



Talking Leaves: Volume 5, Issue 3

Autumn 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.



Contents

The Healing Time - Pesha Gertler
Tracking the Soul 2016 - Another Sacred Mind-Jarring Experience
The Storm - Rainer Maria Rilke
Stone Soup
Tracking the Soul Webinar Class 2017
Our Standing Invitation to You



The Healing Time

by Peshah Gertler

*Finally on my way to yes
I bump into
all the places
where I said no
to my life
all the untended wounds
the red and purple scars
those hieroglyphs of pain
carved into my skin and bones,
those coded messages
that send me down
the wrong street
again and again
where I find them,
the old wounds,
the old misdirections
and I lift them
one by one
close to my heart
and I say holy.*

Holy.

Tracking the Soul 2016 – Another Sacred Mind-Jarring Experience



The workshop was really, really something for me. I say "something" because I am a bit at a loss for words right now. It was wonderful, scary, fun, sacred, mind-jarring, a time of growth and peace and a whole lot more. Thank you very much for planning and then leading us, with Nia, of course! – Megan

Along with 9 other people, Megan helped set the tone for our time together with a phrase she borrowed from the old Monty Python movie – *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*: “Run Away, Run Away!!!” Megan used the phrase to describe a pattern she was trying to shift. But we all quickly adopted it, since we could all relate. It is perhaps human nature to want to avoid facing what makes life difficult for all of us, in varying ways, from time to time. It is much easier to bear the muffled pain of whatever coping strategy we have devised, than it is to focus clearly on the source of the pain itself.

Yet that is what the 10 of us did for 4 days. No one ran away, although we were all sorely tempted at one point or another. Laughing helped, as did the mutually respectful space we held for each other as we listened – really listened – to each other’s stories. Through this listening, a sense of community between relative strangers was quickly formed, in which it felt safer somehow to take the emotional risks necessary – to reveal ourselves and our vulnerabilities to each other, and to experiment with making different choices in relation to the ancient patterns that have kept us stuck – or not quite whole, nor real, nor fully alive – for 40, 50, 60 years or more.

Sharing the Common Predicament of Being Human

As uniquely fascinating as each story was, we also realized that we shared many common issues, and that we were in fact not alone in our struggles. As human beings, embodied souls living an embodied life on a physical planet, we all hold certain needs and desires in common. As I shared in my introduction to the workshop – based on an integration of astrology and the chakra system – these needs and desires can be understood in relation to the spiritual psychology of the seven chakras:

First and foremost, we all need to feel safe and secure – in our bodies, in our homes, in our movement through the world. We need food to eat, a roof over our heads, reasonably good health, a bit of financial security, and a sense of protection – physical, emotional, and psychological – from the dangers of the world. Without this basic foundation, nothing else is possible. This is what we all want and need at the level of the 1st chakra.

At the level of the 2nd chakra, we all want a life that is enjoyable, satisfying, fulfilling, pleasurable, comfortable, somewhat familiar, fun, and worth living.

In the 3rd chakra, we all desire to cultivate our talents and skills, get really good at what we do, and be recognized for our creative achievements. Along the way, we all need to develop confidence, competence, and an ability to function in the world, to make it all work on a practical level.

In the 4th chakra, we all want love, and we are all learning how to love – ourselves, each other, and the world at large.

In the 5th chakra, we all seek a personal truth, something we can believe in, some basic principles and values around which a life of integrity can be built. We all seek to learn and grow from our life experiences, and to share what we have learned with others – to make a contribution.

In the 6th chakra, we all harbor a certain curiosity about the world, about our place within the larger scheme of things, about the deep mysteries of life and death. What is the soul? What is this thing we call reality? What is life all about? We all hunger for a sense of meaning, and an understanding of our life experiences with a larger context.

And finally, in the 7th chakra, we all hunger for an experience of the divine, and for participation in a larger Mystery that transcends our individual lives.

Our soul's journey can be understood as the quest for all of these things – which together make us whole human beings. Our attainment of these things is not a given, and some of them are downright elusive. Not all of us have a strong sense of the divine permeating our lives. We don't always understand our experiences, or see their meaning or purpose. Living a life of integrity is an ongoing challenge in a world that is often built on lies, and half-truths. I personally don't know

anyone for whom the art of love, and the whole arena of relationships is not a steep learning curve. Some of us struggle with a lack of confidence; some of us struggle with over-confidence; all of us are reaching for a higher, more refined, more skillful level of self-expression. No one gets to live a life of unbridled pleasure that is not tempered with some pain. Most of us struggle with fears and insecurities of some sort; and everyone alive on the planet now is, on some level, aware of how the life support systems of the planet itself are being compromised.

Embracing Vulnerability

All of this provides grist for the soul's journey, and for a lifetime of learning and growth. Wherever there is a chronic pattern around some difficulty in relation to any of these basic needs, there is soul work to be done. The fact that you have soul work to do does not mean you are somehow defective, or inferior to the rest of us, or damaged, or incomplete. Quite the contrary - it is your soul work that makes you a human being - a soul alive in a body, reaching toward wholeness.

We are all reaching toward wholeness; and none of us are there yet, or we would not need to be born into these bodies, and live these lives. As I suggested to those present:

There is no need to pretend that you have it all together; no need to put on your game face in order to impress the rest of us with how together you are; no need to deny that you are struggling with something, and that you feel vulnerable at times in the face of those struggles. It is this that makes you real, and that gives you something worth sharing that can feed the rest of us.



This is not the usual way that most of us have learned how to be in the world, but with permission granted, it never ceases to amaze me how much relief there is for all of us, when we can simply let our hair down, drop the pretense, cry and laugh together about the absurdity of it all, and the shared agony and ecstasy of the soul's journey through the vale of human folly.

We often run away from this in the “real world,” because vulnerability is commonly perceived as weakness by those who are too scared to show their true face, and there is not a lot of support for this level of authenticity. Yet, in the sharing of our vulnerabilities, as well as our triumphs, we all quickly realized at this workshop, that we don't have to keep the old paradigm alive, just because hiding behind it has kept us safe all these years. In our brave practice at showing our real faces to each other, we quickly put the lie to the old adage: “Laugh and the world laughs with you; cry and you cry alone.” We laughed and cried together, and all of it was “really, really something.”

Dropping the Jargon

I had spent quite a bit of time with each participant before the workshop, guiding them through a recapitulation of their life experiences related to a specific astrological pattern currently being triggered. Some participants came through my [Tracking the Soul Webinar Class](#); and some came through [Yggdrasil's Mentorship Program](#). Those who came through the webinar class, had just spent the last 8 months parsing the nuances of the system of spiritual psychology – based on an integration of astrology and the chakras of yogic philosophy – I devised in my book [Tracking the Soul](#). These were seasoned astrologers with a hunger for nuts and bolts understanding. Those who came through the mentorship program, by and large, had very little interest in or knowledge of astrology.

In the past, in teaching this workshop, I had included an astrological explanation of each participants' pattern as part of the workshop experience. As part of the experiment this time around – with every Yggdrasil workshop a perpetual work-in-progress – we decided to drop the jargon and speak no astrology at all, so that we could meet on a level playing field and talk about what matters most – the issues and life patterns we were struggling with and wanted to shift.

The astrologers in the group could not help but be curious about the charts of the mentored participants, and some of the mentees could not help but be curious about astrology. But for the most part, the absence of arcane words and concepts foreign to the uninitiated made it possible for us all to meet in a more immediately accessible way. Letting the conceptual scaffolding remain invisible worked well. As co-facilitator, [Nia Kallhof](#) put it, doing it this way meant:

. . . that everyone was present and actively engaged and felt safe enough to air issues in the circle. I feel all the incredible preparation done ahead of time made this possible – little need for the didactic and great exercises and opportunities for experiencing patterns shifting.

In the future, we want to develop this model for other Yggdrasil workshops, as well, since the combination of one-on-one pre-mentoring and group process seems to provide a powerful transformative opportunity.

Leaving Words Behind

Our stories took a day and a half to tell, and although we worried a bit up front that people might get tired sitting for that long, this did not seem to be the case. With breaks between stories, we found ourselves riveted, and fully engaged. Still, after all the words had been added to the cauldron of stone soup we were brewing, the tasty patterns bubbling within wanted out – into more active expression.

So we did want any serious soul-pattern shifter would do. We got up and moved our bodies. Or rather, we let our bodies move us – and tell us what they already knew that the mind was slow to grasp about these patterns we wanted to shift. In most of our workshops now, we incorporate a round of authentic movement to supplement the verbal sharing that gets us in the mood. Authentic Movement is an expressive movement practice developed by Mary Stark Whitehouse in the 1950s. Whitehouse had trained as a Jungian therapist, and as a professional dancer with Martha Graham and Mary Wigman, and sought to develop a movement-based form of active imagination. As Whitehouse describes the intent, "*When the movement was simple and inevitable, not to be changed no matter how limited or partial, it became what I called 'authentic' – it could be recognized as genuine, belonging to that person.*"

Through our authentic movement exercise, each person got to feel their way into a visceral expression of their pattern that had little or nothing to do with what they had previously told themselves – or the rest of us – about it. I was surprised to find much more contentment and peace in relation to my pattern within my body than my mind would allow itself, and this sense became a counterpoint to my usual way of dealing with the pattern. Others explored boundaries and experimented with pushing beyond them. Some thrashed wildly; others barely moved. Just knowing there was no right or wrong way to move was liberating for some.

Taking Risks, Shifting Patterns

In the rest of the workshop, we explored various ways to release the vital energies locked in familiar patterns of self-limitation and the carefully constructed mechanisms for avoiding pain that shroud any pattern in numb, dissociated oblivion. In our planning for the workshop, Nia and I constructed a full day of exercises around the common themes that I saw emerging in the preparatory work with participants. In particular, I had noticed that many people in the group struggled with setting clear boundaries; and most struggled with speaking difficult truths. So, after we were comfortable with each other, and had gotten the energy moving through our bodies as well as our words, this is where we focused our attention.

In the Boundary Setting exercise, we formed two lines at opposite sides of the room. The people in one line walked toward their partners in the other line at a pace set by the person toward whom they were walking. At various points along the way, each person got to signal “Stop” and “Go,” and the person walking toward them had to obey. As deceptively simple as this sounds, it brought up all sorts of issues. Some people felt empowered by being able to declare where their boundaries

were and what their comfort level was. Others felt judged by having boundaries set. We all “*learned a lot about myself and how I relate,*” as articulated by one person in the group.

In the Truth Telling exercise, we got to push back the boundaries of our own comfort zones. A number of participants had something they needed to say to someone back home, but for whatever reason, found daunting. A couple of people had something to say in real time to someone else in the group. In this exercise, we all got to practice – giving “I” messages, and receiving honest feedback, also given as an “I” message. This was – as most of us recognized – just Communication 101, yet it surprised us all, I think, to realize how often we forget and lapse into projected judgments or patterns of blame. The real test, of course, comes when everyone goes back home and musters the courage to actually say what has to be said to the live person, not expecting the held-back message. But the sense of empowered possibility was palpable. As one participant put it, “*By speaking my truth, I began to actively shift an ancient pattern. Need I say this was liberating.*”

Sweating Out Prayers, Praying for Grace

On the second evening, we did a fire/water ceremony; and on the third, we did a sweat lodge – led by Talking Council member [John Staniloiu](#). In both rituals, we made a space for the invocation of Mystery. Most of us spend lifetimes, trying in one way or another to shift wounded patterns that cause us grief, create problems, and sabotage our best efforts at whatever we might otherwise define as progress. We do what we can. Most of the time our efforts are a kind of blind groping toward something better, even if we really don’t have much of a clue what that is. Occasionally – as in this workshop – we deliberately shine a light on what was previously hidden in darkness. If our intent is pure enough, our longing deep enough, our effort sincere enough, then what happens beyond that is not entirely up to us any more. At a certain point – and no one can predict when that might be – an amazing dispensation of grace comes unbidden to meet us half way. It is that moment that we live for. And in moments after we have honestly done all we can, it is what we pray for.

So, after work and play, and in between, we prayed – calling in forgiveness, wisdom, clarity, freedom, joy, an end to suffering, racism, hunger, genocide, and torture, a healing for the Earth, world peace, courage, strength, stamina, laughter, aid for Syrian refugees, the stopping of the TPP trade agreement, the defeat of Donald Trump, and on and on it went. We were on a roll. Our personal patterns were shifting, or at least seemed somehow more shift-able than they had been. Why not shoot for the moon?

We are not foolish enough to believe that we will get everything we ask for. On the other hand, once you become aware that a pattern exists, that you are somehow responsible for creating it, and that you have the power to change it, to re-create it, to turn fetid compost into flowers, then all things begin to seem possible.

That is why we do this work, and why we invite you to join us, the next time we gather to run toward the very thing any sane person would run away from. We do this, not because we are insane, but because we are contrarians – hungry for growth, led and fed by divine grace.



The Storm

by Rainer Maria Rilke

*You are not surprised at the force of the storm –
You have seen it growing.
The trees flee. Their flight
sets the boulevards streaming. And you know:
he whom they flee is the one
you move toward. All your senses
sing him, as you stand at the window.*

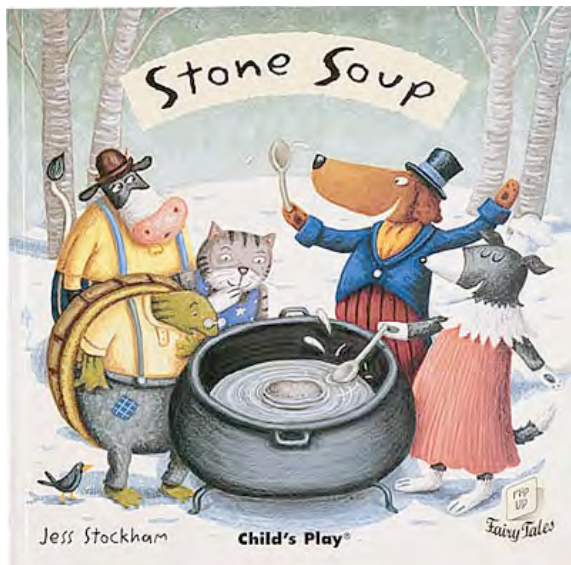
*The weeks stood still in summer.
The trees' blood rose. Now you feel
it wants to sink back
into the source of everything. You thought
you could trust that power
when you plucked the fruit;
now it becomes a riddle again,
and you again a stranger.*

*Summer was like your house; you knew
where each thing stood.
Now you must go out into your heart
as onto a vast plain. Now
the immense loneliness begins.
The days go numb, the wind
sucks the world from your senses like withered leaves.*

*Through the empty branches the sky remains.
It is what you have.
Be earth now, and evensong.
Be the ground lying under that sky.
Be modest now, like a thing
ripened until it is real,
so that he who began it all
can feel you when he reaches for you.*



Stone Soup



Once upon a time, some weary, hungry travelers arrived at a village, carrying only an empty cooking pot. The villagers were suspicious of the newcomers, and unwilling

to share any of their food. Undaunted, the travelers went to a stream and filled their pot with water. Then they dropped a large stone into the pot, and placed it over a fire. They did this with great camaraderie, laughing and enjoying each other's company.

One of the villagers became curious and asked what they were doing. The travelers answered that they were making "stone soup." "It tastes delicious," one of them said, "but it could use a few more vegetables." The villager did not mind parting with a few carrots to help them out, and added them to the soup. Another villager walked by, asking the same question, and getting the same answer. Sure she said, "I don't mind contributing a clove of garlic or two."

And so it went. More and more of the villagers walked by, each adding another

ingredient, and joining the circle. While the soup was cooking, the villagers and travelers started talking, and learned they had more in common than they had originally thought.

Soon, they were all laughing, telling stories, and getting to know each other. Finally, one of the travelers removed the stone from the pot, and a delicious feast was enjoyed by all.

Tracking the Soul Webinar Class 2017



After the workshop are scheduled 3 more webinar classes for those who have followed that route to the workshop. In them, we will explore the astrology behind the possibilities for shifting patterns that are encoded in the birthchart. Those who have worked deeply with the language know that astrology can be helpful in articulating the important experiences that we all have, that are otherwise difficult to put into words. For those who are still integrating what happened at the workshop, these classes will hopefully help to bring the elusive understanding into focus.

Because this webinar series was so rewarding, I plan to do it again next year. A new set of classes will begin in mid-December (the exact date will depend upon the schedules of those participating). If you have a working knowledge of astrology, and consider yourself an intermediate to advanced student, we'd love to have you join us. This class is not for beginners. Nor is it meant to be a pathway to professional competency. It is a venue in which working astrologers can apply the system to their own charts, and whatever personal issues they wish to explore. If you are unclear about whether this class is right for you, I am happy to [talk it through](#) with you.

The webinar series will involve 20 2-hour classes, with homework assignments and email input from me, if desired, between classes. The 1st hour of each 2-hour session will be devoted to the presentation of principles; the 2nd hour will be an application of those principles to the charts of one or more participants. Over the course of 20 sessions, we will cover the following material:

- *The Chakra System*
- *The Quadrants & Houses as Indicators of Chakra Activity*

- *The Planetary Dynamics Involved in Each Chakra Pattern*
- *The Various Ways of Identifying Chakra Patterns*
- *Patterns of Excess and Deficiency*
- *The Nuances of Planetary Placement by Sign*
- *The Activation of Chakra Patterns by Transit or Progression*
- *Tracking the Soul with a Cyclical History*
- *Shifting Difficult Patterns & Core Issues)*
- *Working With the Whole System Around Specific Issues*
- *Wrapping Up Loose Ends & Possibilities of Further Studies*

The cost for the entire 20-session webinar series is currently \$300. The 4-day [Tracking the Soul workshop](#) - next August - is optional, but highly recommended as a way to take what you are learning and bring it into your heart, your body, and your life. You can sign up for one or both on my [Astropoetic School website](#).

For those of you who just want the workshop, you can prepare through our [Mentorship Program](#).

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* - Winter Solstice 2016
Contributions in the spirit of Yggdrasil are welcome by December 14.

