



Talking Leaves: Volume 1, Issue 2

Summer Solstice 2012

Welcome to Yggdrasil

Yggdrasil is a collaborative venture begun by Joe Landwehr and Sara Firman- 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 school for visionary contrarians, integrated with a spa retreat for the evolving soul, set within a self-sustaining forest garden community. We are now in the formative stages of this project, working with a small group of dedicated souls to refine and elaborate our vision, and root it in fertile soil.

Talking Council Update

In the first issue of our newsletter, we introduced you to our Talking Council - the circle of souls that will guide Yggdrasil through the early stages of its manifestation process. Since our Spring Equinox issue, the Council has met three times. In this article, I would like to give you an update of what we've accomplished so far.



At our March meeting, we discussed possible next steps for moving our venture forward. Joe suggested three possible areas of focus: 1) the quest for a location that best met a list of criteria; 2) developing an organizational structure based on existing models; and 3) developing a core

curriculum for the school – with smaller working groups to address each of the three areas. It was agreed that to try to do all this at once would be overwhelming, and that the initial passion of the group was for curriculum development.

What was it we specifically wanted to teach, to whom, and how? This, it seemed, would be our focus for the foreseeable future – both in our Talking Council meetings, and in a private blog that Sara created for Talking Council discussion between sessions.

Toward the end of the meeting, Kate Riley pointed out that we were coming to the vision of Yggdrasil from widely different backgrounds, and that before we could effectively develop a curriculum, we would need to clarify what we each meant by the words we were using. Kate has since left the Council, but we thank her for her contribution – particularly this suggestion, which became the focus of our April meeting, and will continue to play an important role in our process.

In April, we discussed the terms "school," "retreat," and "curriculum" in order to get a sense of the associations each of us had to these words that are central to the vision statement. The word “school” especially seemed to evoke a wide range of responses. Some council members had unpleasant or traumatic experiences of school that colored the way they thought about school now; others had positive experiences, either growing up or through their involvement in various school projects in their adult lives.

School

It was thought by some that the word “school” had an elitist ring to it; by others that it evoked a sense of hierarchy. Joe reminded the Council that the school at Yggdrasil was meant to be a place where everyone would be both teacher and student at various times and in different contexts. Although he conceded that there could possibly be a better word, for the moment at least, there were reasons for continuing to use it, which he later outlined in a blog post, excerpted here:

Despite my own experiences with public school, college and graduate school – which did not address the needs of my soul in the way that I envision Yggdrasil doing – I actually do like the word “school” for a number of reasons.

"School" implies the necessity for disciplined effort applied consistently over a period of time. This is actually how I understand soul work. Although our culture is geared toward instant gratification, the truth is soul work proceeds slowly for most people. Our most difficult issues – what I call core issues – take a lifetime of persistent effort to shift, and even then our gains are often fairly modest.

We can get a contact high from a weekend workshop, but the real work is ongoing and only begins after the workshop, when we are back home in our lives facing our old patterns. Although I don't rule out workshop or weekend retreat offerings, I see Yggdrasil as mostly a place where people can come long enough to acquire the life skills that they will need to do their soul work back home, and to develop a practice that they can continue on their own without daily guidance.

Our curriculum will not be a list of ten easy steps to enlightenment, or even a list of things we all need to know to pursue a generic spiritual path, but rather an initiation of sorts into a learning process that will in many ways be unique to each of us.

In many ways, this is what I already do. I am currently the director of The Astropoetic School for Soul-Discovery (www.astropoetics.com). I have a curriculum. I teach people astrology as a language with which to track and more consciously relate to their core issues and tend their sacred wounds. Over the past 20 years, a number of people have come to the school to learn this language, and I believe it has been a useful model for those who have participated.

Rather than reinvent the wheel, I want to expand it with Yggdrasil, to bring in other people with other skills and areas of expertise that I lack, so that together we can provide a more complete set of resources for anyone wishing to transmute their wounds into a sense of visionary calling.

I see The School I have created as a demonstration of this very process, given my own history of wounding by various schools. I could have run as far away as possible from anything remotely resembling a school. Instead, I set out to create a better one. That effort is ongoing, and now includes all of you. The fact that we are taking a word that is difficult for many and transmuting it into something positive is an example of the kind of thing we hope to teach at the school.

As respected teacher Andrew Harvey says, "Identify your heartbreak and infuse it with sacred purpose. You will start to be a part of the solution." Part of my heartbreak growing up was the woeful adequacy of the entire school system to address my soul, or its needs. I've infused that heartbreak with sacred purpose, and consequently now consider the concept of school - as I currently run my own school and envision its expansion into Yggdrasil - to be part of the solution.

What we call ourselves is less important to me than that we all understand what we are doing when we talk about a school. If we reach a place where we have a common understanding, a better word might more naturally emerge. I don't think we need to force it.

Our original vision statement was called **Yggdrasil: A Deep Forest Retreat for Visionary Contrarians**. The word school was not mentioned. But the reality - as I have experienced it teaching my own brand of soul school for 20 years - is that people don't really enter soul school at all until something in their life breaks down - until they realize that "I live in a broken world, and I myself am broken." Then there is a true opening to soul, and to the possibility of learning something new on the path of soul.

Retreat

Next, the Council discussed the concept of "retreat." Most of us had positive connotations with the word, although at least one Council Member preferred a word that more overtly encompassed the possibility of a "quantum leap in consciousness." Sara noted that, "Retreat is a favored term of mine, I guess because I have a personal inclination toward retreat." Associations with the word "retreat" she came across in her research were "a place of privacy; safety; shelter or protection from

danger or distress; a place that provides shelter or protection; and something to which one has recourse in difficulty (and) a place offering favorable opportunities or conditions.”

Curriculum

Lastly, in our April meeting, we briefly discussed the concept of “curriculum.” Joe suggested that a meaningful approach to curriculum might begin with the questions: “What is your life about? What is it that wants to emerge through you, and what specifically wants to emerge through you now?” The answers to these questions would necessarily be different for each of us. He envisioned having an intake conversation with each participant at Yggdrasil to address these questions, then designing a curriculum specific to the individual, drawing upon the existing resources of the community in order to teach it and/or address other individual needs.

Sara reminded the group that the outline of a core curriculum already existed within the vision statement, and later extracted it as a blog post, again partially excerpted here:

The school will be oriented around four primary soul tasks:

- 1) tending sacred wounds;
- 2) cultivating a deep relationship with a visionary calling;
- 3) inviting dialogue between diverse intelligences; and
- 4) courting the mysteries of the mythopoetic realm.

The curriculum we are creating is for the purpose of addressing one or more of these four inter-related items. The vision statement also outlined the general subject areas that we would like to see included as part of the curriculum:

- astropoetics,
- aquapoetics,
- dreamwork,
- depth psychology,
- psychosomatic bodywork,
- body intelligence,
- sacred dance,
- storytelling,
- cultivating the mythopoetic worldview,
- therapeutic art,
- and other modalities for entering into deep relationship with the sacred wound and its reverberations in body, psyche, and life, as well as with visionary calling.

Lastly, Joe suggested that until the Council had a synergistic understanding of what we were doing as a group and why we were doing it, it was premature to speak of a school to which others could come. He suggested that a more immediate goal might be to develop a weekend gathering, inviting

ourselves, plus perhaps one or two others each to participate in a soul-based learning circle, in the near future, to be held somewhere in the Ozarks.

Tracking the Soul – Tending the Sacred Wound

Through a series of synchronistic events between meetings, Joe realized that his **Tracking the Soul** workshop – based on his second book of the same name – could potentially be the beginning of Yggdrasil’s curriculum. It was designed to address the first of Yggdrasil’s four main soul tasks: tending the sacred wound, although it was not originally conceived in those terms. At the very least, it could be a platform on which to build a first Talking Council gathering.

The **Tracking the Soul** workshop teaches participants how to identify sacred wounds, become more acutely aware of efforts to tend those wounds over a lifetime of experience, and develop more conscious strategies for transmuting them into a source of strength, compassion and wisdom. Joe’s particular approach to this task integrates the spiritual psychology of the seven chakras with the birthchart, but no prior knowledge of astrology or the chakra system is required to participate.

By another series of synchronistic events, Joe rediscovered an interview that he did with Ken Carey (author of *Starseed Transmissions*, *Return of the Bird Tribes*, and *Flat Rock Journal*) – a neighbor and founder of Greenwood Community, where he and Sara now live. This excerpt from the interview (given in 1985) about what trees have to teach us shows an unexpected connection of the work Joe has been doing in relation to the subject of this workshop and the vision of Yggdrasil:

We have a direct connection with the trees, in that they channel minerals and nutrients from the soil through the root system in the earth up into the branches where they absorb sunlight, and then give back to the earth the air that we breathe; while human beings are also in terms of consciousness, trying to raise that energy through the vibrational centers of the body, from the lower to the higher centers, so that we might give more and more . . . love and light through us back into the atmosphere in which we live. To me, trees have always been teachers in that way, because they're doing it, they're showing us how.

Surrounded by trees, as we will be at the workshop, we might as well surrender to what they have to teach us – aided and abetted by Joe’s knowledge of astrology and the chakra system.

At the May meeting, Joe announced that all Talking Council members would have free tuition at the workshop, and that all profit would be donated as seed money for Yggdrasil. He emphasized that the workshop would be a collaborative effort, incorporating Talking Council member Nia Kalhoff’s expertise with crystal healing and daily yoga classes taught by Sara. In addition, the workshop would be held at Hearthaven Retreat (here in the Ozarks) – the contemplative community where Nia lives.

We also want to invite all of you who are reading this newsletter to join us. The workshop will be both an introduction to Yggdrasil and an opportunity to meet at least some of our Talking Council members. For more information, please go to Joe’s web site at www.astropoetics.com.

What Would Your Yggdrasil Be Like?

At the May meeting, Talking Council members considered the following questions. We've outlined some of their responses and invite you to write in with yours.

Assuming for the moment that you are coming to Yggdrasil as a retreat guest or student, what are 5 things that you hope might be provided there that would assist you in your healing?

Aesthetic Environment/Sense of Sacred Space: A recognition of sacred space and aesthetic values in all the surroundings, both indoors and out on the land; a unifying common intent and practice held by all participants (staff and guests) to open to our personal soul guidance and to act to facilitate the highest good for our own soul and the souls of every participant.

Generally Supportive Atmosphere: A relaxed, supportive environment; as much compassion and empathy within the group dynamic as possible; a safe container in which I can trust that I and everyone else will be treated well – with respect and consideration.

Support for Taking Emotional Risk: a process that encourages me to be vulnerable; support to move through my fear, and face the pain and suffering associated with my issues; help in opening to what is scary, painful, uncomfortable and allowing it to be experienced and transmuted by love; help in accepting those parts of me that I may not know about, and in celebrating what I discover.

Challenge: something that challenges me a bit; help in getting out of my comfort zone; an environment and interactions that would support me in shifting my perceptions and behaviors.

Accountability: being held accountable by the group for doing what I say I'm going to do; care to avoid spiritual bypassing.

Movement/Physical Activity: physical activity, to burn off energy, and generate movement around whatever it is I'm thinking about; a chance to dance, move, and use the body to integrate and assimilate whatever is being learned; balance and release through expressive movement; an environment that would encourage me to exercise and eat appropriately and healthfully.

Experiential Learning: experience coupled with insight; encouragement into deep inquiry that is not just intellectual, but also experiential; an opportunity to have consultations or healing sessions with practitioners of the various modalities represented at Yggdrasil.

Individual Attention: an ongoing relationship with one particular mentor/counselor appropriate to my individual needs.

Solitude: opportunities for peaceful solitude and privacy in addition to group sharing – lots of space to be with myself; a relaxed, supportive environment which would encourage me to rest, meditate, journal . . . with both group and individual process time.

What is the cutting edge of your growth as a soul?

To really believe what Mary Oliver describes in her poem “Wild Geese” is possible:

*You do not have to be good
You do not have to walk on your knees
For a hundred miles through the desert, repenting
You have only to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.*

The willingness to consider the possibility that the soul is on a path with an imperative to have certain experiences occur, and to be willing to risk having them occur.

To discover my unknown, the part of me I don't know.

Inviting dialogue among diverse intelligences – in both the human and more-than-human world; cultivating skill at courting the mysteries of the mythopoetic realm.

Truly grasping my infinite nature and experiencing the Oneness of unconditional love.

What would you hope to learn at Yggdrasil to assist you in taking the next steps on your soul's journey?

Facilitation of Clarity: how to get clear what my issues are, so I wouldn't have to waste time dealing with superficialities; how to get clear about my motivation for doing what I do; clarity upfront about how Yggdrasil could help me.

Help in Moving Forward: how to move forward toward creating what I really want in life.

Communication Skills: the art of dialogue; how to have a meaningful conversation with someone with whom I fundamentally disagree; clear, honest and skillful communication.

Community Process Skills: how to create social organizations that mimic nature and work at maximum efficiency.

Practical Skills: permaculture; designing perennial gardens capable of feeding people.

Mythopoetic Exploration Skills: communicating with other forms of intelligence on this planet, with the more-than-human world; co-creative collaboration that includes not only other humans, but also the living land around us; aquatic bodywork, the way that Sara practices it – as a way to facilitate entry into the mythopoetic realm; exploring how "water is to the body as dreams are to the soul" (a quote from Professor Jonathan de Vierville, who teaches a workshop in collective dreaming called [Spawaters, Dreams and Cultures](#), and whom we hope to involve in Yggdrasil in the future); the art of dreaming, particularly lucid dreaming, and dream re-entry.

After we all spoke, Joe suggested that we each pick an item on our list – something we want to learn or experience at Yggdrasil – and create a workshop to present at our 2-day gathering after the Tracking the Soul workshop in October that will facilitate this experience for the rest of us.

At our next meeting, we will each share what we intend to create, and discuss Council member Jack Hebrank's question: "How do you create experiences that 'really get inside a person' and facilitate genuine healing and transformation?"



As we envision the Talking Council, we have room for three more people. If you resonate with our vision statement, and are inspired by what you are reading in this newsletter, you may want to take the next step and participate in the Talking Council. We meet once a month by Skype for 2 hours each session, and would love to have you join us. We do ask for a one-year commitment. If this is something that calls to you, you can contact us at joelandwehr@socket.net and/or sara.firman@yahoo.com.

Earth Exchange: Honoring the Bones of Trees

Trebbe Johnson founder and director of Radical Joy for Hard Times (<http://radicaljoyforhardtimes.org/about/people.html>) invited Yggdrasil to participate in their 2012 Global Earth Exchange on June 23. We hope our first modest gesture will become a regular feature of Yggdrasil.

Radical Joy encourages everyone to find and make beauty in wounded places. The idea is that by reconnecting with these places, sharing our stories of loss and despair, and making acts of beauty there, we empower ourselves to make a difference in the way we live on Earth.

This year, Sara suggested that we start with a place in Greenwood Forest where Sara and Joe live. Throughout the day we'll be visiting a forest creek that became choked with salvage logs and looks like a graveyard; we'll find ways to honor the bones of the trees and celebrate new life.

You can read more and about this and see some photographs here: Honoring the Bones of Trees (<http://radicaljoyforhardtimes.org/list-of-earth-exchanges/viewevent.html?eventid=52>). Photos of the actual event will be posted on this event link after June 23.

Please consider doing your own Earth Exchange - it doesn't matter when you do this and it can be a very simple act. Find out more and join in here: <http://radicaljoyforhardtimes.org>.



The Source

We're delighted to share with you these song lyrics by Talking Council member Brooke Halpin.

*Where is the source, where is the sparrow?
Who will remind you of what had been done
Lost in the woods with no steps to follow
Do you remember the holes in your love?
Never look back, it's too late to borrow
The picture of when the two were the one
Step on your feet and trip in your labor
While making fresh tracks in the dense summer woods*

*Bringing it out, there's no need to harbor
That which increases with the absence of pain
Light up the candle and lay down the bedding
Out in the distance the night sits in shade
Seeing a vision deep in the forest
You don't hear the sparrow to lead you the way
Stopping and turning to a flutter of sound
You lay yourself down and melt to the roots in the ground*

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Brooke is a consummate musician and composer. We look forward to hearing him perform this song (and others) at our Yggdrasil gathering in October.

Sara's Deep Forest Pool

Since April, Sara's friend and mentor Mary Seamster in Portland (also an aquatic bodyworker) has been encouraging her to work on manifesting her own warm pool again. To begin, Sara did a vast amount of research which she intends eventually to turn into a resource for other aquatic colleagues who dream of having their own therapy pool. Warm (at 95°F) pools are not the same as swimming pools and take special considerations, not least of which is cost.

As you know from Yggdrasil's Vision Statement, a warm pool is a significant part of the spa-retreat facility we envision. While we have a long way to go to this larger vision, creating a space where we can incubate some of our ideas will be invaluable. So, Sara is earning and raising funds for a small indoor warm pool in the secluded forest setting where she and Joe currently live. Sara writes:

This pool will enable me to continue to explore the potential of aquatic bodywork and movement practices to facilitate access to our unconscious. My abiding interest in this topic originates with an article I authored for Shamans Drum Magazine in 2002; and 2012 seems a very good time to recommit to my explorations.

Warm-water immersion practices can produce altered or dream states that may help us to gain insight into personal health and to deepen our connection with the more-than-human realms.

Designing the pool so that the surrounding forest and overarching sky are visible, and creating sacred space around it will be important factors. Also important is that the facility be healthy and safe for both humans and the surroundings. The construction process and finished facility will have as light a footprint, and as low an ongoing impact on the environment, as possible. Once I have arrived at a workable plan for this pool project, including costs, I will launch a fundraising effort to meet a clearly outlined and detailed goal.

I will keep a blog that chronicles the progress of Deep Forest Pool. Some may like to gift their support. But I also hope that many will accept the return gift of experiencing the completed pool and my work (for themselves or for others they choose). Joe is offering matching funds for anyone making a donation. Please watch this space and if this project interests you, feel welcome to contact Sara for more information: sulis@aquapoetics.com. You can see more about Sara's aquatic explorations here: www.aquapoetics.com

Our Invitation to You

If you want to be part of this exciting venture, let us know. We'd love to hear from you at whatever level of involvement you are inspired to want to participate. You can:

- 1) Request and read the 2-page vision summary.
- 2) Share this newsletter or the 2-page vision statement with select friends or acquaintances you sincerely believe will be interested. If you do, please copy your email to us at joelandwehr@socket.net and/or sara.firman@yahoo.com.
- 3) Read the more comprehensive vision statement (39 pages) and share with us your feedback. We ask that you not share the more comprehensive vision statement, but instead refer your friends to the 2-page statement, and let them contact us for more.
- 4) Join the Talking Council. If you resonate at a deep enough level with what we are trying to do, this could be your opportunity to dig more deeply into your own mythopoetic roots, even as you help steward the fruiting of the vine.

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Keep an eye out for the next Talking Leaves - Autumn Equinox 2012

Contributions in the spirit of Yggdrasil are welcome by September 15.

