



# Talking Leaves: Volume 5, Issue 4

## Winter Solstice 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](http://yggdrasilretreat.com), and/or keep track of us on our Facebook page at [www.facebook.com/yggdrasilretreat](http://www.facebook.com/yggdrasilretreat).



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## Looking Through a Glass Darkly, Squinting Toward the Light

by Graywolf

This newsletter will arrive in your inbox after one of the most divisive and acrimonious election cycles we have ever experienced here in the US, with an outcome that leaves many of us in shock.

While obviously a fair number of Americans felt as though the system is broken – and it is – and Donald Trump managed to ride that wave of anger and chronic frustration to victory, it is not likely that he will be the one to fix things. Far from “draining the swamp” as he promised during his campaign, he seems to be filling his cabinet with a cast of questionable creatures from the corporate lagoon.

### *The Bad News*

It is not unlikely to assume, in fact, that much of the progress we have made over the course of the last 40 years or so – in relation to environmental law, energy policy, advocacy for domestic and global human rights, worker rights, consumer protection, social security and health care – will be undone, or at least severely compromised, in the next 4.

Progress toward mitigation of climate change will cease – at least on the federal level. The transition from fossil-fuel dependency toward green energy sources that has been gradually accelerating over the past 20 years will meet a new wave of entrenched inertia. Our public lands may be up for unmitigated corporate grab. Industrial, pesticide-intensive, GMO-oriented agriculture will ramp up; as will the incidence of environmentally induced cancers and other diseases caused by exposure to toxic chemicals. Infrastructure failures such as the public water supply disaster in Flint, Michigan will become more frequent and widespread, as will the

contamination of drinking water supplies by fracking, oil spills, and other inevitable environmental catastrophes. With climate change deniers in the White House, weather-related disasters: mega-storms, wildfires, droughts and floods – and human displacement in the aftermath – will become the new normal.

Muslims in this country will suffer systemic institutionalized abuse. Inner city blacks will continue to be shot by white racist police forces, armed with surplus military equipment. Search and seizures (violations of 4<sup>th</sup> Amendment rights) will increase, and in addition, freedom of the press, freedom of peaceful assembly, and the basic 1<sup>st</sup> Amendment right to disagree with the government will be severely undermined, if not outlawed outright. Government surveillance of all citizens will increase, emails, phone calls, and public conversations will all be monitored. Democracy may give way to a totalitarian police state.

Income disparity between rich and poor will increase, as public discourse continues to deteriorate. The right to a safe and legal abortion may disappear; women's health care in general is likely to suffer. The omnipresence of guns in inappropriate places will likely become routine. It is not unlikely to assume that intolerance and violence, including domestic violence against women and minorities, will increase.

Some of these trends have been slowly evolving in recent years anyway. But many issues that many of us care about and around which we feel we have been making progress will likely become severely uphill battles. The world that we have known to this point in our history is about to quickly change in radical ways, some of which we can't anticipate or imagine now. It would be easy to pretend that it won't be as bad as we fear, but it might be a more useful choice to acknowledge that an historic sea change is upon us, and respond accordingly.

### *Yggdrasil's Soul-Based Response*

Some of my friends, and indeed, some members of the Talking Council, myself included, don't see ourselves as overtly political. Most of us have decided some time ago that politics is less important, or less vital a focus than, spiritual growth. We all believe as Gandhi is reputed to have said, but did not, that we must "be the change we wish to see in the world," that change must begin with us, and that a change of consciousness must precede any outer change we wish to create in the world.

Indeed at Yggdrasil, our first soul task is tending the sacred wound – which is our way of saying that regardless of the state of the world, work on ourselves must be primary. Wounded people create a wounded world, and so before we can become effective agents for change, we must tend the personal wounds that stir our reactive emotions, cloud our vision, and cause us to act unconsciously in ways that undermine our conscious intentions. The willingness to do this is a sacred task, because when we heal, we automatically contribute to a world made whole through our presence within it.

In a perfect world – where everyone had this commitment to healing – there would be a seamless progression from personal healing to societal transformation, that is to say, a culture where

humane, ecologically sensible, progressive policies resulted in increased wellbeing for humans and more-than-human denizens of the natural world; and ecological vitality graced the entire planet.

### *Politics and the Sacred Wound*

But we do not live in a perfect world. As Bob Dylan once reminded us, “we live in a political world.” And in a political world, psychological dysfunction becomes the limiting factor in our collective capacity to create the world we all say we want. To the extent that those who make the decisions – or those who elect those who make the decisions – harbor unhealed psychological wounds, festering or frozen emotions with no pathway to release, fear, shame and anger color the decision-making process. To the extent that blame is projected onto some imaged enemy or scapegoat, the quest for power becomes an impulse to suppress, repress and abuse the perceived opposition. To the extent that any of us acts out of a sense of compromised integrity, we lie to ourselves about what is important, what we really want, and who we really are. And we elect leaders who lie to us, tell us what we want to believe, even though deep down in our heart of hearts, we all know it isn’t true.

All of this results in a world where those of us who do work toward personal healing must do what we do in a cultural vacuum. To some extent, we can compensate by surrounding ourselves with like-minded others. But the world at large continues to reverberate in ways that are not only in sharp contrast to what we believe and want to believe, but a very real counterforce to everything we hold sacred. As the world descends into a more entrenched state of wounding – which anyone looking objectively at the world as it is can see – those who consider themselves to be spiritual, rather than political, tend to become more isolated, more marginalized, and in some cases, more out of touch with reality.

### *Taking Your Spirituality Into the World*

At a certain point – and for some of us that point may be now – we must take our heads out of our navels and take a hard stand for something beyond our own personal wellbeing that we value enough to fight for. As the former UN Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld once said, “In our era, the road to holiness necessarily passes through the world of action.”

*What do you do when the dark-skinned person next to you is being beaten or dragged into a concentration camp? Is it enough then to simply value human decency?*

*What do you do when the forest you love is being clear-cut? Or the mountain you love to climb is being decimated for gold? Or when your drinking water is making you and your family sick? Is it enough then to simply espouse ecological principles?*

*What do you do when your right to speak out is criminalized? Do you speak out anyway, risking your very life for the truth? Or is it enough to console yourself with the thought that your silent and secret freedom of thought can never be taken away?*

These are hard questions. But as the political reality descends more deeply into the morass of collective psychological dysfunction, they may be questions you are compelled to address. In such a moment, will a focus on your own personal healing and wellbeing be enough?

Or will you have to walk your talk, step outside your comfort zone, and take some heart-pumping action in the world you love, whose integrity is being violated? At what point does your own personal sense of integrity – of wholeness – depend upon your defense of the integrity of the world? At what point does your deepest sense of spirituality naturally morph into a responsibility to the world?

### *Reaching for a Deeper Level of Visionary Calling*

These are the sorts of questions we are all being asked to address now. This leads us to Yggdrasil's second soul task, which is the cultivation of visionary calling. Any visionary calling worth its salt is a sense of responsibility to the world, rooted in a place of deep personal integrity. Once you step into your visionary calling, your life is no longer just about you. It is instead focused around your response to a world that badly needs the best you have to offer.

You cannot offer your best if you are not continuing to tend your sacred wound, to heal the places inside yourself where personal wounds that stir reactive emotions, cloud your vision, and cause you to act unconsciously in ways that undermine your conscious intentions.

But it is no longer enough *just* to tend the sacred wound. You have to do more than that. And the more-than-that that you do must be within the world – the political world in which collective dysfunction routinely stirs reactive emotions, clouds our vision, and causes us all to act unconsciously in ways that undermine our conscious intentions.

So how to “keep your head about you, when all about you are losing theirs” becomes an issue. This is a much more difficult challenge than simply disavowing politics for the spiritual life. In fact, when you truly find the depth of soul necessary to claim a visionary calling, this will no longer be an option. You must instead bring everything you have – all that you have learned on your soul's journey, all the healing and inner work that you have done to fortify you, all the wisdom you have earned the hard way – to bear upon the wounding of the world.

Some of us may be drawn to work with individuals as a healer of individual wounds. This is a common path for someone ready to take on the second soul task of making the world a better place, while still largely disavowing politics. If we all help heal each other, the unspoken theory goes, eventually we will all be healed. Or at a certain point – according to another theory that has since been discredited – we will reach critical mass and the [100<sup>th</sup> monkey effect](#) will kick in.

I do think there is some truth to this, obviously – at least as a useful metaphor, if not to be taken literally – or I wouldn't have chosen the path I have. I think that anything we can do to reach out and alleviate the suffering of another being – human or more-than-human – is a profound and

important thing to do, and we should all do as much of it, every day, as we can possibly do, whether we call ourselves healers and hang up a shingle or not. This is, I believe, the bottom line of what it means to be a conscious, compassionate human being on a planet that requires a conscious, compassionate response as a simple matter of collective survival.

At a certain point, however, if we truly want to be effective in alleviating the pain and suffering of those who come to us for healing, or just in an everyday sort of way, of those whose paths cross our own, we have to look beyond the immediate healing crisis, and ask, “How is it that we got here in the first place?”

At a certain point, for example, a physician dealing with children suffering from diseases like cancer, and arthritis and early-onset diabetes, might wonder, “What is it that is causing such serious diseases at such an early age?” Following that trail might then lead to a deeper understanding of the ways in which toxic chemicals in the environment cause health issues – at which point, the quest of the healer enters the political realm. Such a physician can continue to address the many suffering children, or she can also begin to address the larger conditions that lead to suffering. This is a deeper step into visionary calling, and it is necessarily a political step into the world of dysfunctional collective psychology.

A similar step might be required of a social worker dealing with victims of domestic violence, moved to ask what is the larger culture of violence in which domestic violence is but a symptom – and how can I address that?

A drug counselor dealing with a widespread epidemic of oxycodone dependency might eventually be prompted to wonder, “Why do we just medicate people who suffer? Why don’t we address the underlying issues that make them want to seek relief at any cost in the first place?”

Under every incidence of personal suffering is some larger question like this. As healers, and as people of compassion for others, we can spend our lives putting out brush fires, but at a certain point – assuming we reach that point – there is a thread to follow that weaves through a larger tapestry that connects us all. This is the thread along which we will find a deeper sense of visionary calling. It will not be easy to follow this thread, but until and unless we do, the integration – and healing – that we seek as a culture will continue to elude us, and our collective wounds will continue to fester, unaddressed.

When we do follow this thread, it will be in the place where spirituality and politics meet and eventually merge, where from a place of integration within ourselves, we become a true healing force within the world, because we are brave enough to step out into it, knowing that the pain and suffering that lies outside our thoroughly cleansed and perfectly aligned auric field – and our comfort zone – is where the real work begins.

### *Reaching Across the Chasms That Divide Us*

To follow such a thread will require us to take a stand, and taking a stand is inevitably a political

act – however spiritually motivated it may be. Even being enlightened – or in most cases, believing ourselves to be “beyond all that” – does not excuse us from fighting the good fight. As the Buddha recognized when he took the vow of the bodhisattva, solitary enlightenment is an oxymoron. No one really gets to sit back and enjoy their spiritual bliss while others are suffering.

Those of us who are healers naturally reach out, but in most cases, if we are honest with ourselves, only to the edges of our carefully constructed lives. How many of us pass that homeless person by on the highway ramp, pretending they are not there? While many of us cheer the brave souls at Standing Rock from the digital safety of a You-Tube video on Facebook, how many of us are ready to go there and embody the solidarity we feel in our hearts? When is the last time you took a disgruntled Republican to lunch? How many of us are willing to reach out to those who voted for Trump – the bigots and the bullies – and really talk to them about their angry concerns?

This is scary territory for most of us, myself included. But if all we ever do is preach to the choir of our resonant soul-tribe, while those on the “wrong side” – however we define that – do the same, nothing changes. In order to change the world, we must reach across all of those seemingly unbridgeable chasms that divide us, and build bridges.

### *Reviving the Lost Art of Dialogue*

This brings us to Yggdrasil’s third soul task – which is to create dialogue between diverse intelligences. This can include a conversation between humans and other species; it can also include conversations with unseen spirit beings – angels, gods and goddesses, or totem animals during a shamanic journey. But most fundamentally, it includes a conversation with another human being who sees the world differently than we do.

As evidenced by the talking heads of any late night television show, and by the horrible abusive shouting match that passed for political discourse in this last election, the art of genuine dialogue across cultural and conceptual divides is dead. If we want to change the world, we must revive it. We must learn how to listen and consider points of view different than our own, and be prepared to change our minds. As the old cliché goes, “If you can’t change your mind, how can you be sure you still have one?”

Changing your mind does not mean compromising your values or going over to the dark side. It does mean that deep down at the secret heart of everything that pushes your buttons is a nugget of truth that waits for you to claim it. If you can’t get past your knee-jerk talking points, your pet theories, your New Age platitudes, or your attachment to your own sacred cows, in order to hear that truth, you are basically stuck. When people who are stuck push against other people who are stuck, spirituality descends into fundamentalist dogma, and politics descends into gridlock.

### *Moving Past Entrenched Warfare*

It is easy to feel superior, and point your finger at others; much harder to examine and re-examine

your own beliefs, and consider what lies beneath the apparently antagonistic beliefs of others that might actually provide some common ground. Maybe there is a fear there; or a misconception; or a false assumption; or just a willful refusal to face the truth. Or maybe, there is a deeper truth that you would rather push away, or not face yourself. Are you prepared to crack open your worldview – through dialogue with the Other – in order to find out? If you are not, then you will sit on your comfortable side of the divide, while others sit on theirs, and nothing will change. Fear of the Other will rule the day, and conflict will be the inevitable outcome.

If history has taught us anything, it is that fighting the good fight – taking a stand for what matters most – as noble as that is, will only take us so far. As Isaac Newton once noted in relation to the mechanical forces that he believed to govern the material world, “For every action, there is an equal and opposite reaction.” The same seems to be true in politics, and in the shifting sands of cultural paradigms. To the extent that we push for a more humane, more sustainable world, the entrenched forces invested in a hierarchical, exploitative system push back. And often, because these entrenched forces feel they have a great deal to lose, they push back harder, with greater determination and perseverance, than we do. So – as this recent election has demonstrated – for every step forward that we take, we get pushed two steps back.

This will continue happening until we find a way to constructively engage “the enemy” in conversation. Sometimes “the enemy” will be not willing, but if you just assume that is true, without looking for that unexpected opening, the conversation that could change the world – or at least your perception of the world – will never happen. Until our concept of community is large enough to include those who see the world differently than we do, then the world will continue to be divided, and wracked by perpetual political warfare. To move past this, we must open our minds and hearts, and enter into dialogue with the scary Other across the chasm of the Great Divide – whatever that is for us.

### *Looking Beyond the Obvious*

Lastly, we come to Yggdrasil’s fourth soul task – courting the mythopoetic realm. This is where, in our leisure moments, we engage our dreams, take to heart those moments of synchronicity that reveal something meaningful happening beneath the appearance of things, and seek a soul-based understanding of events.

While this quest is essentially a spiritual undertaking, and can, in the hands of some, become a distinctly woo-woo occupation, divorced from physical-plane reality, it also has practical and political repercussions. For merely entertaining the idea that there might be more going on here than meets the unaided eye can be a humbling, eye-opening experience. The truth is often complex, paradoxical, and multi-layered. We are all blind, endlessly circling an elephant we can never fully know, no matter how much information we gather, no matter how pure the source.

Certainly, if you watch the mainstream media news, you are likely to have a distorted perspective. But many alternative publications also have their entrenched biases, and in some cases, may also be missing the boat. And if you simply console yourself with the New Age thought that this is not



really happening, or turn your gaze elsewhere, not wanting to “give it energy,” your denial of hard realities does not bring you any closer to the truth.

I do think the dangers enumerated at the beginning of this article are real, and that we ignore them at our collective peril. This is not a time for sticking our heads in the sands, or resorting to magical thinking in order to self-soothe. Having said that, however, I also think that entertaining the possibility that larger forces are at work here than can be comprehended by human minds is a healthy attitude to take.

There are many things we can do. We can continue to work on ourselves, to root out and integrate all those places within where we feel separate and apart from those around us. We can continue to reach out from a place of caring and compassion to include not just those we resonate with, but also to those who see the world differently. We can continue to stand for those things we believe in, walk our talk, and put our bodies, our money and our time where our values live. We can be kind to each other. We can be gentle with ourselves. We can enjoy life. And at the same time, we can lean beyond our comfort zones, more deeply into the world, bringing with us everything we have learned from our spiritual journeys, to bear upon tough real-world challenges.

Having done all that, we can also keep a part of ourselves in dispassionate reserve, as a witness to a radically changing world – one that lies largely beyond our capacity to influence or control. We have to do all we can, AND at the end of the day, we have to surrender, not in resignation, but as in Max Ehrmann’s famous poem – *Desiderata* – written in 1927, just before the Great Depression and World War II plunged the world into another historical Abyss:

*Beyond a wholesome discipline, be gentle with yourself.  
You are a child of the universe no less than the trees and the stars;  
you have a right to be here.*

*And whether or not it is clear to you,  
no doubt the universe is unfolding as it should.  
Therefore be at peace with God, whatever you conceive Him to be.*

*And whatever your labors and aspirations,  
in the noisy confusion of life, keep peace in your soul.  
With all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams, it is still a beautiful world.  
Be cheerful. Strive to be happy.*



## **Being the Open Geode – Gathering Input for a Workshop**

We are currently in the process of developing a workshop for those brave souls poised on the edge of a deeper sense of visionary calling, or those who have been pursuing their visionary calling for

some time, but face ongoing issues and challenges that are being intensified now. If you recognize yourself in this description, you can help us design this workshop, and we want to hear from you. In the open letter below, Talking Council member Nia Kallhof invites your input.



“Some of my close friends and I have been talking about how to stay inspired and motivated to keep taking actions to create the lives we desire in alignment with our soul's purpose. We've all had pretty amazing lives when you look at the big picture and gained much wisdom and skills from our experiences. In our hearts we know we are ready to be of service though sharing what we have been gifted with and helping facilitate the growth and healing of others. Many of us have been doing this work for a very long time. However, how best to keep doing that in the face of a rapidly changing world is not always clear. It is so easy to get discouraged and go into self-doubt when we meet roadblocks or we don't get the response we want when we put ourselves or our message out there.”

“Does any of this sound familiar? Do you resonate with these observations? If the answer is yes, we would like your help.”

“Please help us design a program or course as part of [Yggdrasil's soul-based curriculum](#) that will address where we are~where you are~on the journey of the soul. What are the issues you face day to day living into a life of soulful purpose? What kind of support, learning opportunities, communication do you think would be, or have been, helpful? Have you made some discoveries on your own that you would like to share? We really want your input: experiences, thoughts, questions, and suggestions. Thank you for sharing. We are really looking forward to a provocative dialogue.” You can [email Nia directly](#) with your thoughts and ideas.



## Yggdrasil's Mentorship Program – Special Offer

For those of you would like more help in finding your way into a deeper sense of visionary calling, and/or a more effective response to these challenging times, we are very excited to offer you a very special opportunity to get your new year off to an inspirational start. For a limited time, Yggdrasil's Mentorship Program is offering a free one-on-one soul mentoring session with the Yggdrasil mentor of your choice.



Drawing on many years of training and experience in personal growth work, meditation, shamanic and spiritual practices, crystal resonance therapy, and breathwork/rebirthing, Nia Kallhof intuitively guides her mentees as they tend their core wound, connect with their deepest Self and highest Truth, and learn to live their heart's desire. She embraces the personal journey of each soul with her full loving presence and helps it along with guided visualizations, creative assignments, and perceptive questions and reflections. Nia has worked with many women seeking a deeper relationship with the Goddess and their soul's journey as women.

Contact Nia at [nia@crystalsoflight.com](mailto:nia@crystalsoflight.com) for your free mentoring session.

Joe Landwehr is an astrologer of 40+ years experience, and author of several books. He has studied kundalini yoga with Yogi Bhanan, and siddha yoga with Swami Muktananda, while training as a psychotherapist, and has integrated yogic philosophy, psychotherapy and astrology into a comprehensive approach to spiritual growth and development that he teaches in various formats. He is especially interested in working with those who are interested in using their birthcharts as a roadmap to self-transformation. Mentees wishing to participate in the [Tracking the Soul workshop](#) will work with Joe.



Contact Joe at [jlandwehr@yggdrasilretreat.com](mailto:jlandwehr@yggdrasilretreat.com) for your free mentoring session.

## Welcome to Our Newest Talking Council Member – Hannah Joy



Hannah has been Goddess of the Kitchen during recent Yggdrasil events, and has been through all our workshops as well as the Mentorship Program. It seemed only natural to ask her to join the Talking Council, as her next step, and she gracefully accepted our invitation. In previous incarnations she has also been a nurse, businesswoman, farmer, Vista Volunteer, and workshop coordinator.

Hannah says, “I enjoy gardening, cooking, making and using herbal medicine and wine, as well as crafts, photography, reading, and building my nest.”

“Matters of the soul became of interest during my mid-twenties when Edgar Cayce books were introduced at a meditation group, the quest continues. Living in tune with Nature is very

important to me and most of my existence has been lived in the country. My personal inner journey has been enhanced by a wide variety of therapies both talk and body work plus writing and inner child dialogue along with many different workshops from role playing to writing.”

“My vision of a perfect cronehood is sitting in my cabin in the woods listening to others share their story and helping them become more aware of who they are in order to reach their higher calling.”

“Perhaps *The Place* is within and the journey without end.”



## 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* – Spring Equinox 2017  
Contributions in the spirit of Yggdrasil are welcome by March 13.

