



Talking Leaves: Volume 5, Issue 1

Spring Equinox 2016

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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Our Third Annual Sacred Balance Workshop

May 19 – 22, 2016

Hearthaven Retreat – near Willow Springs, MO



To become a whole human being, all of us need to cultivate both the archetypal Masculine and the archetypal Feminine.

The archetypal Masculine encompasses the drive in each of us – women and men both – to individuate, to become unique individuals following a meaningful and fulfilling path to self-actualization.

The archetypal Feminine encompasses the longing in each of us to belong – to a satisfying intimate relationship with a life partner, to a family, a community, a soul tribe, and ultimately to a larger web of life.

If one or the other is neglected or underdeveloped, or wounded in some way, it creates an imbalance, and ultimately contributes to a wounded world culture that does not support life, liberty, or the pursuit of individual or collective wellbeing.

We live in a culture dominated by the wounded masculine psyche. The wounded masculine is obsessed with competition, achievement, money and power, and has lost a deeper sense of calling to serve community and planet. The wounded feminine is obsessed with appearance, superficial connectivity, and security, and has lost an intuitive Earth-based wisdom and a capacity for compassion and caring. Together we have created a wounded world torn by war, genocide, ecocide, exploitation, addiction, denial, and out-of-balance behaviors that harm us all.

In 2012, Yggdrasil created the Sacred Balance workshop to facilitate the restoration of balance

between the archetypal Masculine and Feminine – first within ourselves, and then as we take back what we have learned into our relationships, families and communities, within the larger whole. The workshop is an opportunity to explore and begin to heal our sacred wounds as men and as women, and to come together to create dialogue and cooperation towards re-balancing the Masculine and Feminine in ourselves and our culture.

What Participants Have Said About Previous Workshops

The workshop is “an opportunity for deep self-discovery from the inside out while being held in an open safe loving container with very revealing experiential activities.”

“I feel a subtle sense of being more anchored inside myself . . . Through this workshop, a little bit of my fear of being on this Earth was lifted.”

The Sacred Balance workshop is “one of the most genuine experiences I’ve had because of the sincerity of the facilitators and the other participants.”

The 2016 workshop will be held at Hearthaven Retreat, near Willow Springs, Missouri from Thursday evening, May 19 through noon on Sunday, May 22. It will be co-facilitated by Talking Council members [Joe Landwehr](#) and [Nia Kallhof](#).

You can read more about the workshop and sign up [on our website](#).

Carpe Diem: Reclaiming the Lost Parts of Self at a Sacred Balance Workshop

So much for theory. What is it like, you are wondering, to actually attend a Sacred Balance workshop? Good question. I’m glad you asked. The following account is an updated version of the last installment of a blog series entitled [Seeking Sacred Balance](#), originally posted on our website in 2014. The full blog series goes into more detail about the underlying philosophy behind the workshop. The excerpt below is just a taste of what happens when the philosophy is brought to life in real time.



People bring all kinds of issues to this workshop – which we did for the first time in 2012:

In our first workshop, one woman was struggling to revive her own career ambitions, several years after a divorce led to the loss of her cherished home and the business she helped build.

A man just about to have a heart operation felt a need to acknowledge his feelings and open himself to some deeper emotional truths.

Another man, whose work in the world had become routine and automatic felt draw to pay more attention to the quality of everything he did.

A young woman who was too intent lately on finding her path through life, rediscovered her playful side and realized that for her, Sacred Balance was a matter of having more fun.

*In our workshop last year, one man discovered that his inner beloved was the small boy inside he had abandoned years ago, when he decided to get **serious** about his life.*

A woman decided to leave her partner of 40 years to reclaim her wholeness and her joy.

Another woman had a vision of sapling bursting from the ground in a flash of light, and felt more grounded as she took this vision into her body.

Although the concept of Sacred Balance provides a common context for our work together, the infinite variety of ways that we have of living in wounded imbalance makes the work endlessly interesting. Just about anything can happen, realizations abound, and sometimes lives change.

We do put a great deal of preparations into our workshops, but at the end of the day, it is the people who come and the intentions that they bring that make each workshop what it becomes. Sacred Balance – or as it is “officially” called, [Returning the Inner Masculine and Feminine to Sacred Balance](#) – is an experiential workshop that includes ceremony, shamanic journeying, authentic movement, and solo time in nature, as well as deep sharing in same sex and mixed gender groups. The variety of experiences allows people with different learning styles and different sensibilities to have insights by different means – not all of them rational or cognitive.

One of the most cherished exercises in past workshops for most people has been the drawing of [Inner Child Cards](#) – “illuminating the mystical meaning of fairy tales and the hero’s journey of the soul,” but also often pointing in rather disarming ways to the very place where Sacred Balance is most needed. Our wounding often occurs in childhood, and many of these deceptively simple tales speak directly to these wounds. At our workshops, we generally draw one card to represent our archetypal Masculine and one to represent our archetypal Feminine.

At one of our workshops, one woman drew the Big Bad Wolf (from the Little Red Riding Hood story) to represent her inner Masculine. Meditating on this card prompted her to wonder:

Does the Big Bad Wolf really deserve to be ostracized from my life? Doesn't he stand for the instinctive and wild one, the protector and marker of boundaries I've failed to bring out when I most needed to defend what I loved? Those who are meek and mild can only flee like deer when the wolf comes around.



This woman had recently fled from a disastrous relationship in which her partner played the part of the Big Bad Wolf. This card was suggesting that Sacred Balance for her might be a matter of reclaiming her own Big Bad Wolf - the part of her that was capable of daring to thrust herself into a dangerous world with bold audacity and stand her ground in that world.

Six months after this workshop, this woman finally found a job - after six years of fruitless searching - at a retreat center halfway around the world in the Himalayan foothills. This world is radically different from the one she left behind - more uncertain, fraught with unfamiliar dangers, wild in a way that the Big Bad Wolf would appreciate - but this woman has found the courage and the Sacred Balance within herself to say "yes" to the grand adventure. And her life is quite different now because of that. Moreover, she is making a contribution to the world that stems directly from the healing she was able to do in reclaiming the more daring (archetypal Masculine) side of her nature. You can read a more complete account of her experience at the workshop [here](#).

Sometimes, change happens regardless of our resistance to it. One man, facing a heart operation, felt the very idea of considering a distinction between Masculine and Feminine to be beyond his conceptual capacity. Yet throughout the workshop, he found himself opening up to what he later identified as his Feminine side. He didn't realize this until he got home and found himself engaged in a heart-to-heart conversation with his boss at work (a construction job) about personal issues - a conversation he did not think he would have had were it not for the workshop.

He recognized that he missed a great deal in life because he was not open to receiving - believing instead as men are sometimes prone to do that he had to do it all by himself.

As he became more accepting of himself throughout the weekend, he began to realize that it was the imperfections in people that made them special and endeared them to him, not the obvious virtues that the archetypal Masculine side of his nature would previously have led him to celebrate.

At the end of the workshop, this man became the catalyst for a very moving closing circle. Though we had intended to allow maybe an hour for the six of us to share the highlights of our weekend, we spent three emotional hours in deep appreciation of each other. This man with the heart in need of repair led the way in modeling just how deeply our bonds of affection for each other could run.

In response to our evaluation form, his favorite part of the workshop was “the bonding that took place from the exercises and sharing and the safe crucible created for deep heartfelt sharing and healing!” Although I had known this man – a personal friend – for years to be a caring individual, I also experienced a newfound vulnerability within him as he opened to his Feminine side that made his caring more balanced and authentic.

What happens at any workshop is, of course, dependant on the depth of desire and the readiness of each individual to embrace the opportunity for growth that it presents. But as this man stated in summary, “a participant could heal parts of their lives simply by attending and participating. Just being there is beneficial. Carpe Diem.”

Sacred Balance occurs when we whole-heartedly embrace each opportunity for healing as a step on the path toward self-actualization of a more authentic and more balanced self.

If you are read to seize the day and whole-heartedly embrace an opportunity for healing, join us at this year’s Sacred Balance workshop. You can sign up directly on our [website](#). Bring a friend and you will each get 10% off the regular price.

Blank the End, Blank the Beginning

by Joe Landwehr

Originally published in the Spring 1988 edition of *The Whole Network Journal*

Speaking of workshops, here is an account of a workshop I attended in 1987, where I attempted to interview Ralph Blum, author of the popular [The Book of Runes: A Handbook for the Use of an Ancient Oracle – the Viking Runes](#). The Runes, of course, were originally channeled by Odin, hanging upside down from Yggdrasil, although they remained largely relegated to the dustbin of history until revived for postmodern consumption by Ralph Blum’s classic. Naturally when I learned that he was coming to Santa Fe, NM – where I lived at the time – to teach a workshop, I knew I had to be there. The lessons I learned that day seem just as vital now as they did then, and perhaps provide a cautionary tale about how to and how not to approach any personal growth experience.

In conceiving the idea to write this article, I had originally planned to interview Ralph Blum, the man who wrote *The Book of the Runes*. Blum is largely responsible for bringing this ancient Viking oracle back into public awareness, although others have since overshadowed his pioneering effort with a flood of contradictory and complementary opinions. His critics have accused him of

bastardizing a tradition steeped in a history of its own, and recreating it in his own image. Certainly there is some truth to these accusations, although Blum is the first to admit that he does not base his understanding of the runes on scholarship. Instead he made each rune the object of meditation, and through one sleepless Summer Solstice eve, derived his own set of meanings. Beginning with a list of key words Ralph simply asked the Runes themselves how they wished to be interpreted. The result is an amazingly profound and accurate treatise that reads the way one might hope an oracle would. As he states in Chapter Two of his book, “When I began to work with the Runes, I had never seen a rune text, so I did not realize I was breaking away from the traditional sequence . . . used by the early practitioners of *runemal*. But **function determines form, use confers meaning, and an Oracle always resonates to the requirements of the time in which it is consulted.** I had to rely on the Runes themselves to establish their own order and to instruct me in their meanings.”

It is not as though Blum were some poor ignorant fool, looking for a quick-fix fortune-telling device. Having graduated from Harvard, and hobnobbed about academia for any number of years, Ralph had as much scholarship available to him as he had ever wanted to consult. Instead he chose to explore this tangle of lines on stone that had found their way to his doorstep, without the benefit of what had come before. Yes, it is probably largely true, as Ralph says, that, “**the wisdom**



of the Rune Masters died with them. Nothing remains but the sagas, the far-flung fragments of runic lore and the Runes themselves.” Yet for those who delight in piecing fragments together, there is another way to approach the formidable task of reconstructing an oracle. There are many others who have taken such an approach.

Here was a man, well versed in the scholarly tradition, turning his back on that tradition to face the Mystery bare handed. Here was a man, I thought, who is likely to understand not only something about the Runes, but also something of how oracles in general are evolved. Perhaps he was a true keeper of the flame, a carrier of the torch of oracular tradition from the distant past of our pagan ancestors into the age of the technocrat. In an era when tribal cultures are being bulldozed along with primeval forests, and the wisdom of the ancients discarded like so many pop-top cans, it might come in handy to speak oracalese ourselves, to carry tools within our personal bag of tricks with which to reconstruct those ancient teachings. Perhaps this man had something truly important to say about the process of keeping one’s own counsel, of consulting the teacher within for answers to the ageless riddles of this unfathomable earthplane existence.

So, in hearing that Mr. Blum was actually coming to town, I was delighted to arrange the opportunity to speak with him. I admired him for his courage in daring to show how anyone could evolve an oracular system through opening to the source of guidance within. It seemed another way in which we could reclaim power previously invested in our priestesses and shamans, our psychologists, and professional sages, and all of those upon whom we have projected the

oracular function. I was ready to learn more about forming a personal relationship with the unknown, about reclaiming my own power. As it turns out, that is exactly what Mr. Blum had to teach me, although not in the way I expected him to.

From the start, everything that could possibly go wrong did. Meeting him outside the lecture hall, first impressions suggested a quiet, humble, reflective man, who had obviously drunk deeply from the bottomless well. I saw what I wanted to see. After chatting a few minutes, I asked him if he could find the time in his busy schedule for me to interview him. He said nothing, but instead turned his back to walk into the lecture hall now opening, and managed to disappear into the crowd . . . obviously an elusive shaman, not used to the glare of public scrutiny. Late I was to learn that I was not the first to suffer this fate, nor was Ralph actually as shy about sharing himself with admiring crowds as I had first imagined. The truth was that he simply did not have anything to say that I could not find out for myself.

From the podium that night, Ralph was most entertaining, telling anecdote after anecdote about his love affair with the runes, and his orgy of public attention. His was the natural humility of one who has already property of the nothing left to faithful stones side, he was never habitual hand's the great wisdom translated for Quoting often written bible, he openly marveling cleverness, preening about the humble servant of channel for a work day surely take its the I Ching and the Rig Veda as God's own benevolent dispensation. At a loss for words in response to some skeptic's question, the answer was always in the bag, or in the book the bag had spawned.



made his soul the masses, and has lose. His bag of perpetually by his more than an grab away from he himself had posterity. from his self-could be seen at his own prancing and stage, ever the mystery, the mere that would one place along side

At one point, Ralph remembered me, and said he hoped I was getting all this down, because he was already giving me his interview. Actually, I wasn't. I hadn't thought to bring my tape recorder, and did not feel moved to take notes. As it was, it did not matter, for I had already bought the book and had heard (or rather read) it all before.

Catching him at the end of the lecture, between the admiring glances that were cast upon the many beautiful bags of jeweled runes he had brought with him, I asked him again about the interview. "Tomorrow," he said. "I'll be at The Ark (a local bookstore), signing autographs. We

can do the interview there.” Following Ralph’s example, I slid my hand into a bag of mother-of-pearl, and drew the blank rune: “Blank if the end, blank the beginning . . . In that blankness is held undiluted potential. At the same time, pregnant and empty, it comprehends the totality of being, all that is to be actualized . . . Willingness and permitting are what this Rune requires, for **how can you exercise control over what is not yet in form?**” Good point. Perhaps my agenda was not the one to be fulfilled by this interview.

The next day at The Ark, I once again caught Ralph as he was slipping out the door. “Oh,” he apologized. “I completely forgot. I just made some arrangements this morning to meet with some old friends who happen to be in town . . . Oh well, let’s sit down and talk for ten minutes or so. Will that do?” Of course, it had to, although I could have sworn I heard the dozen or so carefully crafted questions I had prepared wince in dismay.

“How do oracular traditions arise? Is there a set pattern from culture to culture, or is the evolution of each uniquely conditioned by the time and place in which it emerges?” Ralph looked blank for a fraction of a second. Then, as quick as a fox crawling slyly into a chicken coop, into the ubiquitous bag when his hand,

and out came . . . Thurisaz. Gateway. **“Oracles arise as a bridge between Heaven and the mundane. Where there is a readiness to contact the numinous, the Divine, to illuminate our experience so that its meaning shines through forms, oracles arise to point the way.”**



And so it went. Actually, I remember his answer to this particular question, at least in essence, because I remember the

rune he pulled. The others were lost because, as I discovered upon sitting down to right this article, that afternoon my tape recorder did not record.

“Come to my workshop tomorrow,” he offered, perhaps partly in pity of my obvious disappointment. “You can ask your questions there. It will be a learning experience for all of us.”

Alas, alack . . . It was not meant to be. After his opening remarks, I gave up all hope of getting what I had come for. “I feel guiltier and guiltier about doing day long workshops,” he began. “Of course, there are things you can do together in a workshop, but all you really need to know is this: When you are looking at an issue in your life, a situation where you really want counsel, you think about it and reach into the bag. You pull out a rune, look up the picture in the book, read what it says, and you think about it. Now that’s really all there is to it, so if you want your money back,

that covers it all.”

During the course of the rest of the day, all that happened, aside from Ralph’s entertaining banter, was easily obtained anytime, anywhere, without the Wizard of Oz’s help. We each picked a run, which Ralph gave commentary on, partly from his book, and partly one might assume, from the portion of his book that got edited. I picked Raido reversed: “At this time, ruptures are more likely than reconciliations. Effort will be required on your part. **Keep your good humor; whatever happens, how you respond is up to you.** The requirements of your process may totally disrupt what you had intended. Hoped for outcomes may elude you. And yet what you regard as detours, inconveniences, disruptions, blockages and even failures and deaths will actually be rerouting opportunities, with union and reunion the only abiding destinations.” Obviously. I was being rerouted back upon my own inner resources. Looking for the Great Master, I had once again found nobody home, an empty mirror with my own chagrined face in self-mockery.

After lunch, we paired off, picked a rune for each other, and read what the Great Master himself had written. Then, some pretty slides of Ralph’s newly proposed rune cards and that was it. No drinking from the bottomless well, no dialogue with the Knowing Self that Ralph had intimated in his book was accessible through his system, no profound revelations or sudden openings in the great wall of mystery to marvel at for millennia to come. Needless to say, had I been one of those who had actually paid for this workshop, I would have been the first to take Ralph up on his offer of rebate.

To add insult to injury, toward the end of this day long fool show, Ralph handed out a packet of provocative articles, among them an intriguing piece describing the correlation between the Runes and the Medicine Wheel, co-authored by Ralph and Joan Halifax. Upon asking permission to reprint this article for our first issue of *The Whole Network Journal*, I was hurriedly told to check back later, when we were ready to go to print. I saw the wily fox slip back through the chicken coop fence, feathers all over his face, and made my way home in disgust.

Obviously Ralph has pushed my buttons. What is going on with me has more to do with where I am, than it does with Ralph. From the outset, I want to claim responsibility for my own reaction. Beyond my disappointment, I can easily appreciate Ralph’s warmth, his humor, and his compassionate insight. He is not a fraud, nor does he pretend to be something he is not. He simply did not teach me what I was hoping that he would.

As an astrologer of seventeen years experience (way back in 1988), I have always had little patience with astrological cookbooks, which give set delineations for each factor, as though it were possible to write down established meanings for symbols that ultimately cannot be plumbed to their depths. As Carl Jung points out, **any symbol, by definition is always only partly conscious and largely unconscious. It is a gateway to the unknown,** a channel of access to previously inaccessible territory. The fact that symbols are rooted in the unconscious is what gives them their power. Once they have been explained, they no longer serve the same function; they inevitably degenerate into two-dimensional signs, a kind of shorthand notation for something else, equally conscious and accessible.

The problem that I have with Ralph's book is that he has treated these runic symbols as though they were signs, as though they could be explained in words. Witty and well written, entertaining and occasionally wise, the book nonetheless tacitly implies that it is possible to establish definitive meanings for these symbols. While Ralph's approach can be considered revolutionary in that he dispensed with tradition and middlemen, and establishes his own immediate relationship with an oracle, paradoxically, the result is a maintenance of the status quo. He has merely evolved his own tradition, and become another middleman between us and the Runes. Nowhere does he tell us how, or even suggest it is possible to go beyond the authority established by his book, and form our own relationship with the oracle, like he did. To his credit, I have seen him take delight in the fact that this kind of innovative exploration seems to be happening anyway, but he is not the pioneer or the pointer of the way that I wanted him to be.



So, again, I am thrown back on my own inner resources. I must find my own avenue of approach to the Runes, establish my own relationship without guidelines. I can thank Ralph for having broken the taboo against evolving fresh definitions for ancient symbols, but beyond that point, no one else can take me. Perhaps, like Ralph, I can begin by simply asking the Runes how it is they wish to be approached . . .

The Runes answer, "Ehwaz, or movement." Now I admit, there is a part of me, perhaps the part of me that stands in trembling awe of the unknown, that would much rather run to Ralph's book, and read an established definition. But if I am to claim my own power in this regard, I must extract a new definition from within my own experience.

What do I already know about this rune? For the last six months, I have been drawing a rune at the beginning of each day, and taking notes of the quality of the day as it relates to possible meanings for the rune I drew. Since beginning this exercise, I have drawn the rune Ehwaz about six times.

On September 24, I found myself clinging to a relationship to which I was deeply attached, but which was ready to pass from my life. On October 13, I found myself contemplating a move back to Missouri, a place where I felt at home, but was rather isolated. At the same time, through talking with friends, it became apparent to me that in the best interests of my continued growth, I needed to stay here in New Mexico, and continue expanding my interactions with the community. On November 4, I made a connection with the woman responsible for bringing Ralph to town, and asked to set up an interview. On November 8, I attended Ralph's workshop, out of which came a deeper resolve to establish my own connection to the Runes, and take another step in reclaiming the projections I had bestowed upon external authority. On December 1, I had a terrible headache, but went ahead anyway and had some passport photos taken. On January 16, interestingly enough, I attended another workshop here in town, realized halfway through that I

wasn't getting what I thought I wanted, acknowledged my need to move rather than sit through somebody else's stuff, and did what I needed to do.

So, yes, it has been true: for me, the rune Ehwaz has to do with movement. It also seems to have a lot to do with moving beyond resistance, beyond the inertia of the past, of old habits and comfortable patterns of behavior, beyond my comfort zone, and claiming more of my own power. It seems interesting, and perhaps no small piece of synchronicity that the rune Ehwaz is connected both to this article and to my experience with Ralph. There is some suggestion here, that the writing of this article is the continuation of a process begun with Ralph's unwitting help.

As for the question of how I might best approach establishing my own relationship to the Runes, Ehwaz seems to be telling me that **the answer lies in moving forward, despite my resistance, despite my fear, daring to look at what my experience has been, and extracting whatever meaning is there to be found.** I would quote from Ralph's book, but you can read for yourself what he says, if you are interested, or feeling lazy. Otherwise, you can pick your rune, observe how the energy of that rune manifests in *your* life, and derive your own understanding.

For me, right now, the rune Ehwaz promises to be a faithful companion on my journey into the unknown depths of the oracle. Its meaning will change as I do. Tomorrow it may mean something else again; another rune may take its place as my guide. For you, it may well be another process altogether. Let us take delight in each other's courage, as we dare to make this primal discovery for ourselves.



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](#), attend a [workshop](#), or find a [mentor](#). Or if you want to be a part of this exciting venture, [join the Talking Council](#).

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, eventually to be housed within a self-sustaining eco-village community.

Keep an eye out for the next *Talking Leaves* – Summer Solstice 2016
Contributions in the spirit of Yggdrasil are welcome by June 13.

