting for you.



My Scouting Expedition to Norway and Sweden

by Graywolf

In Dream Council 2, the day after my birthday last year, we explored one of my dreams entitled *Yggdrasil in the City*. In this dream, we appeared to be in a bicycle friendly university town with lots of reddish-orange colored buildings. There was also a restaurant in the dream, where the local delicacy was Norwegian lutefisk. Bringing these clues back into the everyday world, I indulged my curiosity with that most magical of modern day portals into the collective imagination – Google's search engine – typing in “bicycle friendly university towns.” I found one of those annoying, but compelling top 10 lists, and lo and behold, 3rd on the list was Trondheim, Norway.

Those of you who have been following this newsletter will recognize Norway as being at the top of my list of possible locations for Yggdrasil (see [Talking Leaves #10](#)). I had been contemplating an exploratory trip to Norway and Sweden (#6 on the list) for a while, and began planning a trip in earnest shortly after the first of this year. After the work of this Dream Council around my *Yggdrasil in the City* dream, I put Trondheim at the heart of my journey, intending to spend several days there. I finally took my trip this summer and want to give a short account in this newsletter.



To be honest, I did not have the grand mythopoetic adventure on this trip that I anticipated. I never did have that “aha” moment of coming home to the perfect spot in which to root Yggdrasil, the mystery school/retreat center. Norway was absolutely gorgeous with breathtaking beauty at nearly every turn. It also felt somehow inaccessible and foreboding. There are many indigenous tales of unwary travelers being lured into the mountains by a seductive Nordic creature called a Huldra, never to return. The place had that feel about it, not to mention a few practical considerations also foreboding – long, cold, and dark winters; the expense of living there (highest in the world); and a relatively arduous path to immigration, especially for non-Europeans. Sweden – although somewhat more accessible on all three counts – was somehow less appealing.



Having said all that, one of the most powerful days I spent on my trip was in Trondheim. Before I got to Trondheim, I was struggling with some congestion in my lungs, brought on perhaps by a late pollen season, or maybe the cold, damp weather, or maybe the smog in Bergen – a city bound by mountains, which like Denver tends to collect exhaust from cars in a kind of bowl that surrounds

the city. In any case, I was feeling sick – I had a slight fever, was coughing a lot, and had no energy. In my feverish state, I was also in an altered state of consciousness.

So on my first morning in Trondheim, I went first to an indoor water park, where I spent some time in the sauna, which helped a bit. Then I went next door to an interactive rock and roll museum called Rockheim, where I spent 4 hours listening to a fascinating parallel history of popular music, which included some artists I was familiar with, but many that I was not. In particular, I discovered a Norwegian group called Bel Canto, and listened to a beautiful song by them called “[Birds of Paradise](#),” which seemed to speak to the passing of a relationship I was recently compelled to let go of. Since I had the whole place pretty much to myself, I was able to cry my eyes out, and feel some release.



At the end of the day, I wound up going to Nidarosdomen – a gothic cathedral in the classic European tradition, built about 1300, and a major Mecca for European pilgrims. I arrived just in time for a beautiful service facilitated by a woman priest, accompanied by a grand and majestic pipe organ. It was here that my tears turned into prayers.

After that, I started feeling better – both physically and emotionally. The rest of my trip, I feel, was about moving more deeply into my solitude, and being OK with that, while at the same time, connecting with all kinds of people from all around the world; taking photos; posting on Facebook; and immersing myself in the experience of unfamiliar territory.

I spent a fair amount of time being lost, which forced me to ask directions, and be more aware of an internal sense of direction. I found that I could function on my feet in a strange environment, and find my way around with a reasonable amount of trial and error.

I went to several museums featuring information about the runes, Odin and Yggdrasil, but was frankly disappointed in the way it was presented – more as a primitive chapter in a more pedestrian story, with none or very little reference to the more mythopoetic dimensions of the

culture. I did learn more about the shamanic tradition of the Sami, indigenous to northern Norway and Sweden as well Finland and Russia, and may write more about them in a future newsletter.

I continue to be in love with the way both Norway and Sweden have created their culture, which puts people first, and fosters their wellbeing in all kinds of ways – in contrast to the US, where corporate profit is king. It is not like that over there, and I noticed an immediate difference, both energetically and logistically, returning to the US and the chaos of an airport where everything was out of control, dysfunctional, and tense – very different from the much more relaxed, efficient, and smoothly flowing experience of my time in Scandinavia.

I remain convinced that wherever Yggdrasil winds up being, it will be more likely to thrive outside the US than inside. At this point, that is all I know. I'm glad I went and feel it was important to honor the sense of direction emerging in my dreams, the work of the Dream Council, and our ongoing quest for a place for Yggdrasil. The journey continues.

Thinking Into the Box – Our First Yggdrasil Gathering

As I prepare this newsletter, I am freshly inspired by the first of what we hope will be an annual Yggdrasil Gathering, held from September 16 – 20 at Phoenix Ranch, a retreat center near Birch Tree, Missouri and the home of Talking Council member [John Staniloju](#). Because of the wide geographical spread of our Talking Council – from east coast to west coast, and from Missouri north into southern Canada – most of our interaction as a Council has been via Skype. The purpose of the Gathering was to create an opportunity for us to meet face to face, get to know each other on a more casual level, and share our healing/teaching gifts with each other in person. Although not all of us were able to attend, those of us who did had an experience too rich to put into words. Wordsmith that I am, however, I am compelled to give it a shot.

What struck me most about the Gathering was the utter lack of pretense, as the boundary between healer and wounded soul in need of healing, between teacher and student, between dog and god quickly dissolved. We had no plan, other than to be present with each other, and together to discern what seemed to want to happen next. Each of us brought a unique tool bag of resources to the circle, as well as our own personal challenges and issues. As various ones of us felt the need for healing, others of us stepped into the role of healer, only to switch roles later in the weekend. It all flowed rather seamlessly, and we wound up amazed and humbled by the geodic brilliance of each other, each shining forth in just the perfect way at the perfect time.

We laughed a lot, managed to go swimming in the river, be entertained by one of our members singing Van Morrison and another playing banjo, duke it out over Scrabble, and share some delicious meals. We did not shy away from the need to address a few emerging issues between us, and engaged each other in a wide variety of magical healing experiences – everything from a psychopomp ceremony to release earthbound spirits attached to a client of one of our members to emotionally risky dreamwork to alternate life regressions – far too much to elaborate here, except to say that you really had to be there to experience it in order to appreciate its depth and breadth.

Few planned workshops I have ever been to – and I have been to a few – could compare.

I personally had a very powerful alternate life experience guided by spiritual hypnotherapist [Steve Hayes](#), grateful for the rare opportunity to work on some of my own issues with someone whom I trust and respect. Steve is a master at what he does and skillfully led me into a life among “the ancients” that he and I shared. I was moved to call this experience an “alternate” life regression, rather than the more usual “past” life regression, since the character that I was in this ancient time also felt very much like a future self, from whom I could learn a great deal. Without wanting to theorize too much about the mysterious nature of time, I do know that I will draw spiritual nourishment from this experience for some time to come.

One of the most amazing exercises we did together emerged on the last day, out of our collective dreamwork around the image of a ceremonial box. All five of us who had come to the Gathering had, within the past couple of months or so, a dream about a box – with different connotations for each of us. For one member, the box was a prison – something to escape from; for another, it became the Ark of the Covenant, transported by mythic journey to its home in a ceremonial cave; for yet another, the box was formed by a hollowed-out log, which became a dream chamber.

After re-reading our dreams, we decided to actually build a box. With lumber and tools handy and made readily available by Talking Council member [John Staniloiu](#) – in the midst of building his unusual home at Phoenix Ranch – and the combined carpentry skills of four men, we worked together with unanticipated ease to spontaneously plan and construct a wooden box. The box was shaped very much like a coffin, yet to the trained mythopoetic eye shared by all of us, also very obviously a portal into other dimensions. The sole woman among us for this Gathering – [Nia Kallhof](#) – then added cushions and aesthetic embellishments, including a beautiful scroll depicting Quan Yin to serve as our presiding deity on this adventure. Within a couple of hours, we had the necessary vehicle to launch a bona fide mythopoetic journey.



After lunch, we took some time to feel our way into the possibilities, each receiving guidance about what would be meaningful to us. Then after an invocation of spirits by high priest [Bruce Durward](#), we each took a turn in the box. One member had us read affirmations to him; another used the box as an energy generator to send healing energy to troubled spots in the world; I held a mock funeral in which each person spoke their eulogy, before I went into the light; one did a journey for guidance; and for the grand finale, we formed a spirit canoe, so the fifth member could experience a soul retrieval.

I doubt whether any other ordinary wooden box ever saw such use before, but it would appear that in the emerging synergy of the Talking Council, morphing into a Magic Action Council, nothing is really ordinary. As we think our way more deeply into this box, no doubt a portal will open to other dimensions of co-creative possibility. It is already happening, even as the once magical box itself becomes just an ordinary box - the shed chrysalis of a new seed planted deeply in our hearts.

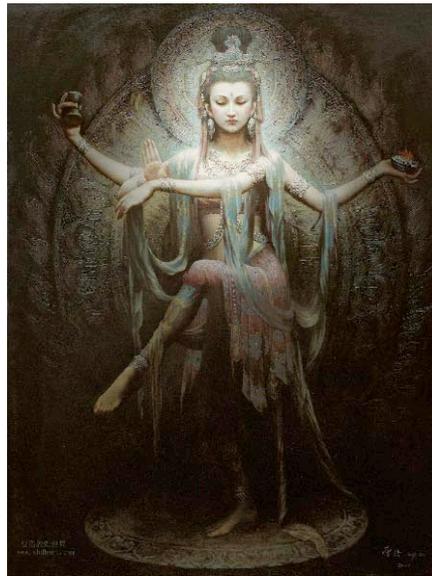


Quan Yin and the Divine Feminine

Presiding over our magic box ceremony was the goddess Quan Yin. In the Buddhist tradition, Quan Yin is the embodiment of compassion, a distinctly Feminine bodhisattva, foregoing her own enlightenment to attend to the pain and suffering of all sentient beings as long as it takes for all beings to be freed from the endless cycle of birth, death, and rebirth.

Often Quan Yin is depicted pouring a stream of healing water, the "Water of Life," from a small vase, blessing all living things with physical and spiritual peace. With multiple arms like Shiva, she also often holds a sheaf of ripe rice or a bowl of rice seed as a metaphor for fertility and sustenance, and sometimes carries the pearl of illumination. The dragon, an ancient symbol for high spirituality, wisdom, strength, and divine powers of transformation, is one of her totems.

In addition to her role in Buddhist lore, Quan Yin is also one of Yggdrasil's patron deities. While it might seem strange that a beloved Buddhist figure could find her way into a venture informed by Norse mythology, this is but one example of the way in which our path forward is often revealed to us in unexpected ways. In the astrological birthchart for Yggdrasil, we have Venus in Pisces rising opposed Mars setting, retrograde in Virgo. When fellow Talking Council member and astrologer [Genevieve Vierling](#) first saw this Venus rising, she immediately thought of Quan Yin, just as Talking Council member [Nia Kallhof](#) - who has done a great deal of spiritual work with various goddesses - was unbeknownst to us, having a vision of Quan Yin in the clouds. Having made her entrance into our awareness with characteristic synchronicity, she has been with us ever since.



As I ponder Quan Yin's role in Yggdrasil, I see that the healing compassion of the Feminine that she brings to our process is absolutely essential to balance the warlike tendencies of [the wounded Masculine](#), which is very much a part of the Norse tradition - and a part of our dysfunctional contemporary culture, particularly here in the US. The idea of Sacred Balance between Masculine and Feminine is very much at the heart of what Yggdrasil is about, and we have built one of our signature workshops around this concept. As I see it, part of our vision involves rewriting the script encoded in the mythology around Odin to incorporate the balancing influence of the Feminine, and in this sacred task, Quan Yin is our guide.

The work that we do here at Yggdrasil, in our workshops, at our gatherings, and in a variety of emerging vehicles involves creating a sacred space - a ceremonial box or chamber - in which healing and transmutation can take place. It is our intent to fill this healing space with love, compassion, and non-judgmental awareness so that whatever wounds we carry can be transmuted into blessings. To do this work requires both the fierce tenacity of the spiritual warrior and the healing waters of compassion, and in bringing both together, Quan Yin and Odin find their way into an unlikely marriage.

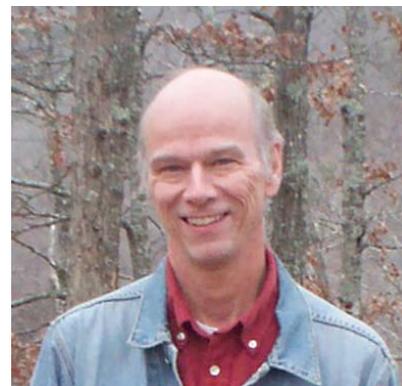
Our Mentorship Program

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

The path of the visionary contrarian is not easy. The work of transmuting core wounds into visionary calling requires fierce dedication, and can at times greatly benefit from the wise counsel of someone who has walked the path themselves - another visionary contrarian who empathizes with your struggle, because it is similar to their own. At Yggdrasil, we have a number of wise mentors, who are available for one-on-one conversation with those are ready to make a solid commitment to their own growth and to the wellbeing of the world.

Since our last newsletter, we have launched the program with our first mentees. The process begins with an intake questionnaire and an evaluation by our team of mentors. Using your response to the questionnaire and the synastry (astrological chemistry) between your birthchart and ours, we assign you to a primary mentor. After an intake interview in which you and your mentor work out a set of goals and intentions, you will begin a 6-session trial.

We are currently offering the trial mentorship on a sliding scale from \$50 - \$100 per hour session. Mentees who complete the first 6 sessions will earn a discount, applicable toward any of our workshops. Mentees who are interested in the astrological details of their core issues on a track toward the Tracking the Soul workshop will work with [me](#). Others will work with either [Nia Kallhof](#) or [John Staniloiu](#).



The three of us work as a team, with peer supervision among us to offer each other feedback and

help each other fine tune our skills. As the program evolves, we will add additional members from the Talking Council, each with a unique set of skills that may serve a broader range of clientele. If this emerging program is of interest to you, [let us know](#), and we will get you started.

The Listener

by Steve Hayes

With compassion and soft eyes
With an awareness, understanding and acceptance
You have never seen before
The listener hears your words
You are drawn to this oasis
That has appeared in the desert of your life
Yearning for the comfort of being figuratively swaddled
In the listener's kind gaze, warm voice and gentle words

Aided by unseen Angels
The listener's eyes delve deep into your soul
The listener's words uncover secrets
You, hadn't even known before
And you dissolve into a puddle of tears
But tears bring insight
The pain of the past has meaning
A bigger picture comes into view
And your life takes on new purpose

and it all begins to make sense.

Our Standing Invitation to You

If you want to stay in closer touch with what we are doing, you can easily subscribe to [our blog feed](#), like us on [Facebook](#), follow us on [Twitter](#), make a [donation](#), and/or attend a [workshop](#). Whatever your level of interest, thanks for being part of our extended community and for helping us hold a space for the vision we carry.

Yggdrasil is a mystery school for visionary contrarians and a forest retreat for souls reinventing themselves, housed within a self-sustaining eco-village community, now being planned.

Keep an eye out for the next *Talking Leaves* - Winter Solstice 2015
Contributions in the spirit of Yggdrasil are welcome by December 15.

